

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Masters of Arts in Leadership

Adventist University of Africa

School of Postgraduate Studies

Title: CAUSES OF MARITAL CONFLICT AND DIVORCE AMONG
ADVENTIST COUPLES IN CAPE COAST, GHANA

Name of Researcher: Kusi-Acheampong Solomon

Faculty Advisor: Robert Osei-Bonsu, PhD

Date Completed: January 2015

Marital conflicts, separations and divorce are fast growing phenomena in the Cape coast district and its environments. It is an undisputable fact that a solution should be found for this problem in the society. This study therefore aimed at designing, implementing and evaluating an educational strategy to reduce these marital conflict that result in divorce to the barest minimum. After an intensive literature review which embodied the study of the bible, the Spirit of prophecy books and other relevant materials, a program was designed and implemented in the Cape Cost district which included: a weekly reading of marriage passages from the book *Adventist Home* by selected families. Furthermore, during Sunday bible studies program in the church, the book *Encounter with Marriage Truth* was read. Monthly meetings for a “Family Life Week of Prayer” for a period of six months were held, and an intensive Pastoral visitation to the selected respondents. It was based on these educational activities that the program was assessed.

The implementation of the program attracted non Adventists, especially Adventist whose parents were non Adventist. Most local churches had their premises filled to the capacity during the program. Some of the participants gave their lives to Christ and got baptized. The confessions and pronouncements made by some attendees, and the reduction in conflicts, separations and divorce during and after the program indicated that the messages had deep impact on the participants. Moreover, the relationship between the district pastors and the church members was improved tremendously. It was observed after the program implementation that many church members were half baked in matters of marriage, hence the numerous marital problems. The researcher recommended that a bible study guide on marriage be prepared for the churches. It was also suggested that both the programs Christian Home marriage week and Family Togetherness week programs continue in the various churches.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment
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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:



Advisor: Robert Osei-Bonsu, PhD



Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies
Willard Munger, PhD



Reader: Jared A. Ntabo, PhD

Extension Centre: Babcock University Campus

Date of Approval: Jan 2015

I dedicate this work to my mother whose support and encouragement has made me what I am today; to my wife who gives up night sleep to support me in the ministry; to my children Justice, Hilda, Samuel and Beryl; and to all those who have physically and spiritually supported us in our ministry. Whatever blessing God gives as a result of this work is theirs to share for eternity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Significance of the Study	4
Scope and Limitation	4
Methodology of the Study	5
Overview of the Study	5
2. THEORITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE	6
Introduction.....	6
What is Marriage?	6
Marriage as a Legal Contract.....	7
Marriage as an Economical Arrangement.....	8
Marriage as a Sexual Relationship.....	10
Marriage as a Means of Procreation	11
When was Marriage Instituted.....	12
God's Original Plan	13
A Life Long Union.....	14
Misconceptions Corrected by Jesus	16
Marriage Compared with Christ and the Church.....	17
3. DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING.....	19
Socio-Economic Status of Cape Coast SDA Church	
Members	19
Historical background of Cape Coast District	20
Church Statistics	21
Summary of Interview	24
Causes of Marital Conflicts and Divorce	24

Lack of Biblical Knowledge about Marriage.....	26
Incompatibility	27
Quarrelsome	28
Inadequate Pastoral Care.....	28
Lower Income and Unemployment.....	29
Family Pressure.....	30
Conflict about Roles.....	30
Interfaith Marriages.....	31
Members Suggested Solutions to Marital Conflict and Divorces	32
Regular Marriage Seminars, Workshops and Bible Studies	32
Courtship and Counseling	33
Workshop on How to Create Wealth / Creation of Jobs for Church Members	34
Frequent Pastoral Visitation.....	35
4. PROGRAM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION	36
Introduction.....	36
Preparation for Educational Strategy	37
Key Partners in the Program Implementation.....	37
Selection of Materials	37
Time Designation.....	38
Visual Aids and Apparatus	38
Project Objective Setting	39
Program Implementation	39
Activity Number One: Pastoral and Leaders Visitation	40
Activity Number Two: Messages from the Book “Adventist Home”	41
Activity Number Three: An Encounter with Marriage Truths	42
Activity Number Four: Family Life Week of Spiritual Emphasis	44
Program Evaluation	46
Evaluation of Family Life Educational Objective	47
Objective One	47
Objective Two.....	47
Objective Three.....	48
Objective Four	49
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	53
Summary	52
Conclusions.....	54
Recommendations.....	55
Recommendations to family Life Ministries Director, SGC	56
Recommendations to Pastors	56
Recommendations to Elders and Family Life Ministries’ Leaders	57

APPENDIXES	59
A. LETTERS	59
B. SEMINAR HANDOUTS	62
C. FAMILY LIFE MINISTRIES MESSAGE	68
D. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND QUESTIONS.....	70
E. FAMILY MINISTRIES QUARTERLY REPORT SHEET.....	72
BIBLIOGRAPHY	73
VITA.....	76

LIST OF TABLES

1. Age of Respondents 21

2. Marital Status of Church Members 22

3. Marital Report on Conflicts, Separations/ Divorce
from 2009-2011 23

4. Causes Responsible for Marital Conflicts and Divorce 25

5. Suggested Panaceas, Frequency and Percentage 32

6. Topics Taught and Discussed on Sundays from
January 1st to June 24th, 2012 44

7. Topics for Family Life Week of Spiritual Emphasis from
January to June, 2012 45

8. Cape Coast District, Comparison of Marital Separations
and Divorce 52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to whom I am indebted for their part in providing services and goodwill during a lengthy project. I will limit the scope to a few whose contributions deserve special thanks:

- Pastor (Dr.) Robert Osei-Bonsu, my Advisor and Dean, School of Theology and Missions, Valley View University
- Mr. Sampson O. Dakio, Senior Research Assistant, Valley View University who read through some chapters and made very valuable suggestions.
- And my Spouse, Mrs. Juliana Kusi-Acheampong for her continued support and encouragement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Several years ago, a panel of experienced family counselors and sociologists were asked the question; what are the most significant changes which have taken place in the family during your life time?”¹ At the top of the list was “divorce”. “One hundred years ago divorce was almost unheard of and unthinkable. Over the last 30 years, the divorce rate has increased by 500%. If current rates continue, almost half of recent marriages will end in divorce.”² Church leaders, family counselors and family heads are all lamenting about separations and divorce all over the world. One seasoned writer, commenting on the incidence of divorce and separations in society said that “no trend in America family life since world war II has received more attention or caused more concern than the rising rate of divorce.”³ Divorce seems to be rocking every nation and community, Cape Coast and its environs in the Central region of Ghana has not been spared the agony.

Cape Coast District is among the districts that first received the Adventist message in Ghana. It is located at the southern part of Ghana and situated in the heart of the Central Region which shares common boundaries with Ashanti, Greater Accra and Western Regions.

¹Kevin Howse, Hugu Dunton and David Marshall, *Family Matters* (Alma Park: Grantham, Stanborough Press, 1988), 10.

²Ibid., 10.

³Robert H. Lauer and Jeanette C. Lauer, *Marriage and Family: The Quest for Intimacy* (Bogota: Sydrey, Brown and Bench Mark, 1997), 396.

Cape Coast is not only the political headquarters of Central Region, but also houses religious headquarters for so many denominations. No doubt it is also the home of the district headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, hence the name “Cape Coast District of Seventh-day Adventist Church, (SDAC).

Divorce and marital conflicts, which have become a world-wide canker as stated above have not only affected irreligious people but have also eaten into the fabric of the SDAC. Statistics of sanctioned church member taken in 2010 revealed that 81% of these members were sanctioned as a result of divorce and other marital related problems. It is a common practice to find one person among many in a village church, teaching Sabbath School and preaching the Sabbath sermon continuously for weeks. Why? This may be due to the fact that all those who can teach and preach in the church have been sanctioned due to marital problems.

Separation and divorce have become rampant in the various communities and this has made single parenting the norm of the day. A prominent writer has stated that “single parent families has increased considerably over the past two decades.”⁴ Indeed, a critical look at the church of God and the various communities, show that single parenting continues to grow. “In 1993, 27% of children lived with one parent, which was nearly double the proportion in 1970.” The writer concluded that “most of those living with one parent are with a divorced parent.”⁵

In the light of the scriptures, Jesus confirms what God spoke through Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets. When the Pharisees tempted Jesus in Matt 19: 3 with the question “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

⁴Ibid., 27.

⁵Ibid., 28.

Jesus giving an answer here aligns himself with the prophet Malachi, who quotes Yahweh as saying “I hate divorce” (Mal 2:6). In the beginning God created Adam and Eve, male and female. He blessed them and asked them to multiply (Gen 1: 27, 28). The implication is that the two sexes should be united in marriage. What Jesus said in Matt 19: 6 and quoted below indicates that marriage was made to be a permanent institution “so then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate.” Frank E. Gaebelin comments, “if God has joined them together according to the structure of his own creation, divorce is not only ‘Un-natural’ but a rebellion against God.”⁶

If divorce is rebellion against God, that it could not be part of God’s perfect design, and no one has the power to put asunder what God has joined together, then, it is imperative to design an educational and spiritual strategy to address the situation.

Statement of the Problem

God’s statement through the prophet Malachi (2:16) and Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in Mathew 19:3 on divorce, as well as many comments made by counselors, sociologist, church leaders, family heads, and many writers attest to the fact that something needs to be done about marriage conflicts, separations and divorce. The single parent family is the fastest growing family style in the world today, why? Rebecca M. Smith in her book “Family Matters” wrote that “some years ago single parents were considered somehow to have failed, but now single parenthood is more accepted since divorce has become a fact of life.”⁷

⁶Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 18: 412.

⁷Rebecca M. Smith, *Family Matters: Concept in Marriage and Personal Relationship* (Encino, CA: Glencoe, 1982), 397.

Will you marvel if you wake up one morning to hear a group of people calling themselves “The Blessed Single Parents Association?” In some communities, many people especially females opt for divorce when difficulties crop up in their marriages because there is the belief that those who fear divorce never get good partners. This is really affecting the physical, spiritual and financial growth of the people and the district. Consequently, it must be taken into serious accounts in the mission work of the district. This study therefore, looks into the causes of divorce and single motherhood, and how to mitigate this canker in society especially in the Cape Coast District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the causes of marital conflicts and divorce, and to design, implement and evaluate strategies to reduce marriage conflicts and divorce in the Cape Coast District of the SDAC to the barest minimum.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in helping pastors, elders and other church leaders to identify the causes of marital conflicts and divorce among Adventist in general especially in the Cape Coast district of SDAC. By utilizing these strategies, the physical, spiritual and financial growth of both the church members and the district will improve.

Scope and Limitation

This study focuses primarily on causes of marital conflicts and divorce. The discussion is limited to the Cape Coast District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Central Region of Ghana.

