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**PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELING WITH DIVORCED
CATHOLICS: TOWARD REFORMULATION OF EGO-IDENTITY AND
GOD-IMAGE**

Eric Awortwe-Dadson

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Doctor of Ministry Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Studies Program

New York, New York

March 2002

Advisors: Dr. Carol Ochs, Sr. Vivienne Joyce, CSW.

Dedication

To Dad [Joseph] and Brother [Michael],
their courage in living and dying
will forever be cherished.

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Chapter I

A Statement of the Issue Addressed by the Project

A. Background of the Issue

It has been said that "individuals marry in order to do something to themselves or for themselves: to grow, to leave home, to have an umbrella to shelter themselves from the world's rains, to hitch a ride piggyback toward a better future"(Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). On their wedding day, the bride and groom are not worrying about the "unthinkable" i.e., separation, divorce or annulment. The Church is beautifully decorated with flowers and banks of glowing candles, all dedicated to this special occasion. People attending the wedding, smile and gesture welcomes as they settle into their pews. Photographers intently adjust their cameras to preserve this festive occasion forever.

At last the organ resounds with the wedding march. The flower girl in her formal gown, carrying a child's straw basket, leads the solemn procession. With cadenced step, the bridesmaids and maid of honor, wearing full-sized versions of the flower girl's gown, follow at measured intervals. Finally, the bride sweeps into the aisle, a vision of white in lace veil and trailing gown. Necks strain and flashbulbs flare to capture her shining eyes and shy smile. The straining and flashing intensify as the bride and groom join at the altar. Together they promise a lifelong commitment to love and fidelity, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health. The newly wedded couple reaffirms the importance and value of marriage. The large number of people attending and the prominence the Church gives to the ceremony further attest to the value of marriage. The bride and groom leave with a warm feeling of reassurance and stability.

Several months or perhaps years along the line we are greeted with shocking news: "We are not together anymore." "We are separated." "We are seeking divorce." Divorce is an increasingly common phenomenon. The number of couples seeking separation or divorce after wedding stand witness to the fact that the institution of marriage and family life is in serious crisis. A 1991 report by the National Commission on Children lists the United States as having the highest divorce rate in the world (National Catholic Reporter, 1999). A study of recent trends cited in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (1992) concluded that as many as "two-thirds of current marriages are likely to end in separation or divorce"(p.1195).

There is a debate among professionals about which is more upsetting and difficult: adults staying in a seriously troubled marriage or getting divorced? I would like to believe that either choice presents difficulties. Many people are becoming much aware of the fact that marriages can be personally unfulfilling, emotionally painful, or even physically dangerous for many adults. Many feeling they have wasted important years in an unhappy marriage, see divorce as a second chance for themselves and for their children. Kaslow's (1981) eloquent statement provides an important view about the potential meaning of divorce: "Although I do not equate divorce with dysfunction, it does appear that the decision to divorce is an attempt to extricate oneself from a trying, conflicted or unsatisfying relationship. It may well be a flight toward health -- a seeking to escape from a living arrangement that has ceased to be tolerable and fulfilling"(p.663). However, I would like to add that regardless of how much a couple wants a divorce and believes it is essential for their personal well being, it is one of the most wrenching or dislocating experiences of adulthood.

A Description of the Group

I plan doing pastoral counseling with seven divorced Catholics [five women and two men] who are experiencing the trauma of divorce and its ramifications. *Rhoda* [age 50] divorced for six years, was married for twenty-five years and has three grown up children. She was married in the Church. *Gina* [age 60] has been divorced for three years. She has four grown up children, and was married for thirty-three years. She was married in the Church. *Tom* [age 50] was married for nineteen years. He has no children of his own but was a stepfather to the children of his ex-wife from a previous marriage. He has been divorced for four years. He also got married in the Church. *Laurie* [age 60] is in her second marriage. She and her first husband got married in the Church and lived together for thirty-five years, and had three children from that relationship. She divorced two years ago, and remarried this time outside the Church. She is seeking a second divorce.

Marcia [age 45] was married for twenty-five years and has two grown up daughters. She has been divorced for five years. She was married in the Church. *Sherrie* [age 56] has been married twice. She was married to her first husband for seven years and had two children from that relationship. Her first husband died a few years after their divorce. She remarried outside the Church, and had three children and her second husband also died. *Dan* [age 60] has been divorced twice. He was married to her first wife for five years and had a son together [his only child]. He remarried outside the Church and ten years later divorced for a second time. He and Sherrie are not married but are presently, living together.

B. Specific Needs I plan to Minister

Adjusting to divorce can be hard indeed. It appears that relatively few people escape the effects of divorce easily. In general, divorce is difficult for both the "leaver" and the "left," for men and women, for those who have bickered and fought and for those who have lived in indifferent silence. Of course, divorce, is more difficult for some people than others. For some the adjustment period is shorter, for some longer. On the average, people need two years before they regain their equilibrium. They usually need additional time to become emotionally detached from an ex-spouse and to establish a stable and satisfying new lifestyle (Clapp, 2000). According to Trafford (1972), it may take at least five or perhaps more years to rise up out of the ashes of divorce and become a "new you."

As suggested by Mitchell and Anderson (1983), pastoral work with those who have gone through a divorce is essentially grief counseling, though it may have other focal points as well. The predominant theme that unifies my project is that divorce generally requires some degree of emotional and spiritual healing. I have identified three specific areas that would call for greater attention in my pastoral work with these divorced Catholics. Inherent in each of the three identified areas are significant losses leading to the phenomenon of grief and mourning.

First, divorce affects one's sense of self or self-worth. Over the years of married life, spouses inevitably relinquish some of their individuality and pursuits in the interest of the marriage. And because of their shared years, children, home, commitments, and activities, their lives become interdependent, as if the two are woven into a single fabric. With divorce, couples must disentangle the threads of their lives, and the process may leave each a shaky identity, in need of reworking before it can stand on its own.

Second, divorce almost always affects one's relationship with God. Many divorced persons struggle with expectations typically formed and sustained by the family, church and society. Unrealistic expectations can lead to shame, guilt feelings and self-condemnation. Although people often feel that their religious beliefs encourage guilt, excessive guilt can undermine a person's religion. Dealing with what seem to be impossible demands, it is likely that a person may reject the God behind such demands as cold, distant and uncaring. At the other extreme, those who continually fall short of their ideals may conclude that they have cut themselves off from God's love. In dealing with God, the prevailing feeling is guilt. Guilt usually stems from the belief that by getting a divorce one has failed God, self and others.

Third and lastly, most Catholics who go through a divorce often discover a need to work through a number of important spiritual issues with both God and the Church. The one is basically inseparable from the other. Too often many who have been hurt by marriage failure feel "out of it" or "second-class." They believe they don't "belong" as much as others do. Many divorced Catholics feel they are automatically separated or excommunicated from the Church. They feel they cannot receive the Eucharist and other sacraments. Many worry about an annulment and the effect it could possibly have on the children of that marriage. The dilemma many of them struggle with has to do with where they stand with the Church. While the Church has an unchanged commitment to the permanence of marriage, many Catholics are unaware that it now has a very different approach to divorced people themselves -- an approach which could hardly be better expressed than in *When Dreams Die*, a very caring statement issued by the bishops of two countries. It may be read in Appendix A.

In dealing with the three issues I have identified above, almost at the same time, divorced people may manifest many feelings and moods: sense of failure, guilt-ridden, withdrawal, anger, tearful, blaming and many more. This is quite understandable because their grief is the loss not just of one relationship, but of many. They face a difficult task of rebuilding or reformulating their life again. I would provide them with a forum where they can share their perspectives, feelings and experiences. My major objective is to assist them in working through the grieving process. I hope that it would eventually lead to a reformulation of their self-image and their relationship with God as well. Ultimately, I hope that the counseling process would give them some motivation to feel once more that they are embraced to participate in the life of the Church.

C. Relevance of the Project to Ministry in a Wider Context

Elements that Constitute Ministry: There are four defining notes: (1) Ministry is specific service to persons in need (2) done in the name of the risen Christ (3) rooted in the Church and (4) contributing to the coming of the reign of God (Coll, 1992). Joseph Cardinal Bernardin speaks for many in the Catholic Church when he writes: "Ministry is a specific activity supported and designated by the Church, which discloses the presence of God in some way in our human condition and empowers us to love more fully in the mystery of God – in communion with God and with one another"(p.135). The starting point of Christian Ministry always draws its inspiration from Jesus Christ. His ministry was characterized by love that enabled people to awaken to their true potential. His presence encouraged confidence; his understanding and compassion lifted hearts in hope – and healing happened.

In his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), John Paul II underscored the importance of helping the separated and divorced to feel and experience a sense acceptance in the Church. He challenges "the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and separated with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can and indeed must share in her life.... Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother and thus "sustain them in faith and hope"(no.84).

Responding to the above challenge(s), this project – pastoral counseling with divorced Catholics – is a specific form of *ministerial service*. It is rooted in the Church's mission of evangelization in complete fidelity to Christ's mission characterized by loving compassion. It aims at attending to the psychological and spiritual needs of divorced Catholics; on the other hand, it is aware of the "more than," that is the mystery of life. It aims at alleviating pain and suffering; on the other hand, it recognizes God in suffering. It aims at making divorced Catholics feel better; on the other hand, it is about confronting, challenging, prophesying. It aims at applying Band-Aids where needed; on the other hand, it strives to go to the roots of the problem to discover who or what is causing the wound (Coll, 1992). The ultimate objective of the project is to assist these divorced Catholics find some motivation to feel once more that they are embraced to participate in the life of the Church. It is my hope that this project would be a useful guide to my colleagues of the priestly fraternity, and to all pastoral counselors who are involved in some sort of ministry with divorced Catholics.

Chapter II

Principles that Guide and Inform

A. Clinical Principles

Pathways to Divorce: There are several pathways to divorce. According to Napier and Whitaker (1978), one of the predetermining factors in divorce is that many individuals marry before they have firmly established a sense of independent selfhood. While research indicates that couples that marry at a later age have much greater chance for a durable marriage, chronological age is not the only variable. The more decisive question is whether at the time of marriage both individuals have passed through a certain *psychological space* in which they grappled with life alone, and discovered that they could win the battle against their own fears. Each partner needs to have discovered that he or she can bear the fundamental anxiety of being a single biological entity in a rather frightening world. As they put it: "In the process of "bearing it," the person gains a certain amount of self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-loyalty -- all important precursors to being able to make a solid commitment to another person"(Napier & Whitaker, 1978, p.221).

Exaggerated and unrealistic expectations of marriage have also been listed among the many causes of divorce. Marriage cannot fulfill all needs and it cannot solve all problems. If a spouse expects it to, he or she could end up feeling that one's partner has failed and cheated him or her. This may gradually lead to disillusionment. Disillusionment is an integral part of any long-lasting relationship. Just as it may be the starting point for the disintegration of a relationship, disillusionment may be the key to deepening and strengthening the relationship. It is often the process where differences come to the open, and the mutual psychological exposure allows the couple to distinguish between reality and

an idealistic perception of their partner. Such a perception minimizes the occurrence of future disappointments and allows a feeling of tranquility and assurance to emerge. The danger is when a person vacillates between idealization of the partner and total disappointment. In time, more and more energies are invested in negative aspects of the relationship. Without the willingness and maturity they need to deal with the disillusionment, the relationship will continue to decline and consequently end in divorce Guttman, 1993.

Another predictor is poor communication and conflict resolution. Clinical studies reveal a certain commonality in the interaction sequence that precedes many divorces. Gottman (1994), uses the terminology: "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," to describe the four disastrous ways of interaction that frequently lead to lack of resolution and marital unhappiness namely: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. (1) **Criticism:** As a general rule, a criticism entails blaming, making a personal attack or an accusation, while a complaint is a negative comment about something you wish were otherwise. Being critical is not evil; it can begin innocently enough and is often the expression of pent-up, unresolved anger. It may be one of those natural self-destruct mechanisms inherent in all personal relationships. Problems occur when criticism becomes so pervasive – or one partner is so sensitive to it – that it corrodes the marriage. When that happens it heralds the arrival of the other, more foreboding horsemen that can further undermine the stability of the marriage (Gottman, 1994).

(2) **Contempt:** What separates contempt from criticism is the intention to insult and psychologically abuse your partner. With your words and body language, you are lobbing insults right into the heart of your partner's sense of self. Among the most common signs

are: insults and name-calling, hostile humor, mockery, and body language. Insults and name-calling include barbs like: bitch, bastard, jerk wimp, fat, stupid, ugly. Some couples are cruder, others more creative. The result is the same. In a marriage, words such as these are such dangerous assault weapons that they ought to be outlawed. Hostile humor is contempt covered with the thin veil of comic relief. Mockery is the art of the subtle put-down. The spouse's words or actions are made fun of and ridiculed, to show he or she is not respected or trusted. Through Body Language, contempt is communicated with a few swift changes of the facial muscles. Signs of contempt or disgust include sneering, rolling your eyes, and curling your upper lip (Gottman, 1994).

(3) *Defensiveness*: Usually if you are being bombarded with insults, the natural inclination is to defend yourself from attack. The fact that defensiveness is an understandable reaction to feeling besieged is one reason it is so destructive – the “victim” does not see anything wrong with being defensive. But defensive phrases, and the attitude they express, tend to escalate a conflict rather than resolve anything. However it is expressed, defensiveness is fundamentally an attempt to protect yourself and ward off a perceived attack. Among the many signs of defensiveness are: denying responsibility; making excuses; disagreeing with negative mind reading; cross-complaining; whining and body language. The major problem with defensiveness is that it obstructs communication. Rather than understanding each other's perspective you spend your discussions defending yourself. Nothing gets resolved, so the conflict continues to escalate and more discussions characterized by attack and defensiveness occur (Gottman, 1994).

(4) *Stonewalling*: Stonewalling often happens while a couple is talking. The stonewaller just removes him/herself by turning into a stone wall. Usually someone who is

listening reacts to what the speaker is saying, looks at the speaker, and says something to let the speaker know that he is tracking. But the stonewaller abandons these messages, replacing them with stony silence. Stonewallers often claim that they are trying to be "neutral" and not making things worse. They do not seem to realize that stonewalling itself is a very powerful act: it conveys disapproval, icy distance, and smugness. Whatever a particular stonewaller's style, the message to the spouse is the same: "I am withdrawing, disengaging from any meaningful interaction with you." If either spouse refuses to communicate whenever a conflict arises, it can be hard to heal a marriage. The fourth horseman need not mark the end of a relationship. But if interactions have deteriorated to this extent then a couple are at great risk of ending up divorced, separated, or living lonely, parallel lives in the same home. Once the fourth horseman becomes a regular resident, it takes a good deal of hard work and soul searching to save the marriage (Gottman, 1994).

Other factors leading many people to divorce include: problems of addiction, physical and emotional abuse. Financial strains, job loss, and relocation can also shake the foundation of a relationship. Added stressors, such as dealing with a chronic illness can compound marital discontent, precipitating a decision to separate. Other traumatic losses, especially the death of a child, pose a high risk for marital distancing and divorce, unless a couple can be helped to console and support each other (Robinson, 1984; Jacobson & Gurman, 1995).

ATTACHMENT AND AMBIVALENCE

For many divorcing men and women, one of the most incomprehensible and frustrating feelings they experience is the continued pull toward an ex-spouse. It is not only those who are left who experience this pull. Leavers experience it, too, and many find

it incomprehensible. This phenomenon is called an *attachment*. It has been described as a sort of emotional bonding and a feeling of connectedness, a feeling of ease in the other's presence and restlessness when the other is inaccessible. Given the wide spread feelings of attachment, it is not surprising that divorcing partners so often have intensely ambivalent feelings about one another. They vacillate between longing and anger, between love and hate (Clapp, 2000).

Three Approaches To Attachment, Separation And Grief

Three similar but distinct ways of thinking about attachment and separation can inform our thinking in our work with divorced persons. Each casts a slightly different light on the experience of grief. Mahler's studies of the *mother-child relationship* help us understand several powerful emotions – particularly anxiety about one's own survival – that accompany loss. Klein and others have developed a theory of object relations, which helps to clarify how human beings invest themselves in other things and persons, and why most changes in life carry with them a powerful element of loss. Bowlby has also written extensively about the process of *attachment*, which helps us to understand how the problems of attachment and separation from childhood continue throughout adult life.

Margaret Mahler: Severing Symbiosis

Before an infant is born, its relationship to the mother is one of complete connectedness and dependence. Birth severs this biological symbiosis. For the first few months after birth, the infant continues to be dependent on others to "supply and deliver raw materials free." The dependency is absolute; the infant can do nothing for itself except give off cries which may serve as signals. Nurture, mobility, protection, and warmth: all these things, and indeed life itself, are provided by others (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

Mahler (1968) has labeled this psychological and social continuation of the original biological connection between mother and child "social symbiosis." She writes: "The intrauterine, parasite-host relationship within the mother is enveloped, as it were, in the extrauterine matrix of the mother's nursing care, a kind of social symbiosis"(p.34). Mahler further claims that all the infant's early experiences tend to reinforce this impression that the infant is its own world. The warmth of mother's body and the food coming from her seem available merely for the wishing. The things that from an adult perspective are externals: are experienced by the baby as portions of the self, and nothing really exists but the self.

Infants are, from an adult point of view, totally selfish; they have no way of acknowledging or even of recognizing a boundary between self and not-self. But this selfishness evokes no moral disapproval from any sensible adult; it is accepted because the infant knows no other life as yet. This is important to remember in any study of grief. The experience of loss at any time in life particularly when dealing with the trauma of divorce, is going to trigger a momentary preoccupation with self that is necessary for psychological survival, just as the infant's preoccupation with self is vital to its biological survival. At the moment of a significant loss – as in the case of divorce – needs for sustenance and protection mount sharply and are often left unsatisfied; at such a point the grief-stricken person may recapitulate that early infant selfishness to the point that others notice and perhaps even condemn it (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

At about the age of three months, the baby begins to see things differently. The process of separation – individuation – called *differentiation* starts. Describing this process, Mahler (1972) writes: "It is synonymous in our metaphorical language with

'hatching from the mother-infant symbiotic common orbit'"(p.334). Mahler calls this "psychological birth" or "hatching," the process by which the infant moves toward becoming a separate, distinct self. It can happen simply: the child cries and mother does not come; or, if mother comes, she does not do what is expected. If nurturers have provided reasonable stability for the child, the experience may be relatively smooth. But if security is lacking, the infant experiences a disturbance in its fragile, evolving self.

This psychological birth or hatching requires a restructuring of one's entire world, and is inevitably accompanied by loss and grief. Mahler suggests that the emotional response to such breaking and remaking of a world is not protest, but diminished activity and a low-keyed emotional tone withdrawal. The process of becoming a separate self is painful, though we value the results. This experience of separation, essential for the formation of the self, is also the fundamental experience of loss to which all subsequent experiences of loss will be referred (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983). After divorce, the process of becoming a separate self is painful but it is necessary for the reformulation of the self. If I may put it: the attainment of "psychological birth" or "hatching" is important for divorced persons to build a new life and find personal growth.

Melanie Klein: Outside Objects Inside Me

At first, the distinction between "self" and "other" is simple. The infant begins to be able to distinguish between me and not-me. This in turn makes attachment to others possible. Then the infant begins to divide the "other" into distinguishable objects: mother, father, other persons, physical objects. In object relations theory, all these persons and things are referred to as *objects*. The infant, having learned to make a distinction between self and object, demands a firm attachment to the object: "*It may not be me, but it is mine.*"

Next, as the infant gradually relinquishes its hold on the actual object – mother, sister, food – it begins to build an internal mental image of the object, so that when the actual object is not present, the child has the image to hold on to. In object relations theory this mental image is called an “internal construct.” For this internal construct to be an accurate representation of the object, the object itself must first be present with relative consistency and frequency. The child maintains relationships with these internal constructs, just as he or she would with the actual external objects. The development of a lively sense of self depends on having an internal world of reliable images to which one is attached (Klein, 1960).

As the child begins to separate and move away, it is important that the mother or another nurturing person remain available on a consistent basis. If that does not happen, the result is called premature object loss. Not only does this lead to a distorted mental image of the lost object; it also evokes a sense of disorganization and even dissolution of the self. As Mitchell and Anderson (1983) have expressed: “The development, in human beings, of an autonomous self requires the presence of dependable objects, the capacity to make emotional connections and ability to cope with some object loss” (p.24).

Objects relations theory goes well beyond the concepts of Sigmund Freud. Freud did recognize the existence of powerful attachments, significant emotional investments in something or someone outside oneself, and labeled such attachments *Besetzungen*, “occupations,” in the sense of occupying territory. [English translations use the Greek word, *kathexis*, to translate Freud’s German here]. Freud’s understanding was that becoming “occupied” by another was primarily a function of instinct, a mechanical satisfaction of needs. According to Klein (1960), the human psyche is much more than a

bundle of instincts. It is a highly personalized world of internalized relationships with significant objects. It may be realistic or distortion-laden, but it is always highly individualized. Each individual internalizes the world in a way unique to that person; therefore, no two experiences of loss are the same, and grief is always personal.

Three important aspects of object relations theory influence our understanding of grief namely: continuity, ambiguity, and the transitional object. (1) *Continuity*: The presence in our minds of a consistent, reliable image of significant figures from the past creates a hedge against a sense of discontinuity. Even when one's internal world contains distorted images, it is generally perceived as continuous with a real past. Our images of the world around us are an important defense against feelings of complete discontinuity (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

(2) *Ambiguity*: What we internalize does not always have a positive value for us. It should not be surprising therefore, that grief is always ambiguous. The recognition that the internal world of the self is composed of both "good" and "bad" objects is the second contribution of object relations theory to our understanding of grief. The truth about almost any human relationship is that it has its good and bad aspects; no relationship is 100 percent good or 100 percent bad. But in the very young there is a tendency to see objects as all good or all bad. This oversimplification lessens as we grow more mature, but never completely disappears. It is often difficult to respond to other people without making them into ideal lovers or sinister persecutors, instead of human beings with limitations and imperfections, with whom it is possible to form a genuine relationship. Therefore, when in either childhood or adulthood someone disappears or ceases to love [like in the case of divorce], those left behind may internalize the lost person as a "bad" object. We should not

be surprised when the loss of a valued object generates feelings of rejection and anger (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

(3) *The Transitional Object*: For the child, the transitional object softens the terrifying process of separation from mother by providing an object that symbolizes the fusion of the infant and the mother in the midst of their separation. The object is usually first offered to the child by the mother; this strengthens the symbolic fusion. The transitional object is not-me, and yet it is so much under my control that I can think of it as part of me. The teddy bear is often cited as the classic example of the transitional object. Transitional objects may also provide a similar function for adults who experience traumatic loss. They help us preserve the mental organization associated with a good object relation that has been lost. In painfully awkward words, a divorced man of thirty-five described how he "hugged a pillow to sleep." Somehow hugging a pillow helped him to endure the pain of loss and sleeping alone (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983).

John Bowlby: Attachment and Separation

The inevitability of attachment has much to do with grief, and separation is as essential for autonomous life as the earlier attachment is for biological survival. The work of Bowlby on attachment, separation, and loss draws particular attention to this theme. Bowlby's studies indicate that attachment behavior is primary, autonomous, and life long: primary because the initial bonding to another human being is determined by patterns of imprinting inherent in the higher primates; autonomous, because the infant's actions influence the response of the primary caretakers; lifelong, because the need for attachment continues throughout life (Bowlby, 1979).

Adult attachments are a straightforward continuation of childhood affectional bonds. Adult attachment is not an infantile need that we outgrow or a regression to a state of infantile dependency. The desire to be loved and cared for is fundamental to human nature in adults as well as children. Since our need to love and be loved never ends, the possibility of loss is present throughout life. Bowlby (1969) states: "This picture of attachment behavior as a normal and healthy component of man's instinctive equipment leads us also to regard separation anxiety as the natural and inevitable response whenever an attachment figure is unaccountably missing"(p.208).

The threat, or actual occurrence, of loss at any time in human life [like in the case of divorce], evokes panic, anxiety, sorrow, and anger in keeping with the intensity of the attachment. Because attachment is lifelong, so is grief. The inability to respond constructively to loss in later life also has its genesis in the child's experience of separation from the mother figure. According to Bowlby, the grieving adult's demand for the absent person's return and reproach against him or her for leaving are continuous with the child's protest in face of loss.

DIVORCE AND EGO-IDENTITY

What is Ego-Identity? Erikson (1980) defined ego-identity as: "The accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity [one's ego in the psychological sense] is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning to others. Thus self-esteem, confirmed at the end of each major crisis, grows to be a conviction that one is learning effective steps toward a tangible future, that one is developing a defined personality within a social reality which one understands"(p.94).

Phenomenologically, ego-identity is experienced as a sense of unity and wholeness, as a synthetic, though often a preconscious, feeling of knowing who one is and where one is going (Aden, 1976).

An identity crisis almost always accompanies the trauma of divorce. With divorce, couples must disentangle the threads of their lives, and the process may leave each a shaky identity, in need of reworking before it can stand on its own. There are other contributors to the post-divorce identity crisis. Most people lose many of the material possessions that have become part of "who they are." Most have to assume new tasks that are out of character for them. Many feel as if they are no longer part of society's mainstream. People commonly feel they have been left adrift the anchor. Questions believed to be settled long ago now resurface: Who am I? What do I want out of life? Where do I go from here?

Divorce has been described by as a process in which a couple experiences a personal crisis. A situation is perceived as a crisis when previously effective problem-solving mechanisms are found to be inadequate in attempting to return to an equilibrium. The good thing is that within any given crisis, there are unique characterizations and exclusive opportunities for growth and development. With a divorced person the opportunities for rebuilding or reformulating a damaged self-image and self-worth begin with the process of grief and mourning (Guttmann, 1993).

DIVORCE AS PROCESS OF GRIEF AND MOURNING

What is Divorce? Divorce has been referred to as a relationship loss – "the ending opportunities to relate oneself to, talk with, share experiences with, make love to, touch, settle issues with, fight with, and otherwise be in the emotional and/or physical presence of a particular other human being"(Mitchell & Anderson, 1983, pp.37-38). ***What is Grief?***

Grief has been defined as a: "process in which our attachments to the lost person or object are not entirely given up, but are sufficiently altered to permit the grieving person to admit the reality of the loss and then live without constant reference to it"(Mitchell & Anderson, 1983, p.96). Grief is the universal and overriding reality for divorced persons. The loss of the person of the spouse, the loss of couple identity – these are but a few of the significant losses leading to the phenomenon of grief and mourning.

Divorce, however, has two unique characteristics: rejection and the need of both individuals to build a new life, separately, while at the same time being able to acknowledge each other. The chances to grow and mature are present in the divorce process, just as they are present in the mourning process. Guttman (1993), lists five stages that divorced persons have to go through namely: denial, loss and depression, anger and ambivalence, reorientation of lifestyle and identity, and acceptance and a new level of functioning.

Denial: The divorce process can be identified long before the appearance of the acknowledged stress factor that eventually causes the marriage to disintegrate. At this point, the marriage maintains itself only within a narrow range of pressures and stress. Denial is a frequently used mechanism that enables the marriage to continue. Two kinds of denial mechanisms can be identified; both fulfill the same function. In the first, the partners typically state that their adaptation to married life, and indeed to one another, is satisfactory, despite their problems and difficulties. In the second, the couple might admit to having serious problems and difficulties, but attribute them to external factors [such as economics or children] in order to avoid earnest consideration of divorce. At this level, the marriage can function and last for a long time. Some couples attempt to deal with their

difficulties and may even improve their functioning as a family unit. However, this attempt might be aborted when faced with a stress situation that overturns the fragile balance of the family's functioning and its relationships. To the outsider the cause may seem trivial. Yet even the most trivial factor can cause a crisis when the marital relationship is too rigid. At this stage, denial is no longer possible and divorce is considered as a viable option (Guttman, 1993).