Methodology of the Study

This is a field research work, hence the primary instrument used to gather information for this paper is through formulated questionnaires, interviewing, traditional and historical facts, searching the internet, articles and books published by Seventh-day Adventists and other writers will not be ignored.

Overview of the Study

Four other chapters follow the introductory chapter. Chapter 2 considers the theological foundation of marriage and God's purpose of establishing it. Chapter 3, on the other hand, deals with the religious and historical background of the people under consideration, causes of marriage conflicts and divorce, and the effects of conflicts and divorce on the people. Chapter 4 begins with the project design, preparation, implementation and evaluation of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes this study with summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

Introduction

This chapter is a comprehensive search from both published and unpublished materials. The aim of this chapter is to find out what marriage is and what the Creator of marriage and the universe expects marriage to be. Consequently, the information gathered will help to address and reduce the problem of conflicts and divorce in marriage to a minimum.

What is Marriage?

Some learned men have assumed that marriage is simply a social societal or cultural institution. For instance, J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson define marriage “as the state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group.”¹ J. R. Aulette a renowned sociologist also views marriage “as a social institution that has several components.”² Other sociologist, psychologist, theologians and many other writers view marriage from different perspectives. Some consider marriage as a legal contract. For instance the SDA Bible Dictionary, edited by Siegfried H. Horn defines marriage as a “legal union of a man

¹ J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson, “Marriage” NBD (1962), 786.

²Judy Root Aulette, *Changing Families* (Belmont, CA: Wad-Sworth, 1994) 253.

and women in partnership with respect to homemaking, bearing and rearing children, and general interdependence and mutual comfort.”³

Diverse views have been expressed about marriage. To some, marriage is an economic arrangement between two parties. There are others who also see marriage as a sexual relationship. Others also see it as a means of procreation. Finally, there are those who see it as a divine, Institution.

Marriage as a Legal Contract

Aulette explains that in the United State, marriage is a legal contract. She continues: “The micro-level legal organization of marriage has a powerful effect on the micro-level experience of people who enter into marriage with each other.”⁴ This means that marriage begins with two individuals, male and female with the support of their families. Marriage is seen as a private affair yet the marriage contract actually gives more control to the government and less to the contracting partners. The questions of interest are; who gives the final nod when it comes to separation or divorce, taking custody of children and sharing of acquired properties or wealth? The final decisions are always in the hands of the government or the court. Frank D. Cox explains further that “it is the state that prescribes certain duties, privileges and restrictions. In addition, the contract cannot be dissolved by the mutual consent of the man and the woman but must be dissolved by state action.”⁵

This explicitly shows that the two who sign the contract, immediately become powerless because the contract is totally overseen by the laws of the State. The State

³*SDA Bible Dictionary*, (1960), s. v. “Angel.”

⁴Aulette, 253.

⁵Frank D. Cox, *Human Intimacy: Marriage, the Family and its Meaning* (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1981).

usually gives a license or certificate and the license certifies that the individual were married by a legally empowered representative of the state, often with two witnesses present. Many churches view marriage as a permanent commitment and do not grant divorce but the State does.

Bob and Margaret Blood testify that “marriage is a legal contract and that for many years it is a spiritual contract as well.”⁶ In progression, they reveal that “most States accept the fact that some couples simply do not get along, therefore such states recognize irreconcilable difference or incompatibility as grounds for divorce”,⁷ and they confirm what is expressed above that “while all religions view marriage as a permanent commitment, there are few who forbid divorce.”⁸ It can therefore be said that when marriage is viewed as a contract, the power is in the hands of the State to annul the relationship especially when one of the parties involves feels so. Marriage in this sense is a State institution that is protected by law.

Marriage as an Economic Arrangement

One of the economic functions of the family is to establish the socio-economic status of its individual members within the community social structure. To some people then, the viability of a marriage depend, in part on the level of income and the wealth of the incoming family or partner. Some parents tread cautiously when it is time for their loved ones to get married. With due diligence they entice wealthy partners or those with wealthy backgrounds for their children. Someone has expressed

⁶Bob Blood and Margaret Blood, *Marriage* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1978), 327.

⁷Ibid., 328.

⁸Ibid., 328.

that “in arranged marriages, for the person who wishes to get married, the question of concern is not looking for love in the relationship but to see whether the marriage proposal is of certain quality or comes from a high social status or not.”⁹ This indicates that a family may that select, or someone may go into the marriage relationship with the sole aim of making money or primarily for financial security.

The economics of arranged marriage therefore lies in the fact that particular attention is given to money. David Knox and Caroline Schacht are rare exceptions, when they expressed that the “marriage license is also an economic license that entitles a spouse to receive payment by health insurance company for medical bills if the partner is assured, to collect social security benefit at the death of the other spouse and to inherit from the estate of the deceased,”¹⁰. This is a real economic benefit for a spouse during both the lifetime and even after the death of a partner. Nonetheless, this should not be the motivation for marriage.

In modern society, most wives or mothers are also employed and therefore contribute substantially to the economy and the family income. This fact is buttressed by what Heather and Isabel express that, “the viability of a marriage may depend partly on the level of income and consumption that the family achieves.”¹¹ This indicates that marriage without proper economic arrangement may not survive to see the light of day. Many people, even Christians have had their marriages disintegrated as a results of losing their jobs. On the other hand, many young men are unable to contract marriage due to their lower incomes and unemployment.

⁹[Http:// www. Marriage.ygoy.com/economics of arranged marriages](http://www.Marriage.ygoy.com/economics%20of%20arranged%20marriages).

¹⁰David Knox and Caroline Schacht, *Choice in Relationship: An Introduction to Marriage and the Family* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1975), 10.

¹¹Heather L. Ross and Isabel V. Sawhill, *Times of Transition: The Growth of Families Headed By Woman* (Washington, DC: Unban Institute, 1975), 41.

Marriages as a Sexual Relationship

A Christian family counselor in one of his talks expressed that, “in both our tradition and church, marriage is usually accepted as a way to legitimize one’s sexual feeling and behavior.” Sex could therefore be partly defined, by its link to marriage. No doubt in the church and in some communities, sex outside of marriage is ideologically viewed as invalid. According to Judy Root,

“Marriage law requires that in order to consummate a marriage, to bring the wedding ritual to completion, a couple not only must have sex with one another, they must have a particular form of sex, intercourse.”¹² Marriage is considered a stable source of sexual satisfaction for couples and is seen as an important facet of marriage life. Many people find sex in marriage richly satisfying and rewarding. William F. Kenkel observes that, “Grief and sorrow, trial and pain are part of life and married life is no exception. Happiness, love and pleasure are also part of life, and it is on this side of the emotional ledger that a satisfying sexual relationship falls.”¹³

In times of tribulation as the statement above expresses, if couples really love each other in the sense of being partners in a pleasant sex life full of lively satisfaction, such couple have very much indeed. It is an accepted fact that a marriage with sexual relationship characterized by love, support, fidelity, honesty and lack of exploitation is more satisfying than casual sexual encounters.

¹²Aulette, 257.

¹³William F. Kenkel, *The Family in Perspective* (Santa Monica, CA: Good year, 1977), 476.

Marriage as a Means of Procreation

In Gen 1:28, God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

Commenting on this statement Andrew J. Cherlin posited that “the belief that raising children is the central task of marriage is an old one, going back to the days when survival of a family live couldn’t be taken for granted.”¹⁴ He continued, “Procreation was seen as socially important work, not the sort of thing to risk by undertaking radical changes in marriage.”¹⁵ Why did the creator bless man to be fruitful and multiply? The creator’s benediction was to enable man to propagate and perpetuate the human species. This is the source of hundreds of millions of human beings who now fill all continents of this world. Gail also, commenting on the importance of children in marriage has this to say: “Children are the future and in society structured by kinship, children are the future of one’s lineage, not some vague abstraction called society.”¹⁶ In most African communities, people believe that children serve as social security or an old age pension, and those who are without them cannot be certain that they will even have proper burial after death.

Looking critically at our present society, it is clear that it promotes the idea of procreation. That is why Sasses has submitted that, “everything from tax deduction for children, to restaurants that allow children to eat free, supports society’s

¹⁴Andrew J. Cherlin, *Public and Private Families: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw –Hill, 1999), 5.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶Gail Putrey Fullerton, *Survival in Marriage: Introduction to Family Interaction, Conflict and Alternatives* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1977), 96.

expectation that people will have children.”¹⁷ In Ghana and many other nations, education has encouraged the bearing of children in a more indirect fashion by providing free public education for all children and there are laws requiring them to attend.

The necessity of procreation in marriage makes parents put pressure on couples who are of child bearing age to get married and have children. Couples’ parents especially in Africa, usually look forward to their grandchildren and as a result make frequent comments, sometimes subtle, other times very direct like “when will I have my grandchildren? Or have your own children and send them.”

This usually happens when a couple without a child is found of sending other peoples’ children on errands. Consequently Sasses’ statement that “some childless couples usually feel strange and out of step with the rest of the world”¹⁸ is in order especially in some African society. Getting married implies bearing children.

When was Marriage Instituted?

According to Gen 2:18-24, marriage was instituted in the Garden of Eden after God had taken a rib from the side of Adam to form Eve. Ellen G. White explains,

God Himself gave Adam’s companion. He provided ‘a help mate’ for him, one who was fitted to be his companion and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Man was not created to dwell in solitude; he was to be a social being. Without companionship, the beautiful scenes and delightful employment of Eden would have failed to yield perfect happiness.”¹⁹

¹⁷Connie R. Sasses, *Families Today* (New York: Glencoe, 1954), 589.

¹⁸Ibid, 589.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *Letters to Young Lovers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1983), 11.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (*SDABD*) has this on one of its pages, “marriage was instituted by God in Eden, before sin entered the world.”²⁰ On the sixth day of creation before God ended His creative work, He created Adam first.

When Adam saw Eve after his deep sleep, he greeted her with joy and relief, uttering the first recorded human words in poetic verse: “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called woman, for out of me this one was taken”. (Gen 2:23). Ellen white expresses, “God celebrates the first marriage. It was one of the first gifts of God to man and it is one of the institutions that after the fall Adam brought with him beyond and gate of Paradise.”²¹

God’s Original Plan For Marriage

For man to understand what God wanted marriage to be like, one has to study the kind of marriage God instituted from the beginning. This is what Gen 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” This text indicates that God created one man, Adam and one woman, Eve. Verse 28 of same chapter says, God blessed them and asked them to multiply and fill the earth. The *Seventh –day Adventist Church Manual* explains, “God intended the marriages of Adam and Eve to be a pattern for all future marriages”²²

It continues.

“And Christ endorsed this original concept: Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said; for this

²⁰*SDABD* (1979), S. V. “Angel.”

²¹Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Oklahoma, Academy, 1983) 26.