Loss and Depression: Whether or not the source of stress is internal or external, it makes the partners cognizant that "something is seriously wrong" with their marriage. They are faced with their inability to deal with the problem separately or together; realization that the "together" is the problem begins to seep in. This stage is characterized by the first awareness as to the seriousness of the matter and the urgent need to deal with it. The typical reaction to this awareness is similar to that following a meaningful loss: grief, depression, a sense of loneliness, and the inability to communicate with others. If at this point the partners are unable to openly and frankly discuss these feelings with each other, the marriage may well be lost already (Guttman, 1993).

Anger and Ambivalence: As divorce becomes a more realistic option, feelings of anger, which are at the source of the depression, becomes stronger. This anger often occurs around the time when decisions regarding custody of the children, alimony payments, visitation rights, and other practical matters have to be made. The more the partners manage to work through their anger and ambivalence toward each other and the divorce in general, the better they can plan coping strategies and not "look back with anger." If acceptance of the divorce does not occur in this stage, it will be increasingly difficult for the partners to confront the challenges of the following stages. It is during this third stage

that ambivalent feelings and attitudes toward the whole process may creep in. Each partner may contemplate if he or she indeed did all they could to save the marriage. Guilt feelings are common features of this stage – the feeling that something could have been done to save the marriage, a self-doubt, a sense of failure, a feeling of emptiness. Also at this stage, thoughts of one or more final attempt at reconciliation are formulated and sometimes even tried. Although these attempts are often doomed from the onset, they are often important in that they enhance the feeling that all has been attempted (Guttman, 1993).

Reorientation of Lifestyle and Identity: At this point, divorce is an actuality, and as such each person must find the best and most efficient way of managing this new identity. The central task facing the divorcee is to develop a new identity in those areas most affected by the marriage, personal, professional, sexual, and social. Both partners may be able to learn and develop new ways to achieve a higher level of functioning in these areas. The most prominent feature of this stage, however, is the reopening and redeveloping of old, unresolved issues of identity, which were pushed aside or only partially dealt with during the marriage. For both partners, marriage was a major component of their self-identities. But many wives, especially those who married at a young age, do not develop a professional and social identity separate from their mates. They, therefore, lack points of reference that might allow them to promote self-esteem outside the framework of marriage. The marriage was so much a part of a married person's identity that he or she often has justifiable fears of being unable to replace the old behavioral patterns with new ones.

The issue of identity as a personal problem develops early in the divorce process. The need of 'finding oneself' rises anew and demands an answer before a change in status

and role can be fully accepted. As part of revising of one's self-image, there is a reevaluation of professional, social, and sexual identity. Not only do financial consideration lead divorced women to seek outside work, but also their desire to build a new identity and to boost their self-esteem. For those who married at a young age or who had limited premarital sexual experience, the need to discover different types of interpersonal and sexual relations is very real. Many divorced people enter sexual relations with partners to whom they have no emotional attachments and with whom chances of a long meaningful relationship are bleak. This "candy store experience" satisfies the need to repair a damaged self-image and helps foster positive feelings regarding sexual relationships. A secondary gain from such encounters is the avoidance of an emotional relationship that carries a commitment.

Some divorces, however, may not allow themselves new experiences because of inner and social conflicts, and values surrounding sex. Others, because of their fears and insecurities, confine themselves to shallow liaisons, unable to integrate and transfer new experiences into long-term relationships. Nevertheless, most divorced people overcome the distortions caused by pain and anger; they manage to reorient their lifestyles and identities, and to view the marriage and their former spouses in a realistic fashion (Guttmann, 1993).

Acceptance and a New Level of Functioning: Acceptance comes about gradually as the divorced person begins to get some feelings for her/himself as an adequate person socially, sexually and vocationally. At this stage, a willingness to invest in another long-term relationship consolidates; the ability to accept others, as well as to be accepted by others, is achieved. This is the basis on which a new identity and level of functioning is

built. When feelings of anger toward the former spouse give way to understanding and cooperation [about children, etc.], this acceptance signifies the stage of letting go of the past and opening oneself to opportunities in the future. At this stage, the newly developed coping mechanism is firmly established. The fears and apprehensions of new relationships subside; a second marriage, based on a more solid foundation, is possible. The success of a second marriage, however, depends on the degree of the successful resolution of those problems posed in each previous stage (Guttman, 1993).

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN REMARRIAGE

Most people who divorce tend to remarry. Second and third marriages have a poorer probability of success than the first, and evidence is accumulating of a high incidence of depression among the divorced. It has been well established in family theory and family therapy theory that the degree of separation a person has from his or her previous marital relationship can be an important indicator of marital success in remarriage (Napier & Whitaker, 1978). If a person has been married and that marriage has been terminated by death, divorce, annulment, separation, or desertion, the experience of that marital relationship will have a lasting impact upon the person. Regardless of the cause of the termination of a marriage, the partners can rarely completely get over or ignore the impact of that previous marital relationship. People are unable to dismiss significant intimate relationships from their life. Although it is possible to remove oneself physically from a relationship, it is rarely possible to remove every trace of that relationship so that a person is as he or she was prior to the time it began (Stahmann & Heibert, 1987).

It might generally be expected that because a high percentage of persons who have terminated their marriage tend to remarry, marriage is viewed as a satisfying and valuable

lifestyle. Often people voluntarily terminate marriages because of discomfort and dysfunction in their particular relationship. One would expect therefore, that people would carefully select a second marital relationship and prepare for it well so that the previous dysfunction might not be repeated. However, there is evidence that this is not the case; many persons enter into second marriage carrying with them the dysfunction and hurt that they experienced in the first marriage (Stahmann & Heibert, 1987).

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

It is crucially important for pastoral caregivers to know what transference and countertransference are and how they might affect pastoral relationships. Transference is ubiquitous. It is an element of all human relationships. But in the pastoral relationship, it is especially powerful. In psychotherapy, transference is unavoidable. Indeed, the entire process is designed to foster these intense feelings. In a pastoral relationship, on the other hand, the priest is not consciously attempting to foster transference. Therefore, he may naively believe that it does not occur. As noted in *The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*, "Although transference reactions occur in all relationships, they occur most frequently and most intensely in relationships with authority" (Rossetti & Pilette, 1992, p.11).

Transference was Sigmund Freud's most brilliant discovery. His concept shed light on an aspect of all human relationships. More than any other element of psychotherapy, the emergence, recognition, and resolution of the client's transference feelings are keys to the patient's inner healing. Freud defined clearly what he meant by transference: "*What are transferences?* They are the new editions or facsimiles of the tendencies and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the process of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic of their species, that they replace some earlier

person by the person of the physician. In other words, a whole series of psychological experiences is revived, not as belonging to the past, but applying to the person of the physician at the present moment”(Rossetti & Pilette, 1992, p.12).

When a priest appears in public, he finds himself the object of many intense emotions. Some believe he is a special person who must be close to God. When these people are with him, they try to be good. Others have been scarred by years of abuse by their fathers or by painful encounters with Church leaders in the past. For these people, the priest may symbolize the abuse they experienced. He may become a focus for their rage. All these strong emotions can be experienced by people before the priest even opens his mouth. They may not have met him before – as a human being, he may be a complete stranger. But they are not looking at his face or the expression in his eyes. They are looking at his Roman collar.

In psychological terms, these powerful emotions evoked by the image of the priest are the result of a psychic process called *transference*. In such a process, a person experiences another as an important figure from his or her past. For whatever reason, the object of the transference has evoked images and feelings that lie deep with the person's memory. A priest might complain: *"It's not fair. I've done nothing. I'm not worthy of their adulation or their scorn."* This is true. They are often not aware of him as an individual with personal thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. Thus, their reactions are not "fair," that is, they are not based on the current reality. As "unfair" as such transference feelings are, they are nevertheless, very *real* and very common (Rossetti & Pilette, 1992).

Because these feelings are not based on reality but are still experienced, they are especially dangerous. The priest who believes he is worthy of the transference adulation he receives is being set up for a fall. Likewise, the pastor who takes personally the transference anger and hostility he receives is liable to become defensive and resentful. In either case, as the object of these fluctuating, intense feelings, he can find his spirits soaring and crashing. It is an exhausting emotional roller coaster upon which no one can survive for long without burning out. To get off this emotional roller coaster, it is important for the priest to handle this transference aspect of pastoral relationships in a positive manner. To do this, he must learn the basic elements of the process of transference, recognize transference when it occurs and manage these intense feelings in a constructive, rather than a destructive way (Rossetti & Pilette, 1992).

A priest symbolically, and sometimes actually, represents an emotionally laden source of authority and thus is the object of intense transference feelings. According to Schwart (1989), clergy are particularly susceptible to specific "performed transferences." These fall into at least three categories: (1) transferences based on previous experiences with parents and other family members in positions of authority; (2) transferences based on previous relationships with clergy; and (3) transferences based on experiences of or relationship with God.

Countertransference as used in psychotherapeutic literature, refers to the emotional responses and distortions experienced by the therapist toward a patient. The narrowest definition of countertransference refers to distortions made by the therapist from unresolved experiences in the therapist's past. Another aspect of countertransference refers to reactions a therapist may have to what the patient is transferring onto him or her.

Countertransferential data can provide some of the most useful clues as to what is occurring in the treatment (Schwarz, 1989; Gorkin, 1987).

B. Religious/Theological Principles

CHURCH, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Theological Understanding of Church

"The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* 1964) teaches that the Church, "a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church"(no.14). It is stated in the same document: "The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things"(no.48). Forgiveness is central in understanding ourselves as a pilgrim Church. Nouwen (1997) writes: "Community is not possible without the willingness to forgive one another "seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22). Forgiveness is the cement of community life. Forgiveness holds us together through good and bad times, and it allows us to grow in mutual love"(p.24).

Church Teaching on Sacramental Marriage

In the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is a sacrament. The classical New Testament foundation for the Catholic teaching that marriage is a sacrament is [Ephesians 5:21-33]. In this passage, the Pauline author compares the covenantal love relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. Paul exhorts wives and husbands to love, regard and treat each other as Christ loves and acts toward us. They ought to respond to each other as the Church is called to respond to Christ. The visible sign in the sacrament of marriage is the living experience of marital love. Reflecting on what it means to experience marriage

as a sacrament, Roberts (1985) writes: "Only in a loving relationship can marriage be a living sign of Christ's life-giving, grace-giving love. Hatred and fighting, violent psychological and physical abuse, or mere loveless coexistence under the same roof: are countersigns rather than signs of Christ's love"(p.221).

"The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World"(*Gaudium et Spes* 1965) sees sacramental marriage as an intimate partnership union between a man and a woman, which leads to a deepening interpersonal relationship and the formation of a community – a family, which ordinarily includes children. This intimate partnership is based on human love, love that is mutual, faithful, exclusive and total on the part of both spouses and involves the sexual expression which leads to child bearing and parenting (nos. 47-52). Expanding on this, Lawler (1985) defines Christian marriage in the light of Vatican II as: "A community of life and love, founded in a mutual and irrevocable covenant, by which a Christian man and woman give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing an intimate partnership of their whole life"(p.806). According to Catholic theology, the most profound type of covenant, aside from that which exists between God and His people, is the covenant between spouses.

Church Teaching on the Absolute Indissolubility of the Sacrament of Marriage

Following the teaching of the Gospels and the Apostles [Mt 5:31; Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18; 1Cor 7:10-11], which restored and brought to fulfillment God the Creator's original plan [Gn1:27; 2:24; Mt 19:3-9; Mk10:2-9], the Roman Catholic Church has always proclaimed the absolute indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage. Down the centuries the Church has repeatedly taught this same doctrine in various Ecumenical Councils [e.g., the Councils of Florence, Trent, and Vatican II through the ordinary Magisterium [teaching

authority] of the Roman Pontiffs and Bishops, and through her constant universal catechetical and missionary activity (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 1998).

The Church upholds that when two baptized Christians [a man and wife] give themselves to each other in a proper forum and with the requisite interior dispositions and capacities, and when the relationship has been consummated by sexual intercourse in a human fashion, it implies that an irrevocable covenant has been established. This union is called ratified and consummated. While all marriages are indissoluble to a certain degree, only the ratified, consummated marriage is absolutely so. By its sacramental nature, the Church has no power to dissolve such a marriage. Death alone can dissolve such a bond [Code of Canon Law, 1983, no.1141]. "The Catechism of the Catholic Church" (1994), which was declared by John Paul II "to be a sure norm for teaching the faith," summarizes this doctrine in the following words: "Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this position of divine wisdom"(no.1640).

The Various Strands of Marriage

Marriage is a unique relationship made up of many strands. It is an *emotional* bond because it is based on love and on such shared experiences as the setting up of a home and the bearing and raising of children. It is a *physical* bond because it is based on sexual union and living together. It is a *moral* bond because it is based on wedding vows. It is a *spiritual* bond because it has been blessed and sealed by God. It is a *legal* bond because it

involves acceptance by the community of a couple's union and legal protection of their status. It is a *personal* bond, weaving these various strands together (Robinson, 1984).

Several of these strands of marriage can be broken. The emotional bond of love can cease, though the shared experiences can never be forgotten. The physical bond of sexual union and living together can cease to exist. The legal bond can be broken by divorce. In brief, the personal bond can seem to have ceased to exist as a human reality. However, in calling back to the creation, to God's original plan, Jesus is indicating that a marriage never disappears entirely. It is arguable whether the million tiny strands of love, shared experience, intimacy and ideals can ever really be sundered completely, but the teaching of Jesus on marriage points to the spiritual bond of a union blessed and sealed by God (Robinson, 1984). For the Catholic Church, a man and a woman are free either to make or not to make the agreement to marry, but if they make it, then God attaches certain consequences to their act. Something very profound happens, a bond is established that is no longer theirs to break as they will. A married couple can no more cease to be husband and wife than a brother and sister can cease to be brother and sister.

ANNULMENT AND REMARRIAGE

It is a sad fact that some marriages fail. The love that seemed to be present on the wedding day soon fades, only to be replaced by anger and alienation. The Christian ideals of marriage seem to be out of reach for some marriages. The Church has always said that when people meet and marry the ideal is that they stay together. However, there has always been a recognition [by the Church] that sometimes marriages just do not work. Sometimes, some marriages do not last. Sometimes, people find themselves abandoned, or locked in a marriage with a partner whom they find intolerably incompatible. Even though

the Church does not generally approve of divorce, the Church also realizes that a civil divorce can sometimes be necessary – “for protection against a partner, for custody and maintenance arrangements, for property settlements, for the security the law can give, or simply in order to put the past behind one and learn to live again” (Robinson, 1984, p.90).

A high proportion of people whose marriages have ended do remarry. Catholic Church Law [called Canon Law] permits a second marriage only if an annulment has been granted to the first marriage. This is required when a divorced Catholic wishes to remarry, or when a Catholic wishes to marry a person who was previously married. In the latter instance, in other words, divorced people who are not Catholics but wish to marry a Catholic may petition the Catholic marriage tribunal for a marriage annulment. Remarriage is possible only after the marriage bond has been annulled. Some divorced Catholics find this very problematic. The other problem is neither partner can remarry because, despite the divorce, they remain husband and wife. Thus neither is free to remarry in the Catholic Church, nor can the Church recognize a remarriage that takes place elsewhere. However, this applies only when a true and unbreakable bond does exist [see Code of Canon Law, 1983, no.1141].

After the Second Vatican Council, the Church began to examine what goes into a valid, sacramental marriage. Just because someone gets married at the Church ceremony and they are baptized does not mean that everything that was required for sacramental marriage was there. The annulment states that the persons are not bound to this marital relationship since the marriage in question was not a sacramental union. An annulment is a statement by the Church that the marital relationship fell short of at least one of the elements demanded as essential by the Church for a sacramental marriage.

What Goes Into a Sacramental Marriage? The couple must fully and freely consent to enter into and live out their Christian marriage. They must agree that their marriage will last forever, that it will be with just that one person, and that in their marriage they will welcome children as being sent by God. Even though they may have given the right answers to the priest's questions and pronounced the formula of consent on their wedding day, were they completely honest in expressing their consent? Were they acting freely and not being forced into the marriage? Were they mentally and morally able to enter into the marital union? Were they sufficiently mature, physically and psychologically, to undertake the duties of Christian marriage? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then it is possible that a true Christian marriage [sacramental] does not now and has never existed between the two people [see Code of Canon Law: nos. 1095; 1096; 1097; 1098; 1103].

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED

1. How does a Church annulment differ from a civil divorce?

The State issues divorces. A civil divorce is a legal dissolution of the marriage contract. The bond that once existed is legally severed. There are people who claim that annulments are "Roman Catholic divorces." An annulment is not a divorce. The Catholic Church does not issue divorces. It cannot sever a true marriage bond. An annulment is a declaration by the Church that for particular reasons a valid/true Christian marriage did not take place at the time of the wedding.

2. Isn't it threatening to be told that my marriage was invalid?

Marriage is made up of many strands – emotional, physical spiritual, legal and personal. Invalidity refers only to the basic spiritual bond sealed by God. In annulment no

one is implying that nothing existed, that there had never been any emotional, physical, moral or personal bonds, that the past is wiped away as though it had never existed.

However, the aim of the tribunal is to lead a person to see whether or not something was so seriously lacking that the union could not be called a Christian marriage in the true sense of the word. If, with the aid of the tribunal personnel, you yourself come to the realization that it could not truly be called a marriage, then you will no longer find the statement threatening.

3. Isn't it better to put the past behind me?

If we face our own past, we are much better able to handle the future. If we do not face it, we can make the same mistakes again. Facing our past is not easy, but, when it is approached in the right spirit, many people have found it a most helpful experience. If you approach a tribunal with this attitude, then we can hope that you will go away feeling more confident of the future.

4. What story would I be required to tell?

The important moment in a Church nullity case is the moment of the wedding. So the story will go back into family backgrounds, the courtship, the dynamics of the relationship, the story of the marriage and what has happened to each party since the separation. By having the whole picture, it is much easier to put the moment of the wedding into a context.

5. Will my former partner be contacted?

If the case is to go ahead, your partner must be contacted. The marriage involved two people and both have a right to know that an annulment is being sought. This is a requirement of natural justice.

6. What if my partner refuses to cooperate?

Your partner will be contacted by the tribunal and invited to come in for an interview. If he or she refuses to cooperate or does not answer the letter, the case will go ahead without the partner.

7. Will I have to confront my partner at the tribunal?

No, this is avoided. Your partner will be invited to come to the tribunal, but it will not be at the same time as yourself.

8. Is it better for my case if my former partner does go for an interview?

Yes, it is much better. To have the certainty necessary to give a decision, the tribunal must be sure that it has heard the full story. It is much easier for the tribunal to be certain if it has heard both parties.

9. Does it mean that the tribunal does not believe what I say?

No, it does not mean that. It means only that all of us see things through our own eyes. With the best will in the world, any one person will find it difficult to give the whole story of a relationship such as marriage.

10. Can my former partner stop the case from being heard?

Sometimes people do attempt to do this, but it is the one right they do not have. If you have presented a case, no Church authority will stop it from being heard. If your partner wishes to oppose, this must be done by opposing within the system, that is, by giving evidence, naming witnesses, etc. In this your partner will be listened to as fully and carefully as yourself, and his or her rights will be fully respected, but the case will go ahead to the conclusion.

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11. Isn't it an arbitrary system? How can any human being presume to decide when God has not sealed a union?

In so many matters God works through human beings. That is not nearly as efficient or certain as if God made known all decisions personally, but it is the way God has chosen. The Church is a community and like any community it is entitled to have its law concerning marriage. It is freely admitted that sometimes the decision are very difficult. The human decisions are fallible, but the individuals can only do the best they can on the basis of the specialized training and experience they have received.

12. Is the tribunal a process of judging between me and my partner?

The tribunal is in no way involved in the field of moral judgments, in deciding who was right and who was wrong, who was to blame and who was innocent. An annulment is not decided on the basis of dividing up blame for the breakdown of the marriage, but solely on the basis of whether one of the grounds of annulment is proved or not.

13. What do I tell my witnesses to say to the tribunal?

The truth. Nothing else will help. Attempts to make up a story would invariably be discovered. In fact, you will be asked not to discuss the case at all with your witnesses, so that they can give their own testimony objectively, just as they see it.

14. Is it necessary to obtain a civil divorce before applying for a decree of nullity?

A tribunal would not issue a decree of nullity with consequent freedom to remarry until there had been a civil divorce. Normally the divorce would be obtained before the case is begun, as there can otherwise be complications. Normally a tribunal prefers that all civil matters [custody, property settlements, etc.] be resolved first, as otherwise conflicts from these cases can spill over into nullity cases.

15. What documents am I required to present?

A full certificate of the marriage and a copy of the divorce decree are required. A Catholic is also required to present a certificate of baptism. In particular cases, certain other documents could be required, but you would be informed of this.

16. Does the decree of nullity mean that the children of the marriage are illegitimate?

No. This is a common misconception. The legitimacy of children is not affected by the annulment. In the eyes of the Church and in civil law, the children are considered the legitimate offspring of a union that failed. The children are legitimate in every respect as long as the parents themselves believed to be married at the time the children were born. As long as there has been a wedding ceremony and the couple were generally considered to be married at the time, there is no question of illegitimacy.

17. How much does a decree of nullity costs?

The cost varies slightly from diocese to diocese but the average cost at this writing is about \$1000. A tribunal has to employ staff, pay rent and generally run a large and busy office. Because of the common but false accusation that decrees of nullity can be bought, the Church is very sensitive about costs. No one is ever asked to pay the whole cost of a process. Every tribunal is subsidized from Church funds. In most tribunals two-thirds comes from the Church subsidy, only one-third from clients. From those who can afford it, a payment is asked. If a person cannot pay that amount, less is asked. If a person cannot pay anything, nothing is asked. No one is ever refused a decree of nullity because of an inability to pay. A rich person receives no priority, either in the time the case will take or in the way the case is handled.

HOLY COMMUNION FOR DIVORCED AND REMARRIED CATHOLICS

The covenant relationship between man and woman is a sign of Christ's love for his Church. The Eucharist celebrates this covenant between Christ and the Church. Since the Eucharist is a unique sacramental sign of Christ's covenant relationship with his spouse, the Church, the Eucharistic action is a model for the way man and woman ought to relate to each other in marriage.

Q: What is the status of a divorced Catholic who has not remarried with regard to the reception of communion? John Paul II, in a document on "Family Life" (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981) clearly states that divorced Catholics are not excommunicated, and that they may receive the Eucharist, especially when they are the innocent parties. He writes: "People who have undergone divorce, but being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life,...for such people, it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to admission to the sacraments"(no.83).

Q: What is the status of divorced Catholics who have married outside the Church? To them, "The Catechism of the Catholic Church" affirms that: "A new union cannot be recognized as valid if the preceding marriage was valid. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Holy Communion as long as the situation persists" (no.1650). The Church firmly upholds that this norm is not at all a punishment or a discrimination against the divorced and remarried, but rather expresses an objective situation that of itself renders impossible the reception of Holy Communion. "They are

unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and his Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage" (*Familiaris Consortio* no.84).

John Paul II, however, makes it clear in the same section of the document that these Catholics, married: "outside the Church," should not consider themselves as separated from the Church, "for as baptized persons they can and indeed must share in its life" (*Familiaris Consortio* no.84). Once again, the Pope's words make clear that these people are not excommunicated. However, such Catholics may not participate in the Eucharist.

Q: What is the status of those who are divorced but for practical reasons like the children's upbringing they cannot separate. Can they receive the Eucharist? In the document *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) John Paul II, addresses their situation. He states: "Reconciliation in the sacrament of penance, which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples" (no. 84).

Q: What about the situation where an annulment is not possible? Can these people receive the Eucharist? Again His Holiness, John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) summed up concisely the official teaching. But most Catholics in this situation are

not aware that the Church has always had what might be called a "second level" of teaching applying at the level of conscience, which is very relevant to them. Thus John Paul II spoke of those "who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid"(no.84). However, he made no concessions as regards the status of their relationship as a marriage. The only way open them to achieve a Catholic marriage, is to bring that first marriage to the tribunal for annulment.

The people John Paul II described include many whose marriages will never be annulled, not because their case is not a strong one, but because witnesses cannot be located or refuse to be interviewed. Sometimes a key witness is dead. Similarly, a Catholic married to a divorced person who is not a Catholic will, perhaps, have good reason to believe that an annulment could be granted to the first marriage of that partner – but the partner does not wish to apply to the tribunal. Obviously, there is little the Catholic can do about this. The partner may say, very reasonably, "Look, if annulment process only involved me, I would be happy to do it for you. But you tell me that it would mean asking friends, and my own parents, even my-ex-spouse to be agreed to be interviewed, and I don't think I want to do that."

This attitude is perfectly understandable, no matter how anxious a Catholic partner might be for the annulment of that first marriage. *What is the Church saying to those in this situation?* The conflict faced by a Catholic in either of these situations is: knowing that it is very likely that the first marriage was not in itself binding in the sight of the God, but this is not going to be established officially. There is a pastoral solution that is

compassionate, reasonable, and theologically sound. It is called the "conscience decision" or the "internal forum solution."

A PASTORAL APPROACH: THE "CONSCIENCE DECISION"

In certain situations, the Catholic may make a decision in what is called the "internal forum," or a "conscience decision", and may then continue to receive communion (Hosie, 1995). The internal forum is your conscience. The external forum is the Church's entire administrative and judicial system. "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (1965) defines conscience as: "the most secret core and sanctuary of the person. There one is alone with God, there in one's innermost self one perceives God's voice" (*Gaudium et Spes* no.16). The "internal forum" or "conscience decision" has always been part of the teaching of the Church that the individual conscience is the proximate norm of morality, while the law is a remote norm. You are always obliged to follow the dictates of your conscience, even if your conscience is in disagreement with legitimate authority. Following your conscience is not merely a right, but a duty. If a conflict arises between your conscience and the Church law, you are obliged to pursue the matter, and seek further enlightenment (Catoir, 1979).

The use of "conscience decision" was explicitly referred to in 1973 by the cardinal in charge of the Church's highly authoritative teaching body in Rome called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In a letter dated April 11, 1973, which appears in the "Canon Law Digest", 9:503f, Cardinal Seper urged pastors of souls to follow up with special solicitude those who are living in an irregular union, applying in the solution of such cases, in addition to other correct means, the approved practice of the Church in the internal forum. Pope John Paul II certainly did not rule out this outcome in his reference to

people who are objectively certain that their previous marriage was not valid (*Familiaris Consortio* no.84).

Guiding Rules: There are rules, of course, applying to the conscience decision.

These rules were spelled out by Archbishop Hamer, of the same Roman congregation, two years after Cardinal Seper's letter. Hemer said that those who use this solution should try to live good Christian lives, and should *avoid scandal* by receiving the sacraments where they are not known (Canon Law Digest 9:504f). Scandal means behavior that is likely to lead another person into committing sin. Some people have no comprehension why couples divorced and remarried outside the Church can receive the Eucharist. The Church teaches that if there is a possibility of scandal, it might be better for the couple to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist in a different parish. However, if the couple is virtually unknown in the parish and there is little danger of scandal, such remarried Catholics could certainly receive the Eucharist in the parish where they live (Hosie, 1995).

It is worth mentioning that the exercise of an informed conscience is one which the Church expects people to make for themselves. In other words, it is something private, something we work out in prayer and reflection on the state of our own consciences. Sometimes, in order to do that, we may need to seek the help of a priest. The "conscience decision" is not based merely on a desire to receive Holy Communion [although this desire obviously inspires the effort by people to look at their situation]. Rather, it is based on a conviction that the first marriage was not one, which ought to be seen as valid and binding, even though this will probably, never be officially declared by the Church.

THE PROCESS OF IMAGING: SELF-AND-GOD PHENOMENON

Central to an understanding of personal development is the notion that the person is in the process of imaging. Imaging is not something we do; it is at the heart of who we are. It is the way we compose reality. It is a personal, ongoing process that allows each self to find coherence in life experiences. It is a process that strives to realize meaning – to find it, to construct it, to challenge it, to affirm it. And it is a process that refuses to be held bound by the present; it searches for possibilities, it envisions how the future might be, and it is intimately connected, as Erikson's work suggest, with the foundational virtue of hope (Shea, 1995).

The process of imaging and its vital connection to the development and functioning of the self is portrayed as the "imagination." Johnson (1987) writes: "Without imagination, nothing in the world could be meaningful. Without imagination, we could never make sense of our experience. Without imagination, we could never reason toward knowledge of reality"(p.ix). If this is true of experiencing in general, it must also be true of our experiencing of God. Parks (1986) makes this point when she says: "the task of the imagination, and particularly of the religious, is to compose the real" (p.114). Religious reality, whatever it may be for the individual person, is grasped by the self through the process of imaging of which the self is capable. In other words: "it is through imaging that the self relates to God; religion as a process of imaging is, then, an ongoing construing of the self-and-God phenomenon"(Shea, 1995, p.338).

The trauma of divorce does not only affect a person's self-image or ego-identity but it often affects one's relationship with what or who is perceived as the ultimate authority in the human psyche and how he or she experiences being defined or valued by that ultimate

authority. Thus the question of identity that is usually asked in our time – Who am I? – is not helpful outside of the relational question, Whose am I? Karl Jaspers is quoted as saying: “The kind of God-image a human being has determines what kind of personality he is” (Jordan, 1986). The Christian philosophical position has been stated by J. V. Langmead Casserly: “In the history of human thought, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man [sic] rise and fall together. The more profound our sense of the reality and meaning of divinity, the more vivid our apprehension of the unique status and dignity of human personality.” From the psychological point of view, Earl Loomis has stated this same truth: “Man’s [sic] image of God and his image of himself are always linked together” (Jordan, 1986, p. 22). In other words, the self mirrors its own perceived absolute.

GOD OBJECT IMAGES

The formation of our God-images is a complex phenomenon. Anna Freud and others have pointed out that we have the tendency of endowing our parents and other significant authority figures with divine powers. The research of Rizzuto (1979), has added a powerful proof of the reality of the mental representation of God in our lives. Our early object relations are most lasting and important elements in our internalized images of God. Our life experiences – good and bad – all contribute immensely to the formation of our selves and our God-images. Our internalized images of God are not completely fixed, but have the potential for change. It searches for new possibilities. We are constantly in the process of imaging and reformulating our sense of self and God-images.

A number of psychoanalytic thinkers, including Guntrip (1969), McDargh (1986), Meissner (1984), Rizzuto (1979), and Spero (1981), have addressed the meaning of God during the developmental process. These writers conceptualize the experience of God in

the context of object relations theory. God becomes, within this theoretical framework, an object like any other, representing a blending of early self-parental relationships with an ongoing developmental experience of the world. God can therefore, be experienced in a wide variety of ways significantly dependent on the unique quality of each person's individual developmental process.

The God experience, in object relations theory, is generally considered to be among the various types of transitional phenomena that were originally conceptualized by Winnicott. In the transitional experience, a person suspends strict reality testing in order to create a meaningful working through of an important conflict or crisis [like going through a divorce]. For the child struggling with fears of maternal abandonment, for instance, a favorite toy can become a satisfactory replacement for mother, serving the child's developmental demand to be self-soothed while mother is out of the room. When the experience of the favorite toy as a transitional object becomes internalized, the child has succeeded in his or her struggle toward autonomy (Banschick, 1992).

However, unlike other transitional objects – a favorite toy or a blanket – which a healthy youngster eventually abandons and mourns, the God experience as a transitional phenomenon, is never really abandoned and therefore never mourned. Certainly, one may lose meaningful interest in God at any point of development or going through some crisis like the trauma of divorce, but rarely because of his “death” or “loss.” The ultimate other is an object that by its very nature can be rehabilitated, rejected, or engaged whenever a person's internal emotional circumstances require it (Banschick, 1992). This leads to a most interesting conclusion, which has been convincingly argued that God remains a

transitional object that is available to a person at all points of life, as the person needs God and needs God to be (Rizzuto, 1979).

Psychologists have done research of God-images – how they are formed, how they affect self-esteem, how they are transformed. But these studies deal with only half the picture. As pastoral care givers, we are also interested in the original image, but unlike the clinicians, we believe that a covenant has two parties to it. People do not simply form a mature God-image; instead they open themselves to a relationship with God. That experience will transform any received image or images formed out of our childhood needs. We do not need to form our God-image or deliberately transform it. We only need to become aware of the image we hold and be open to holding it lightly so that it can be reshaped by our experiences (Ochs & Olitzky, 1997).

PUNITIVE GOD VRS GOD OF COMPASSION

Our image of God is so important when we come to terms with suffering. If God is a God "out there" who is always demanding hard things for us in order to purify us or punish us, then we will draw little comfort and consolation from our relationship with God during painful situations [like going through a painful divorce]. We may, in fact, feel a lot of anger, bitterness, guilt and resentment toward this God. Our awareness of the loving presence of God does not mean that we will never have moments of feeling angry at God or abandoned by God or be just plain unfeeling toward God during time of loss. These are natural, human responses of grief. But we will not go on forever blaming God for causing the situation or for not intervening and stopping the event. If our image of God is a positive one, we will eventually return to a time when we recognize the comfort and love that are waiting there for us (Rupp, 1988).

MY OPERATIONAL THEOLOGY

Operational theology, in contrast to professed theology, looks beyond an individual's verbally and intellectually articulated theology to the dynamic images, mental representations of God, world view, maps of reality, belief systems, and value systems which actually dominate the life experience of people. Edwin A. Hoover defines operational theology as: "a person's beliefs about the world, humankind and God, based on experience, perceptions, myths and hopes and that person's belief about his/her place in relation to all this"(Jordan, 1986, p.29).

My operational theology or image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ is a Compassionate, caring God. This God is: *"like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering the lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast"* (Isaiah 40:11). This is the God who consoles when we feel our brokenness. This God tells us how much we are loved: *"I have called you by name: you are mine... You are precious in my eyes and glorious... I love you... Do not be afraid, for I am with you"* (Isaiah 43:1, 4). As a Good Shepherd, God protects his flock. God's voice speaks of food and water. Peace and security. God leads and guides the sheep to abundant pasture. God revivifies the sheep that are critically wounded along the way.

What is the pastoral implication of my operative theology as I exercise ministry with these divorced Catholics? When Jesus says: *"I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep"* [John 10:11], by these words I believe he is telling me about his goodness, which he wants me to follow. As I execute this project, the challenge before me is to function as a "block of salt" for these divorced Catholics to lick

for their well being. In other words, my pastoral efforts would be to understand their plight, guide, sustain and seek to restore them to wholeness – emotionally and spiritually.

THE USE OF RELIGIOUS RESOURCES

The term "religious resources" refers to any of a number of beliefs, concepts, and practices that are generally associated with religious thought. I believe that the professional helper must be aware of the potential vital role of religion in the life of the individual. The following religious resources namely: hope, forgiveness and prayer would form the backbone throughout the counseling sessions. I would endeavor to foster hope, encourage or promote forgiveness/reconciliation. I would also utilize prayer as a spiritual support network.

(1) *Hope*: I would like to believe that hope is, quite possibly, the greatest motivating force in all of life. The concept of hope is fundamental to those experiencing some sort of crises. Furthermore, it is just as central to any worthwhile understanding of religion. The ultimate source of religious hope is a faith that God is the living God and is active in the world today. A life of hope is the ability to live in absolute confidence of promises, to function each day trusting that God's promises and purposes will not fail (Ducan, Eddy & Haney, 1981).

(2) *Forgiveness*: Theologically and psychologically, forgiveness of God, self, and others is a central reality in a divorced person's context as well as in the therapeutic change involved in healing and rebuilding. One of Jesus' descriptions [not prescription] of forgiveness is: "forgive each other as readily as God forgave you" (Eph 4: 32, *NJB*). One in a faith relationship with God experiences the eternal and unconditional forgiveness of the Divine, which may be reflected in Divine forgiveness for self and others.

(3) *Prayer*: In *Understanding Prayer* Edgar Jackson says that he is "inclined to think that the benefits of counseling might not be necessary if there were a more adequate prayer life practiced by persons who were trying to find their way in life" (Hulme, 1981, p.133). Since an "adequate prayer life" is a possible preventive of the need for counseling, prayer as a resource in pastoral counseling is a way of helping persons during the counseling process and also to carry on after counseling. While prayer is not a substitute for counseling, it is an undergirding support for the counseling and the counselee.

Reflecting on the importance of prayer, Kushner (1981) writes: "We can't pray that God will make our lives free of problems; this won't happen, and it is probably just as well.... But people who pray for courage, for strength to bear the unbearable, for the grace to remember what they have left instead of what they have lost, very often find their prayers answered. They discover that they have more strength, more courage than they ever knew themselves to have. Where did they get it? I would like to think that their prayers helped them find that strength. Their prayers helped them tap reserves of faith and courage which were not available to them before"(p.125).

Chapter III

Methodology

A. The Approach and Procedure Employed in Executing the Project

In the execution of the project, I plan to undertake the following specific activities.

(1) I would seek a written permission from the pastor of the parish to conduct this ministry with some of the divorced congregants in the parish. A copy of the letter may be read in Appendix B. (2) After seeking an approval from the pastor, I would send letters of invitation to some of our divorced parishioners stating my intentions to conduct this ministry. A copy of the letter may be read in Appendix B. (3) I would give them some time to decide whether they would want to be participants. In about a week's time, I would make a follow up [phone calls] to solicit their responses. (4) I would proceed to invite interested or prospective candidates for individual interviews.

The purpose for conducting the preliminary individual interviews would be three fold. First, I would use that forum to speak on a one to one basis about the project's rational. I would underscore the importance of preserving confidentiality in the counseling sessions. I would also seek their permission [verbal and written forms] to tape-record the counseling sessions. This would, in my judgment, make it easier to transcribe what would be transpiring in the sessions. A copy of the letter may also be read in Appendix B. Second, I would use the opportunity to get to know them better and I would also be making assessments about their willingness to share their perspectives, feelings and experiences. Third and lastly, I would use the initial interviews to gather useful information concerning: (a) the length of the marriage and how long they had been divorced. [Heavily invested, even over-invested marriages that end in divorce have a longer and more stringent grief

process]. (b) The presence or absence of children. [Divorce ought to be a definitive ending of a relationship. The couple with younger children, however, have a much more indecisive divorce relationship than the couple without children or whose children are already grown ups].

After the initial interviews, I plan doing group counseling through five sessions for five consecutive weeks. In the course of these sessions, sitting arrangements would be in a circle form. I would endeavor to establish a pastoral presence through: an empathic listening and a non-judgmental presence. I hope taking this stance in a counseling process would help them take a significant step toward gaining emotional control: telling their story. As a group facilitator, I would encourage the participants to share their stories and assist them explore on the following selected themes: (1) Gaining an understanding of what led to the failure of the marriage; (2) What they learned about themselves through their divorce; (3) How it feels to be a divorced Catholic; (4) The role of Religion in their life, and their relationship with the Church; and (5) Their relationship with God. The verbatim account of the pastoral encounters may be read in Appendix C.

I would empathize and be supportive as I assist them to explore [ask questions for clarification, offer encouragement and challenge them as well where necessary], on the selected themes. I would be flexible enough to whatever personal concerns or topics of interest they might have and for that matter would want to talk about. When deemed appropriate, I would clarify certain issues where necessary particularly concerning the teachings of the Church on marriage and divorce. As an important part of providing them with emotional and spiritual support, I would begin and end each session with a prayer. At the right time, I would also share an inspiring story about our "Broken Pieces" and how it

can be related to their brokenness. It may be read in Appendix D. When I am through with the five sessions, I would finally conduct individual closing interviews to solicit their impressions about the whole counseling sessions. The outcome of the closing interviews may be read in Appendix E.

B. Methods of Assessing Outcomes: Possible Gains, Losses, or no Change

I anticipate members to (1) actively participate in all the sessions and be able to share their perspectives, feelings and experiences (2) claim some responsibility for themselves (3) grieve and mourn their losses (4) come to feel once more that they are embraced to participate in the life of the Church and (5) I would also use the closing interviews to solicit their impressions about the sessions.

Chapter 1V

Results

A. A Description of Outcomes Assessed According to Methods Specified in the Proposal, and in Chapter III, Section B

Session I

Theme: Gaining an understanding of what led to the failure of the Marriage

All the participants were present. I opened the session with a prayer and we spent about 10 minutes introducing ourselves. It was meant to put the group in a relaxed posture and also to acquaint themselves with each other. I spoke briefly about the project and introduced the theme for the first session. *Marcia* was very expressive. She was shocked when her husband announced that he wanted a divorce: "I felt extremely frightened... I felt like an empty shell... I had no clue whatsoever"(M1). I acknowledged her feelings of shock and explored what might have possibly caused her ex-husband's leaving (C1). She expressed: "...Looking back, I begin to understand that certain comments and behaviors I just excused or that didn't mean anything at the time, now I begin to realize there was a message there. But I wasn't picking up..."(M2). She was claiming self-responsibility when she admitted that she ignored or excused the warning signs. She was probably in denial back then.

Then she began blaming her ex-husband: "...And obviously, he didn't tell me earlier that he wanted out of the marriage. He just left. It was about him"(M2). I pointed out her blaming mechanism (C2). She continued blaming but eventually began claiming some responsibility when she revealed a pattern of interaction that contributed to undermining the stability of her marriage. She said: "He didn't give the marriage a chance.

As long as I went along with what he wanted, everything was great. But I couldn't do that all the time. That was when he would beat me to the ground. When I was no longer useful, he discarded me"(M3). I noticed that she felt rejected. I asked a clarification on what she meant by: she was beaten to the ground (C3). Together we uncovered what appeared to have been the conflict in her marriage namely: complaints about certain unmet needs. She said: "He complained that I don't make love right... He was probably right. What's the point of always going to bed and sexually pleasing somebody who wouldn't give what means most to me? I probably didn't want to fulfill his"(M4). She was claiming some responsibility. I pointed out that perhaps, she didn't want to satisfy him sexually because she felt he wasn't fulfilling her needs" (C4). She explained further: "...I asked him to fix the house and make it a nicer place for us to live. He knew I wanted that more than anything but he wouldn't do it. For ten years I asked him to buy me a necklace but he didn't. If that would make me happy why wouldn't he do it?"(M5). I sensed frustration in her voice and I acknowledged those feelings (C5).

She grieved when she said: "...The last time we spoke, I happened to ask if he was happy. His leaving bothers me. I make the most out of my life and to a degree I am happy but I am not content with my life. I miss my husband. I miss the family unit. He told me he regrets leaving"(M6). She started crying. I acknowledged her feelings of missing her husband and the family unit (C6). I sensed that she might be emotionally attached to her ex-husband. She confirmed that impression when she said: "Call me crazy! He may have disappointed me but this is the man I chose to be my husband and have children with. No matter whom I may find in my life, it would never replace him. There will always be a

special place for him in my heart till I die"(M7). She was grieving and holding on to her ex-husband – the missing object – in her heart.

I assisted her in working through the grieving process by exploring how she felt when her ex-husband told her that he regretted leaving (C7). She disclosed the following painful sentiments: "In a way it bothered me to hear that he wasn't happy. But I can't grieve for the torment he may be having because he chose it. What about me? When a spouse doesn't leave this world to go to the other world, you constantly have to address it. I remember the good things we had together but the bad things are killing"(M8). I got her to talk more about her hurting feelings (C8). She verbalized her hurting feelings and continued grieving: "The bad things are killing. He even got remarried on the Island where we went for our honeymoon. That's so hurtful. I feel it would have been much simpler had God taken him away instead of him doing something so cold and callous without any regard for anyone else's feelings other than his own. I honestly wish I had a grave to go to. That I could put flowers and grieve instead of knowing that someone chose not to be with me"(M9). I acknowledged her hurting feelings and encouraged her to grieve (C9).

Rhoda was quite expressive. Like Marcia, she was also shocked by her divorce. She revealed: "My mind went blank when he told me he wanted out of the marriage... I was in total shock"(R10). I acknowledged her feelings of shock and explored whether she identified some warning signs that her marriage was heading toward a bad direction (C10). She disclosed: "Towards the end, we weren't seeing much of each other. He was out of the house most of the time because of his work. And every now and then, he humiliated and belittled me. Even when we were with people, I never got the respect from him..."(R11). They gradually grew distant from each other. As she reported, her ex-husband was out of

the house most of the time because of his work. *Could it be that he was using his work as an excuse to avoid her?* I noted from what she just shared that she did not feel respected enough and I wondered how she dealt with it. I enquired if she spoke with her husband about how she felt (C11). She said with tears: "I didn't address it. We never discussed it. He had the power to leave me. I don't know if I would ever accept it"(R12). I noted two things. First, the rapport between them was not good enough and second, she felt the humiliation of being rejected.

We [group members] gave her some time to recover. I assisted her in working through the grieving process. I noted and did mention that she was finding it difficult accepting that her husband left her for another woman (C12). My intervention got her to verbalize her hurting feelings: "He stripped me of everything that I had. I had to start from zero and work to where I am now. It has been a long road. He should have died. Two years ago, there was a rumor that he was dead. I thought he left because he was sick and wanted to spare me of pain"(R13). She could not believe that her ex-husband could be so hurtful. She thought it would have been much easier to accept if her ex-husband had died. She was hurting and grieving. I acknowledged her sentiments (C13).

She spoke about a continued pull of feelings she was experiencing toward her ex-husband and she described those feelings as weird: "...It sounds so weird. Even though I resent him for putting me in this situation, sometimes I can't help thinking about him. I mean things like: what he is doing! What he is thinking. May be he doesn't care as much as I do"(R14). I mentioned that the phenomenon she was experiencing was an emotional attachment. I explained that some people overcome it quickly. Others may need more

time. I assured her that it was a normal feeling but too much of it could prevent her from moving forward and starting a new life (C14).

Gina was quite expressive. She claimed that she divorced because her ex-husband was mentally and emotionally abusive: "...I was in a thirty-year mentally and emotionally abusive marriage. He constantly accused and embarrassed me even in front of the children that I was cheating on him. I never cheated on him... The intimacy and everything got worse. I was totally consumed. It reached a point and I knew I couldn't take it anymore: the abuse, drinking, and other embarrassments. I was totally petrified of him and at that point I knew I couldn't survive it. I lost my whole "me" in the marriage. No matter how bad the situation is the person who leaves is going to be the bad guy"(G15). She felt totally consumed in the marriage and that made her lost her whole "self". Her self-image and self-esteem suffered greatly because of what was going on in the marriage.

Her statement: "...No matter how bad the situation is the person who leaves is going to be the bad guy" — that made me suspicious. I suspected she might be having some guilt-feelings. I acknowledged how stifling she might have felt in her marriage and then explored how she felt about leaving her marriage (C15). She said: "I had the fear that he was going to harm me. I had to protect myself, which I eventually did by leaving. But I must say that it was hard for me to give up on my marriage, but certainly I did everything I could. He refused to seek help. I knew I couldn't survive that kind of marriage"(G16). As implied, she left the marriage to protect herself. Nevertheless, she felt guilty for leaving her abusive marriage. I sensed that she was struggling to convince herself that she made the right decision.

Tom was expressive. He shared that his wife divorced him because she was not happy: "She told me that she wasn't happy. I was shocked and I cried. I was totally distraught when she left"(T17). He felt rejected and was hurting. I acknowledged his painful feelings and explored what was going on in the marriage that made his ex-wife unhappy (C17). He explained: "We disagreed. We had conflicts. We fought a lot. Once she nearly stabbed me with a knife and I had to punch her on the face. I was financially supporting her but I wasn't around much. I found ways to avoid her because of the fights. We drifted apart. Even with all of that going on I wasn't prepared to end the marriage. There were times I knew it was coming but I wouldn't accept it. When she left, I was very angry with myself and everybody else. And I made sure the children were angry too" (T18). I noted a couple of things. There were signs of physical abuse in the relationship. They physically assaulted each other. Obviously, he and his ex-wife did not communicate well enough. He was claiming partial responsibility for the failure of the marriage.

As he mentioned there were times he suspected the marriage was heading toward trouble but he would not accept it. He was in denial back then. When his wife left, he became angry with himself and everybody else. He was in a depressed mode. I explored his anger and why he considered it so important making sure that the children also got angry (C18). He explained: "I wanted them to know the reality of what was happening. As long as they don't cause harm or hurt anybody, they have the right to be angry. Being angry is good in a certain sense. It keeps me going"(T19). He was claiming his angry feelings.

Laurie was quite expressive. She divorced her husband because she claimed he was verbally and mentally abusive: "I thought I married a perfect man who was going to do

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everything right but he turned out to be verbally and mentally abusive. We fought constantly over money. He made me beg for simple things in life: clothes for the children, heat in the house. He would lie to me that there was no money"(L20). She thought she married a perfect man who was going to do everything right. I explored further her expectations (C20). She expressed: "It was all an illusion. There was no discussion between us whatsoever. That was the way our whole life was. What he said was final and had to be taken no matter what. I left because I didn't want the arguments, lies and fighting over money to continue"(L21).

I noted two things. First, she became disillusioned when her dream of a perfect man was not fulfilled in the man she married. Second, they were not communicating well enough and I pointed it out to her (C21). She admitted it and further shared that her son's death motivated her to leave the marriage eventually: "Yes! And it was my son's death that broke the camel's back. His death gave me the strength to leave the marriage. If I could live through the death of my son, then the death of that marriage that was over long, long time even before leaving was nothing. My divorce was harder than I thought but it was a lot more relieving"(L22). *Was she implying that she enjoyed some degree of emotional well being following her divorce?* I sensed that she might have a lot of grieving to do about her son's death but I deferred exploration to an opportune time.

Dan was very expressive. He has been divorced twice. In both cases he claimed they argued constantly: "...My first wife and I argued constantly. She hates me and I don't know why. Then I married my second wife. We got along pretty well but again we would argue. She also left me for another man. I was shocked. We had arguments but I didn't think it was going to end up like it did. I didn't see it coming"(D23). I took note of a

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couple of things. He was in denial back then. He felt rejected or abandoned twice. He has no idea why his first ex-wife hated him. I asked if he would feel comfortable sharing what they usually argued about (C23). He revealed the following: "We argued about a lot of things. My first wife was the type of woman whose make-up was to cut and push down" (D24). I sensed that he was very angry with her first ex-wife. I suspected and did mention that it appeared there were signs of contempt, belittling and insults going on in his marriage (C24). He replied: "We had all of that. Once she threw a cup of coffee at my face. She was going to grasp my throat and throw me out of the window. I don't remember exactly how I reacted. May be I also threw my cup of coffee at her. I was very angry"(D25).

I noted and did point out that he and his first ex-wife did not communicate well enough. I also explored whether he still has no clue why his first ex-wife hated him (C25). He finally, understood why she hated him when he said: "I guess she was unhappy with me..."(D26). He grieved when he said: "...She [first ex-wife] even poisoned my son against me. We had a three-month-old baby when we divorced... The last time I spoke with him I was really arguing and yelling at him because he was pushing hard to say I am wrong. I have told him several times that I don't feel guilty for what happened between his mother and me and I think that is making it hard for him. That was the end of our relationship. We haven't spoken for about three years"(D26). I sensed that he was hurting, grieving and probably feeling guilty as well but it seemed like he was trying to repress his guilt. I assisted him in working through the grieving process by acknowledging his losses: his couple identity and a relationship with his only son. I explored whether he would want to re-establish a relationship with his son (C26). He gave a yes and no answer: "I don't feel it's right that I go and look for him because it would make him feel that he is right. If

he wants a relationship I am ready"(D27). My impression was he seemed willing for a relationship but wanted his son to take the initiative.

Sherrie was expressive. She divorced her husband because she claimed he was physically and mentally abusive: "...I was married to a physically and mentally abusive husband. We fought constantly. I even lost a six-month pregnancy out of that"(S28). She started crying. To acknowledge her loss and assist her in working through the grieving process, we [group members] supported her – giving her some time to work through that emotional moment. When she recovered, I acknowledged how difficult it might have been for her to relive that painful experience (C28). Following the experience of losing her pregnancy, she disclosed how the animosity between them intensified: "...each time we fought, I would do so with much anger and vengeance, and less fear of him. He threatened many times to kill me. Once in a fight, I broke his head with a bottle...I realized that if I continue to stay in the marriage it would be disastrous. That is either he kills me or I kill him and I saw myself coming close to that. To prevent that from happening I left"(S29).

She and her ex-husband emotionally and physically abused each other. As she explained, the animosity between them could have resulted in a fatal killing. She left to prevent that from happening. I mentioned that it was a hostile environment and challenged her on what responsibility she claimed for what happened (C29). She said: "He tried to blame me. He would say something like: it was my fault because I provoked him. But that wasn't true. The only responsibility I would claim for myself is: I should have left sooner. For the most part I will blame him because I was the only one who each time tried to understand, worked things out and made peace. He didn't do that"(S30). She claimed just a thin responsibility and apportioned greater blame on her ex-husband.

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I sensed from the prevailing atmosphere that each person in the group was hurting. I acknowledged their emotional pain and encouraged them to grieve, assuring them that it was part of the healing process (C30). We closed the session with a prayer together.

Session II

Theme: What they learned about themselves through their Divorce

They [group members] were all present. We prayed together a prayer I had prepared and given them copies. I introduced the theme for the second session. I also mentioned and encouraged them to share anything that possibly might have surprised them in our first gathering. *Dan* was very expressive. He treated his ex-spouses as non-entities and rejected any shared memories: "...I treat my ex-spouses as non-entities and expect them to treat me in the same way. If we don't we could embarrass each other. By that I mean we can become sexually involved. If we are no longer married then we don't have to be fond of each other. If I want to remember past memories, I would do so on my own. I don't need an ex-spouse to help me do that"(D31). The question is: *Could both attitudes – his rejection of shared memories and the treating of his ex-spouses as non-entities – be interpreted as his way achieving emotional and physic divorce?*

He learned to claim some responsibility for himself when he said: "I have learnt a lot about myself. I think on different levels. At one level, I can argue that my ex-spouses abandoned me. And to a greater extent, that is how I feel. They abandoned me. I can argue that I am the innocent party. At another level, I would say I contributed to the failure of the marriage"(D39). I acknowledged his claim of self-responsibility (C39). He further claimed responsibility when he said: "I was raised to be right always. I will say that advice was wrong. I think the advice should be to try and make things around you happy, and not

be right always"(D40). I explored how his upbringing might have influenced his marriage (C40). His response was: "Definitely, in a big way. For example: if I thought my wife should clean the dishes I would really stick to my guns. If she asked me to change my son's diaper, I wouldn't do it because that's a woman's job. Today, I am willing to sacrifice and come to a compromise. I know that I don't have to stick to what is right but I have this feeling of being right always"(D41).