²²General Conference of the Seventh–day Adventist, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: General Conference of Seventh–day Adventists, 2010), 149.

reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh' so then, they are no longer two but one flesh therefore what God has joined to together, let no man separate."²³

The marriage that took place in Gen 2:21-24 between Adam and Eve was between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns make it clear. George Bush posited, "God decides to make 'a helper' for the man' (2:18); he selected 'one rib' from 'one man' (2:21), and fashions it into 'a woman' whom he then takes to 'the man' (2:22); 'the man' says that 'she shall be called a woman' (2:23); thus 'a man' leaves his parents and is joined to 'his wife' (2:24)."²⁴ From the explanation given by George Bush, there is no ambiguity in the kind of marriage God instituted for mankind.

Moses never said that God designed many wives for Adam, he had put the wife in the singular number. No doubt John Calvin states that "the conjugal bond subsists between two persons only, therefore nothing is less accordant with the divine institution than polygamy."²⁵

It should then be understood that if God had intended for man to be polygamous, He would have created many 'Eves' for Adam. God has therefore expressed and maintained that the holy institution of marriage should be monogamous.

Ellen White adds her voice to this discussion pointing out that "this first marriage is an example of what all marriages should be like. God gave the man one

²³Ibid., 149.

²⁴George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical on the Book of Genesis; Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Institution, 2ed.* (New York: Newman and Ivision, 1852), 1:69.

²⁵John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis, Vol. 1*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 136.

wife. Had He deemed it best for the man to have more than one wife, He could as easily have given him two, but he sanctioned no such thing.”²⁶ By implication one can say that polygamy is and can never be part of Gods original plan for marriage.

A Life Long Union

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual commenting on Matt 19:3-8; Mark 10:2-9 has this to say, “divorce is contrary to God’s original purpose in creating marriage and that Jesus restored the creation view of marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a women and between the couple and God”²⁷ The above statement is strengthened by E. G. White when she penned that, ”the vow of marriage links the destines of the two individuals with bonds which nothing but the hand of death should sever.”³⁴ Despite the entry of sin, Christ has come to restore all things and put the hands of the clock to its rightful place. People who decide to go into marriage should reflect carefully whether they can cleave to each other through the vicissitudes of marriage’s life’s long relationship. Marriage should be well thought of before being considered. Jesus endorsed the permanence of marriage when He told the Pharisees, “Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate” (Matt 19:6).

In the *Exposition Bible Commentary*, Gaebaline has this to say, “If God has joined them together, according to the structure of his own creation, divorce is not only ‘un-natural’ but rebellion against God”²⁸. Passionately he conclude that

²⁶Ellen G. White, *Marriages, Wise and Unwise: Youth Instructor* (10th August, 1899), 437.

²⁷Ellen G White, *Adventist Home* (Harry: Oklahoma, Academy 1983), 340.

²⁸Gaebelein, 18:413.

“divorce is not part of the creator’s perfect design.”²⁹ It is very clear from Scripture that divorce does not have any part in God’s original plans for marriage.

Misconceptions Corrected by Jesus

Sociologists, psychologists and many other learned men like J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson see marriage as a state by which men and woman can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group. Aulette views marriage as “a social institution that has several components.”³⁰ As expressed above, many people consider marriage as a legal contract, economic arrangement, and sexual relationship and even as a means of procreation. There are others who see it as a divine institution.

Taking the creator who instituted marriage out of this institution, and making it only a social institution is dangerous. To put marriage in the bosom of sinful man without the manual (the bible) of the designer brings conflict, separation and divorce into the institution. Presently couples see divorce as a natural solution for marital difficulties but God, the designer says, “I hate divorce” (Mal 2: 16).

J. Richard Udry has asserted that, “one of the most fundamental reasons for the high divorce rate is the fact that divorce is less socially stigmatized today than before.”³¹ He continues, “An increasing proportion of the population define marriage not as a religious institution ordained by supernatural sanction and therefore indissoluble, but an arrangement of mutual gratification.”³²

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Aulette, 253.

³¹Udry, 339.

³²Ibid.

It is sad that mankind is taking the institution of marriage only as a social institution. Man can learn from the experiences the Pharisees had with Jesus on marriage. In Matt 19:4-6, when they came to test Jesus on divorce, He answered them, ‘‘Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate.’’

Among the Jews, a man was permitted to put away his wife for the most trivial offenses and the woman was at liberty to marry again. This practice led to wretchedness and women because the properties of men. Jesus spoke against this misconception when He said, ‘‘any man who divorce his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, commits adultery if he marries some other woman’’ (Matt 19:9). When they pressed to know why Moses allowed them to divorce, Jesus added that ‘‘it was because of the hardness of their heart that Moses suffered them to put away their wives, but from the beginning it was not so’’ (Matt 19:8). It was not God’s plan that divorce should ever be part of the marriage institution.

Therefore, Christians today who desire and proclaim in their hearts to follow God’s plan will not, without scriptural grounds resort to divorce as a solution to marital difficulties.

Marriage Compared with Christ and the Church

The Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology commenting on Rev 19:7-9 expresses that, in the New Testament ‘‘marriage is a symbol of the relation between Christ and the Church and the consummation of all things called the ‘Marriage of the lamb’ will be when Christ takes his ‘bride’ the Church, to be with him.’’

In Ephesians 5, Paul discusses in detail Christian marriage. In verse 32, he states that marriage depicts the relationship between Christ and His Church. Indisputably, in the scripture, marriage serves as a symbol of the intimate relationship between God and his people (Jer 3; Eze16; Hosea1-3). “God woos and wed Israel; the relation is tender and intimate. Israel’s apostasy is called adultery.”³³ God’s purpose for Christian marriage; the joining of a Christian man and woman is for them to illustrate the love of Christ for His Church. As the husband loves his wife unconditionally, so he forms a picture of how Christ loves the Church. As the wife respects and submits to the husband so she forms a picture of the Church following Christ into the work of the father.

The relationship between Christ and His bride (the church) is permanent, and that’s how He wants the relations between couples to be. Ellen White posits, “The spirit that manifest towards the church is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest towards each other.”³⁴ In conclusion, we need to be reminded that, “Christ honored the marriage relationship by making it a symbol of the union between Him and His redeemed ones. He Himself is the bridegroom, the bride is the church, as His chosen one He says, thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”³⁵

³³Ibid., 726.

³⁴Ellen G. white, *Adventist Home* (Harry, Oklahoma: Academy 1983), 26

³⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING

Socio-Economic Status of Church Members

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Cape Coast District is situated in the Central region of Ghana with its District Headquarters in Cape Coast the regional capital. The Central Region was the former seat of government of the Gold Coast now Ghana. Cape Coast was the seat of the British colonial administration until 1877. It is an ancient and historic town and its roles in Ghana's history is a long and honorable one. The city still shows evidence of former associations with the slave trade and has the most extensive surviving historic core of pre 1900 buildings.

Besides the castles and forts, the Cape Coast Municipality could also boast of a crocodile pond at Bebianeha (Hans Cottage), lagoons and beautiful beaches available for development. The region has fascinating fishing villages, historic towns, and rich natural attraction. The Kakum National Park, just 30km north of Cape Coast is the foremost natural reserve in the country. This National Park lies almost in an untouched virgin rainforest which is preserved as a long habitat for birds, butter flies and rare animals. The region's culture is depicted through its many exciting festivals which are held throughout the year. Some of the best known festivals are "Bakatue" which is literally the opening up of the Benya Lagoon into the sea which symbolizes the beginning of the fishing season for the people of Elmina on the first Thursday of the new year; and "Fetu Afahye" celebrated with durbar of chiefs by the people of Cape Coast on the first Saturday of September.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Cape Coast district extends beyond the Cape Coast Municipality. The Church district shares common boarders with the following Seventh-day Adventist Districts; Twifo Praso, Assin South, and Mankessim. According to Ghana Statistical Service Census results released in 2010, the Central region where the SDAC, Cape Coast district members live and work, has a population of about 2, 201, 863. Out of this number, the Adventist population in the district is about 1,184.

The main economic activities in the district are agriculture, commerce, service, manufacturing and processing in that order. Agriculture is the leading economic activity as expected in a rural economy. It is followed by commerce, manufacturing and processing which is marginal and mostly found in Cape Coast. Fish production cannot be overlooked and it is mainly from marine source.

About 90% of the Church Members are involved in agriculture and their activities are done in small scale due to difficulties in accessing credit, non-availability of improved seeds, high cost of inputs and inadequate agricultural technical staff. These setback in employment opportunities make the income level of most Adventist in the District low.

Historical Background of the District

Not until 1960, there was no SDAC in Cape Coast. The first church of the district was established at Beenuyie in 1949 by the late Elder Robert Essel who was a relative of William Dawson of Fetteh, one of the Pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventists in the then Gold Coast. In 1952, Elder Kwa Mensah of Abam established a branch of the church at Bedanegyia, a few kilometers from Beenuyie.

In 1960, the first church in Cape Coast was established at Bakaano which has grown to become the Central Church in the district. It was organized in 1969. Ten

years after its organization, the Central Church also established the Elmina Church. In 1984, the Seventh-day Adventist Students' Fellowship at the University of Cape Coast, in consultation with the Cape Coast Central Church, organized an evangelistic campaign which gave birth to the present day Pedu Church. Presently, there are ten organized churches, twenty-seven companies and four Sabbath school branches. The total membership is now about 1,184.

Statistics of the Church

Table 1 shows the membership of SDAC, Cape Coast district which was broken down into four different age groups.

Table 1. Age of Respondents

Age	No. of Members in a Group	Percentage (%)
13-19, teenagers	402	35
20-30, young adults	350	30
31-50, adults	288	25
51 and above elderly	128	11

Table 1 shows that the first group was that of the teenagers, which was made up of 402 members which comprises 35% of the total membership, the highest in the group. The second group was the young making up of 350 of the membership and a percentage of 30. The adults group comes next with a membership of 288 and a percentage of 25.

The last group was the elderly one, which has the least number of 125 and a percentage of 11. Few members among the teenagers are married especially those found

in the villages. Some of the young adults are in schools, others are learning various trades and a few of them are in petty trading. A number of the young adults are married especially those in petty trading. Majority of the married couples are found in the adult and elderly groups.

Table 2 shows the marital background of church members of SDAC, Cape Coast District as revealed by the family Ministries report from 2009–2011.

Table 2. Marital Status of Church Members

Year	No. of Married Couples	No. Married to Adventist	Adventist Women Married to Non-Adventist Men	Adventist Men Married to Non-Adventist Women	No. of Bachelors	No. of Spinsters
2009	375	210	85	80	132	125
2010	382	212	87	83	135	130
2011	392	216	91	85	140	133

Table 2 shows that the number of married couples rose from 375 in 2009 to 392 in 2011. At the same time, the number of Adventists who married from the Church rose from 210 to 216. The most disheartening situation was that those who married from outside the church were more than those who married from within the church; the ratio is 11:6.

As at 2011 the total number of married couples stood at 392. Out of the number, 176 were married to Non-Adventists. That is, they were in interfaith marriages. This number comprises about 45% of the total number of married couples. There is also another challenge because as at 2011, there was a total of 273 singles as against 392 married couples. What is preventing these bachelors and spinsters from

marrying? Is it a choice they have made? Is it because of the non-availability of suitable partners in the Adventist Church? Can they turn and fall into interfaith?