He learned that his controlling character – a superego tendency [always insisting on his rightness about things] influenced his marriage. He however, reported a change of behavior – willingness to sacrifice and compromise in relationships. He knew that insisting on his rightness always was not a good thing to do but he admitted he has a strong tendency towards it. I commended him for that self-awareness (C41).

Tom was quite expressive. Like Dan, he also rejected shared memories and treated his ex-spouse as a non-entity. He expressed: "...She [referring to his ex-wife] wanted us to be friends. If after all those years I wasn't good enough for you why would I want to be your friend. She doesn't deserve my friendship. I treat her as a non-entity. There should be no communication"(T32). I noted that he was angry and hurting for the humiliation of rejection or abandonment. He learned two important lessons: "I learned a couple of things. First, if you marry too early you are bound to get a divorce. I was 19 and she was 15. People shouldn't be allowed to marry until they have acquired some values. You can only value the other person if you acquire values for yourself. Second, I have been in a couple of relationships and there is the fear that you are going to be hurt again. But I would like to believe that every relationship is different. You have to take a chance. If you are afraid to take a chance you are taking away from your life. If you hold on to the past you wouldn't

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go forward. I have learned that no matter how much it hurts, there is the courage to go on" (T54). He learned to have the courage to move on. He advised his colleagues to overcome their fears and take a chance to establish new relationships. I acknowledged his learning insights (C54).

Laurie was very expressive. She favored shared memories and rejected being treated as a non-entity: "I don't want my ex-husband to treat me as a non-entity. It may sound weird but we are friends now. We both remarried but we are doing some of the things we should have done. I enjoy having contact with him. There are children involved and for that I will never, ever sever that connection. I am the one he came home to when things were going right and we had a wonderful life. I don't want to forget that past. I don't want to keep it in memory only. I want to share it sometimes with him"(L33). She was reclaiming her past memories. Sensing that she was probably emotionally attached to her ex-husband, I sought a clarification on what she meant by they were both doing some of the things they should have done (C33). She confirmed my impression when she said: "He calls to tell me that I am in his thoughts. Before he hangs up he would say: I love you and will always love you! And I would say I know. We were married for thirty-eight years and had three children and it's difficult to forget about it. The biggest bond between us is that we buried a child together"(L34). They both missed each other.

She learned to claim self-responsibility: "I allowed myself to be put there because I trusted and believed all that he told me rather than opening my eyes to see what actually it was. I wanted to believe that he was going to be truthful, take care of me and not harm me in any way – mind, emotions and finances. I allowed that to happen to me even more for a second time because I wanted a fairy tale marriage"(L35). I explored her fairy tale

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marriage (C35). She explained: "I thought I married a prince charming and that we were going to work together and that it was going to be happy. And yes, we will hit a bump on the road but yet together we will struggle to work it out. And together we will pull the horses forward to get things done. And when he comes home, we will take a ride together, and be happy together. It was an illusion"(L36).

I challenged her on what I perceived to be a high expectation (C36). And her response was: "I would be very disappointed if I have to lower my expectations. You are supposed to do things together and not go in two separate ways. I left because I needed to find who I am"(L37). I suspected that high expectations might have probably contributed to her disappointments. She claimed she left the marriage because she needed to find herself. I explored what she has discovered (C37). This was what she had to say: "I have strong shoulders now. I have learned to open my eyes more and not allow myself to be persuaded by first sight. I have learned that I don't have to throw away my past. You learn and grow from it. The past is part of us and to look at it once in a while makes a difference. It helps you to see things differently"(L38). She learned from her past broken pieces. I acknowledged her profound insights and learning experiences (C38).

She remarried after her divorce: "I got married again trusting that it would be different this time but it's not working out well. He is a liar like my first ex-husband. I am in the process of getting a second divorce"(L51). I pointed out that she seemed attracted to liars (C51). She responded: "I have learned that you always tend to go to the same type of man in a different dressing box. I don't understand why. May be they found it easy lying knowing I would believe everything they told me. They have destroyed my heart. Now

it's hard to trust anybody"(L52). I noted that she was having difficulty trusting again. I encouraged her that it takes time and patience to trust again (C52).

Marcia was very expressive. She learned a couple of things: "He was very charming when I first met him. I never questioned him. I trusted him more than I trusted myself. He was not what I perceived him to be. I have to say that even with the bad relationship and as hurtful as it was, it has taught me a valuable lesson. Words are very cheap; actions tell you everything. It's more important for me now to watch what someone does than only to listen to what they say. I have learned that I am a decent person. I don't feel inferior anymore even though once in a while I go back. To tell you the truth in the marriage, I was beginning to feel that I was worth nothing. That was a wrong thing to do. When you over-compromise, you slowly but surely lose value of yourself. I lost my self-respect. When I think of the way I served him, I get very angry with myself"(M42). She felt disillusioned. Her self-image and self-esteem suffered greatly – feelings of rejection leading to an inferiority complex. And quite frankly she revealed that even before the marriage ended, she was beginning to feel worthless. She however, claimed that she learned an important lesson from her unfortunate experience. I sensed that she was moving toward repairing a wounded self-image.

I took particular note of the following statement: "...When I think of the way I served him, I get very angry with myself"(M42). With the insight that anger turned against one's self can put a person in a depressed mood, I explored further her anger. I pointed out that she sounded very angry (C42). Initially, she tried to cover up her anger but sooner claimed it when she said: "I am trying not to be angry. But there are times I am very angry with him too for treating the children and me the way he did. We didn't share our

daughter's wedding together, and we aren't going to share our grand child together. And financially, I am struggling too. At this stage in my life I shouldn't be going from paycheck to paycheck. I shouldn't live this way..."(M43). She started crying. She was angry because she suffered multiple losses: her couple identity, family unit and a markedly reduced financial support. We [group members] gave her some time to recover. Then, I acknowledged her losses and encouraged her to claim her anger and grieve (C43).

She was hopeful about marrying again but was scared of the possibility of ending up marrying the wrong type: "Someday I would want to get married again. But statistics will tell you that people quite often gravitate to the same people they married and broke up with. The person may look a little different but you are actually dealing with the same type of individual you had before. And that's scary"(M53). I acknowledged her anxiety and explained that most second marriages fail because people tend to bring along their old hurts and certain life patterns that sabotage the stability of marriage. I encouraged that she was not doomed to repeat the past; and that the key was to learn from past mistakes and not repeat them (C53).

I made a statement that at times fear can paralyze us from moving forward (C56). That led her to further verbalize her fears, distrust of men and the efforts she was making to overcome: "Yes, for years I was very scared to let men into my life. I built a wall around me. It has only been the last couple of years that I have gotten into a place where I can even risk. I want to trust and believe that there are good men out there. I just haven't been fortunate to meet them. I really try but the few men who have come very close have disappointed me. May be I am looking in the wrong places or there is an issue about me that I have to look at. May be I am attracted to the wrong type of individual. I really don't

know the answer but I really try"(M57). I mentioned that much as she felt disappointed by men, she was also reaching inward to consider what she might possibly be doing or not doing to contribute to her disappointments. I commended her for making self-assessment in a responsible way (C57).

Rhoda was very expressive. The divorce did affect her self-image and her self-esteem also suffered markedly. However, she was making an effort to recover. She expressed: "When he left, he just ripped the paper out of the typewriter and threw it into the waste bag. That is how I feel to a certain extent about my situation. But I try to live happily. I go to work. I socialize with friends. I laugh and I cry too. This is how I try to make inner peace. I still can't imagine why he resented me. How could I just become non-existent? I was a very important part of his life and I am nothing anymore. Forget about me but what about the children and grand children? I don't think I can inflict that much pain to anybody. I also resent losing the house I occupied for thirty years of my marriage. He gave me the house but I had to sell it because I didn't make enough money to maintain it. It's a sad state of affairs. I don't want to get emotional"(R44a). She started crying but tried to repress her emotions.

I noted a couple of things. Despite the blow to her self-image and self-esteem, she was making an effort to live happily. She reported having a job and a support network -- friends to socialize with. I also noticed that she was having difficulty accepting why her ex-husband resented her. She was hurting because she suffered multiple losses. She lost her couple identity. She was feeling the pain of rejection and its humiliation. She was hurting for her children and grand children too. She was also hurting for suffering financial constraints leading to the loss of her bridal home. I observed that she was trying to repress

My intervention got her to talk further about some of her accomplishments: "I am not saying I haven't grown because I have. My position at work right now [office manger] is a big achievement for me. Another thing I have also been able to achieve is going back to my maiden name. It was difficult and it took me a whole year to decide on that. I needed to do it for myself and pursue a new identity. I am in a stuck mode for a moment and then move on"(R44b). She reported some personal and professional accomplishments. I noticed that she was painfully but gradually moving toward reformulating a new identity.

She indicated that there is a possibility of remarrying but admitted that she has more learning to do: "I have met someone. I am trying to be hopeful that this relationship would work. I find it hard expressing myself because I don't want to offend him [her new boyfriend]. I didn't have that in my first marriage. I really want to learn: to open up and be a better communicator. I have learned to some extent but I am still sitting on the fence. I need to jump off the fence"(R48). *Was she claiming some responsibility for herself?* I think so. She admitted having difficulty expressing her feelings to her new boyfriend. And she claimed she did not have a flow of communication in her first marriage. She wanted to learn to become a better communicator. I would consider that as her way of claiming some responsibility. I sensed a strong determination in her resolution to learn and become a better communicator. I encouraged her to go for it (C48).

Gina was very expressive. Following her divorce, she learned to talk and become more assertive. She also sounded very understanding and sympathetic: "I have learned to talk and be assertive. And there is a goal for that. I don't want to be consumed again. I know that it's painful to be left. When we broke up, I realized that he was hurting. I couldn't get near him. I couldn't get a word to him. When I finally spoke with him I said to him: it wasn't all you. I think it made a big impact on him. This past month was our grand son's birthday and he [ex-husband] called to find out how we were doing. Why can't the rest do the same? It takes just a little human kindness"(G45). She learned to establish an amicable human relationship with her ex-husband. She advised her colleagues to do the same with their ex-spouses.

I explored further her forgiving spirit (C45). This was what she had to say: "I don't totally blame him because there were two people involved in marriage. I was passive and didn't speak out very often, so how could he have known that things were that bad? I shouldn't have allowed that to go on for such a long time as I did. So of course, I take part of the blame"(G46). She learned to claim some responsibility for herself. She believed that her own passivity possibly contributed to the failure of her marriage. I commended her for the claim of some responsibility (C46). *Did she learn to open up and start a new relationship?* She made an effort but she failed and she explained why: "Shortly after my divorce, I was in a four year on and off relationship. It didn't work. I didn't know what a relationship was because I didn't have one before. Do I know it now? No! I am afraid to make a commitment. I have the fear that if I open up it's going to happen to me again. I guess I am very cautious or skeptical of men. It's like a wall I have built. That's what isn't going to let me get passed. Perhaps, another reason why I am not interested in a new

relationship is that I have a good paying job and I don't have to depend on a man to make a living"(G49).

I noted that she was having difficulty making a commitment or trusting men again. She believed her overly cautiousness or skepticism of men was hindering her from moving forward. I challenged her on how she was learning to overcome her skepticism (C49). Her response was: "I keep trying hard but I don't know if I would totally get rid of it. More or less I feel I need to open up more"(G50). She was struggling but I sensed in her words a motivation to open up more to relationships.

I observed that *Sherrie* had been quiet since the beginning of the session and I was concerned about her silence even though she was listening attentively. *Was she withdrawing?* I enquired about what was going on with her. She explained that she was not feeling well. All the same, she was willing to share. Even though that was the only time she spoke, she shared significantly on how she learned to open up and start a new relationship: "...After my divorce, I was very angry because I did everything for my first husband. And I wasn't going to do it for anybody again. Later on, I changed my mind. I don't have to punish myself and for that matter any man who might be interested in me. I like to do things for people. So I chose to be the same person that I was and it turned out well when I married my second husband but he died. Now Dan and I have been in a relationship for about five years. We were afraid in the beginning at least I was. We tried and are still trying. I didn't want anything of the past to sour me for the rest of my life. I have learned to trust again"(S56). She learned to enter into another relationship because she did not want her past painful experience to sour her for the rest of her life. I acknowledged her courage to trust again and added that at times fear can paralyze us from

moving forward (C56). We ended the session with a prayer I had prepared and given them copies. We prayed together.

Session III

Theme: How it feels to be a Divorced Catholic

They were all present. To begin the session, I asked for a volunteer to lead us in prayer. Since nobody volunteered, I assumed that responsibility. I proceeded and introduced the theme for the third session. *Rhoda* was expressive. Following her divorce, she went to see a priest and she explained why: "After my divorce, I went to see a priest. It was something I needed to do for myself because I had been away from the Church for a period of time. The priest advised that I shouldn't be too hard on myself. I didn't blame my divorce on God or the Church. But when I went to Church, I didn't feel comfortable in God's House. I can't believe it's six years since my divorce and I am still going through these emotions"(R58). She started crying. She could not understand why she was still going through those painful emotions after six years of her divorce. I observed that she felt embarrassed showing her emotions. I encouraged her that it was healthy to cry because she was still going through a very painful experience. I explored further what was happening that made her felt uncomfortable at Church (C58). She explained: "I stopped going to Church because any time I went I felt uncomfortable in God's House. Not that anybody singled me out but I was ashamed of being divorced"(R59). I noted that she was being self-critical. I communicated that impression to her and counseled that it was not healthy to be overly self-critical (C59).

She angrily expressed a concern about the annulment process: "I was told that my ex-husband remarried in the Church six months after our divorce. Why should the Church

do something like that? Should the other partner not be at least informed? It's not fair for the Church to do that"(R71). She was really angry and I suspected of a possible transference. I explained that usually both partners are informed that an annulment was being sought. I counseled that she might want to find out whether her ex-husband really got married in the Church and she was not contacted or it was just a rumor (C71).

Laurie was expressive: "My generation was taught that if you divorce, you no longer belong to the Church and you can't receive communion. When my mother died I wanted to receive communion but I knew I couldn't because of Church teaching. It was my sister-in-law who advised me to say my act of contrition before receiving communion that day..."(L60). I suspected of a possible transference when she angrily said: "...We are supposed to be God's children and you send us to wander on our own? We should be taken under the wings of the Church and supported more. You preach tolerance. Where is tolerance for us? We didn't receive tolerance. So now we are struggling with going through separation of family, separation of home and separation from the Church. And about annulment: what effect would it have on my children?"(L60).

I noted that she felt separated from Church. She suggested that the Church should take them in and support them more. She wanted to know what effect(s) an annulment could possibly have on her children. I suspended talking about annulment and instead, explored whether she felt she made the right decision for receiving communion at her mother's funeral (C60). This was what she had to say: "I said my act of contrition before receiving communion. I am sorry for my sins. I believe God forgives me"(L61). I was under the impression that what she did sounded similar to the exercise of conscience. However, I was not very sure how much she was convinced about what she did. I

therefore, educated her by explaining that if in the exercise of conscience she reached a decision that for one reason or the other her previous bond was invalid, she could come to peace with herself and might receive communion. I mentioned that if a conflict arose between her conscience and Church law, she was obliged to seek enlightenment (C61).

Gina was expressive. Following her divorce, she experienced empty feelings any time she went to Church: "After my divorce any time I went to Church, I had a different feeling. It was a feeling of just going to Church. It was like walking in and praying and just going through a service. But in this small group I feel that I am part of it. You feel that somebody is going to help you. When you are out there you are just wandering about" (G62). She felt empty in Church. She found my project helpful. It gave her a sense of belonging. I acknowledged her feelings (C62).

She expressed the following concerns about annulments: "What is the use for an annulment? There shouldn't be annulments at all"(G63). She further expressed with anger: "I think the Church is forcing it [annulment] on us"(G64). I suspected of a possible transference going on. I acknowledged the feelings she had that an annulment was being forced on her. She insistently wanted to know the usefulness of annulments. I suspended talking about annulments and instead asked that we give others the opportunity to express their concerns as well (C64).

Sherrie was very expressive: "I was angry at the way the Church treated me after my divorce. I couldn't receive communion. They wouldn't baptize my son from the second marriage because I wasn't married in Church. I was even refused an absolution. It's terrible. As far as annulment is concerned, I don't believe in it. I think it's the way you people make money in the Church. If I am wrong, tell me! How much is charged for

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an annulment?"(S65). I sensed a possible transference going on when she angrily said: "... I think it's the way you people make money in the Church..." and further insisted that I tell her the fee charged for an annulment. Suspecting that she was angry and possibly grieving, I suspended talking about annulment fees and instead assisted her in working through the grieving process by exploring how she was feeling at the moment (C65). She claimed her anger and explained further how she was feeling: "...I am angry because I felt the Church abandoned me. It was as if God had turned His back on me. But I didn't give up my faith. I continued to pray at home..."(S66). She was angry at the way the Church treated her. She felt separated or excommunicated from the Church and consequently, felt abandoned by God as well. But she kept her faith and continued to pray at home.

Marcia was expressive. Following her divorce, she would not go to Church and she explained why. "After my divorce, I wasn't going to Church. Not that I lost complete faith in the Church but I felt that nobody wanted me..."(M67). She felt the Church would not be interested in her. She angrily expressed: "... If I decide to come today, I wouldn't hesitate to receive communion. I am not going to let anybody judge me including priests. I don't care, who ..." (M67). I suspected of a possible transference going on. She angrily criticized the Church for not understanding the plight of the divorced: "...The Church is extremely narrow-minded. Take those rose colored glasses off. This [divorce] may not be what we wanted but it's the reality of what is going on in the world. We want understanding. A priest once told me that if I want to do it in the proper way, I should go for an annulment. That's not acceptable to me. This is what I am angry about. Someone already made a decision about my life without my approval. When I took my vows, I meant every word so for what reason should I go for an annulment?"(M67). She wanted to

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know more about the grounds for annulments. I took note of three things. First, she felt judged. Second, she felt being forced to do something against her wishes regarding going for an annulment. Third and lastly, she was probably anxious about what an annulment could possibly do to the marriage she still cherished. I communicated those impressions to her (C67).

Dan was expressive. He expressed the following concerns: "I felt ostracized by my family, society and excommunicated from the Church. I still feel excommunicated by living with Sherrie and not properly married. This is what the Church teaches..."(D68). He felt excommunicated by living with Sherrie in a common-law marriage. He expressed other concerns about annulments: "... About annulments, I understand you have to be a multi-millionaire to get one. What are the grounds for annulments? I heard you have to prove that the other party committed a fraud. They bring in other people and you have to revisit the past with all its pains. At my divorce proceedings, none of charges brought against me was true. I accepted those charges to get out of the marriage. Twice I lied under an oath. I am guilty of lying. These things need not be revisited because they bring up a lot of unsettling and painful memories"(D68).

He was feeling guilty for lying in his civil divorce proceedings. I sensed that perhaps, he was anxious that he might have to lie at the annulment proceedings. I communicated my impression to him (C68). He admitted his guilt and anxious feelings: "Yes! They [ex-wives] wanted divorce and to deny the charges they brought against me would in effect mean we were still married and I didn't want to remain married to them. May be I shouldn't have lied but it was the practical thing to do at that time"(D69).

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Tom was expressive. He was concerned about the annulment process: "I understand the annulment process is difficult. It goes back to when you were dating. They go too much in detail. My marriage commitment was to God and not the Church so why should the Church annul my marriage? What right has the Church got to annul my marriage?"(T70). I noted that he was concerned that his privacy could perhaps be invaded. He wanted to know why the Church should annul his marriage. In other words, he was inquiring about the grounds for annulments. He also wanted to know what right or power has the Church got to annul his marriage. I explained to him that God works through the Church. I admitted that it is not as efficient or certain as if God personally made known all decisions, but it is the way the Church believes in how God works. I explained that the Church as a community is entitled to have its law concerning marriage. I admitted that human decisions are not perfect and sometimes the decisions made are very difficult but the individuals entrusted with the grave responsibility can only do the best they can on the basis of the training and experience they have received (C70).

Counselor [C72]: When they finished expressing their concerns, I clarified certain things. I explained that the ideal for Christian marriage is that couples stay together. I mentioned that the Church recognizes that sometimes marriages do not succeed due to many factors. I assured that a divorced person is not separated or excommunicated from the Church. I explained that a divorced person might still receive the sacraments particularly the innocent party. Concerning remarriage, I stated clearly the position of the Church that one must receive an annulment before he or she can remarry in the Church.

I explained that just because someone got married at a Church ceremony and they were baptized did not mean that everything that was required for a sacramental marriage

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was there. I underscored that the process of looking deeply at a life and a relationship and what happened at the beginning of the relationship began to be a norm as the Church looked at who should get an annulment. I explained that an annulment is saying that there was something missing that prevented the union from being a sacramental marriage. I added that only in a loving relationship can a marriage be a sign of Christ's life-giving, grace-giving love. Hatred and fighting, violent psychological and physical abuse, or mere loveless co-existence, these are countersigns rather than signs of Christ's love.

To answer their questions regarding the grounds for annulments, I began by speaking about the importance of marital consent and the nature of sacramental marriage. I explained that the couple must freely consent to enter into and live out their Christian marriage. They must agree that their marriage will last forever, that it will be with just that one person, and that in their marriage they will welcome children as being sent by God. I explained further that even though they may have given the right answers to the priest's questions and pronounced the formula of consent on their wedding day, were they completely honest in expressing their consent? Were they acting freely and not being forced into the marriage? Were they mentally and morally able to enter into the marital union? Were they sufficiently mature, physically and psychologically, to undertake the duties of Christian marriage? I underscored that if the answer to any of these questions is "no," then it is possible that a true Christian marriage [sacramental] does not now and has never existed between the two people.

I assured them that the marriage tribunal is not a way of passing moral judgments or deciding who was right and who was wrong, who was to blame and who was innocent. Rather it works solely on the basis of whether one of the grounds of annulment is proved or

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not. About annulment fees, I explained that the diocese asks a contribution of about \$1000 to help cover the cost of the process, but no one would be turned away if they cannot pay. I mentioned that arrangements to make payments in installments could be made.

I acknowledged their concerns that facing the past could be scary because old wounds are reopened. Nevertheless, I assured them that approaching an annulment in the right spirit could help them put the past behind, heal and continue with their life. Concerning the effect an annulment could possibly have on children, I assured them of the official teaching of the Church that the legitimacy of children is not in any way affected by the annulment. I counseled that they should not rush into any decisions but give themselves some time and think about it. We closed the session with a prayer I had prepared and given them copies. We prayed together.

Session IV

Theme: The Role of Religion in their life and their relationship with the Church

They were all present. As usual, we began the session with a prayer together. I welcomed them and introduced the theme for the day. I reminded them of what I spoke about in our previous session namely: sacramental marriage, annulments, reception of communion and ex-communication. I proceeded to invite them to share any surprises, contentions, as well as what they thought had been clarified for them (C73).

Gina was very expressive. She understood that the annulment fee was quite manageable. She also expressed some concerns about the annulment process: "The money part of annulment has been clarified. Now I know it isn't all that expensive. But I consider annulment as another process of divorce. Spiritually, I don't need to divorce. Besides, I have to appear before a board and they would go through every detail of my marriage.

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Because I don't want to go for an annulment, is the Church going to shut the door on me?"

(G74). I noted the following: she felt an annulment would wipe away her marriage spiritually. She was also concerned that the process would invade her privacy. I assured that even if for some reasons she could not go for an annulment, she was in no way excommunicated from the Church. I counseled that she could use what is called the conscience decision. I explained that if in the exercise of conscience she reached a decision that for some reasons her previous bond was invalid, she could come to peace with herself and she may receive communion. If a conflict arises between her conscience and Church law, she was obliged to seek enlightenment (C74).

She spoke about her relationship with the Church: "Going to Church makes me feel better inside but it doesn't last because there is this feeling that I don't actually belong" (G89). The feeling of relief she got from going to Church was short-lived. I invited her to talk more about those feelings (C89). She explained further: "Most of the time, I come to Church not during service hours but on my own to pray. That's because at times when I see families I kind of isolate. In my mind, I think I am the only one who is divorced. I know it's not so and that this feeling of strangeness comes from within. I am working on that"(G90). She felt isolated in Church because she felt guilty and ashamed of being divorced. She realized that she was being self-critical and claimed she was working on that. I encouraged her in that direction and explored further why going to Church was so important for her (C90).

This was what she said: "Going to Church relieves me of all kinds of burdens. It's my way of talking to God about my troubles. It strengthens my belief in God and assures me that I am not alone. I don't go to Church only to pray for things even though there is a

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lot of that implied. You just can't handle everything on your own all the time. So going to Church helps"(G91). She found going to Church comforting. It gave her peace of mind and helped to strengthen her belief in God. *Did she feel embraced by the Church?* There was a positive indication that she was gradually beginning to feel that she is embraced. She made an affirming statement when she said: "Coming to this support group has made me feel a little bit back in the Church itself. It has helped me to understand some things better. We need more support groups. We need a little bit of embracement"(G93). She found my project very helpful. Her suggestion that there should be more support groups was a very important one.

Marcia was very expressive. She understood a couple of things. However, she expressed some concerns about annulments: "Certain things have been clarified for me too. The monetary aspect of annulment is now clear. It's quite manageable. I am also glad to hear that being divorced doesn't necessarily mean you can't receive communion. But I still can't go through an annulment. I believed in my marriage and I still do to a degree. I find no reason whatsoever to break that bond. Whether I ever get married again or not, in my heart he will always be my husband"(M75). She was probably afraid that an annulment would wipe away the marriage she still cherished. I communicated those impressions to her (C75).

Did she feel embraced by the Church? There was a positive indication that she was gradually beginning to feel that she is embraced. She said: "... I am also glad to hear that being divorced doesn't necessarily mean you can't receive communion..."(M75). She further expressed: "When I divorced the last place I thought of going was the Church because I didn't think they would even want to discuss my divorce. I was ashamed to

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associate with people even with my friends. The stigma attached to it is almost unbearable. Now I feel I have to come back to the Church"(M84). I explored why coming back to the Church was so important for her now (C84). She said: "I feel it's the good thing to do. I feel I have to go to Church and pray and feel that I am not alone and facing the challenges of life all by myself"(M85). She considered going to Church was a good thing to do. That was an affirmative statement. She was beginning to get a sense that the Church is embracing her.

She also complained about the Church when she said: "The Church embraces marriage so anyone who has a broken marriage, is considered a threat to the Church. But the fact remains that a good number of marriages fail. Is the Church going to turn us away? That's the time the Church should embrace. There are not many support groups in the parishes. What does that say about us? Does it say the Church is embracing? (M92). She felt the Church should do more by creating support groups in the parishes. That for her would be a further sign that the Church was showing interest or embracing divorced persons. Her suggestion was a significant one. In the end, she made an affirmative statement: "...I am glad that I was able to talk about how I feel about the Church. I like to go to Church more: light my candles and pray. It doesn't solve all problems but it makes me feel much better about myself"(M143).

Dan was very expressive. He spoke about his relationship with the Church: "The Church teaches that I am ex-communicated especially now that Sherrie and I are living together and not married. But I feel it isn't sinful. I go to Church and I receive communion, and that brings me some comfort. I don't even confess that we are living together because I don't believe it's sinful. Being with Sherrie makes me emotionally

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happy and healthy. We play a low key. I love the Church but I don't believe certain things that the Church teaches. But I don't go about complaining. I just know how to live with it"(D76). *Did he feel embraced by the Church?* I assisted him toward that direction. He emphasized earlier on that the Church teaches that those who are living together but not in marriage are excommunicated. I clarified that the Church does not encourage that kind of union but it does not teach that those in that situation are separated or ex-communicated (C76). I considered the following statement very significant: "...I love the Church but I don't believe certain things that the Church teaches. But I don't go about complaining. I just know how to live with it"(D76). His remarks define clearly where he stands with regard to his relationship with the Church.

I explored why he and Sherrie kept their relationship on a low key (C76). He explained: "I know that it troubles some people when they see divorced people receive communion and even more so in our case living together and not properly married. We try to keep it on a low key because we don't want to cause a scandal. Right now in my life it's so important for me to go to Church and be part of it"(D77). Again, his last statement was significant: "... We try to keep it on a low key because we don't want to cause a scandal. Right now in my life it's so important for me to go to Church and be part of it"(D77). I explored whether he and Sherrie have any intentions of getting married (C79). He revealed that he has no immediate intention of marrying and he explained why: "I doubt if I would go for an annulment to get married in the Church. We do a lot of responsible things but a lot more is at stake when you begin to talk about marriage. For instance, I have a son, and Sherrie has her own children and grand children. Emotionally, I am not prepared to deal with all that. Besides, we each have different life styles. What is important for me right

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now is to make each other happy. We are healing each other"(D80). He felt satisfied remaining in a common-law marriage situation. He claimed they were healing each other.

He felt the Church disappointed him when he was encountering problems in his marriage. He angrily expressed: "I feel the Church let me down when I was having trouble with my marriage. There was no place to go to within the Church"(D95). I enquired if he went to see a priest (C95). He answered: "I didn't think I could go to the Church to talk about my problems. Before I got married, the Church required a three-week marriage preparation course. Nobody said to me if you get into trouble, call this Catholic hotline that deals with marriages in trouble. What I feel cheated out was the Church wasn't there when I was in trouble. And now that the marriage is over, you are saying I should go for an annulment to get married in the Church. I could have gone to the Church and I believe they would have told me to be sweeter to my wife or go and see a counselor"(D96). I suspected of a possible transference going on.

I insisted on why he failed to see a priest. I said to him: "You thought the Church wouldn't be there for you. Don't you think that perhaps, it might have been different if you had gone to see a priest?"(C96). Now looking back I think I was too defensive at that point. I guess that is my countertransference. He explained further why he did not go to see a priest: "At that time, there was nowhere in the Church I could go to. The issue is it was after the breakdown of the marriage that the Church began to show more interest. If it had been advertised that this [parish] has this program and people whose marriages are in trouble, come on this day and we would be there to help you, it would have been helpful. It may also strengthen the Church's position to say we recognize people who are facing

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difficulties in their marriage. It will help all of us"(D97). The suggestion of designing a special parish program to support couples with marital problems was a laudable one.

Sherrie was expressive. She did not consider her common-law marriage situation as sinful. When she went to Church she would receive communion: "I don't feel I am living in sin by not getting married but living together with Dan. I love him. When I go to Church I receive communion because I don't think I did anything wrong. The Church means a lot to me. I go to Church because I love God and I think it's the right thing to do"(S78). I inquired whether she has any intentions of getting married (C79). She replied: "We haven't really discussed about marriage. We are happy at where we are..."(S81). She emphasized that she never felt her divorce was a sinful act: "...I don't feel I committed a sinful act by divorcing. Giving the circumstances of my first marriage and the way I tried to make it work, I never once felt guilty about my divorce or that my divorce was a sinful act. No guilt! My divorce was a decision I made after many beatings, after many tears, and after trying and trying"(S81). *Was she really guilt free or she was repressing her guilt?*

Did she feel embraced by the Church? She expressed the following sentiments: "...The Church means a lot to me. I go to Church because I love God and I think it's the right thing to do"(S78). I continued assuring her that she was not ex-communicated and that if in the exercise of conscience she reached a decision that for some reasons her previous bond was invalid, she could come to peace with herself and might receive communion. If a conflict arose between her conscience and Church law, she was obliged to seek enlightenment (C81).

Tom was expressive. He spoke about how he felt about the Church and God: "The Church puts a lot of restrictions on marriage. You teach that what God has joined, let no

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man divide. You fear to leave a bad marriage because of religious beliefs. The teachings make you think that no matter how bad the marriage is you are obligated to one another and must make it work. How I feel toward God is more important to me. I believe I can divorce and God will still love me. I try not to leave too many things for the Church to decide for me"(T82). I acknowledged his feelings (C82).

Did he feel embraced by the Church? He found going to Church and receiving communion very meaningful. He expressed: "When I go to Church I receive communion because I feel I am entitled to it. It gives me a feeling that Jesus died on the cross for me. I like going to Church because it makes me feel good about myself. The Church is very important to me even though I don't leave many things for the Church to decide for me" (T83). His last statement was significant because it defines his relationship with the Church. He found going to Church comforting but claimed he would not leave many things for the Church to decide for him.

Rhoda was very expressive. *Did she feel embraced by the Church?* There was a positive indication that she was gradually beginning to feel that the Church is embracing. She found my project very helpful. It brought her a feeling that it was time she started thinking seriously about going to Church. She expressed: "Being part of this group has brought me a sense that I need to come back to the Church. May be God is bringing me back into His life"(R86). That was very affirming. I acknowledged her feelings and explored further why she considered coming back to the Church so important (C86). She explained: "I am at a place in my life and I feel I have to begin going to Church. I pray to God everyday but I actually need to go to Church often to express myself more to God and become part of the community again"(R87). She made another affirmative statement when

she said: "Finding out that I can go to Church and be accepted is comforting. Now I have the feeling that I am not an outcast..."(R146). She felt embraced and she saw the need of beginning going to Church and becoming part of the worshipping community again.

Laurie was very expressive. *Did she feel embraced by the Church?* There was a positive indication toward that goal. She had been away from the Church for quite some time and she described how she started feeling the need of coming back: "I have been away from the Church for a long time. When I started having problems in my second marriage, I went to see a priest. He told me that may be God was bringing me back into the Church. Since then, I have been saying my rosary every morning. If it weren't the rosary and certainly help from other people I probably, would have jumped out of the window. They have kept me grounded. Now, I go to Church by myself and it gives me some sense of peace even though I am still on the edge. It's important for me to start going to Church again to show that I am embracing my religion"(L88).

She found going to Church very important and helpful. That was an affirming statement even though she claimed she found herself on the edges of the Church. I acknowledged her sentiments (C88). She expressed a sense of wonder about my project when she said: "I was very surprised to find that there is a divorced support group in the Church. I was shocked because I knew the Church frowns on divorce. It certainly helps to have that support from the Church"(C94). She made another affirming statement when she said: "...I felt a heavy load has been lifted off my shoulders when I learned that divorced people are still part of the Church. There are many Catholics out there who don't know this. If I had not come to these sessions, I wouldn't have learnt these things"(L150). She thought the Church frowns on divorce. The project enlightened her about all that the

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Church is doing -- reaching out and embracing her children who are suffering from the brokenness of marriage. Her suggestion that it was helpful to receive support from the Church was a laudable one. We closed the session with a prayer together.

Session V

Theme: Their Relationship with God

They [group members] were all present. We started the session with a prayer. I welcomed them and mentioned that it was going to be our last meeting as a group. I introduced the theme and invited them for sharing. *Gina* was quite expressive. She felt guilty: "I felt guilty for my divorce. From that guilt I tried doing something extra. When I finalized the divorce papers, I was willing to delete a certain paragraph that he found particularly troubling. I also gave certain things that we owned together back to him. I didn't want to rip him off totally or make the situation worse. But I think there shouldn't have been guilt in the first place"(G99). She made compensations for her guilt. I assisted her work through the grieving process by exploring whether she felt her guilt was a healthy one (C99). She said: "My feelings fluctuate. At one moment, I feel I did the right thing. Another moment, I feel I did something terrible. What I possibly did wrong was for not speaking up. I was too passive. May be if I had spoken up things would have been different. I lost a whole lot of contact with him. That I still miss. But in everything you have to give up something to gain something. There shouldn't have been guilt because I left an abusive marriage to gain my peace of mind"(G100).

She had mixed feelings about her divorce: relief and guilt. She claimed she lost contact with her husband and she still missed that to some degree. I sensed that she has a minimal emotional attachment to her ex-husband. I observed that she was working through

her guilt to convince herself that she made the right decision leaving her abusive marriage. She claimed her divorce brought her closer to God: "My divorce probably, made me have more belief in God. I have started going to Church and I pray more. God is very reliable. He gives me strength to keep going"(G111). She was forgiving toward her ex-husband and felt forgiven by God as well: "For me forgiveness is having an understanding for the other person. Now looking back, I can understand that my ex-husband didn't know better and so I can forgive him and come to peace with myself. And I feel God forgives me too"(G129).

Marcia was very expressive. Her divorce gave her a feeling of failure: "When my marriage ended I felt very guilty. Had he not left, I probably would have gone to the depth to do whatever to salvage my marriage - the most sacred thing for me"(M101). Responding to my challenge (C101) on what she thought she could have possibly done to keep her marriage intact, she began reworking through her guilt more realistically. She said: "That's a hard one. I don't know what more I could have done for a person like him. I have to stop blaming myself because no matter what I did I couldn't make him change his mind. It takes two people to salvage a marriage"(M102). She was learning not to be self-condemnatory.

When her husband left, she was angry and blamed it on God: "When he left, I was very angry and blamed God. God was a taboo for me. In my mind God is there to protect you. If you live a good and decent life, God wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I felt God did something to hurt me. At that time, I was totally devastated and I couldn't see clearly. I needed to blame somebody and God was handy. I don't blame God anymore. He gave us free will. Whatever the reasons now I know that I contributed to what happened in the

marriage. I have taken responsibility for it"(M114). She stopped blaming God and learned to claim some responsibility for herself. I acknowledged her claim of responsibility and explored her prayer life (C114).

She claimed her divorce brought her closer to God: "I really feel closer to God than I have ever been. I pray everyday asking God to help me find peace and contentment in my life. Years ago when I got upset about something, my husband would always put his arms around me and assure me that everything will be all right. Now when I pray, I feel God has His arms around me with the assurance that everything will be all right. God is giving me what I miss most in my life. That's comforting but I am human and sometimes I need to connect with somebody. I am missing that in my life. My biggest struggle right now is reaching a point where I can accept the possibility of being alone and coming to peace with it"(M115). She felt at prayer that God had His arms around her -- giving her what she was missing most in her life. Obviously, she was grieving. I noted an interesting dynamic. Through prayer God became for her a transitional object. She was unforgiving toward her ex-spouse: "If there is any forgiveness that should be given, it's forgiveness that I have to give to myself and not to him"(M136).

Rhoda was quite expressive. Her divorce gave her a sense of failure: "I felt guilty too. He didn't want to be with me anymore and that made me feel I did something wrong. No matter what you do the guilt will always be there. Guilt is a very bad thing"(R103). I encouraged her to talk more about her guilt (C103). She expressed further: "I felt guilty in a thousand different ways. May be if I had done this or that he wouldn't have left. You always think you could have done something to save the marriage"(R104). I enquired whether she considered her guilt was a healthy one (C104). She simply responded: "I don't

know!"(R105). I counseled her by explaining that guilt could be a wake up call. However, constantly berating herself was unhealthy. I mentioned that forgiveness is a powerful remedy and asked if she felt forgiven (C105).

She responded: "I do feel forgiven but once a while I still get those guilt feelings. I pray to God to help me get some peace of mind"(R106). I explored her prayer life and this was what she said: "Even though I sometimes feel like walking through a cloudy day, I picture God as a Sun in my life. He gives me warmth. Somebody loves and cares about me. I pray that I make the right decisions in my life"(R107). I noted that she was not yet ready to forgive her ex-husband when she said: "I don't know if I can forgive him"(R130). That was an indication that she was still hurting.

Sherrie was very expressive. What she shared did not relate specifically to her divorce. It had to do with losing her child and how that affected her relationship with God. She felt guilty and blamed herself for her son's death: "I...lost a son to an automobile accident. I felt I could have prevented it"(S124). She started crying. We [group members] assisted her by giving her some time to go through her emotional pain. When she recovered, I acknowledged her painful loss and explored what she thought she could have possibly done to prevent the accident (C124). She said: "I know I couldn't have done anything to prevent it but as a mother I felt I could have done something. I just couldn't understand why God took away my son"(S125). I noted how she shifted the blaming dynamics from herself to God. I pointed out that it sounded like she was blaming it [her son's death] on God (C125). She admitted it and expressed her anger: "Yes, I did. I was very angry with God. I took a crucifix that was hanging on the wall and smashed it against the floor and broke it into pieces. I am very sorry for what I did. My son's death brought

me closer to the Blessed Mother who also lost her only Son, Jesus Christ. I know she will understand my pain"(S126).

I pointed out to her that identifying with the Blessed Mother helped her deal with her son's death but she was probably still blaming God (C126). She responded: "Initially, I blamed God but now I would say I rather question God. I would like to believe that things happen for a reason but at times we find it difficult accepting it because we don't see the bigger picture. Now I feel my son is in a better place, even though if somebody had said that to me in the beginning that would have made me very angry. Now I can say for myself that he is in a better place with God"(S127). I acknowledged that she arrived at that profound insight by questioning God. I added that sometimes questioning certain events in our lives opens the way to deepening our relationship with God (C127). She was forgiven and sounded contrite when she said: "I forgave my ex-husband long time ago. He died a few years after our divorce. I prayed for him when I heard of his death. I am sorry for what happened all over the years between us. I am also sorry for smashing the crucifix. I pray and ask for forgiveness. I hope the Lord would forgive me"(S128). I assured her that the Lord is rich in compassion (C128).

Tom was very expressive. He felt guilty and ashamed when his wife left him: "I felt guilty too. I began drinking heavily"(T108). I suspected that he drank heavily to hide his guilt and shame. I communicated that impression to him (C108). He confirmed my impression when he said: "I felt I must be not much of a man for her to leave me for another man. I started having affairs with several women. Every woman I took to bed I did it out of anger. Eventually I stopped because I realized that I was using these women and they were using me. I began praying to God for help"(T109). I noted that his ego was

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severely wounded. He was very angry and claimed he had several affairs with women. *Was he using sex to punish these women? Was he using sex to repair his wounded self-image?* I acknowledged his hurting feelings and explored his prayer life (C109). In the beginning phase of his divorce, he was angry and blamed God but he eventually stopped when he realized that God has given us the gift of freewill. He claimed he feels closer to God than before: "In the beginning I was angry and blamed God. But eventually I realized that God gives each one freewill. I came to the realization that why should I be angry and blame God for something that someone chose to do. Now I pray and rely on God more because I realize how little and weak I am without Him. Prayer gives me strength knowing that if I pray God will hear me. May be not exactly the way I would want it but I would like to believe that God hears my prayer. I feel closer to God than I was in my marriage"(T110).

He would not forgive his ex-wife. He sounded very angry when he uttered the following: "I know God is merciful but I can't forgive my ex-wife. Why should I forgive her? I am not Jesus Christ. I don't forgive the sins of the world. I don't want to forgive her"(T131). I pointed out that he sounded very angry (C131). And his response was: "I am not a stone. Why should I forgive somebody who hurts me? It's my choice not to forgive her. I pray and ask God for my own forgiveness"(T132). I suspected a possible transference going on. Obviously, he was hurting. I explored further how he would feel to forgive her ex-wife (C134). He responded: "Forgiving her will take away everything - all the damage she did to me. I don't want to set her free. Many people think if you don't forgive the other person you will not be happy. That's not true for me. It makes me happy

to be mad at her. I don't want to set her free"(T135). I pointed out that he was not yet ready to forgive (C135).

Thinking of what transpired between him and his ex-wife during the course of their marriage, he believed he sinned. He claimed that he believes in confession but has not been to confession for a long time: "We are all sinners because we are human. Whether we like it or not people sin. With all the stuff that was going on in my marriage, I know that I sinned. I believe in confession but I haven't been to confession for a long time"(T139). I asked for a clarification on what he meant by: he believed in confession but has not been to confession for a long time (C139). By his response, I sensed a possible transference going on: "I believe in confession but I don't go to confession. I believe in confessing to God directly. I feel more comfortable with that than doing it through the priest. I have nothing against the Church. I go to Church every Sunday and I believe the Church is good but because of the many restrictions the Church sometimes puts on people, I prefer confessing directly to God. The priest is not God. The priest may have the greatest intention in the world but he is not God. So why not go to God directly and hope that I get an answer?" (T140). I acknowledged his feelings (C140).

Laurie was very expressive. She felt God has been compassionate toward her: "God is so compassionate. He gave me two things to deal with – my son's death and my divorce. God gave me the strength to cope"(L112). I acknowledged her feelings and explored her prayer life (C112). She said: "I pray my rosary. When I pray, I feel that God is by my side. I got passed the guilt of my divorce. I divorced for my survival. My inside was dying and probably dead. I felt that life was too precious and that it was time for me to move on. I suffered too much abuse – verbally and emotionally. And that really kills the

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human spirit. I don't believe God put me on this earth to be tortured and die at somebody's hands. I mean emotionally and spiritually"(L113). I acknowledged her sentiments (C113).

She grieved as she spoke about her son who died: "Sometimes you don't treasure the things you see everyday until you loose them. I love my other children but the one who died I can't hug him. I can't kiss that one. The only way I can get to him is to mention his name and feel his presence. He is at home with God but not with his mum"(L119). She broke down crying. I assisted her in working through the grieving process. I observed that other members of the group wanted to share their experiences as well, but I asked that we give her [Laurie] more time to work through her emotional pain. When she recovered, I continued exploring by mentioning that even though she found it consoling to think that her son was at home with God; at the same time she was hurting that he was not with her. I asked if she does visit her son's graveside (C119).

She replied: "Tomorrow is his fifth [death] anniversary and I am going to lay a wreath on his grave. When my son had his first heart attack, my ex-husband asked me to speak with the doctor to find out what was happening. I didn't because he was already an adult. When he died, my ex-husband blamed it on me that if I had spoken with the doctor, my son would have probably been here today. That's the guilt I have. I pray and ask his forgiveness always. He is my angel. I know he is protecting me"(L120). She started crying. I noted that she was feeling guilty and blaming herself for her son's death. I enquired about how she was dealing with it (C121). She disclosed: "From the time of my son's death, I honestly think I didn't have enough time to deal with it. I think I need to look at it well. I could have gone to the doctor and my son would still have died"(L122).

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She was lessening self-blame and was beginning to look at her son's death more objectively. She would need to do more. I therefore, recommended that she would need more time to look at her son's death and I encouraged her to grieve (C122). She claimed she felt much better verbalizing her feelings: "For a long time I kept so much inside. I wouldn't let it come out. I feel good talking about it"(L123). I noted that she was not ready to forgive her ex-husband because she was still hurting: "Truly, I haven't forgiven him because of what he did to me"(L137). I counseled her that forgiveness cannot be rushed but certainly it makes healing easier (C138).

Dan was quite expressive. He spoke about the challenges he faced going through his divorce and how he endured. He believed God helped him through: "When I divorced I felt like I had failed God and myself. When you go through divorce, there are moments when you don't know and see things clearly. Divorce heightens the fears of uncertainties about life. The future seems bleak. You don't feel positive or good about yourself. The loving God helped me through. It's terrible to go through divorce and if you survive, you have a certain feeling that God is with you"(D116). His statement earlier on: "When I divorced I felt I had failed God and myself" alerted me that he might be having some guilt feelings.

I explored his prayer life (C116). He expressed: "I pray to God that I make the right decisions in my life. Years ago, I might have been fearful that if I do wrong God would strike me dead. Today, I am not fearful of God in that sense. I believe God loves me and I love Him"(D117). He believes God loves him and he loves God. I explored further what was going on that made him felt like he had failed God and himself (C117). He admitted his guilt: "I think I was too strict with my ex-wives. I am guilty of that. But

God is merciful and I believe He forgives me"(D118). He believed God forgives him.

Was he forgiving toward his ex-wives? He was not explicitly clear on that but I deduced from his remarks to Tom that he was perhaps forgiving: "It's very rare to truly forgive yourself and not forgive others. Usually you are the last person to forgive yourself"(D133).

Before closing the session, I shared with them a story relating to our own brokenness. It may be read in Appendix D. We closed the session with a prayer together.

ASSESSMENT OF CLOSING INTERVIEWS

Marcia: Speaking about how she felt about the sessions she said: "I learned that a lot of things that are still raw in me. Do I deal with them better than I used to? Yes! Talking about those things that happened in the marriage really got me. I just didn't think they could still hurt so much. The sessions helped me look at the whole picture of what happened to me"(M141). Asked if she found it helpful revisiting those painful memories (C142), she responded: "Yes! It was painful but it's worth doing it because it has given me a better understanding. If you don't take the time to look at the whole picture, you aren't taking care of it and it will come back to hunt you. I needed this time to find: who I am, what I like and what I think"(M142). As to whether her spiritual needs were met (C143), she said: "The prayers were comforting. They reflected the kind of things I was going through. I am glad that I was able to talk about how I feel about the Church. I like to go to Church more: light my candles and pray. It doesn't solve all problems but it makes me feel much better about myself"(M143).

Rhoda: Speaking about the sessions she said: "It blew my mind to see how I am still emotionally hurting inside. It's about six years since my divorce and it's still painful"(R144). She claimed that some of her emotional needs were met: "I felt relieved to

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let the emotions come out and realize that I am still in pain. I thought I had moved on but I learned that I have suppressed a lot of feelings. But I must say that even though it was very emotional and painful, I feel some inner peace. I felt like healing the broken pieces. I wish the support group would continue"(R145). This was what she had to say about her spiritual needs: "Finding out that I can go to Church and be accepted is comforting. Now I have the feeling that I am not an outcast. I have laminated the prayers and I pray them everyday. I was having trouble sleeping but since coming to the sessions and saying the prayers every night I have been sleeping well"(R146).

Realizing that she might need more help, I enquired about her plans or concerns (C147). Her response was: "I think I have to try and accept my divorce. I have to understand that the other person didn't want to be with me and I can't force him. They say if you survive after five years, you would get over it but it's six years now and I am still struggling. I have been thinking of seeking a professional help"(R147). She was still worried about how she has not gotten over it six years after her divorce. I however, noticed a big change in her outlook. She was gradually coming to the realization that she has to try and accept her divorce. Acceptance comes about gradually. She felt seeking a professional counseling would be helpful and I recommended it. I further assured her that she would probably need more time before coming to accept her divorce (C148).

Laurie: Referring to the sessions she said: "They were very enlightening and supportive. I learnt that there is still much pain in me. It was painful sharing my story but it helped me to understand myself better"(L149). As to whether she found the sessions to be spiritually sustaining (C150), this was what she had to say: "The prayers were spiritually comforting – speaking about everything that I was feeling. That was very important for the

human spirit. I felt a heavy load has been lifted off my shoulders when I learned that divorced people are still part of the Church. There are many Catholics out there who don't know this. If I had not come to these sessions, I wouldn't have learnt these things"(L150).

Sherrie: Speaking about her impressions, she said: "The sessions brought up many things I have tried to drown for many years. You think you have gotten passed it but not really. It was relieving when I braved myself and talked about it. I found the prayers emotionally and spiritually helpful. I have laminated the prayers and I say it everyday"(S151). **Dan:** This was what he had to say about the sessions: "I haven't spoken about all that happened to me for a long time. I tried for so many years to forget about it.

The sessions brought all these up which I think was helpful. It helped me to listen and understand myself better. I felt relieved talking about things that mean a lot to me especially how I feel about the Church. And honestly I learned a lot about the Church. It was edifying. I could relate to the prayers because they spoke directly to how I was feeling. The first prayer really touched me: "Jesus was broken. Our marriages are broken. People are broken." It meant a lot to me because I also felt broken when my marriage failed"(D152).

Gina: She voiced out her impressions: "The sessions were great and I felt good being part of the group. My eyes were opened much more to many things I didn't know before. I enjoyed the prayers immensely. We need things like that to support us. I particularly enjoyed talking about forgiveness. Any time I forgive I feel a whole lot better about myself"(G153). **Tom:** Speaking about the sessions he said: "They were emotionally and spiritually supportive. I understood myself better. I was glad to talk about my religion and my beliefs and to hear what others also believed in. A lot of people turn away from the

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Church after divorce because there is no opportunity for them to talk about some of the things we did. I liked the prayers too. Prayers can be used to save many lives"(T154).

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Chapter V

Discussion

A. The Implications of Results as reported in Chapter IV

As mentioned earlier on, the fundamental claim of my thesis is that Catholics experiencing the trauma of divorce face three major challenges. First, divorce affects a person's sense of self or self-worth. Second, it almost always affects a person's relationship with God. Third and lastly, divorce in most instances, affects a person's relationship with the Church. Implicit in each of the three components is always something to grieve about. In order to reformulate one's sense of self, one would need to grieve and grieve well. The divorced Catholic would also need to work through a number of spiritual issues with God and the Church. Put succinctly, one would require some degree of emotional and spiritual healing. The following implications drawn from the outcomes of the project are worth noting.

(1) *Level of Participation:* They [group members] were punctual and present throughout the five sessions. Some of them were more vocal than others. Those who needed to be more expressive, I encouraged them in that direction. I was glad about the way the group functioned i.e., sharing their perspectives, feelings and experiences. They listened to themselves and found tremendous support in each other. I was glad about the way I directed the group and the extent to which I allowed the group to take on its own life.

(2) *Bruised/Wounded Ego-Identity:* There was enough evidence that their sense of self or identity suffered markedly because of their divorce. Those [namely: Marcia, Rhoda, Dan and Tom] who found themselves abandoned or "left" by their ex-spouse suffered the pain and humiliation of rejection. The divorce affected and diminished their sense of self

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as decent human beings. Not only must they learn to do without someone they had come to feel they could not live without, but they must endure dagger-thrusts to the heart, such as: "You deserve to be rejected." "You are not worthy to be loved." For those [namely: Laurie, Gina and Sherrie] who initiated the divorce, I observed a noticeable difference in their outlook. Somehow, they perceived their divorce as a flight toward health or growth. Perhaps, it was their way of escaping from a living arrangement that ceased to be tolerable and fulfilling. But as the saying goes: "Even winners pay the price," they could not totally escape the devastating effects of divorce. My conclusion is whether "leaver" or "left" each person suffered the blows of divorce. It lashed the self-image they worked earnestly to cultivate. It overthrew and crashed into pieces the long worked for dream of marital stability and happiness. The task ahead of them was to rebuild or reformulate a damaged or wounded self-image.

(3) *Ability to Grieve – The Potential for Healing:* In the process of sharing their stories, painful memories surrounding their marriage and divorce were reawakened. Every one in the group, grieved about something: the feeling of rejection; the loss of couple identity; loss of contact with one's only child as a result of the divorce; the pain and humiliation suffered from physical, emotional, mental and verbal abuses; markedly reduced financial support; loss of marital home; separation from family and friends; and separation from the Church. These were some of the losses they shared leading them to grieve. I assisted them in working through the grieving process in a significant way.

(4) *Claiming of Self-Responsibility:* I noticed how some of the group members pointed the finger of blame at their ex-partner. They experienced their hurt as a form of injustice – someone has caused their problem. That defense mechanism was quite

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understandable and it helped me to understand that they were still hurting badly. The implication however, was should intense blaming continue much longer, it could mean that they did not want to examine their shortcomings and begin taking charge of their lives. I assisted them in lessening their tendency to point fingers at their ex-partner by challenging and pointing out their blaming patterns. In that way, I assisted almost all of them to claim some self-responsibility – a positive and restorative sign that they were working toward taking charge of their life and learning to move on.