Table 3 below reveals the marital conflicts and separations/divorces of the SDAC, Cape Coast District.

Table 3. Marital Report on Conflicts, Separation/Divorce from 2009 - 2011

	Total No. of Marital Cases	No. of Cases (Conflicts)	No of Cases resulted in	No. of Married Couples	Percentage (%) of
	(Conflicts) Reported to the	That was Settled.	Separation Divorce	Couples	Couples Who Separated Or Divorced
2009	25	8	10	375	3
2010	24	6	12	382	3
2011	18	6	9	392	2
Average	22	7	10	383	3

This record reveals that in the year 2009, twenty-five marital conflicts were reported to the District Family Ministries Department (DFMD) Out of these cases, eight were resolved and ten resulted in separation /divorce. In the year 2010 also, twenty-four marital conflicts were reported to the DFMD, six were resolved and twelve resulted in separation/divorce. Furthermore in 2011, eighteen conflicts were reported to the DFMD, out of this number, six were resolved and nine ended in separation/divorce. These were conflicts that the local churches could not resolve and therefore transferred them to the DFMD.

Within the three years under study, a total of 67 marital conflicts were reported to the DFMD. Out of this number, twenty were resolved amicably and thirty-one resulted in separation/divorce. The ratio of marital couples to the divorce/separation rate is 31:383 which about 8% is. If the separation/divorce rate is

marched against the number of conflicts reported, it is 31:67 which about 46% is. This shows a very gloomy picture and must be carefully looked at by the district.

Summary of Interview

Evidence tapped from the socio-economic status of the church members reveals that marriages are affected negatively by low incomes of couples. But that is not the only factor, there are other causes that initiate conflicts and precipitate into separations or divorces. According to interviews conducted among the church members and leaders, thirty-five respondents gave fourteen factors that cause conflicts and divorce among church members marriages

Causes of Marital Conflicts and Divorce

Table 4 below shows the summary of the causes of marital conflicts and divorce that respondents gave as responsible for marital conflicts and divorce among church members.

Table 4. Causes Responsible for Marital Conflicts and Divorce

No	Factors/Causes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Lack of Biblical knowledge about	30	86
2.	marriage	23	66
3.	Incompatibility	23	66
4.	Power struggle in marriage	19	54
5.	Inadequate Pastoral Care	15	43
6.	Lower Income and Unemployment	14	40
7.	Family Pressure	10	29
8.	Conflict about Roles	8	23
9.	Inter Faith Marriage	3	9
10.	Repeated Adultery	3	9
11.	Childlessness	3	9
12.	Common Adultery or Infidelity	3	9
13.	Child bearing outside marriage	2	3
14.	Inter class Marriage	1	3

Eleven questions were asked during the interview (See Appendix D). The aim was to find out the causes that influence marital conflicts, separation or divorce among church couples. During the interview, thirty-seven church members were approached. Thirty-five responded positively and two did not compromise. Fourteen factors were

raised by the respondents. Considering the fourteen causes, eight of them were seen to be common to all.

The fourteen factors which are shown on the table in their order of merit are; lack of biblical knowledge about marriage, incompatibility, quarrelsome, inadequate pastoral care, lower income and unemployment, family pressure, conflict about roles and inter faith marriage. The others are; repeated adultery, childlessness, common adultery, childbearing outside marriage, interclass marriage and sexual dissatisfaction. This study will only consider the first eight causes which were common to all in their order of merit.

Lack of Biblical Knowledge about Marriage

Lack of Biblical knowledge about marriage was one factor that almost every respondent mentioned as the cause of divorce/separation and marital conflict. Out of the thirty-five respondents, thirty of them agreed that lack of biblical knowledge about marriage has been the main reason for conflicts and divorce in many marriages. A number of members who got married before entering the church were of the view that, they knew nothing about the principles of marriage when they got into it. They knew not that they should have taken great care in the formation of friendships and in the choice of a life companion. They seem to have left Christ out of their marriages because by then they knew Him not. They chose for themselves life partners, instead of allowing Christ to choose for them. The young lady, a single parent and respondent who expressed the above views ended quoting from Prov 19:14 saying that a prudent wife comes from God and so also is a prudent husband.

Another woman respondent lamented that the marriage principles laid down in the Bible are like manual for marriages. She felt sorry for the young ones in the church who were contemplating to marry from outside the church. She said so because

she felt her failure in marriage was as a result of the lack of biblical knowledge. She confirmed that if there is any institution in our world today that should be taken so seriously, then it should be marriage. And if there should be any counselor, then, it should also be the Bible. In conclusion she expressed that, proper consultation should be made before one binds herself to a man and vice versa.

Incompatibility

According to the factors enumerated by the respondents, incompatibility was second. It came to light that there are some married couples who almost disagree on any important issue that they need to decide on. Many are observed to have a "conflict confronting" attitude, a respondent noted, while others possess a "conflict avoiding" attitude. An interviewer confirmed that, usually, the partner with a "conflict confronting" attitude confronts the other with areas of concern, disagreement, and complaints. Often these complaints are expressed with strong emotions that get progressively stronger. When it happens this way, the confronted spouse, withdraws or ignore what he/she hears or responds with defensiveness, resentment and anger. This is the picture, one spouse gripes, the other withdraws and then reacts, the respondent noted.

Another respondent revealed additional way by which incompatibility manifest itself. She said it has to do with the couple keeping silence and rarely arguing, but they are at odds over almost everything, each of them has a different expectations about family life, marriage, child rearing and religion. Often such couples have few shared interests, activities, friends or reasons to sky together. The respondent added that most incompatible couples had their marriages arranged solely by parents or others and that they never had time to study each other or go through courtship. Others

too, in an attempt to “hit and ran” unfortunately have their partners impregnated leading to an unwarranted marriages.

Power Struggle in Marriage

While most of the members interviewed were concerned with the lack of biblical knowledge about marriage and incompatibility as the main cause of conflict and separation in marriages, other respondents hammered on power struggle in marriage. Partners are supposed to be friends but there are couples who treat their partners as enemies, a respondent lamented. She continued that there is always accelerated power struggle within the marriage, and this happens when each couple believes that he/she is better and more right than the other. By this attitude she concluded, skirmishes continue with occasional major battles and ceasefires.

Out of the thirty five members who responded to the interview, twenty-three expressed the view that power struggle among partners will continue to breed conflicts and disturb the peace that should prevail in marriages.

Inadequate Pastoral Care

Next to the three top causes of conflicts and divorce in marriage, was mentioned inadequate pastoral care. Nineteen of the thirty- five respondents agreed that there have been conflicts and divorces in the marital life of the church members as a result of inadequate pastoral care. One of the respondents, a retired minister, articulated that pastoral quality care to the church members could always have great positive impact on the marriage of church members in the district. The minister noted that most of the church members married before they joined the church. As such, they are amateurs in marriage and therefore, need counseling. He cried over the Pastor Member ratio which now stands at 1: 900 in the conference.

Members usually complain of not seeing the pastor frequently and this affects their spiritual and marital life. Elders do their best to support church members when they have conflicts, but the minister's presence has greater impact, a respondent concluded.

Lower Income and Unemployment

Many families in the district face crisis of economic distress due to unemployment and under employment. A greater number of the church members are subsistence farmers and what they produce is from hand to mouth. The effect of unemployment and lower income on members and families depend partly on how long it last. A respondent said such menace do not affect only old couples but also young ones, and concluded that its effects are seen among couples with young children in the church. It was observed that this usually creates economic separation or divorce. It was also learnt that those who are under such economic pressure in the church have lower marital quality due to an increase in conflict and decrease in warmth among family members.

The DFMD leader added his voice, expressing that mounting economic pressure makes some men in the church more irritable and short tempered, increasing their hostility in their marital relationship. This problem of lower income and unemployment he said causes men to behave more punitively in their parental roles and it also affects their ability to effectively meet the needs of their children and partners, hence, conflicts and separations.

Lower income has forced some church members to secretly work on some Sabbaths for long hours. In some marriages, a retired policeman confided that lower income and unemployment has caused a shift in power balance and issues like

who washes dirty clothing or who takes rubbish out and makes dinner has become a battle grounds.

Family Pressure

In Africa where the extended family system is greatly cherished, anyone who decides to marry should consider the advice of parents and other family members. A respondent who was once married to someone from another region expressed that, one does not get married only to the partner but also to the in-laws. She continued that there are some in-laws who do not want their children to marry from certain regions. Those who refute and go ahead may have challenges at the latter part of their marriages. This is because most of such marriages do not last as the men are later forced to marry a lady from their own region.

According to the study, 40% of the respondents agreed that they have had problems in their marriages as a result of family pressure. Ellen White a Christian writer in her book *Counsels for the church, volume 1*, expresses that children should consult their parents and should not use only their own desires and inclinations. She adds that, “those who do so do it out of selfishness and close their hearts to filial affection”.¹

Conflict about Roles

The next issue that came out as a conflict causer in marriages is the way people are brought up in their various families. A women's ministries leader, and respondent noted that, one does not marry someone whom he or she has grown up with in the same house hold. One picks someone from a different background and

¹Ellen White, *Counsels for the Church* (Harray: Oklahoma, Academy, 1983), *Volume 1*, page 131.

this at times bring two incompatibles together, hence, conflicts in marriages. She explained that one might have grown up in a house where both boys and girls did the house chores but marries a man who thinks that the kitchen is a woman's place as well as other house chores. She concluded that such men usually expect their partners to support them in their duty as breadwinners. When the women refuse they are branded as non-supportive, what about their refusal to assist the women in their home chores?

Interfaith Marriages

The last issue that caught the eyes and minds of the respondents as causing conflicts and separations in many marriages is the act of marrying outside the church. About 23% of the respondents held the view that marrying outside one's faith may lead to marital conflict.

A respondent quoted from Gen 6:1, 2 and explained that it was as a result of the sons of God getting married to the daughters of men that spread evil and increased wickedness. He concluded that this resulted to almost the total wiping away of the human race, but for one faithful man and his household.

Drawing from 2 Cor 6:14 and Deut 7:13, some churches do forbid interfaith marriages. Truly speaking, interfaith marriage has destroyed many marriages of SDA church members in the District. Out of the eight respondents who were of the view that interfaith marriages breed conflicts and do not last, all of them were women and five of them confessed suffering from it. They expressed the sentiments that before their marriages, the men agreed that they would allow them to hold on to their original faith. But some years later pressure from two main sources, spouses close relatives and church leaders, demanded they should deny their faiths. The worse of it was that their children are torn up between the two parents and the two religions. Some reached compromises by dividing the children between the father and the mother,

each taking their share to church. It is seen that this solution usually worsens, deepens and perpetuate conflicts. Some women are divorced and the men have married from their churches. Some of the children have also become indifferent to any religion, respondents concluded.