(5) *Learning from Past Experiences:* Learning from past and painful experiences can be our best teachers. Such learning experiences help to minimize future disappointments. I identified significant ego-strengths in each one of them. *Dan* learned that his controlling character i.e., always insisting on his rightness about things [a super-ego tendency] influenced his marriage. He reported a change of behavior when he said he was now willing to sacrifice and compromise in relationships (D41). *Tom* learned that marrying too early without having the necessary prerequisites i.e., achieving a considerable level of maturity, self-respect and respect for one's partner, contributed to the failure of his marriage (T54). *Laurie* learned to open her eyes more. She claimed she would not allow herself to be persuaded or taken in by first sight again. She learned that her past would always be part of her. She believed that looking at it once in a while helped her to see things differently (L38). She learned to grow from her broken pieces.

Rhoda learned about her weakness i.e., her inability to express herself to her current boy friend. She claimed that she did not have a flow of communication in her first marriage. She wanted to learn to open up and be a better communicator (R48). She believed achieving that goal would be beneficial to her future relationship. She was

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learning to turn her deficit into strength. *Marcia* learned that even with her bad marriage experience and as hurtful as it was, it has taught her a valuable lesson that words are very cheap; actions tell you everything. It was more important for her now to watch what people say by their actions than just listen to what they say by mouth (M42). *Gina* was very passive in her marriage and she has learned to talk and become more assertive. She described her goal was that she did not want to be consumed again (G45). *Sherrie* disclosed that initially, she feared entering into another relationship but gradually she learned to trust again. She learned to move on into new relationships because she did not want her past painful experience to sour her and rob her of happiness (S56). They learned from their past experiences. They demonstrated considerable ego-strengths.

(6) *Relationship with God*: With respect to their relationship with God, I observed that anger and guilt were the predominant feelings. Knowing that unresolved anger and excessive guilt could seriously undermine a person's religion and consequently affect one's relationship with God, I assisted them in working through these powerful emotions considerably. I assisted them in renewing and enhancing their relationship with God. In the end, they reported that they felt closer to God.

(7) *Relationship with the Church*: Several concerns were raised. They wanted to know about the grounds for annulments. Almost everyone thought the annulment process is intrusive. Some felt that an annulment was being forced on them. Some feared that an annulment implied spiritual divorce. They were also concerned that an annulment could affect the legitimacy of their children. They thought that one has to be a multi-millionaire to get an annulment. The issue about the reception of communion was raised. Some felt

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separated or ex-communicated due to their personal experiences with a Church authority and/or teaching. Some felt ashamed being divorced and that kept them away from Church.

I listened and tried to understand their perspectives, feelings and experiences. I explored with them, corrected certain misconceptions and offered some education about the official teaching of the Church on these matters. Gradually, they understood certain things better. They understood that annulments are not issued only to the rich and that the fee charged is quite reasonable. They also understood that being divorced does not necessarily mean one cannot receive the sacraments. I explained that annulments are not "Catholic divorces." I assured them that annulments do not affect the legitimacy of their children. They expressed in different ways how important the Church was for them and how they wanted to be part of the worshipping community again. I assisted them in repairing some of the rifts between them and the Church. I did not anticipate that the sessions would solve all their problems. That would not have been a realistic goal. I believe that some of them continued to have some concerns or unresolved issues but we worked together toward doing some healing and reconciliation. In the end, they found the freedom and motivation to participate and feel comfortable in Church.

(8) *Transference and Countertransference*: Transferential anger surfaced around Church issues. Some of them directed their unresolved anger toward the Church at me. I did not take their transferential anger or seemingly hostile attitude personally. The dynamics of their relationship toward me taught me that as I exercise ministry, I could become a target. I used their transferential anger to explore further what needed to be explored for their advantage. However, there was one exceptional case where I could not use a transferential anger for the benefit of a client. I understood that to be my

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countertransference i.e., my own unresolved issue which I explored and are discussed in detail in the theological section [see pp.154].

(9) *The Use of Prayer:* We began and ended each counseling session with a prayer. I prepared the prayers ahead of time to reflect the theme for each session. I gave them copies and we prayed together. In the third session, I asked for a volunteer to lead an opening prayer but nobody volunteered. I sensed an atmosphere of uneasiness or hesitancy among the group. They told me that I would do a better job praying with them. I eventually led them in prayer. If I am to do it again, there are two things I would like to improve upon. First, I would try and make the prayers more spontaneous. Second, I would not assume the full responsibility of leading prayers throughout the sessions. I would encourage them and even call them by name to lead the group in prayer. In that way, prayer would emerge from people's life experience. That approach would help the pastoral counselor gain more insight into their emotional and spiritual needs. I recognized that lay people would need to be educated to recognize the validity of their prayer.

(10) *The Need for Education:* Certain misconceptions were expressed. Why do so many believe that one has to be a multi-millionaire to get an annulment? Why do people believe that an annulment would affect the legitimacy of children? Why is it that people question the entire annulment process? Why do so many assume that any divorced Catholic who receives Holy Communion must be in bad conscience? Why do so many believe that the Church frowns on all cases of divorce? The Catholic Church strongly promotes a culture in favor of marital indissolubility. That I support it is the right thing to do - to defend marriage's permanence, which was ordained by God. At the same time under certain circumstances, the Church acknowledges that civil divorce can be tolerated

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and does not constitute a moral offense. According to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church," separated couples are permitted to obtain a civil divorce if it is "the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance"(no.2383). Not many Catholics are aware of these issues. I suggest the education of Catholics in such matters is needed.

(11) *Closing Interviews:* Almost everyone expressed how emotionally painful it was by recalling past memories of the things that led to the failure of their marriage. But in the end, they found it to be very therapeutic. The sessions helped them tell their story and that enabled them to see and understand what happened to them in an organized way. It helped them put their situation within boundaries. They also claimed that the prayers reflected what they were going through and they found them to be spiritually comforting and sustaining. The sessions gave them better understanding about themselves and many other issues about the Church they did not know before. They found the sessions to be emotionally and spiritually restorative.

B. Contributions of the Project to Clarifying and Expanding

1. Clinical Principles: What has the project taught me psychologically?

Interactional Patterns that Undermine Marriages: Every marriage has its own unique personality and idiosyncrasies but they also share some commonalities as well. The common thread in each person's story that contributed to marital unhappiness consequently, leading to divorce was a combination of physical, mental, verbal, and emotional abuses. There was enough evidence of the following elements in their marriage namely: belittling, contempt, insults, complaints, arguments, disrespect, disagreements,

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conflicts, and fights [see session I]. Put in a few words, it was evidently clear that poor communication and conflict resolution contributed to the failure of their marriage.

Gottman (1994), reports that there are certain disastrous ways of interaction namely: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling that frequently sabotage couples attempt to communicate with their partners. He explains the negative impacts of these behaviors when he said: "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* are so dangerous to your marriage because they sabotage your attempts to keep negativity from overwhelming your relationship. By unsettling a marriage's healthy ecology – that 5-to-1 ratio in favor of positive interaction – the horsemen can throw a happy couple into a disastrous tailspin" (p.101). Gottman explains further that these horsemen comprise only the first of two cascades toward marital dissolution, not the end of the line. It is only after they turn a relationship sour that the ultimate danger arises: partners seize on powerful thoughts and beliefs about their partner that cement their negativity. Only if these inner thoughts go unchallenged are you likely to topple down the final marital cascade, one that leads to distance and isolation. Gottman's description of such disastrous ways of interaction largely, captures the inner conflicts/tensions I identified with the group.

Disillusionment: For most people it is within the family more than anywhere else that their needs are met or not met. At the same time, marriage cannot fulfill all needs and it cannot solve all problems. If the spouse expects marriage to do this, he/she could end up that one partner has disappointed him/her. It may gradually lead to disillusionment. That appeared to be the issue with *Marcia* and *Laurie*. There were elements of idealization and high expectation in their outlook. The following anecdotes are revealing. *Marcia* complained that her ex-husband failed to provide for what meant most for her: "...I asked

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him to fix the house and make it a nicer place for us to live. He knew I wanted that more than anything but he wouldn't do it. For ten years I asked him to buy me a necklace but he didn't. If that would make me happy why wouldn't he do it?"(M5). She further revealed signs of idealism and disappointment when she said: "He was very charming when I first met him. I never questioned him. I trusted him more than I trusted myself. He was not what I perceived him to be..."(M42).

Laurie also manifested signs of idealism and disappointment: "I thought I married a perfect man who was going to do everything right but he turned out to be verbally and mentally abusive. He made me beg for simple things in life: clothes for the children, heat in the house. He would lie to me that there was no money"(L20). At another instance, she expressed: "I thought I married a prince charming and that we were going to work together and that it was going to be happy. And yes, we will hit a bump on the road but yet together we will struggle to work it out. And together we will pull the horses forward to get things done. And when he comes home, we will take a ride together, and be happy together. It was an illusion"(L36). Responding to my challenge (C36) about her supposedly high expectations she said: "I would be very disappointed if I have to lower my expectations. You are supposed to do things together and not go in two separate ways..."(L37).

Both of them particularly *Laurie* manifested traits of illusionism about marriage i.e., a mistaken perception of reality about marital life. *Is it therefore, a bad sign to have illusions about certain things in life?* Not necessarily. I think as human beings some measure of fantasy or illusion is quite appropriate. As Joyce (1985) rightly puts it: "Illusions are a necessary part of psychic growth"(p.73). However, the problem arises when we fail to work through our illusions, transform them by way of leaving certain

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unrealistic perceptions behind us. We would definitely have some serious problems if we fail to work through our illusions and instead allow them to override our sense of reality. According to my understanding, *Marcia* and *Laurie* became disillusioned/disappointed when the fairy tale marriage dreams they held in their hearts were not fulfilled in the men they chose to marry. Guttman (1993) writes: "disillusionment is an integral part of any lasting-relationship. It may be the starting point for the disintegration of a relationship; and it may also be the key to deepening and strengthening a relationship"(p.40). Perhaps, *Marcia* and *Laurie* could have saved their marriage if they had maintained a healthy flow of communication and learned to accommodate their expectations and idealistic perceptions from one another to suit reality. That would have minimized the occurrence of future disappointments and allowed a feeling of tranquility and assurance to emerge. As Guttman further describes: "the danger is when a person vacillates between idealization of the partner and total disappointment. In time, more and more energies are invested in negative aspects of the relationship. Without the willingness and maturity they need to deal with disillusionment, the relationship will continue to decline and consequently end in divorce" (1993, p.40).

Psychological and Emotional Maturity: Almost everyone in the group admitted that they married young. Nevertheless, they claimed that they were sufficiently prepared for marriage. *Tom* was the only exception. He claimed that he and his ex-wife got married too early [19 and 15 years old respectively]. He inferred that by marrying too early, they were already preparing the ground for their future disappointment. He said: "... if you marry too early you are bound to get a divorce. People shouldn't be allowed to marry until they have acquired some values. You can only value the other person if you acquire values

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for yourself..."(T54). According to him, marrying too early without acquiring sufficient values for one's self could hinder a person in having respect for his/her significant other.

Napier and Whitaker (1978), list the lack of firmly establishing a sense of independent self, as one of the contributing factors in divorce. They report that while research indicates that couples that marry at later age have a much greater chance for a durable marriage, chronological age is not the only variable. The more decisive question is: whether at the time of marriage both individuals have passed through a certain *psychological space* in which they grappled with life alone, depended only on their own resources, and discovered that they could win the battle against their own fears. Each partner needs to have discovered that he/she can bear the fundamental anxiety of being a single biological entity in a rather frightening world. As the authors put it: "In the process of "bearing it," the person gains a certain amount of self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-loyalty – all important precursors to being able to make a solid commitment to another person"(p.221).

THE GRIEF JOURNEY OF THE GROUP: THE POTENTIAL FOR HEALING

Mitchell and Anderson (1983) write: "Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost. Guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, anger, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair and helplessness: all are part of grief and all are common to being human. Grief is the clustering of some or all of these emotions in response to loss"(pp.54-55). Few people go through the breakdown of a marriage without some form of trauma. No matter how necessary the separation is, at the time it takes place, it is still the final moment in a human

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drama. The marriage had once represented an ideal, a dream of happiness, an investment of emotional energy and hard work in something most important in the couple's lives. This explains why people whose marriage breaks down are particularly vulnerable to self-doubt, depression and a sense of emptiness. I identified the following stages of grief and bereavement:

Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Grief

(1) There was the stage of *shock*, when a person has a cold realization that the marriage is heading toward a bad direction. It can lead to a sense of numbness where people walk around in a daze, unable to think clearly. Those in the group who found themselves "left" or abandoned by their ex-partner went through this stage. *Marcia* expressed: "I felt extremely frightened when he told me he wanted a divorce. My world completely changed in a moment. I felt like an empty shell. It was the most devastating thing that ever happened to me. I had no clue whatsoever"(M1). *Rhoda* said: "My mind went blank when he told me he wanted out of the marriage. My initial reaction was: was it something I did? I even suggested we go for counseling but he had already made up his mind. I was in total shock"(R10). *Tom* expressed: "...I was shocked and I cried. I was totally distraught when she left"(T17). *Dan* simply retorted: "...I was shocked..."(D23). This stage was not quite evident in the cases of *Gina*, *Sherrie* and *Laurie* who initiated their divorce.

(2) I identified the stage of *denial* as well. *Marcia* expressed: "...Looking back, I begin to understand that certain comments and behaviors I just excused or that didn't mean anything at the time, now I begin to realize there was a message there. But I wasn't picking up..."(M2). *Rhoda* said: "I didn't address it. We never discussed it..."(R12).

Tom has this to say: "...Even with all of that going on I was not prepared to end the marriage. There were times I knew it was coming but I wouldn't accept it..."(T18). *Dan* also said: "...We had arguments but I didn't think it was going to end up like it did. I didn't see it coming"(D23). Probably, each one felt that "this can't happen to me; other people separate/divorce, but it can't happen to me." I guess they were clinging to the original dream, a refusal to accept that the dream was going to end. Even though it was not quite evident with: *Gina*, *Sherrie* and *Laurie*, I would like to think that they might have also gone through this stage.

(3) The stage of *guilt* was identified. Each person expressed some form of guilt: the feeling that something could have been done to save the marriage, a self-doubt, shame, a sense of failure toward God, self and other, a feeling of emptiness – a sense of being diminished from within. Such feelings are natural and should be accepted as natural. However, it is a danger sign if a person experiences no such feelings at all, because it can mean that they are being repressed. The other danger is if there is too much guilt and is allowed to fester forever, it can destroy a person's life (Robinson, 1984). I assisted them in working toward resolving their guilt. I will discuss in detail the spiritual dimension of this stage in the theological section [see pp.134].

(4) The stage of *grief* was an overriding reality. They recounted their significant losses: feeling of abandonment or rejection; loss of couple identity; loss of family unit; loss of relationship with one's only child; loss of marital home; markedly reduced financial support; loss of pregnancy due to a physical abusive relationship; and separation from Church. These were some of the losses they shared leading to the phenomenon of grief and mourning. Most of them cried and it was quite understandable because many emotions

have been involved, and they must be released. This is necessary for a cleansing, a healing of the person as the grief is shared.

Anger deserves special mention in their process of grieving. Greteman and Dunne (1990) have put forward the following claim: "anger is a symptom, a surface emotion that is driven by a deep need. Once you pierce the surface anger, you find deeper feelings – envy, hurt, guilt, need – that people have difficulty dealing with. They escape from these feelings through anger" (p.65). Each person in the group expressed some form of anger. Some directed their anger toward: (i) an ex-partner and/or self (ii) God (iii) Church and (iv) me – the counselor [transference anger]. For the purpose of this section, I will discuss anger directed toward an ex-partner and/or self. I will reserve a detailed discussion of the remaining components with spiritual undertones for the theological section [pp.128].

Anger and Ambivalence: Marcia gave expression to her angry feelings – directed toward ex-partner and self: "... To tell you the truth: in the marriage, I was beginning to feel that I was worth nothing. That was a wrong thing to do. When you over-compromise, you slowly but surely lose value of yourself. I lost my self-respect. When I think of the way I served him, I get very angry with myself" (M42). Understanding that anger directed against self can put a person in a depressed mood, I encouraged her to talk about it by pointing out that she sounded very angry with herself (C42). Initially, she wanted to repress or deny it but she sooner claimed her anger: "I am trying not to be angry. But there are times I am very angry with him too for treating the children and me the way he did. We didn't share our daughter's wedding together, and we aren't going to share our grand child together. And financially, I am struggling too. At this stage in my life I shouldn't be going from paycheck to paycheck. I shouldn't live this way. I helped him to be who he is

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today"(M43). She was angry because she suffered multiple losses and the humiliation of abandonment. I acknowledged her losses and encouraged her to claim her anger and talk more about it, assuring her that it was part of the healing process (C43).

Tom also gave expression to his angry feelings – directed toward his ex-partner and self: "...When she left, I was very angry with myself and everybody else. And I made sure that the children were angry too"(T18). Responding to my question (C18) why it was so important for him making sure that the children were also angry at their mother, he said: "I wanted them to know the reality of what was happening. As long as they don't cause harm or hurt anybody, they have the right to be angry. Being angry is good in a certain sense. It keeps me going"(T19). Understanding that suppressing the emotion (anger) far from solving a problem, may create a growing pressure that will eventually break them down or explode with destructive force against self and others, I encouraged and succeeded in getting them verbalize their angry feelings in ways I considered were appropriate and healthy.

There were some who expressed ambivalent feelings – mixture of love and hate. I noticed considerable traits of emotional attachments with some in the group. Clapp (2000) defines emotional attachment as: "a sort of emotional bonding and a feeling of connectedness, a feeling of ease in the other's presence and restlessness when the other is inaccessible"(p.38). Clapp further states: "For many divorcing men and women, one of the most incomprehensible and frustrating feelings they experience is the continued pull toward an ex-spouse. Ex-partners think and wonder about another and seek news about the other's activities. Some make excuses to call or stop by, some actively miss their former

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mates, some pine for them. It is not only those who are left who experience this pull. Leavers experience it too, and many find it incomprehensible"(Clapp, 2000, p.37).

With regard to this continued pull of feelings, I noticed that the difference was perhaps, between the men and women. *Sherrie* however, did not manifest this pull of feelings. *Gina* gave a minimal expression to this feeling when she said: "...I lost a whole lot of contact with him. That I still miss..."(G100). I understood that *Marcia*, *Rhoda* and *Laurie* were legally divorced but emotionally they somehow carried on their marriage internally. *Marcia* expressed: "We haven't spoken for about two years because I am a non-entity. The last time we spoke, I happened to ask if he was happy. His leaving bothers me. I make the most out of my life and to a degree I am happy but I am not content with my life. I miss my husband. I miss the family unit..."(M6). Responding to my acknowledgement (C6) of her painful feelings: missing her ex-husband and family unit, she confirmed my impression when she said: "Call me crazy! He may have disappointed me but this is the man I chose to be my husband and have children with. No matter whom I may find in my life, it would never replace him. There will always be a special place for him in my heart till I die"(M7). *Rhoda* speaking about the continued pull of feelings had this to say: "...it sounds so weird. Even though I resent him for putting me in this situation, sometimes I can't help thinking about him. I mean things like: what he is doing! What he is thinking. May be he doesn't care as much as I do"(R14).

Laurie also expressed: "I don't want my ex-husband to treat me as a non-entity. It may sound weird but we are friends now. We both remarried but we are doing some of the things we should have done. I enjoy having contact with him. There are children involved and for that I will never, ever sever that connection. I am the one he came home to when

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anxiety as natural and inevitable response whenever an attachment figure is unaccountably missing"(p.208). *Marcia, Rhoda* and *Laurie* described their continued pull of feelings as *weird, crazy* and *incomprehensible*. With the insights gained from Bowlby that these feelings are normal, I explained to them what they were experiencing. I mentioned that some people overcome it quickly. Others may need more time. I assured them that it is a normal feeling but too much of it could prevent them from moving forward and starting a new life (C14).

Marcia and *Rhoda* gave expression to feelings of ambivalence [love and hate]. *Marcia* said: "... I feel it would have been much simpler had God taken him away instead of him doing something so cold and callous without any regard for anyone else's feelings other than his own. I honestly wish I had a grave to go to. That I could put flowers and grieve instead of knowing that someone chose not to be with me"(M9). *Rhoda* also expressed these feelings: "...He should have died. Two years ago, there was a rumor that he was dead. I thought he left because he was sick and wanted to spare me of pain"(R13). Both of them experiencing the humiliation of rejection or abandonment felt that perhaps, it would have been much easier to accept if their ex-spouses had died. It was evidently clear that they were angry and grieving.

Is it normal to love and hate the same person at the same time? Another important aspect of object relations theory of *Ambiguity* throws much light on the grieving processes of *Marcia* and *Rhoda*. The theory states that what we internalize does not always have a positive value for us. It should therefore, not be surprising that grief is always ambiguous. The internal world of the self is composed of both "good" and "bad" objects. It is often difficult to respond to other people without making them into ideal lovers or sinister

persecutors, instead of human beings with limitations and imperfections, with whom it is possible to form a genuine relationship. Therefore, in effect when someone ceases to love or disappears like losing husband/wife to divorce, those left behind may internalize the lost person as a bad object. The lost object becomes a highly charged internalized "bad" object. The loss of a valued object generates feelings of rejection and anger (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983). My understanding is *Marcia* and *Rhoda* lost their valued objects – their husbands – through a painful divorce. Their losses generated feelings of rejection and anger. They vacillated between longing and anger, between love and hate.

Emotional Detachment: I observed that *Dan* and *Tom* manifested signs of emotional detachment. They rejected any shared memories and treated their ex-partners as non-entities. *Dan* expressed: "... I treat my ex-spouses as non-entities and expect them to treat me in the same way. If we don't we could embarrass each other. By that I mean we can become sexually involved. If we are no longer married then we don't have to be fond of each other. If I want to remember past memories, I would do so on my own. I don't need an ex-spouse to help me do that"(D31). It was important for him to treat his ex-partners as non-entities to avoid sexual intimacy. Clinical studies support his claim by reporting that some men and women driven by emotional attachment even go through periods of dating each other again. And some even resume sexual relations (Clapp, 2000). This was what *Tom* also had to say: "I totally agree. She wanted us to be friends. If after all those years I wasn't good enough for you why would I want to be your friend. She doesn't deserve my friendship. I treat her as a non-entity. There should be no communication"(T32). He seemed emotionally detached. I however, suspected that *Tom*

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treated his ex-wife as a non-entity and insisted there should be no communication whatsoever, because he was still hurting for being rejected by his ex-wife.

(5) *Reorientation of Lifestyle and Identity*: The process of becoming a separate self is painful but it is necessary for growth or reformulation of the self. Mahler (1972) describes this process as "psychological birth" or "hatching"(p.334). Applying Mahler's terminology to the divorce case scenario, it can as well be said that this stage involves the process by which the divorced person moves toward becoming a separate, distinct self. In other words, the divorced person needs to work toward achieving "individuation." Speaking of the same phenomenon, Napier and Whitaker (1978) write: "If [and we say it big] they are going to get a meaningful divorce, one that includes psychological as well as legal freedom to leave each other, they will need the same thing that is required in a good marriage: *real* individuation...they will need to disentangle their massively intertwined thinking processes; they need to create a sense of genuine autonomy"(p.225). Guttman (1993) states that the most prominent feature of this stage is the reopening and redeveloping of old, unresolved issues of identity, which were pushed aside or only partially dealt with during the marriage. The central task facing the divorcee is to develop a new identity in those areas most affected by the marriage: personal, professional, sexual, and social.

Each person in the group made considerable efforts toward redefining their identities. The following anecdotes are revealing. *Gina* expressed: "...I lost my whole "me" in the marriage..."(G15). She continued: "...I was passive and didn't speak out very often..."(G46). Her whole sense of self was severely affected by her marriage. She finally said: "...I left an abusive marriage to gain my peace of mind..."(G100). She added: "I

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have learned to talk and be assertive. And there is a goal for that. I don't want to be consumed again"(G45). She learned to develop a new personal identity in the area most affected by the marriage. *Laurie* claimed that she divorced to find herself: "...I left because I needed to find who I am"(L37). Responding to my question (C37) whether she did find herself, she revealed: "I have strong shoulders now. I have learned to open my eyes more and not allow myself to be persuaded by first sight. I have learned that I don't have to throw away my past. You learn and grow from it. The past is part of us and to look at it once in a while makes a difference. It helps you to see things differently"(L38). She learned to develop new ways of achieving a higher level of functioning by redefining her personal identity.

Rhoda made reference to how she was redefining a new identity in the following areas: personal, professional and social. She said: "...I try to live happy. I go to work. I socialize with friends. I laugh and I cry too. This is how I try to make inner peace..."(R44a). She further expressed: "...My position at work right now [office manger] is a big achievement for me. Another thing I have also been able to achieve is going back to my maiden name. It was difficult and it took me a whole year to decide on that. I needed to do it for myself and pursue a new identity..."(R44b). *Marcia* had this to say: "...I have learned that I am a decent person. I don't feel inferior anymore even though once in a while I go back. To tell you the truth in the marriage, I was beginning to feel that I was worth nothing. That was a wrong thing to do. When you over-compromise, you slowly but surely lose value of yourself. I lost my self-respect..."(M42). I observed that as painful as it was, she was working toward redefining her personal identity.

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By large, everyone in the group made some reference to efforts made toward redefining their sexual identity. *Sherrie* and *Dan* driven by the quest for intimacy were learning to trust each other. They have been living together for about five years but are not married in the technical sense. *Sherrie* felt that closing up on relationships would mean punishing herself and for that matter any man who might be interested in her. She said: "...After my divorce I was very angry because I did everything for my first husband. I wasn't going to do it for anybody again. Later on, I changed my mind. I don't have to punish myself and for that matter any man who might be interested in me. I like to do things for people. So I chose to be the same person that I was and it turned out well when I married my second husband but he died. Now *Dan* and I have been in relationship for about five years. We were afraid in the beginning at least I was. We tried and are still trying. I didn't want anything of the past to sour me for the rest of my life. I have learned to trust again"(S56). *Dan* also expressed: "...Being with *Sherrie* makes me emotionally happy and healthy..."(D76). He further said: "...What is important for me right now is to make each other happy. We are healing each other"(D80). They had no immediate intentions of getting married but they saw their present relationship as a way of healing each other. According to my understanding of their situation, they were satisfying their quest for intimacy and repairing their wounded/damaged self-image.

Rhoda was in the process of re-establishing a new sexual identity. She revealed the following: "I have met someone. I am trying to be hopeful that this relationship would work. I find it hard expressing myself because I don't want to offend him. I didn't have that in my first marriage. I really want to learn to open up and be a better communicator. I have learned to some extent but I am still sitting on the fence. I need to jump off the

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fence"(R48). She believed that learning to open up and communicate more would sustain her new relationship. *Marcia* expressed: "Someday I would want to get married again. But statistics will tell you that people quite often gravitate to the same people they married and broke up with. The person may look a little different but you are actually dealing with the same type of individual you had before. And that's scary"(M53). She was scared of opening up for fear of further disappointments. I acknowledged her anxiety and explained that most second marriages fail because people tend to bring along their old hurts and certain life patterns that sabotage the stability of marriage. I encouraged her that she was not doomed to repeat the past; and that the key was to learn from past mistakes and not repeat them (C53).

Marcia expressed further: "For years I was very scared to let men into my life. I built a wall around me. It has only been the last couple of years that I have gotten into a place where I can even risk. I want to trust and believe that there are good men out there. I just haven't been fortunate to meet them. I really try but the few men who have come very close have disappointed me. May be I am looking in the wrong places or there is an issue about me that I have to look at. May be I am attracted to the wrong type of individual. I really don't know the answer but I really try"(M57). I noted that she was doing soul searching. She was responsibly making self-assessment about what she might perhaps, be doing to contribute to her disappointments. She expressed her major struggle about her quest for intimacy: "...I am human and sometimes I need to connect with somebody. I am missing that in my life. My biggest struggle right now is reaching a point where I can accept the possibility of being alone and coming to peace with it"(M115). She was searching to re-define her sexual identity – one that she can comfortably assume.

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Guttman (1993) writes: "Some divorcees, however, may not allow themselves new experiences because of inner...conflicts... Others, because of their fears and insecurities, confine themselves to shallow liaisons, unable to integrate and transfer new experiences into long-term relationships"(p.35). Whilst this description may seem true in the case of *Marcela*, I am most inclined to think that to a greater extent the above description captures the internal struggle of *Gina* as well. *Gina* expressed: "Shortly after my divorce, I was in a four year on and off relationship. It didn't work. I didn't know what a relationship was because I didn't have one before. Do I know it now? No! I am afraid to make a commitment. I have the fear that if I open up it's going to happen to me again. I guess I am very cautious or skeptical of men. It's like a wall I have built. That's what isn't going to let me get passed..."(G49). I noted that she was struggling with making a commitment. Responding to my challenge (C49) on how she was learning to overcome what I understood to be her inhibition [overly cautiousness or skeptical mindedness] she said: "I keep trying hard but I don't know if I would totally get rid of it. More or less I feel I need to open up more"(G50). I sensed in her words a motivation toward opening up more to relationships. She made reference to her professional identity as well - using it as a possible reason why she was reluctant entering into new relationships: "...Perhaps, another reason why I am not interested in new relationships is that I have a good paying job and I don't have to depend on a man to make a living"(G49).

Laurie remarried but she was in the process of getting a second divorce. She said: "I got married again trusting that it would be different this time but it's not working out well. He is a liar like my first ex-husband. I am in the process of getting a second divorce"(L51). I pointed out that she seemed attracted to liars (C51). She responded as

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follows: "I have learned that you always tend to go to the same type of man in a different dressing box. I don't understand why. May be they found it easy lying knowing I would believe everything they told me. They have destroyed my heart. Now it's hard to trust anybody"(L52). I encouraged her that it takes time and patience to trust again (C52). *Why was she attracted to liars?* Often people terminate marriages because of discomfort and dysfunction in their particular relationship. One would expect, therefore, that people would carefully select a second marital relationship and prepare for it well so that the previous dysfunction might not be repeated. However, there is evidence that this is not the case; many persons enter into second marriage carrying with them the dysfunction and hurt that they experienced in the first marriage. That seemed to be the case with *Laurie*.

That would lead us to a further discussion regarding "mate selection and marriage." There is a popular idea that marriage and mate selection are a matter of chance or accidental. If the marriage does not work, and one or both spouses are unhappy, the fault must lie with chance. It certainly could not be the responsibility of the participants! Clinical studies have shown that the idea that mate selection is accidental is not true. Mate selection is one of the most accurate choosing processes that human beings engage in. We suspect that human beings choose exactly the mate they need at that point in time. However, it has to be underscored that this does not mean that there is not another person in the world who could fulfill some of the same needs as the person who is selected. It does mean that the partner chosen through the mate selection process is in many ways exactly the partner that the person at that time needs. We think Voltare said it best when he said, "Every person gets exactly what they want. The trouble is, we did not know what we wanted until we got it. We suspect people usually do know, at least on some subconscious

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(6) *Acceptance and a New Level of Functioning*: Acceptance comes about gradually as the divorced person begins to get some feelings of him/herself as an adequate person socially, sexually, and vocationally. Feelings of anger toward former spouse begin to subside. The divorced tries to let go of the past and begins to open one's self to opportunities in the future (Guttmann, 1993). *Sherrie*, *Gina* and *Dan* could let go of the past [refer to S128; G129; D133]. *Laurie* sounded pretty well adjusted but she could not let go of what her ex-husband put her through (L137). *Marcia* has also not fully let go of the past (M136), however, she was moving toward acceptance of her situation when he said: "...His leaving bothers me. I make the most out of my life and to a degree I am happy but I am not content with my life..."(M6). *Rhoda* has also not reached the stage where she could fully let go of the past (R130). Initially, she found it very difficult accepting that her ex-husband resented her. She expressed: "...He had the power to leave me. I don't know if I would ever accept it"(R12). During the closing interview, I noticed a big change in her outlook. She said: "I think I have to try and accept my divorce. I have to understand that the other person didn't want to be with me and I can't force him..."(R147). *Tom* particularly, could not overcome his anger toward his ex-wife. He was still hurting (refer to T131, 132, 134 & 135). Acceptance comes about gradually.

These stages of grief and bereavement outlined above: did not occur in a neat sequence with clear gaps between them. They overlap and intertwine, and each person in the group temporarily moved backwards. I learned that the grieving process takes its own time, and there is not a great deal that can be done to hasten it. The most necessary virtue needed both by the counselee and the counselor is that of patience.

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The Spiritual Dimension of Grief: The second and third components of my thesis claim that most Catholics who go through divorce often discover a need to work through a number of important spiritual issues with God and the Church. The one is basically inseparable from the other. I observed that with regard to their relationship with God and the Church, the predominant feelings were anger and guilt.

Rhoda shared the following: "...I didn't blame my divorce on God..."(R58). She further expressed: "Even though I sometimes feel like walking through a cloudy day, I picture God as a Sun in my life. He gives me warmth. Somebody loves and cares about me. I pray that I make the right decisions in my life"(R107). *Gina* expressed: "My divorce probably, made me have more belief in God. I have started going to Church and I pray more. God is very reliable. He gives me strength to keep going"(G111).

Luurie said: "God is so compassionate. He gave me two things to deal with – my son's death and my divorce. God gave me the strength to cope"(L112). She continued: "I pray my rosary. When I pray, I feel that God is by my side..."(L113). *Dan* also expressed: "...When you go through divorce, there are moments when you don't know and see things clearly. Divorce heightens the fears of uncertainties about life. The future seems bleak. You don't feel positive or good about yourself. The loving God helped me through. It's terrible to go through divorce and if you survive, you have a certain feeling that God is with you"(D116). He continued: "I pray to God that I make the right decisions

in my life. Years ago, I might have been fearful that if I do wrong God would strike me dead. Today, I am not fearful of God in that sense. I believe God loves me and I love Him”(D117).

Because divorce often brings much turbulence and chaos, it is not unusual to experience some upheavals in one's spiritual life. There were some in the group who angrily blamed God for their divorce and for other reasons. However, they eventually reworked their relationship with God. The following vignettes are revealing. *Marcia* expressed the following sentiments: "When he left, I was very angry and blamed God. God was a taboo for me. In my mind God is there to protect you. If you live a good and decent life, God wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I felt God did something to hurt me...I was totally devastated and I couldn't see clearly. I needed to blame somebody and God was handy. I don't blame God anymore. He gave us free will. Whatever the reasons now I know that I contributed to what happened in the marriage. I have taken responsibility for it"(M114). She continued: "I really feel closer to God than I have ever been. I pray everyday asking God to help me find peace and contentment in my life. Years ago when I got upset about something, my husband would always put his arms around me and assure me that everything will be all right. Now when I pray, I feel God has His arms around me with the assurance that everything will be all right. God is giving me what I miss most in my life..."(M115).

Tom also expressed his feelings: "...How I feel toward God is more important to me. I believe I can divorce and God will still love me..."(T82). He further said: "In the beginning I was angry and blamed God. But eventually I realized that God gives each one free will. I came to the realization that why should I be angry and blame God for

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something that someone chose to do. Now I pray and rely on God more because I realize how little and weak I am without Him. Prayer gives me strength knowing that if I pray God will hear me. May be not exactly the way I would want it but I would like to believe that God hears my prayer. I feel closer to God than I was in my marriage”(T110).

Sherrie expressed her anger toward God following the death of her son: “...I just couldn’t understand why God took away my son”(S125). I assisted her in working through her anger by pointing out her blaming attitude (C125). She responded: “...I was very angry at God. I took a crucifix that was hanging on the wall and smashed it against the floor and broke it into pieces. I am very sorry for what I did. My son’s death brought me closer to the Blessed Mother who also lost her only Son, Jesus Christ. I know she will understand my pain”(S126). What she did deserves special attention. She gave expression to her intense anger toward God by destroying a crucifix. One way of understanding what she did is to label her action as sacrilegious – meaning a violation of and irreverence toward an object that is sacred and dedicated to God. In other words, she desecrated a sacred object – a crucifix. In Church language what she did was a grave sin. But perhaps, there is another way to understand what she did. Obviously, she was actively angry toward God for losing her son. By expressing her anger in the way she chose – shocking as it may seem – in psychoanalytic language, she was probably searching for Winnicott’s notion of a “holding environment” or in Ulanov’s terminology, she was searching for a “space” to experiment with a variety of relationships with God (Ulanov, 2001).

I understood *Sherrie’s* acting out – breaking of the crucifix – as an essential part of her quest for meaning. Paradoxical as it may sound, she was angry with God but at the same time she was searching for God. Nouwen (1997) would perhaps, describe the

struggles she was going through as: "living the questions" as to why her son should die. Creating a non-judgmental space for her to express herself and actively "live the questions" of her son's death could open her to new perspectives or horizons. With that mind, I said to her: "Identifying with the Blessed Mother helps you deal with your son's death. At the same time my impression is you still blame God for your son's death"(C126). That intervention got her to begin re-working her relationship with God. She said: "Initially, I blamed God but now I would say I rather question God. I would like to believe that things happen for a reason but at times we find it difficult accepting it because we don't see the bigger picture. Now I feel my son is in a better place. Even though if somebody had said that to me in the beginning that would have made me very angry. Now I can say for myself that he is in a better place with God"(S127). What she said was very significant because it explained how the expression of her anger resulting in the breaking of the crucifix, gradually opened to a new or renewed image of her God. I acknowledged that she arrived at that profound insight by questioning God. I added that sometimes questioning certain events in our life opens the way to deepening our relationship with God (C127). The path to forgiveness and reconciliation became a reality when she said: "...I am...sorry for smashing the crucifix. I pray and ask for forgiveness. I hope the Lord would forgive me"(S128). I assured her that the Lord is rich in compassion (C128).

In the process of grieving, some of them actively blamed and directed their anger toward God. That raises a point for discussion: *Is it okay to blame and be angry toward God?* Insights from both psychology and theology adequately inform us on this issue. We know from the psychological point of view that anger is a part of an adult's response to loss. Such anger in many instances is indiscriminate in its targets. Traumatic loss upsets

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our illusion that we live in an orderly world. If we can find someone or something to blame, we can continue to avoid the fact that life is uncertain and precarious (Mitchell & Anderson, 1983). From the theological perspective, we also know that our rage against God for allowing a tragedy to happen is predicted on the primordial conviction that at least God can stop or prevent something from happening to us. If God is in control, why does He allow such painful things to happen to us? Perhaps, God is impotent and not in control after all or is in the language of C. S. Lewis, a "cosmic sadist." Lewis unexpurgated anger at God is an inescapable component of his grief: "If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine... Step by step we were led 'up the garden path.' Time after time, when He seemed most gracious He was really preparing the next torture"(Lewis, 1961, pp 25 & 27).

Evidently clear from the vignettes: *Marcia, Tom* and *Sherrie* at a certain stage in their divorce process, were angry and blamed God for their misfortune. *Does it mean therefore, that their God-images are far from being positive?* By no means! As Rupp (1988) puts it: "Our awareness of the loving presence of God does not mean that we will never have moments of feeling angry at God or abandoned by God or be just plain unfeeling toward God during times of loss. These are natural, human responses of grief and some feel them more strongly than others. But we will not go on forever blaming God for causing the situation or for not intervening and stopping the event. If our image of God is a positive one, we will eventually return to a time when we recognize the comfort and love that are waiting there for us"(p.34). The question each person struggled with and tried to answer was: *Did God really cause my suffering?* *Marcia, Tom* and *Sherrie* eventually

reworked their relationship with God. They came to realize that God is neither the cause of their pain and suffering nor a capricious sadist plotting their pain. But the mystery of loss is part of the pain of grief. I would like to believe that in itself, anger is never wrong or sinful. It is what we do with it that matters a great deal. If we deliberately hold onto it, feed it, and allow it to poison every aspect of our lives, we can expect serious spiritual and emotional pain.

The manner by which each person in the group experienced God deserves special attention both psychologically and theologically. From the psychoanalytic point of view, the God experience as a transitional phenomenon is never really abandoned and therefore, never mourned. Certainly, one may lose meaningful interest in God at any point of development or during a moment of crisis, but rarely because of his "death" or "loss." The ultimate other "God," is an object that by its very nature can be rehabilitated, rejected, or engaged whenever a person's internal emotional circumstances require it (Banschick, 1992, p.76). One might say that in prayer, each person in the group figuratively entered the transitional space where he or she met his or her God-representation. As Shafranske (1992) describes: "In prayer, the individual does enter the transitional space, where he locates the transformational object in his dynamically created God-representation. Such experiences do express what is most unique, profound, and personal in individual psychology"(p.67). Looking at it from the way each person experienced God, one might reach the conclusion that God remained a transitional object available to them at all points of life, as they need God and need God to be (Rizzuto, 1979). Their experience with God during their moment of crisis was extremely functional. God became for them a safe place

From the theological point of view, each person in the group used prayer to search for peace, hope, comfort and meaning in the true God. They were searching for an object – God – that would embrace, transform and sustain them. In Thomas Merton's terminology, they were striving for communion with God. It is only when the center of the person's identity is linked to the eternal Thou or the ultimate identity that one is truly oneself (Jordan, 1986, p.23). St. Augustine echoed the same truth when he said: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." Emotional and spiritual growth means moving more and more toward finding the heart and focus of one's personality linked with the true God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Guilt: What is guilt? Agudo (1980) writes: guilt “is the process of judging or condemning one’s behavior, thoughts, or words. This process automatically produces feelings of shame and grief. These feelings motivate and regulate the individual’s response to his/her impulses, a condition which eventually contributes to the development of the individual’s personality”(p.17). It is virtually impossible to experience tragedy without feeling guilt. “I should have done things differently.” “I could have done more.” “It’s my fault this happened.” These are the refrains that run through our minds when a tragedy strikes. Each person in the group expressed some form of guilt. Some demonstrated a fairly reasonable sense of guilt. Some seemed to have too much of it. And others sounded like repressing their guilt.

Marcia expressed: "When my marriage ended I felt very guilty. Had he not left, I probably would have gone to the depth to do whatever to salvage my marriage – the most

sacred thing for me"(M101). Responding to my challenge (C101) on what she thought she could have done to keep her marriage intact, she began reworking through her guilt. She said: "That's a hard one. I don't know what more I could have done for a person like him. I have to stop blaming myself because no matter what I did I couldn't make him change his mind. It takes two people to salvage a marriage"(M102). She was making a realistic assessment of her situation. She was learning not to be self-condemnatory. *Tom* expressed how his divorce gave him a sense of failure and self-doubt: "I felt guilty...I began drinking heavily"(T108). Responding to my intervention (C108), that he drank to cover up his shame and guilt, he summed up his guilt and the humiliation he suffered for being rejected: "I felt I must be not much of a man for her to leave me for another man. I started having affairs with several women. Every woman I took to bed I did it out of anger. Eventually I stopped because I realized that I was using these women and they were using me. I began praying to God for help"(T109). He acted out self-destructively – abusing alcohol and engaging in promiscuity. He eventually stopped and turned to God for transformation.

Laurie had this to say: "...I got passed the guilt about my divorce. I divorced for my survival. My inside was dying and probably dead. I felt that life was too precious and that it was time for me to move on. I suffered too much abuse – verbally and emotionally. And that really kills the human spirit. I don't believe God put me on this earth to be tortured and die at somebody's hands. I mean emotionally and spiritually (L113). She was working through her guilt to convince herself that she made the right decision leaving a relationship that was emotionally and spiritually crippling. She did express guilt about her son's death: "...When my son had his first heart attack, my ex-husband asked me to speak with the doctor and find out what was happening. I didn't because he was already an adult.

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When he died, my ex-husband blamed it on me that if I had spoken with the doctor, my son would have probably been here today. That's the guilt I have. I pray and ask his forgiveness always. He is my angel. I know he is protecting me"(L120).

She was blaming herself for her son's death. She thought her son would probably have been alive if she had acted differently. Responding to my exploration (C121), regarding how she was dealing with her guilt, she began taking a realistic view about her situation. She said: "From the time of my son's death, I honestly think I didn't have enough time to deal with it. I think I need to look at it well. I could have gone to the doctor and my son would still have died"(L122). She continued: "For a long time I kept so much inside. I wouldn't let it come out. I feel good talking about it"(L123). She was beginning the healing process.

I was concerned about *Rhoda* and *Gina* because I sensed they might be having too much guilt. The following anecdotes are illustrative. *Rhoda* said: "I stopped going to Church because any time I went I felt uncomfortable in God's House. Not that anybody singled me out but I was ashamed of being divorced"(R59). She expressed further: "...He didn't want to be with me any more and that made me feel I did something wrong. No matter what you do the guilt will always be there. Guilt is a very bad thing" (R103). She added: "I felt guilty in a thousand different ways. May be if I had done this or that he wouldn't have left. You always think you could have done something to save the marriage"(R104).

Gina also expressed the following guilt laden sentiments: "...No matter how bad the situation is the person who leaves is going to be the bad guy"(G15). She continued: "... I must say that it was hard for me to give up on my marriage, but certainly I did

everything I could..."(G16). She expressed a feeling of emptiness: "After my divorce any time I went to Church, I had a different feeling. It was a feeling of just going to Church. It was like walking in and praying and just going through a service..."(G62). She continued: "Going to Church makes me feel better inside but it doesn't last because there is this feeling that I don't actually belong"(G89). I explored (C89) further her guilt. She said: "Most of the time, I come to Church not during service hours but on my own to pray. That's because at times when I see families I kind of isolate. In my mind, I think I am the only one who is divorced. I know it's not so and that this feeling of strangeness comes from within. I am working on that"(G90). She gradually gained self-awareness that she was being overly self-critical and she claimed she was working on it. She further expressed guilt: "From that guilt I tried doing something extra. When I finalized the divorce papers, I was willing to delete a certain paragraph that he found particularly troubling. I also gave certain things that we owned together back to him. I didn't want to rip him off totally or make the situation worse. But I think there shouldn't have been guilt in the first place"(G99).

Dan also expressed: "...When you go through divorce, there are moments when you don't know and see things clearly. Divorce heightens the fears of uncertainties about life. The future seems bleak. You don't feel positive or good about yourself. The loving God helped me through. It's terrible to go through divorce and if you survive, you have a certain feeling that God is with you"(D116). These remarks revealed some inherent sentiments of guilt. I noted at the same time, how he tried to deny having any guilt. Referring to a conversation he had with his son he said: "The last time I spoke with him I was really arguing and yelling at him because he was pushing hard to say I am wrong. I

have told him several times that I don't feel guilty for what happened between his mother and me and I think that is making it hard for him..."(D26). *Sherrie* also claimed she never felt guilty about her divorce: "...I don't feel I committed a sinful act by divorcing. Giving the circumstances of my first marriage and the way I tried to make it work, I never once felt guilty about my divorce or that my divorce was a sinful act. No guilt..."(S81). *Were Dan and Sherrie really guilt-free or were they repressing their guilt?*

Both of them would not even acknowledge the reality of sin in their common-law marriage situation. *Sherrie* expressed: "I don't feel I am living in sin by not getting married but living together with *Dan*...When I go to Church I receive communion because I don't think I did anything wrong...(S78). *Dan* also said: "...I don't even confess that we are living together because I don't believe it's sinful..."(D76). It was *Tom* however, who could acknowledge the reality of sin when he said: "We are all sinners because we are human. Whether we like it or not people sin. With all the stuff that was going on in my marriage, I know that I sinned. I believe in confession but I haven't been to confession for a long time"(T139).

By and large, I suspected that some of the group members have a negative perception about guilt or felt uncomfortable acknowledging their guilt. That raises an issue for a discussion namely: *Should guilt be viewed as "an enemy," – unhealthy always, to be eradicated?* In other words: *Is Guilt Good or Bad?* In his book *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Karl Menninger (1973) observes that: "In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of "sin," a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that sin no longer is involved in all our troubles – sin with an "T" in

the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? (p.13). Quite accurately, Menninger argues that a life that ignores the correcting influence of guilt is a life destined for misery.

Sensing that it is a danger sign if a person experiences no such feelings at all, because it can mean that they are being repressed, I explored further with *Dan*. He eventually did express some form of guilt but again he felt uncomfortable when he said: "...At my divorce proceedings, none of charges brought against me was true. I accepted those charges to get out of the marriage. Twice I lied under oath. I am guilty of lying. These things need not be revisited because it brings up a lot of unsettling and painful memories"(D68). He did eventually express guilt when he said: "When I divorced I felt like I had failed God and myself..."(D116). Exploring further (C117), he expressed: "I think I was too strict with my ex-wives. I am guilty of that. But God is merciful and I believe He forgives me"(D118).

Personally, I believe that guilt is a necessary emotion and has a useful function. Sometimes our guilt is well founded. We should feel guilty when we do something wrong. It is a healthy response, a sign of a conscience. People who feel no guilt could be a sign that perhaps, they might be repressing it and that is not healthy. Sinners that we are in many respects, we need an internal alarm system to warn us of sin. Properly experienced, guilt is a feeling of blameworthiness that prompts an individual toward constructive adjustment. It calls us to a healthy self-scrutiny consistent with Psalm 26:2: "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart." When we examine sins from the past, a healthy sense of guilt encourages in us prayers of repentance and reliance upon the mercies of God. Yet, as with many other helpful traits, guilt can become so exaggerated that it is more of a hindrance than a help. When past problems are too prominent in a person's

present life-style, he/she can be drained of joy and effectiveness for God. When that occurs, false/animated/neurotic guilt probably gained a footstool.

It is therefore, helpful to learn to avoid the extreme of false guilt while at the same time maintaining the healthy use of true guilt. Sensing that too much of festering guilt can destroy a person's life, I explored (C104) with *Rhoda* whether her guilt was healthy. She simply answered: "I don't know"(R105). I explained to her that guilt could be a wake up call. However, constantly berating herself was unhealthy. I mentioned that forgiveness is a powerful remedy and asked if she felt forgiven (C105). She responded: "I do feel forgiven but once a while I still get those guilt feelings. I pray to God to help me get some peace of mind"(R106). *Gina* responding to the same question (C99), whether her guilt was healthy said: "My feelings fluctuate. At one moment, I feel I did the right thing. Another moment, I feel I did something terrible... There shouldn't have been guilt because I left an abusive marriage to gain my peace of mind"(G100). She was struggling to convince herself that she made the right decision.

Forgiveness – God, Self and Other: Theologically and psychologically, forgiveness of God, self, and others is a central reality in divorced persons context as well as in the therapeutic change involved in healing and rebuilding. I learned that they [group members] may not be able to free themselves of all guilt, but certainly they may be able to achieve what their hearts have been longing for peace and that can be found only with God and also their ability to forgive themselves and their ex-partner. Nouwen (1997) writes: "To forgive another person from the heart is an act of liberation. We set that person free from the negative bonds that exist between us. We say, 'I no longer hold your offense against you.' But there is more. We also free ourselves from the burden of being the 'offended one.' As

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long as we do not forgive those who have wounded us, we carry them with us or worse, pull them as a heavy load. The greatest temptation is to cling in anger to our enemies and then define ourselves as being offended and wounded by them. Forgiveness, therefore, liberates not only the other but also ourselves. It is the way to freedom"(p.25).

Did they learn to forgive their ex-partner? Did they learn to forgive themselves?

Did they feel forgiven by God? I observed that some of them learned to forgive and some did not. *Gina* expressed: "For me forgiveness is having an understanding for the other person. Now looking back, I can understand that my ex-husband didn't know better and so I can forgive him and come to peace with myself. And I feel God forgives me too"(G129).

She added: "...Any time I forgive I feel a whole lot better about myself"(G153). *Sherrie* also expressed: "I forgave my ex-husband long time ago. He died a few years after our divorce. I prayed for him when I heard of his death. I am sorry for what happened all over the years between us. I am also sorry for smashing the crucifix. I pray and ask for forgiveness. I hope the Lord would forgive me"(S128). *Dan* claimed forgiveness for himself when he said: "I think I was too strict with my ex-wives. I am guilty of that. But God is merciful and I believe He forgives me"(D118). He made further remarks about forgiveness: "It's very rare to truly forgive yourself and not forgive others. Usually you are the last person to forgive yourself"(133). Probably, he meant forgiveness for his ex-wives.

The others were not yet ready to forgive their ex-partner. *Rhoda* expressed: "I do feel forgiven but once a while I still get those guilt feelings. I pray to God to help me get some peace of mind"(R106). With respect to her relationship with her ex-husband she said: "I don't know if I can forgive him"(R130). *Marcia* also expressed: "If there is any forgiveness that should be given, it's forgiveness that I have to give to myself and not to

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him"(M136). *Laurie* said plainly: "Truly, I haven't forgiven him because of what he did to me"(L137). *Tony* also expressed the following sentiments: "I know God is merciful but I can't forgive my ex-wife. Why should I forgive her? I am not Jesus Christ. I don't forgive the sins of the world. I don't want to forgive her"(T131). He said further: "...Why should I forgive somebody who hurts me? It's my choice not to forgive her. I pray and ask God for my own forgiveness"(T132). Then he added: "Forgiving her will take away everything – all the damage she did to me. I don't want to set her free. Many people think if you don't forgive the other person you will not be happy. That's not true for me. It makes me happy to be mad at her. I don't want to set her free"(T135). I suspected that he has some form of emotional attachment to his ex-wife. He wanted to hold on to his anger about his ex-wife perhaps, for fear of loss of significance. By holding on to his anger there was a danger of him getting stuck in the grieving process. And that would consequently prevent emotional and spiritual growth.

Why was it difficult for some to forgive? What does forgiving an ex-partner mean for them? I am inclined to reason out that perhaps *Tom's* statement: ["Forgiving her will take away everything – all the damage she did to me. I don't want to set her free..."], captures the rational of those who found it difficult forgiving their ex-partner. The importance of learning to forgive an ex-partner was emphasized in the words of Young: "Forgiving former spouses who have injured us doesn't mean blotting out what they have done or even adopting a permissive attitude toward them. Our forgiving doesn't make them different persons. The most painful aspect of such forgiveness may be that it may not be reciprocated – there may be no sign that a former spouse has forgiven us or looks at us

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differently. We don't forgive to win forgiveness in return, but rather to be more closer to God who is all-forgiving"(1984, p.112).

I encouraged discussion on forgiveness because I believe that forgiveness is a quality considered effective in buoying the human spirit. It helps to heal painful memories. Nouwen (1997) captures it better with these words: "Forgiving does not mean forgetting. When we forgive a person, the memory of the wound might stay with us for a long time, even throughout our lives. Sometimes we carry the memory in our bodies as a visible sign. But forgiveness changes the way we remember. It converts the curse into a blessing... Forgiving allows us to claim our own power and not let these events destroy us; it enables them to become events that deepen the wisdom of our hearts. Forgiveness indeed heals memories"(p.29).