Members Suggested Solutions to Marital Conflicts and Divorces

The church members did not only express their concerns about what causes conflict and divorce, they also suggested solutions to the problems. Table 5 below is a summary of the recommended solutions to the causes elevated during the interviews.

Table 5. Suggested Panaceas, Frequency and Percentage

NO	Approach	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Regular marriage seminars, workshops and bible studies	25	71
2.	Courtship and counseling	20	57
3.	Workshops on how to create wealth/ creation of job for church	8	28
4.	Frequent pastoral visitation	3	6

Regular Marriage Seminars, Workshops and Bible Studies

As expressed above, many of the church members got married before entering into the church. They therefore had little or no knowledge about Christian marriage. Twenty-five members making up 71% of the respondents suggested that regular marriage seminars, workshops and bible studies could

help couples gain knowledge about Christian marriage. One respondent noted that they were made to understand that those who fear divorce will never get good marriage. While the Bible talks about the permanency of marriage, in some traditions, people talk about breaking and looking for a better one.

Some respondents asserted that, Elders following well drawn programmes should visit local churches in the villages where there are no Bible teachers to help educate members on marital issues. Marriage Counselors and experts should be invited on monthly and quarterly bases as well as during zonal corporate worship periods to educate church members on how to contract marriage biblically and lawfully. Many respondents think this could reduce interfaith marriages, family pressures and many erroneous ideas about marriage.

Courtship and Counseling

A number of respondents also talked about courtship and counseling. About 57% of them consented that courtship and counseling should be made compulsory or be encouraged in the district. It was observed that mostly, people who marry traditionally are of the view that courtship and counseling are not important. At times too because members are far from the district pastor, they go ahead with their marriages and may or may not inform the pastor.

The District family ministries leader who was also one of the respondents reiterated that couples who are allowed to court and are taken through counseling are encourage to dialogue before and during marriage about the reality of season of ecstasy when the tide rushes in, and season of disillusionment when the mind flats. The opening of such issues at this time give the couple a sense of permission to address again as the twists and turns of married life unfold, he concluded.

The period of courtship and counseling also provide opportunity for the couple to further develop the relational skills necessary for couple intimacy. The ability to convey and receive love, to affirm one's partner, to process anger and to resolve conflicts effectively can be learned by any couple willing to listen to one another and put energy into enhancing their skills, another respondent added.

To make this a reality, it was suggested that local, district, zonal and family ministries leaders need to be trained to assist the minister in this direction. This could reduce conflicts, incompatible and quarrelsome tendencies.

Workshop on How to Create Wealth / Creation of Job for Church Members

Eight respondent observed that church members should be taught how to create wealth and that the church should also create jobs for its members. One continued that wealth creation is not necessarily linked with University Education. If it were not so, then why do we have graduate unemployment today? He concluded that, wealth creation is an art. Some people are born with it while others learn it. Therefore, the church should invite knowledgeable business personnel and experts to give church members the expertise and technical know-how to enable members start their own businesses. Members could be taught how to organize themselves into smaller groups so that they could have financial support from financial institutions as well as the Adventist Relief Agency.

Churches could also get involved in the creation of simple jobs like pure water production, poultry farming and vegetable crops production. Such business ventures could employ some church members. When members get sustainable jobs and get to know how to create their own jobs then marital conflicts, separation and divorce which results from lower income and unemployment could be reduce to the barest minimum, a respondent added.

Pastoral Visitation

Apart from the above solutions, three respondents were of the view that frequent pastoral visitation to church members can be vital to their spiritual nurturing and growth. In a low tone, one respondent expressed that this area is mostly neglected by pastors. One of them also noted that many members are carrying burdens that are not spoken about, but with frequent visitations members might grow to respect and trust the minister and open their hearts to him. This will go a long way for the minister to solve marital and other problems before they get out of hands. Before she ended, she added that in their culture, a home-going minister or elder makes a church-going people.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The proposal for the project was approved in May 2010 but the actual research work started in August 2010 when the problem of marital conflicts and divorce among Adventist couples in Cape Coast and its environs became clear in the mind of the researcher and other administrators of the district. The researcher had an in-depth discussion with the Family Life Director of the South Ghana Conference and his inspiration is still in mind.

After this, the statement of the problem, purpose of study, significance of study, scope of limitation, methodology of the study and the organization of the study were looked at and grouped under chapter one. Under chapter two are the theoretical foundation of marriage, while chapter three deals with the socio-economic status of Cape Coast S.D.A. church members and causes or factors of marital conflicts and separation/divorce of the people. From this point, it became imperative to design, implement and evaluate in chapter four a family life ministries education strategy to address the causes of conflicts and separations/divorce that were tearing families apart in the district. Due to time constraints, four out of the eight factors that are responsible for conflicts and divorce were addressed. Procedures followed are listed below:

- a) Preparation
- b) Project Objectives

- c) Project Implementation
- d) Project Evaluation

Preparation for Education Strategy

The researcher before the implementation of the project in January 1st, 2012 made preliminary preparation which included a district meeting with church leaders as well as family life leaders of the various local churches. Key partners, made up of seasoned Elders and the associate district pastors were briefed after the district meeting. Materials to be used for the program were selected and some downloaded from the website of the Family Life Ministries Department of the General Conference of SDA Church. Program guide was prepared. Two projectors, laptops and other visual aids were assembled.

Key Partners in the Program Implementation

On the 10th of December 2011, the district executive committee chaired by the researcher and assisted by the associate district pastor selected some seasoned elders and men of the church to assist in the implementation of the program. Committed deacons and deaconesses who gave themselves up to help with visitation were also enlisted. In spite of the fact that district, local and family life leaders were sensitized, letters were also sent to all local churches confirming the date of take-off (See Appendix A).

Selection of Materials

The twenty-six Family Life Ministries messages to be read every Sabbath within the six months period were taken from the book, *Adventist Home*. These messages were to be read in between Sabbath school and divine service every Sabbath. Due to limited space only two samples are included (See Appendix C). The

Family Life week of spiritual emphasis sermons were downloaded from the official website of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. For the Sunday Family Life Bible Studies, the book, *A Resource Handbook for Families and Family Ministries Leaders* written by Pastor D. K. Nguando-Yamoah was used.

Time Designation

With the assistance of the district executives, a time table was prepared to schedule the activities of the training program. To start with, pastoral visitation teams were put in place to prepare the people ahead of the educational program. The visitation teams were to start operations in October 2011, three months before the actual program in January 2012. The family life week of spiritual emphasis was also scheduled to take place within the 1st week of every month starting from January 2012 to June ending. The local churches normal Sunday one hour Bible studies program was extended to two hours and the contents of the lectures were from the book *Resource Handbook for Families and Family Ministries leaders*. The series was renamed “An Encounter with Marriage Truth.” The Family Ministries messages selected were also planned to be read in all churches in between Sabbath School and divine service.

Visual Aids and Apparatus

Visual aids were prepared for the entire program. Churches were asked to put in good shape their chalk boards and those who had none were assisted to purchase one. Black markers were also provided for local churches that had white boards. Some few pens, pencils and small notebooks were bought and given to those who could not afford such materials at the time. These materials were provided to enable participants put down some important facts and relevant Bible texts. Two computers

and projectors were gathered to be used. Marriage films like Tyler Perry's *Why did I get married* and *Fireproof your marriage* by Kirk Cameron were used. Not only were the above movies used but also recorded talks shows of the renowned Ghanaian marriage known counsellor "Opanin Kwadwo Kyere" were also employed. Television sets and video players to show films on marriages were also assembled in the local churches.

Project Objective Setting

The main purpose of creating this project intervention strategy was to reduce marital conflicts, separation and divorce to the barest minimum in the chosen district. In order to achieve this set goal, four objectives were formulated to enable the researcher reach the project's over-all purpose. These included:

1. Creating the desire for those who were of age to pick their partners from the church and avoid interfaith marriages after listening to inspiring messages from the *Spirit of Prophecy* writings and testimonies from those currently involved in interfaith marriages.
2. Intensification of pastoral visitation to improve pastor/church members relations.
3. To increase the number of Adventists couples who are more compatible
4. Deepening the understanding and acceptance of Biblical marriage principles to reduce marital conflicts, separation and divorce.

Project Implementation

After setting up the goal for the educational program and choosing the activities through which to attain the goals, which included, the Pastoral visitation, family life week of spiritual emphasis, the *An Encounter with Marriage Truths Bible*

Studies and family life messages, all became set for the implementation. All materials for the project were assembled for implementation.

Activity Number One: Pastoral and Leaders Visitation

Some three clear months before January 1st, 2012, the researcher and his associate met with the church leaders and planned for a thorough pastoral visitation throughout the district. Only elders, deacons and deaconesses, and church members who showed interest and volunteered for this service were used. It was observed that it would be unfair to assume that every church member had the gift or interest for such ministry hence the use of volunteers. For the purpose of this project, the district was divided into three zones or the visitation. This was done so that the visitation teams could be closer to their own people or church members.

Using the Christ method of visitation, members were grouped into two's. Married couples who joined were allowed to move together. The time for visitation was flexible. Groups chose their own day and time and leaders were appointed to monitor the activities of the team members. It was realized that most groups visited during the villages' market days when people stayed at home to market their farm products. The researcher and his wife, his associate and the wife also visited couples in the three zones. Three days of fasting and prayers preceded the visitation programme to renew the spirituality of the participants. The researcher, his associate and the district Evangelist were dispatched to the three zones where the visitation teams were gathered to prepare them physically, spiritually and socially for the task. The visitation team members were taught how to enter homes and relate to the people they come in contact with. The teams were also encouraged to listen even to non-Adventist church members and praying with them in anticipation that it may open the way for some of them to attend the six months program. Interestingly, most of the

teams continued their visitation throughout the six month period. It was during this period that the researcher understood the Christian adage that “a home going pastor or elder makes a church going people”.

Activity Number two: Messages from the book “Adventist Home”

Messages were selected from the book *Adventist Home* by Ellen G. White to be read every Sabbath throughout the six months period, thus beginning from January 1st to June 28th 2012. Three themes were selected, one for January and February, March and April, and then May and June. The theme for the first two months was “Choosing the life partner”. Commenting on the great decision of choosing a life partner, the great Christian writer had this to say,

“Make haste slowly. Few have correct views of the marriage relation. Many seem to think that it is the attainment of perfect bliss; but if they could know one quarter of the headaches of men and women that are bound by the marriage vow in chains they cannot and dare not break, they would not be surprise that I trace these lines.”¹

The themes for March-April, and May-June respectively were “Factors that make for success or failure” and “The Marriage Altar.” The weekly message topics were:

- January 7th – Hasty, Immature Marriages.
 - ✓ 14th – Compatibility.
 - ✓ 21st – Domestic Training.
 - ✓ 28th – True Conversion, A Requisite.

- February 4th – Solemn Promises.
 - ✓ 11th – A Happy Successful Partnership.
 - ✓ 18th – Mutual Obligation.
 - ✓ 25th – Marital Duties and Privileges.

- March 3rd – Atmosphere of the Home.
 - ✓ 10th – Fundamentals of True Homemaking.

¹Ellen White, *Adventist Home* (Harrah: Oklahoma Academy, 1993), 44.

- ✓ 17th –The Eden Home, a Pattern.
- ✓ 24th – Where Shall the Home be?
- ✓ 31st – Children, a Blessing.

- April 7th – Influence of the Mother.
 - ✓ 14th – Misconception about the Mother’s work
 - ✓ 21st – Imperfect Patterns of Motherhood.
 - ✓ 28th –The Kind of Husband not to be.

- May 5th – Divorce.
 - ✓ 12th – Moral Standards.
 - ✓ 19th – Religion in the Family.
 - ✓ 26th – A United Front.

- June 2nd –Objectives of Discipline.
 - ✓ 9TH – The Time to begin Discipline.
 - ✓ 16th - Discipline in the Home.
 - ✓ 23rd – Administration of Corrective Discipline.
 - ✓ 30th – With Love and Firmness.

Wherever it was applicable, in the local churches, couples in good standing were selected to read the message of the day and at the end, the other partner either prayed for all families worldwide or a selected a family which is in need. A translated version of the week’s message neatly printed in the local language was given to church members at the entrance of the church building.

Activity Number Three: An Encounter with Marriage Truth

This program attracted some non-Adventist church members at certain centers. This happened because as the visitation teams visited, and prayed with people, they also invited them to the program. Thank God some couples renewed their vows and even gave their lives to Jesus. The *Encounter with Marriage Truths* seminar was planned to replace the usual Sunday bible studies which usually started at 7:00pm each Sunday and ended at 8:00pm. By popular request, the time was extended to two hours. The program was planned in such a way that the facilitators were rotated from

one place to the other throughout the period. This was done to make the program lively and not monotonous.

Marriage films like Tyler Perry’s “Why did I get married” and “Fireproof your marriage” by Kirk Cameron were also shown. Not only the above movies, but recorded marriage talks of the renowned Ghanaian marriage counselor Opanin Kwadwo Kyere were played and fully discussed. Table 6 below shows the topics that were taught and discussed on Sundays from January 1st to June 24th, 2012.

Table 6. Topics Taught and Discussed on Sundays from January 1st to June 24th, 2012

Month	Date	Topics Discussed/Activity
January	1 st	Christian Marriage
January	8 th	Co-habitation
January	15 th	Forbidden Marriages
January	22 nd	Forgiveness: The gift which heals and brings true togetherness.
January	29 th	Film Show
February	5 th	Domestic violence
February	12 th	Father’s position and responsibilities
February	19 th	Mother’s position and responsibilities
February	26 th	Film show
March	4 th	Attitude towards an unbelieving companion
March	11 th	Principles of marriage finance
March	18 th	Relaxation and recreation
March	25 th	Film show
April	1 st	Dangerous Amusement for the young
April	8 th	The choice of Companions
April	15 th	Good judgment and self-control in marriage
April	22 nd	Families on the fault line
April	29 th	Sex, gender and the family
May	6 th	Single parenting
May	13 th	Remaking your world
May	20 th	Qualities to be sought for in a prospective Wife/Husband
May	27 th	Is premarital counseling necessary?
June	3 rd	Courtship
June	10 th	Home Government
June	17 th	A Christian Household
June	24 th	Film show

Each of the meetings started with a hymn, followed by prayer then the bible study or movie or a recorded marriage talk. This was always followed by questions and answers and closed with prayers and benediction.

This *Encounter with Marriage Truths* opened the understanding of both church and non-church members. Many people confessed that they married without any knowledge about what marriage entails. Such people went away and brought in friends. No wonder eleven people were baptized through this educational program and eight people who had backslidden because of marital problems got strengthen and came back to worship their God.

Activity Number Four: Family Life Weeks of Spiritual Emphasis

The fourth activity was the family life weeks of spiritual emphasis. The program was to be carried out at the first week of every month starting from January to June as shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Topics for Family Life Weeks 2012.

Week	Period	Day	Topics for Each Week
1	Jan. 1 st – 7 th	1	Marriage under the Everlasting Covenant
		2	Living Together by Grace
		3	Empowering One Another for Abundant Life
		4	Towards Full Measure of Intimacy
		5	Grace Changes Everything
		6	Movie Series on Family Issues.
		7	Forgiveness: Healing the wounds we do not Deserve
2	Feb.5 th –11 th	1	Seasons of Marriage
		2	The Marriage Miracle
		3	A Time of Dialogue
		4	Married “As Children of Light”
		5	A Day to Remember
		6	Ridging the Well
		7	A Journey called Marriage
3	March 4 th -10 th	1	Family Finance
		2	Family Stress Management
		3	Caring for Aging Parents
		4	You and Your Child
		5	You and Your Teen
		6	Movie Series on Family Issues
		7	Leaning on One Another
4	April 1 st – 7 th	1	The Great Decision
		2	True Love or Infatuation
		3	Communication
		4	Conflict Resolution
		5	Sexuality and Family Planning
		6	Movie Series on Family Issues
		7	The Successful Family
5	May 6 th – 12 th	1	Close Companion
		2	Choosing to Love Again
		3	Adam’s Peace
		4	When Children Have Children
		5	Recovering from the Losses of Life
		6	Movie Series on Family Issues
		7	How to Love the Son of Thunder
6	June 3 rd – 9 th	1	Resolving Conflict Creativity
		2	Divorce and the Family
		3	Family Violence
		4	No One Deserves to be Abused
		5	Let us Address Family Violence Quickly
		6	Movie Series on Family Issues
		7	Making the Home a Place of Peace and Healing

These evenings of Family Life Spiritual Emphasis became like church house evangelism at some places. People from other denominations joined the church to share the blessings of God. People came in with their partners, and shared their marital problems with the facilitators. The program usually started with a hymn, prayer and followed by the theme song. After the theme song came the facilitator and usually thirty minutes was allotted for questions and prayer sessions. Five minutes to the end of each day's program was used for what was called "Couple Activity". Participants, especially married couples were given an assignment each day to perform at home and pray over it. For example on the 4th of January when the topic "Towards Full Measure of Intimacy" was treated, the "Couple Activity" came in this form- Write separately and then share alone as couples the following:-

1. Ways in which I feel I really know you...
2. Ways in which I feel known and understood by you...
3. Barriers we are experiencing that inhibits intimacy...
4. Areas in our relation where there is still distance, intimacy to be stretched towards...
5. Things I can do to bring down the wall between us...

At the centre where the researcher conducted his program, many elderly people confessed that their health started deteriorating either after separating from their spouses or had much conflicts and violence in their marriages. This was after the facilitator had commented that intimacy remains at the centre of our journey on this earth, even into adulthood. And those studies proliferate about the importance of human intimacy to basic health and wellbeing, even to survival. Explaining what a leading specialist in psychosomatic medicine at the University of Maryland had said, there is biological basis for our need to form human relationships, and that if we fail

to fulfil that need, our health is in peril.² The researcher was called upon to baptize some participants even before the end of the six months.

Program Evaluation

The main purpose of this project was to reduce marital conflicts and separation/ Divorce in the Cape Coast District of the SDA Church and its Environs. It was therefore vital to evaluate the four objectives to find out if they were achieved at the end of the implementation level or not.

Evaluation of Family Life Educational Objectives

Objective 1. Objective number one was to create the desire for church members to choose their partners from the church. This objective was promoted during the Encounter with Marriage Truths bible studies series. Topics such as The Christian's Marriage, Forbidden Marriages, The Choice of Companions and A Christian Household, opened the eyes of the church members and helped them to know why God instituted marriage and his original plan before sin came in. The sacredness and importance of marriage became more vivid to the church members during the period of family life week of spiritual emphasis. The Movies series that were shown, and the powerful sermons presented such as; *A Journey Called Marriage, The Great Decision, True Love Or Infatuation* and the testimonies from those who have experienced interfaith marriages, as well as those in Christian marriages, no doubt, created the right desire and taste for those who are about to enter into marriage. It became clearer to those who are not yet married to go in for partners who belong to their faith.

²James J. Lynch, *The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness*, (1979), quoted in MacDonald, 1992, pg. 24).

Objective 2. The aim of the second objective was to use pastoral visitation to improve pastor/church members relationship. How was this achieved? Using Christ method, two persons in each group, about three hundred and fifteen families were visited. Those who visited in the various local churches in the villages did so in the name of the pastors because they were chosen from elder, deacons and deaconesses. The associate district Pastor and his wife, and the researcher and his wife visited about one hundred and thirty-nine families. Wherever we visited, people were ready to receive us. Both church members and non-church members shared their problems. We prayed with them, counsels were given and church members praised God for this new trend of development. Church members said they felt proud among cotenants because they commented that they have not seen their church leaders doing that before. This revived the heart of the church leaders and by God's grace through this initiative, visitation of church members has come to stay in the district. The leadership of the district has seen the value to visitation to the nurture of believers

Objective 3. The focus of this objective was to increase the number of church members married to Adventist. As table 2 in page 23 shows at the close of year 2011, the total numbers of Adventist married to non-Adventist were 176 as against 216 who were married to Adventist. The aim was to reduce the 176 and increase the 216.

After going through the Bible studies and the six month prayer emphasis, those who are of age and had the mind to choose partners from outside, changed their minds. Some confessed and praised the church for such a wonderful enlightenment. The church prayed, individuals prayed wherever they went during the day and in the evenings the churches were on fire. The Week of Prayer emphasis topics such as *Marriage under the Everlasting Covenant*” and *The Successful Family* were fully

appreciated by the Church members and those who participated in were full of praise. Some participants suggested that such sermons could be repeated anywhere anytime.

Objective 4. Objective number four aimed at deepening the understanding and acceptance of Biblical principles of marriage, and to reduce marital conflicts, separations and divorce to the barest minimum. It was realized during the interview that many of the present church members got married before they joined the church and had little or no knowledge about Biblical principles of marriage. Most of such men, even by the time they joined the church, had not performed the marriage rites of their spouses.

During the Encounter with Marriage Truth series, the presentations were done with this objective in mind. Topics such as The Journey into Intimacy, Forgiveness: Healing the wounds we don't Deserve, Empowering one another for Abundant Life, A Time to Dialogue, Ridging the Well, Family Finance, Conflict Resolution, Communication in Marriage, Resolving Conflicts Creatively, Divorce and the Family, Family violence and many others gave the church members what they deserved. Mid-way into the six months, report on marital conflict in the churches and to the district family life committee reduced almost to zero. Church leaders reported at the district meetings that the churches are at peace when it comes to marital conflicts. People have now understood how important conflict resolution is in marriage and how to use it to sustain their marriages.

Members who were also in interfaith marriages and had planned to end their relationship due to deadlock in conflict resolution have had safe haven for their marriage, especially those who were able to invite their partners to the program. Two of such people were among those who were baptized after the program.

According to the District Family Ministries Department (DFMD) statistical report, a total number of 67 conflicts were reported at the district during 2009 -2011 period. This gives a yearly average of 22 conflicts. Out of the 67 conflicts, 20 were resolved amicably but a whopping number of 31 resulted in separation or divorce. It was observed that the average total number of married couples for the period in question was 383. The ratio of separation and divorce to the number of married couples was 31:383, which was about 8%. The same number of separation and divorce marched against the number of conflicts reported at the district level gave a ratio of 31:67 which was about 46%.

The implementation of the program ended in June 2012 and from July 2012, to June 2013, a period of one year that the evaluation had been done; there had been a wonderful trend of events. The average number of conflicts for 2009 – 2011 was 22 per year. To the surprise of the researcher and all those concerned, the number of conflicts reported at the district from July 2012 – June 2013 reduces to 10. Eight out of this number was peacefully settled. One is still pending and only one resulted in divorce. Not this alone, the average number of members married to Adventists increased from 213 to 220 during the period under review. Eight persons got married within the time of evaluation. Only one church member married from outside the church. The table below depicts the new trend.

Table 8. Cape Coast District, Comparison of Marital Separations and Divorce

Year	Total No. of Marital Cases (Conflicts) reported to the DFMD	No. of Cases (Conflicts) that was Settled.	No. of Cases that resulted in Separation or Divorce.	No. of Married Couples.	Percentage of Couples who Separated or Divorced.
2009	25	8	10	375	3%
2010	24	6	12	382	3%
2011	18	6	9	392	2%
2009 – 2011	22	7	10	383	3%
(AV) July 2012 – June 2013	10	8	1	395	0.2%

At the end of the The Family Life Educational Program, no church member has gotten married without at least going through counseling, whether traditional marriage, blessing or wedding. Even the one who married outside the church received some form of counseling with her partner.

Table 8 shows that things have improved. The average percentage of separation and divorce from 2009 -2011 was 3%. That meant that out of the 383 married couples in the district, 3% seeks and go through separation or divorce every year. Now after the program, the percentage has dropped from 3% to 0.2%. This is really fantastic. It seems church members have now understood what marriage is and why God instituted it. Conflicts, separations and divorces cannot be absolutely

eradicated from marriage but as the researcher perceived, it has reduced to the barest minimum in the Cape Coast District and its environs.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The objective of this project was to develop and evaluate a strategy to reduce to the barest minimum the causes of marital conflicts and divorce among Adventist couples in the Cape Coast district and its environs. To achieve this, a general overview of the project was given in chapter one. The content consisted of the statement of the problem, purpose of study, significance of study, scope and limitation, methodology and an over view of the study.

Chapter two dealt with the literature review. It established the theological foundation for the education strategy in the Cape Coast district of SDAC. This educational strategy was basically derived from the Bible with support from the writings of Ellen White and many other scholars. One laudable way of making church members true disciples of God, is to help them remain steadfast in the noble institution of marriage. Marriage was instituted by God and only the scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) can direct the best way it should be ran, because it has the power to demystify the shrouded part of marriage.

In chapter three, the socio-economic status and the historical background of the district and the church members was considered. Marital trends were looked at from the year 2009 – 2011. Church members gave reasons why conflicts, separations and divorce were so rampant in the district and how it can be curbed.

After chapter three came chapter four, which attempted to solve the problems that were enumerated. Hence a full description of the research design, implementation and evaluation was examined. It was also in this chapter that the project preparation and formulated objectives were discussed in detailed.

The purpose of chapter five is to summarize the work done and to draw conclusions on the outcome of the various investigations, interventions and to make recommendations where necessary and also for further implementation of the suggestions this project could not realized.

Conclusion

At the time of the study, a number of observations were made that need reflections so that conclusions could be arrived at. The conclusions were as a result of the findings that came out from the project implementation.

The Study disclosed the following:

1. A large number of married couples lack biblical knowledge on the principles of marriage. It came to light that many church members married before they joined the church and that even some marriages were not contracted in the normal traditional way. The partners lived as concubines and pregnancies occurred. Therefore their knowledge need to be upgraded to be in line with the right facts about Christian marriage. In due course such marriage should be regularized.
2. Another cause observed to facilitate conflict, separation and divorce in the district was the low incomes and unemployment status of many of the church members. About 90% of the church members are employed in the agricultural sector, such members do not earn much because they practice small scale

farming. They receive low incomes and are unable to provide the needs of their family members hence conflicts, separation and divorce.

3. During the study, the researcher realized that some church members attended church services wearing different masks. They do all they can to have brighter faces yet their true faces and picture are well portrayed at home. Not until the pastoral visits, the leadership did not know what was really happening in many homes. The study observed that pastoral care was inadequate in the district and this can also contribute to marital conflicts.
4. During the implementation session, it became known that most church members marry without going through courtship and counseling. Such church members do not learn how to resolve conflicts creatively; they are disarmed in time of conflict and have no skills to work through a difficult marital challenge. Marriage, like a journey across a country side, has rough and smoother spots. Those who refuse to go through courtship and counseling embark upon the trip, often without a map. They start the journey without a clear destination, better preparation and information about the landscape, hence conflicts and separations.

Recommendations

After the researcher has gone through the program design, implementation and evaluation, it is imperative that recommendations be made which could be to the advantage of the local churches in the Cape Coast district. It could also be of benefit to the Family Life Ministries Leaders, Pastors and the South Ghana Conference (SGC) of SDA Church. After the evaluation of the program, it came to light that conflicts had reduced by 55%. Thus a yearly average of 22 marital conflicts reported to the district, reduced to 10. What then happened to separation and divorce? It also

reduced from 3% to 0.2%. It is the view of the researcher that if the recommendations are followed critically for some three or four years, it is possible that conflicts could be reduced drastically and separations and divorce to zero.

Recommendations to Family Life Ministries Director, SGC

God instituted two institutions in the Garden of Eden at the end of creation. They are the Sabbath and marriage. Satan's attempt to eradicate the solemnization of these institutions from the minds of people is still in force. This is why there is so much pervasiveness in marriage today, even Christians are accepting lesbianism and gayism'.

The Adventist Church worldwide has two main educative programs for the church, they are *The Christian Home Marriage Week* and *Family Togetherness Week*. Every year, the church makes available the relevant materials for family life lectures in February and September respectively. It is recommended that each of these programs should be repeated each year, that is within each quarter, there should be one of these programs to help sensitize members on the institution of marriage.

It is also recommended that the conference prepares a "Marital Bible Study Guide" for the local churches; this will go a long way to educate church members and help them shed false ideologies about marriage.

Recommendations to Pastors

Visiting church members can be vital to their spiritual nurture and growth. The minister should therefore maintain a balance between public and personal ministry. According to Acts 5:42, the early Christian church were daily in the temple and in every house teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Paul in Acts 20:20 said he taught the people publicly and from house to house.

It is clear that many church members are carrying marital burdens that they never speak about. The Minister making visitation part of his regular ministry will make the church members grow to respect and trust him. What will follow will be the church members willingly opening their hearts and sharing their burdens which will include marital ones with their spiritual leader.

Minister should be at services early and also linger a while afterwards to attend to church members who either come early or stay a little late to share some problems with the Pastor.

The Minister should have a well developed schedule whereby specific marital sermons, films and video could be preached and showed to deepen Adventist marital values. Family issue topic should also be included in Sunday evening Bible study programs. This will go a long way to educate and enlighten those who have married non Adventist and brought them into the church and also those who married before becoming Adventist Christians.

Pre-marital training seminars and workshops, when given early to teenagers and young adults who make about 65% of the church population can also improve the future state of marriages in the district. The Church Pastor should also team up with other God fearing marriage experts to organize training programs for church Elders and Family life leaders in the district. This will prepare the leaders to do effective teaching, preaching and counseling in the absence of the Pastor, especially in remote areas where the Pastor's presence is not much felt

Recommendations to Elders and Family Life Ministries Leaders

The current Pastor/church member ratio in the conference which stands at 1:900 is of great concern. For the pastor's work to be effective, Elders and family

ministries leaders should give them helping hand as the seventy elders selected by Moses did. It is recommended that church elders and Family Life Ministries leaders should act as spiritual leaders, have general oversight and nurture church members. They should visit and pray for the sick and discouraged and those with marital problems. Whenever they lead, in the absence or in conjunction with the pastor, they should practice all that is recommended for the Pastors.

Finally the district administrator with the assistance of other resourceful personnel's should organize workshops on how to create wealth for the church members. This will go a long way to improve the financial status of the church as well as individual church members.

It is the wish of the researcher that the recommendations given in this study be unhesitatingly implemented by church administrators to sustain the fire which is already burning. Some could be used in the short term and others in the long term plans of the district. Nearby districts which share common woes with Cape Coast District can also make use of the recommendations.

APPENDIX A
CORRESPONDENCE

Letter 1

Seventh-day Adventist Church
Cape Coast District
Post Office Box 225
Cape Coast

The Executive Secretary
South Ghana Conference of SDA
Box 803
Accra.
December 7, 2010

Dear Sir,

RE: PROJECT WORK

I am a post graduate student of the Adventist University of Africa (AUA), pursuing studies leading to a degree in Master of Arts in Leadership. The University expects me to conduct a research on a proposed project, “Causes of Marital Conflicts and Divorce among Adventist Couples in Cape Coast and its Environs in Ghana and Strategies to reverse it,” which is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the said degree.

I would be very grateful if your office could permit me to collect the necessary information from the above mentioned district

Yours Faithfully,

Pr. Kusi-Acheampong Solomon

Letter 2

TO ALL CHURCHES IN CAPE COAST

Dear Beloved,

RE: PROJECT WORK FOR KUSI-ACHEAMPONG SOLOMON

With reference to the meeting we had with you on the above mentioned subject, the district writes to inform you that the program begins on January 1st, 2012 and ends in June 28th, 2012.

Please let us pray and get ready for this important program. As much as possible let us keep to the said date.

May the Lord of revival visit us as we seek revival through studies and prayers.

Yours faithfully,

Ekow Tawiah Holman

District Secretary.

Letter 3

TO ALL CHURCHES IN CAPE COAST DISTRICT

Dear Brethren,

RE: PROPOSED PROJECT WORK

I am writing to inform you that Pastor Kusi-Acheampong Solomon, a post graduate student at the Adventist University of Africa, Kenya, is working towards a Master of Arts degree in Leadership.

He is expected to conduct a research on his proposed project work which is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the said degree.

I would be grateful if you could assist him to meet his academic and professional aspiration, thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

Pastor R.A. Ntriakwa
(Executive Secretary)
Mid-South Ghana Administrative Unit

cc:

The Officers, MSGAU
Ps. Kusi-Acheampong Solomon

APPENDIX B

SEMINAR HANDOUTS

Evening I

Marriage

Marriage Under the everlasting Covenant

Human beings were created for relationship with God and with one another. In Genesis account, the only conflicting element present that seemed to mar the perfection of all that created was the “aloneness” of Adam. Fittingly then, the creation of the two sexes brought a cry of ecstasy from the lips of the male (Gen 3:23).

Because the intimacy they were created to enjoy is too risky apart from the protection of covenant, God instituted marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

The tragic account of Genesis 3 marks the cataclysmic effect of the fall of marriage and family relationship. Whenever sin reigned, co-regency and mutuality would give way to domination, exploitation, blame and hostility, even unfaithfulness, abuse and violence.

Praise God, however, the curse of Genesis 3 is not the gospel. Jesus came to restore all that had been lost, including His original design for marriage. In her book “Thoughts from the Mounts of Blessing,” (1956) Ellen White notes, “Like every other one of God’s good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been

perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty (p. 64). Commenting further in the “Adventist Home” (1980, p. 99), Ellen White makes it clear that the fall, but rather that Jesus came to restore God’s original design for the marriage relationship.

The logical beginning point of any family relationship is a covenant commitment, which has unconditional love, at its core. Out of the security provided by this covenant love develops grace. In this atmosphere of grace, family members have the freedom to empower each other. Empowering leads to the possibility of intimacy between family members. Intimacy then leads back to a deeper level of covenant commitment.

Since relationships are dynamic and ever changing... if a relationship does not spiral into deeper levels of commitment, grace, empowering and intimacy, then it will stagnate and fixate on contract rather than covenant, law rather than grace, possessive power rather than empowering and distance rather than intimacy (Balswick and Balswick, pg. 21-22).

The biblical model for Christian marriage and family relationship is God’s everlasting covenant of love with his children (Isa 54:5; Jer 31:32; John 15:12; 1 John 4:7-11). In the New Testament, marriage is elevated as a symbol of the union between Christ and the redeemed (Compare Matt 9:15; 25:1-13; John 3:39; Eph 5:31, 32; Rev 21:2.9)

God’s covenant is one unconditional commitment. It is not contingent upon or response. God did not offer to enter into “Something for something” contract with Israel. His covenant is not extended only if his children keep up their end of the bargain. It is not based on performance. Rather God freely enters into a covenant

relationship with each generation by His choice and based upon His promises to generations before them, knowing all the risks.

COUPLE ACTIVITY

Dennis Gnersey in his book “The Family Covenant (1984)” suggest that the usual wedding vows sound like that were written for angels, and that they would be more realistic if they read:

I take you to be my lawfully wedded spouse with the full knowledge that you are weak as I am weak; that you will be unfaithful as I will be, if not in actuality, then in fantasy; that there will be times when you will disappoint me gravely as I will disappoint you. But in spite of all this, I commit myself to love you, knowing your weakness and knowing the certainty of betrayal (pg. 23)

Talk “Knee to Knee” about your reaction to these vows. In what ways would these vows have been more realistic for your marriage in the light of your experience together as a married couple? Does the acknowledgement of the limitations of every human being to keeping covenant detract from the commitment being made? In what ways does this acknowledgement strengthen commitment? Compose “wedding” vows for yourself now in the context of your experience together to this point. Find opportunity to recommit yourselves to each other with these vows.

Evening II

Forgiveness

Forgiveness: Healing the wound we don't deserve.

Living together by grace is possible only as we grasp the radical concept of forgiveness. It is a complex process with many facets, only one of which we will be discussing. The process by which a person who has been deeply hurt can come to forgiveness and find personal healing. It is this process that alone can pave the way for reconciliation in a broken relationship. It can provide the balm to soothe a hurting heart. Whether the other person involved ever asks for forgiveness or full restoration in the relationship is ever achieved.

All that we know about forgiveness we learn from God. The most just being in the universe- the great Lover of rightness and fairness is also the great forgiver. In His justice, God could not wink at our sin and overlook it. Sin's consequences must be borne. Rightfully, they should be borne by sinners. But God in His mercy "made Christ to be sin for us" (1 Pet 2:23, 24; 2 Cor 5:21). Ellen White puts it eloquently: Christ was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins in which He has no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed" (D.A. 1940. P.25).

Forgiveness is painful, it is hard. Forgiveness forever changes the life of the forgiver. It will never be the same again. Lasting impression are made, permanent

scars are created, but willing forgiveness can overtime bring healing for the hurt we don't deserve. So Christians are encouraged to leave repayment with God (Rom 12:17-19) and called to forgive one another (Eph 1:7)

Of all the bible writers, the physician Luke has the most to say about forgiveness. Perhaps he found in this radical principle of the kingdom the balm for which he was searching to heal the hurts of His patients' heart. Consider the following passages as a group. What understanding about forgiveness do they offer?

1. Luke 5:18-26 – Jesus first heals the wounds of the heart with forgiveness before touching the paralytic's broken body.
2. Luke 23:24 – Forgiveness is present even before the offender asks for it.
3. Luke 17:3-4 – forgiveness is not about keeping score. It is not a single, one-time act. Rather it is a process which moves a person from deep hurt, often though deep pain and much anger and resentment, to healing.
4. Luke 7:41-48 – Little forgiveness produces little love. Much forgiveness produces much love.
5. Matt 18:21-35 – when people grasp the magnitude of the forgiveness offered them by God, they will cease relating to others as if they must exact payment for every harm done to them and will become forgivers out of gratitude.

The parable in Matthew 18 is about comprehending the magnitude of God's forgiveness, freely granted us in Christ. As we stand under the cascading fountain of His forgiveness, we may reach out to those who have hurt us, with forgiveness which we do not have of ourselves. As Ellen white comments in "Christ's Object Lesson" (1941), "The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude towards others, we show whether we have made that love our own" (p. 251).

COUPLE ACTIVITY

Complete the following statements individually, then share your response privately as a couple, dialoging together about forgiveness in your relationship as husband and wife.

- 1. New thoughts I have had about the meaning of forgiveness in marriage.

.....

- 2. Times in our marriage when your forgiveness has meant so much.

.....

- 3. Areas where forgiveness is needed in our relationship to make way for new beginnings.

- 4. Contemplate together this statement from Dennis Gnersey, “The family Covenant” (1984):

If there is no commitment no covenant, there is no will to go on. If there is covenant, you can forgive seventy times seven. You can endure when everything inside you says quit.

Covenant does not consign us to the past and its defeats. Covenant orients us to the hope that our covenant-making God can make all things new in Christ (p. 25).

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE FAMILY LIFE MINISTRIES MESSAGE

Sabbath 1

January

Forbidden Marriages. The lord commanded ancient Israel not to intermarry with the idolatrous nations around them: “Neither shalt thou make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.” The reason is given. Infinite wisdom, foreseeing the result of such unions, declare: “for they will turn away thy son from following me. That they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.” “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”

In the New Testament are similar prohibitions concerning the marriage of Christians with ungodly. The apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians writes: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial....

My people come out from among them and be ye separate.

APPEAL: how many parents and those of age would like to heed to the counsel of the Lord? Let them stand for prayer.

Sabbath 2

March

Compatibility. In many families there is not that Christian politeness that true courtesy, defense, and respect for one another that would prepare its members to marry and make happy families of their own. In the place of patience, kindness, tender courtesy and Christian sympathy and love, there are sharp words, clashing ideas, and a criticizing, dictatorial spirit.

It is often the case that persons before marriage have little opportunity to become acquainted with each other's habits and disposition; and so far as everyday life is concerned, they are virtually strangers when they unite their interest at the altar. Many find, too late, that they are not adapted to each other, and lifelong wretchedness is the result of their union. Often the wife and children suffer from the indolence and inefficiency or the vicious habits of the husband and father.

The world is full of misery and sin to day in consequence of ill-assorted marriages. In many cases, it takes only a few months for husband and wife to realize that their dispositions can never blend; and the results is that discord prevails in the home, where only the love and harmony of heaven should exist.

APPEAL: Hence forth, it should be the life study of both husband and wife to avoid everything that creates contention and keep unbroken the marriage vows. Pray for all couples as they stand on their feet.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview conducted during the four 13th Sabbaths in four (4) organized churches and one in camp meeting 2011.

1. March 26th, 2011 – Some church members, Central Church, Cape Coast.
2. June 25th, 2011 – Some church members, Elmina Church, Elmina.
3. September 24th, 2011 – Some church members, Yamoransah Church, Cape Coast.
4. December 31st, 2011 – Some church members, New Life Church, Atobiase.
5. September 4th, 2011 – (At Camp Meeting) District Family Life Leader.

Questions asked during the interviews

1. How old are you?
2. Are you married?
3. Were you married before you entered into the church?
4. Are you married to an Adventist or a Non-Adventist?
5. How often do you have conflicts in your marriage?
6. What are some of the issues that creates conflicts in your marriage?
7. Are you separated, divorced or staying together?
8. Are you employed? If yes, who is your employer?
9. Is your partner employed? If yes, who is the employer?
10. Is your husband or wife employed? Who is the employer?

11. Your salary bracket per month?

- a. Less than GHC 100.00
- b. Between GHC 100.00 – GHC 500.00
- c. Between GHC 501 – GHC 1000.00
- d. Above GHC 1000.00

APPENDIX E
FAMILY MINISTRIES QUARTERLY REPORT SHEET
South Ghana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
FORM 'B'

Name of District..... Quarter Ending.....

No. of Churches No Reporting:

1. Number of married couples:
 - a. Adventist Couples.....
 - b. Adventist women married to non-Adventist men
 - c. Adventist men married to non-Adventist women
2. New marriages contracted during the quarter.....
3. Marriages blessed during the quarter
4. Members whose Husbands live in overseas countries
5. Members whose wives live in overseas countries
6. New babies born during the quarter
7. Number of children dedicated
8. Number of children (0-12)
9. Number of children (13-19)
10. Number of singles (20 and above)
11. Marital cases amicably resolved in the quarter.
12. Marital cases resulting in separation / divorce in the quarter.
13. Number of unsettle family cases at the end of the quarter.

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VITA

Personal Identification:

Name:	Kusi-Acheampong Solomon
Date of Birth:	20 th September, 1956
Marital Status:	Married
Personal Contact:	(Mob. No.) 0204321058
Gender:	Male
Home Town:	Adumasa, Ashanti Akim
Citizenship:	Ghanaian
Wife:	Juliana Kusi-Acheampong
Employment Organization:	South Ghana Conference
Organization Address:	P.O. Box GP 803, Accra

Education

Adventist University of Africa Babcock, Nigeria:	Master of Arts in Leadership Candidate
Valley View University, Oyibi:	Bachelor of Arts Theology, 2003
Workers College, Kumasi:	General Certificate of Education 'A' Level, 1981

Work Experience

Teaching: Isua Grammar School, Nigeria.....	1981-1985
Prison Officer, Ghana Prison Service	1986-1991
Revenue Officer, Ghana Water Company	1991-1999