Jesus counsels us about the theology and psychology of forgiveness. He says: "Forgive seventy times seven times" [for the whole story read Matthew 18:21-35]. Then He tells a parable which indicates "torture" if we do not forgive. What excellent psychology! Most people who are tortured mentally have been hurt and have refused to forgive. Any psychologist or psychiatrist can tell you of persons who suffered mental torture and even mental and emotional illness by refusing to forgive. Jesus knew very well that a deep and realistic spirit of forgiveness is essential, not only to our spiritual health, but our mental and emotional health as well. That is why Jesus instructs us to love others, even if they have hurt us. Forgiveness is the love of those who have hurt you. If you do not do this, it is not God who punishes you; you punish yourself; you torture yourself by nursing the resentment. How much peace and joy we miss when we fail to forgive! In the spirit of Jesus' counsel, John Paul II, in his book *Forgiveness: Thoughts for the New Millennium*,

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underscores the importance of forgiveness when he said: "We should always forgive, remembering that we too are in need of forgiveness"(1999, p.22)

Much as I promoted forgiveness, I was at the same time cautious: not to let it sound like I was rushing them to forgive. It has been suggested that in clinical work before encouraging people to forgive others, or seek forgiveness from others, it is clinically crucial to assess peoples' readiness for such an intervention. Forgiveness as a spiritual and emotional process takes time, sometimes more time. When people have been severely hurt by others, they often must go through a stage like healing process: (a) shock and denial; (b) awareness and recognition that they have been hurt, and offended; (c) feelings of hurt, grief, anger, and rage and the opportunity to appropriately express these feelings to others; and (d) letting go, forgiving, and moving on with life (Richard & Bergin, 1997). I noted how difficult it was for some to forgive precisely because they were still hurting badly. That brings to mind another important quality of forgiveness – it is a gift. For some, forgiving their ex-partner seemed impossible, but nothing is impossible for God. If they really want it and pray for that gift, God will answer their request. The God who lives within us will give them the grace to go beyond their wounded selves and come to a time when they can truly say: "In the Name of God you are forgiven." That statement truly opens the door to healing.

The Divorcee and Church Issues: With regard to their relationship with the Church, three major concerns were raised namely: (1) Reception of communion, (2) Annulments and (3) Ex-communication. Anger was the predominant feeling – directed toward the Church and in some instances toward me – transference anger. I assisted them in working through their relationship with the Church in a satisfactory way.

(1) *Reception of Communion*: The following anecdotes express some of their sentiments. *Tom* said: "When I go to Church I receive communion because I feel I am entitled to it. It gives me a feeling that Jesus died on the cross for me..."(T83). *Marcia* angrily expressed: "... If I decide to come today, I wouldn't hesitate to receive communion ..." (M67). *Rhoda* and *Gina* did not say anything about the reception of communion. The question worth discussing is: *Can Tom, Marcia, Rhoda and Gina continue receiving communion?* A document on "Family Life" (*Familiaris Consortio* (1981) states: "people who have undergone divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life... for such people, it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to the admission to the sacraments"(no.83). The document explains clearly the status of a divorced Catholic who sees him/herself largely as an innocent party and has not remarried. Inferring from the document one might reach the conclusion that *Tom, Marcia, Rhoda* and *Gina* – who largely perceived themselves to be innocent parties [meaning they never willed to break the marriage intentionally], and are currently not remarried – may receive communion and the other sacraments without any moral guilt.

The given situations of *Laurie, Dan* and *Sherrie* may require a unique pastoral solution. *Lucille* expressed: "...When my mother died I wanted to receive communion but I knew I couldn't because of Church teaching. It was my sister-in-law who advised me to say my act of contrition before receiving communion that day..."(L60). Asked (C60) whether she felt she made the right decision to receive communion she said: "I said my act

of contrition before receiving communion. I am sorry for my sins. I believe God forgives me"(L61). The question is: *Can Laurie receive communion?* Her situation may need a further elaboration. She was married in the Church and she divorced her husband. She remarried outside the Church without an annulment of her first marriage. The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" maintains that: "a new union cannot be recognized as valid if the preceding marriage was valid. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Holy Communion as long as the situation persists"(no.1650). I will temporarily suspend discussion on her situation and introduce another complexity into the picture regarding *Dan and Sherrie*.

The situation in which *Dan* and *Sherrie* are in presently, presents a pastoral challenge. The following anecdotes point to the issue at stake. *Dan* expressed: "The Church teaches that I am excommunicated especially now that *Sherrie* and I are living together and not married. But I feel it isn't sinful. I go to Church and I receive communion, and that brings me some comfort. I don't even confess that we are living together because I don't believe it's sinful. Being with *Sherrie* makes me emotionally happy and healthy. We play a low key. I love the Church but I don't believe certain things that the Church teaches. But I don't go about complaining. I just know how to live with it"(D76). To this, *Sherrie* added: "I don't feel I am living in sin by not getting married but living together with *Dan*. I love him. When I go to Church I receive communion because I don't think I did anything wrong. The Church means a lot to me. I go to Church because I love God and I think it's the right thing to do"(S78).

Sherrie and *Dan* have been living together for about five years but are not married.

They are in what is technically called common-law marriage. *What does the Church say about their irregular situation?* Their situation could be better described as a "trial marriage" or "cohabitation." The Church discourages such a union for two reasons. First, the gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person: such a giving, cannot take place with full truth without concurrence of the love of charity, given by Christ. Second, marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the Church, which is not a temporary or "trial" union but one which is eternally faithful"(*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, no 80).

The question is: *What factors are contributing to this irregular situation of Sherrie and Dan?* A brief synopsis into their background would at this point be necessary to situate them within a context. *Dan* married his first wife and she left him. He remarried outside the Church without an annulment of the first marriage and again, his second wife also left him. So he has been twice divorced. *Sherrie* divorced her first husband because she claimed it was a physically and mentally abusive marriage. She remarried outside the Church without an annulment. Her first ex-husband died a few years after their divorce. Her second husband also died later on. Now she and Dan have been living together for about five years but are not married. *Do they intend getting married in the Church?* *Dan* said: "I doubt if I would go for an annulment to get married in the Church. We do responsible things but a lot more is at stake when you begin to talk about marriage. For instance I have a son, and Sherrie has her own children and grand children. Emotionally, I am not prepared to deal with all that. Besides, we each have different life styles. What is important for me right now is to make each other happy. We are healing each other"(D80).

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Sherrie added: "We haven't really discussed about marriage. We are happy at where we are. I don't feel I committed a sinful act by divorcing. Giving the circumstances of my first marriage and the way I tried to make it work, I never once felt guilty about my divorce or that my divorce was a sinful act. No guilt! My divorce was a decision I made after many beatings, after many tears, and after trying and trying"(S81).

I learned that *Sherrie*, *Dan* and *Laurie* were already receiving communion. The question is: *Can they receive communion without any moral guilt that they are violating Church teaching?* There is a pastoral solution that is: compassionate, reasonable, and theologically sound that could be used in their peculiar situation. It is called the "conscience decision" or the "internal forum solution." John Paul II, in "Family Life" (1981) summed up concisely the official teaching. But most Catholics in this situation are not aware that the Church has always had what might be called a "second level" of teaching applying at the level of conscience, which is very relevant to them. Thus John Paul II spoke of those "who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid"(no.84). They may receive the Eucharist. However, the Pope made no concessions as regards the status of their relationship as a marriage. The only way open them to achieve a Catholic marriage is to bring that first marriage to the tribunal for annulment.

The "internal forum" or "conscience decision" has always been part of the teaching of the Church that the individual conscience is the proximate norm of morality, while the law is a remote norm. You are always obliged to follow the dictates of your conscience, even if your conscience is in disagreement with legitimate authority. Following your conscience is not merely a right, but a duty. If a conflict arises between your conscience

and the Church law, you are obliged to pursue the matter, and seek further enlightenment (Catoir, 1979). The exercise of an informed conscience is something private, something one has to work out in prayer and reflection. Sometimes, the need would call for seeking the help of a priest.

(2) *Annulments*: They [group members] raised several concerns about annulments. *Gina* expressed: "...I consider annulment as another process of divorce. Spiritually, I don't need to divorce. Besides, I have to appear before a board and they would go through every detail of my marriage..."(G74). Almost everyone decried the interior discernment of annulment process, claiming that it is invasive or intrusive. Some felt they were being forced to go for annulment. *Marcia* particularly remarked: "...A priest once told me that if I want to do it in the proper way, I should go for an annulment. That's not acceptable to me. This is what I am angry about. Someone already made a decision about my life without my approval..."(M67). Certain misconceptions about annulments were expressed as well. For instance, some of them thought that one has to be a multi-millionaire to get an annulment. Others felt an annulment would affect the legitimacy of their children.

Speaking about annulments, *Gina* asked: "...Because I don't want to go for an annulment, is the Church going to shut the door on me?"(G74). I explained that the same pastoral solution that is compassionate, reasonable, and theologically sound namely: the exercise of conscience could be applied for those who for some reasons cannot go for an annulment or whose marriages will never be annulled for various reasons. Even though we have this pastoral approach that is compassionate, I would like to underscore that the "conscience decision" is not based merely on a desire to receive Holy Communion [although this desire obviously inspires the effort by people to look at their situation].

Rather, it is based on a conviction that the first marriage was not one, which ought to be seen as valid and binding, even though this will probably, never be officially declared by the Church.

What is my understanding of annulments? Personally, annulments are not meant to be exercises in cutting red tape to free an individual to remarry in the Church; they are not "Catholic divorces." They are signs of the Church's compassion and concern for those who have gone through the experience of divorce. They can be an invaluable means to facilitate healing and assist in rebuilding of a new life. Many Catholics who have gone through an annulment have stated that they felt the Church was truly listening to them and their needs. Others say that the annulment process finally enabled them to leave the past behind with dignity and move forward into their future(s) with a sense of peace about their lives.

I would however, like to underscore that each person is different and we may understand or approach the same thing with different emotions or feelings. As each person spoke about annulments, I observed in them: feelings of anxiety. They were probably anxious about what an annulment could possibly do to them and their children. I think applying any psychological or emotional compulsion on people to go for annulment could have detrimental effects on both their emotional and spiritual well being. When that happens, freedom of consent may be vitiated and indicate that perhaps there was no true freedom for the person to make personal decision either to go for it or not. Where deemed appropriate, I offered some education and corrected some of the misconceptions they were having that: if their marriage is declared null their children would be illegitimate; also the wrong notion that annulments cost thousands of dollars and are given only to the rich.

What I found helpful was listening to their concerns, understanding where they were coming from and where deemed appropriate, I offered helpful education and encouragement.

(3) *Separation/Excommunication*: Some felt separated or excommunicated. The following anecdotes reflect some of their sentiments. *Dan* said: "The Church teaches that I am excommunicated especially now that Sherrie and I are living together and not married..."(D76). *Marcia* also said: "The Church embraces marriage so anyone who has a broken marriage, is considered a threat to the Church. But the fact remains that a good number of marriages fail. Is the Church going to turn us away? That's the time the Church should embrace. There are not many support groups in the parishes. What does that say about us? Does it say the Church is embracing?"(M92). *Sherrie* expressed: "I was angry at the way the Church treated me after my divorce. I couldn't receive communion. They wouldn't baptize my son from the second marriage because I wasn't married in Church. I was even refused an absolution..."(S65). She continued: "...I am angry because I felt the Church abandoned me. It was as if God had turned His back on me..."(S66). *Laurie* also expressed: "...we are struggling with going through separation of family, separation of home and separation from the Church..."(L60). I assisted them considerably in working through their relationship with the Church. In the end, almost all of them came to feel once again that the Church is embracing them. They found the freedom and motivation to participate and feel comfortable in Church.

The issue of ex-communication needs a further elaboration: *Are divorced people excommunicated from the Church?* The official Church position, as set by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation, "Family Life" (1981) clearly states that divorced Catholics

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are not excommunicated. He writes: "people who have undergone divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life... for such people, it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to admission to the sacraments"(*Familiaris Consortio* no.83). For those who have remarried outside the Church the same document addresses them: "I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life"(*Familiaris Consortio* no.84). The document clearly affirms that divorced Catholics are not ex-communicated. They are part of the Church.

Dealing with Transfereential Anger: They supposedly directed their anger toward the Church at me as well. The following examples are illustrative. *Laurie* angrily expressed: "...We are supposed to be God's children and you send us to wander on our own? We should be taken under the wings of the Church and supported more. You preach tolerance. Where is tolerance for us? We didn't receive tolerance. So now we are struggling with going through separation of family, separation of home and separation from the Church..."(L60). *Sherrie* angrily said: "...As far as annulment is concerned, I don't believe in it. I think it's the way you people make money in the Church. If I am wrong, tell me! How much is charged for an annulment?"(S65). With anger, *Marcia* also said: "...If I decide to come today, I wouldn't hesitate to receive communion. I am not going to let anybody judge me including priests. I don't care, who! ..." (M67).

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Tom angrily expressed the following sentiments: "...I can't forgive my ex-wife. Why should I forgive her? I am not Jesus Christ. I don't forgive the sins of the world..."(T131). Responding to my comment (C131) that he sounded very angry, he said forcefully: "I am not a stone..."(T132). He also said: "I believe in confession but I don't go to confession. I believe in confessing to God directly. I feel more comfortable with that than doing it through the priest. I have nothing against the Church. I go to Church every Sunday and I believe the Church is good but because of the many restrictions the Church sometimes puts on people, I prefer confessing directly to God. The priest is not God. The priest may have the greatest intention in the world but he is not God. So why not go to God directly and hope that I get an answer?"(T140). *Dan* also angrily expressed: "I feel the Church let me down when I was having trouble with my marriage. There was no place to go to within the Church"(D95). He continued: "...What I feel cheated out was the Church wasn't there when I was in trouble. And now that the marriage is over, you are saying I should go for an annulment to get married in the Church. I could have gone to the Church and I believe they would have told me to be sweeter to my wife or go and see a counselor"(D96). Obviously, these were angry sentiments.

How did I hand these powerful emotions supposedly directed toward me?

Reflecting on transferences, Rossetti and Pilette (1992) write: "The priest may evoke a parishioner's past experiences of his or her father. He may remind adults of the pastors or authority figures they experienced as children. In some distinct way, the image of priest recalls the feelings about the Church and even images of the Divine"(p.12). They [group members] perceived me as someone representing Church authority. It was highly possible that my presence symbolically evoked images and feelings that lie deep within their

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memories. That might possibly explain why they transferred their unresolved anger toward the Church at me. For the greater part, I did not take their transference anger personally. I used it to explore further what needed to be explored for their benefit.

I did, however, manifest a countertransference in my dealings with one of them. In that particular instance, I could not use a transference anger for the benefit of that client. I was defensive – too reasonable in my response to the feelings of *Dan*. He spoke about how he felt the Church disappointed him when he was having difficulty with his marriage. He claimed there was no place to go to within the Church (D95). I immediately jumped in and asked whether he went to see a priest (C95). He explained that he did not think he could go to the Church to talk about his problems. He added that he could have gone to the Church and they would have told him to be sweeter to his wife or go and see a counselor (D96). I said to him: "You thought the Church wouldn't be there for you. Don't you think that perhaps, it might have been different if you had gone to see a priest?"(C96). My response to him was a *cross-complaining*. In other words, I was implying that perhaps he has no right to say that the Church disappointed him because he did not actually go to ask help from the Church.

What could possibly explain my defensiveness? In that particular case, I took his transference anger personally. I felt he was attacking the Church and for that matter priests of the Church. Consciously or unconsciously, the stance I took was to ward off what I perceived to be an attack. As Gottman (1994) puts it: "The major problem with defensiveness is that it obstructs communication. Rather than understanding each other's perspective you spend your discussions defending yourself. Nothing gets resolved"(p.90). *Dan* suggested that the Church could design a special program to assist people

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experiencing marital difficulties (D97). I failed to acknowledge that important suggestion. In my defensive posture, I was not hearing any of the good things he was suggesting.

C. Contributions of the Project to Ministry in a Wider Context

As mentioned in [Chapter 1: section C], this project is a specific form of *ministerial service*. My work with the group was essentially a grief counseling. Knowing quite well that ignoring grief could actually be dangerous to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well being I offered opportunities for healing [emotional and spiritual]. In the first two sessions, I facilitated a non-judgmental atmosphere. I encouraged them to explore by asking for clarifications, gently confronting and challenging certain defeating behaviors, while supporting and affirming when possible. Those who broke down and cried I gave them enough time to recover. I acknowledged their hurting feelings/losses and assisted them work through the grieving process. Those who felt embarrassed and tried to suppress their painful emotions, I encouraged them to grieve. Those who needed to be more expressive I gave them the leverage.

The counseling process aimed at alleviating pain and suffering but it was not meant to totally erase painful memories associated with divorce so that they become amnesiacs. Rather it helped to make those memories less haunting and controlling. It helped to free them from the mire of strong feelings so that they could once again say yes to life and not give up. I applied Band-Aids where needed but I also confronted and challenged them on many aspects of their life. The goal was to discover with them who or what was causing the wound and to help them see many of the realities that led to the breakdown of their marriage. That pursuit proved quite challenging because when people are hurting especially from divorce experience, it takes a lot of courage to learn and claim some

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responsibility as to the part they might have played in the failure of the marriage. But that was an important aspect of the project. Learning from past failures and claiming some responsibility help to lessen future disappointments and also help to put stories in perspective and come to deal with it objectively.

Another important aspect of the project aimed at helping them get reconciled with the Church. In the third and fourth sessions, I facilitated a welcoming atmosphere and encouraged them to share their concerns namely: what was affecting them as Catholics and most importantly their relationship with the Church. For the most part, anger was the predominant feeling. They manifested angry feelings at the Church and supposedly at me as well. I acknowledged their pain and angry feelings. I understood that behind those angry feelings was an element of grief. They felt separated from the Church. I used that opportunity to explore further what needed to be explored. In this way, I assisted them in working through the grieving process. Those who wanted to dominate the discussions, I supportively acknowledged their concerns and asked them to give others the opportunity to express themselves as well. I answered some of their questions but mostly I tried to listen and explored with them, aiming toward resolving some of their clinical and spiritual issues. When everybody had satisfactorily expressed their concerns, I spoke about Church teachings on: sacramental marriage, reception of communion and about annulments. Not to sound like imposing those teachings on them, I invited them to share their surprises, contentions as well as what they thought had been clarified for them.

Almost everyone in the group having been hurt by marriage failure felt "out of it" or "second-class." They believed they do not "belong" as much as others do. Put in figurative terms, they found themselves living at the "edges" or "margins" of the Church.

I assured them that marriage failure does not mean they are ex-communicated from the Church. I assisted them in coming to feel that they are embraced to participate in the life of the Church. This way, I raised the consciousness of who we are as a pilgrim Church. The worshipping community is a group of pilgrims, wayfarers, and sojourners with the same ultimate goal. It is a believing community in which each member has needs that can be fulfilled by others in the group, and in which each has the capacity to contribute to the needs of other group members in the Church.

As a Church, we can learn a lot from people with broken marriages. As Downey (1998) rightly puts it: "we can look to persons and groups at the margins of society and church for a new sense of life's meaning and purpose. Those at the margins, both past and present, have usually not made it into the mainstream because their voices have been muted by those in the center. Their stories have been eclipsed by the governing myths by which we live. A myth such as "the American dream" is empty of meaning for many persons and groups. Recognizing this emptiness can free us to hear anew and to receive gifts from other traditions"(p.87). By reconciling them to the Church, I helped to renew and build up the whole Church -- the Mystical Body of Christ.

In the fifth session, I explored another important aspect of the project namely: their relationship with God and thereby, assisted them in working through a number of emotional and spiritual issues with God as well as the Church. In a nutshell, I assisted these divorced Catholics by sustaining, guiding, healing and reconciling them. *Sustaining* entailed helping them to endure; *guiding* involved assisting them make confident choices; *healing* entailed helping them be restored to a condition of wholeness -- emotional and

spiritual; and *reconciling* meant helping them reestablish broken relationships with others, Church and God (Estadt, 1984).

By combining insights and techniques derived from psychology with insights from theology and religious resources, I assisted them in finding emotional and spiritual healing. As Estadt (1984) rightly puts it the "primary goal of ministry is not to promote mental health, though frequently it does so. Rather the goal of ministry is to give witness to God's loving care as people [like divorced Catholics] search for healing, meaning and purpose on life's journey. To the extent that the contemporary disciplines of psychiatry and psychology enrich the understanding of the human journey, and to the extent that they promote the well being of the human person, to that extent, psychology, psychiatry, and ministry are partners in a broad ministry of human caring"(p.44). That was what the project was all about.

D. Implications for Future Ministry

Reflecting on the outcomes of the project, I noted certain important issues worth mentioning. A quick look at them might give pastoral counselors some sense of direction to our future ministerial efforts with divorced people.

(1) *Ministering to Persons in Grief*: Intense grief is 100% emotion. Thus at times facts and logic do not make contact with the griever. Grief should not be regarded in purely rational terms as an event that happens and is likely to end very soon. I would suggest that pastoral counselors should not perceive their ministry as one of "having the answers" and of being able to "dispel grief with word magic." The process takes its own time, and there is not a great deal that can be done to hasten it. What is called for is the careful establishment of a longer-term counseling relationship. The most necessary virtue

needed both by the counselee and the counselor is that of patience. In the pastoral counseling scenario during the expression of emotions, it would be helpful if the pastoral counselor would minister to the person by being available and occasionally gently eliciting memories that carry emotional impact. The more the bereaved talk about their feelings and the more they reminisce about their loss, the more quickly they will be able to make contact with reality. In addition, they will loosen one by one the ties that bound them to the lost object.

When the mourner has quieted down, the pastoral counselor may be tempted to say something because he/she feels people expect some words of comfort that will soothe the painful feelings. In addition, the long silence becomes extremely uncomfortable and at that point attempts are often made to comfort the sorrowing with spiritual solace. I think these remarks are not heard because the bereaved is not listening and furthermore the words might be inappropriate, if not harmful. Sometimes it is said: "I know what you are going through." How can anyone? No two people experience the same pain. Other attempts to console the mourner that are ineffective are: "Time will heal," "It all happens for the best," "It is God's will," "He's not suffering anymore," "He's in heaven." All these sermonettes may be true, but I think it is best to allow the bereaved to express these thoughts because he/she may interpret your sayings as being cold and insensitive when someone else says it. [For how I handled a similar situation refer to Appendix C: Session V: S127 & C127].

(2) *Self and God-Images*: The pastoral counselor must pay attention to how divorce may have affected people's sense of self, and invite them to challenge their debasing beliefs about themselves and replace those misconceptions with more creative notions about themselves. Encouraging them to be less self-critical is a key intervention. They

need to know that the most harmful judgments are the ones they make themselves, because these will go deeper. Often they will imagine that everyone else is judging them just as harshly, when in fact this may not necessarily be the case. Since a person's erroneous view of self is interwoven with that person's erroneous view of God, the pastoral counselor must also be alerted to someone's constricted God-image. This is important because constricted God-images if left unchecked can undermine a person's religion and dim a person's perception of God's love. It would prove helpful if the pastoral counselor would gently confront those psychic structures, forces, and images which masquerade as God. The pastoral counselor without imposing his/her own God-image must seek to facilitate modification and growth of peoples' images of God. Particularly helpful and when deemed appropriate would be to share with divorced persons incidents from Sacred Scripture which exemplify the mercy, forgiveness, and love of God. It should not be expected that they would change their concept of God immediately, but hopefully the sharing will cause them to consider their idea about God [if constricted], and gradually incorporate some aspects of mercy, forgiveness and love into it.

(3) *The Role of Forgiveness:* Theologically and psychologically, forgiveness of God, self, and others is a central reality in the divorced person's context as well as in the therapeutic change involved in healing and rebuilding. Forgiveness is an important quality and it helps people to heal faster from brokenness. As much as it is a rich pastoral resource, it has to be used appropriately. Forgiveness of God and self must be highly encouraged. With respect to forgiveness of others, I suggest that the pastoral counselor need to be cautious for the simple reason that people cannot be rushed or forced to forgive. At best it has to be encouraged. If the pastoral counselor encourages people to forgive

others before they have had the opportunity to appropriately work through the healing process, considerable emotional and spiritual harm could be done. When people attempt to forgive prematurely, the healing process is prevented from occurring, and invalidated and unresolved feelings of pain, grief, guilt, shame, anger, and rage continue to create problems for them in their lives.

(4) *Prevention:* We are by now aware that the forces that impel people toward each other are various. Some of the psychological forces at work are healthy, and others are not. Some of the forces that impel people toward marriage have the capacity of moving the couples toward further growth and health, whereas other forces have within them the possibility of disruption or disappointment. Many people have no sense of what a true commitment means. As a Church we need to stress more on prevention. The hope is that with good preparation for marriage, divorce will decrease. I suggest that preparation ought to be both long-term and immediate. In long-term, young people need to learn from their earliest years that marriage deserves the best and most serious preparation. In the immediate term, couples planning to marry should be completely convinced of this need. There should be no necessity for the priest to persuade them that they ought to make for marriage preparation. I suggest that the Church needs to be firm about the necessity of marriage preparation and premarital counseling. It may not solve all problems but the hope is that divorce rates will decrease. The Church must also seek to offer the best kind of marriage counseling for those whose marriages are in difficulty. Those experiencing difficulty in their marriage need to understand that seeking counseling where problems are occurring is not a confession of failure, but is simply wise practice.

(5) *Sensitivity to the needs of the Divorced:* Many divorced Catholics do not feel accepted in the parish. Bishop Robinson (1984) claims there can be many factors involved. The persons concerned can sometimes be seeking the solution to all problems, and this is more than the parish can offer. Sometimes a parish is geared to meet ordinary needs, but not special ones. Sometimes there are simply too many other special needs. Sometimes, as with widows and widowers, people are willing to rally around at the beginning, but do not know how to cope with emotional distress on a longer-term basis. Sometimes they fear a long-term, time-consuming involvement in the divorced person's problems. Sometimes it is their own fears of what other people are thinking that get in the way. Sometimes it is simply that the bereavement process cannot be hurried. Sometimes it is a fear on the part of the priest or married couples that too much acceptance of such persons is dangerous to marriage. They may turn to see a failed marriage as threat that will weaken marriages. Sometimes it is a fear that the divorced person will remarry and force confrontation with Church teaching. He concludes with the following significant statement: "Whatever the reasons, the question of acceptance is one that parishes must face, for the problem exists and will not go away. Separated and divorced persons have a deep need for this acceptance"(p.77).

I would suggest there ought to be "room for pastoral flexibility" in dealing with them. To the degree that we accept that through Christ we ourselves have been reconciled with God we can be messengers of reconciliation for others. Essential in any pastoral work with divorced persons is a nonjudgmental presence. Divorced persons can be encouraged to play active role in local parishes and, vice-versa, parishes need to reach out to their divorced parishioners by including them in Sunday petitions and making sure all parish

events are sensitive to the needs of single parents. In other words, Church-sponsored events should not be exclusively couple oriented. Most importantly, they would need parish-based support groups to form the core of diocesan outreach to separated and divorced Catholics.

REFLECTIONS: JESUS, CHURCH AND DIVORCE

There are many divorced Catholics who hardly attend Church services because somehow they feel they do not belong. Some of them even feel unwelcome in their respective parishes. We can come up with a good number of reasons to explain why. As we may probably know, in the past rejection of divorce was regarded by the Church as the same as the defense of marriage. Today, however, a clear distinction is made between the two. The words of Jesus about divorce were very basic. As we begin to consider them, we should bear in mind how misleading it can be to quote phrases from the Bible in isolation, without taking into account the religious and cultural circumstances in which they were written. Jesus' statements about divorce were strong, unequivocal: he condemned it. The question is: *What was the context in which he spoke?*

In Mark, the oldest of our Gospels, Jesus clearly disagreed with the Mosaic Law permitting divorce. Jesus' teaching prohibiting divorce is quite comprehensive and radical, allowing no exceptions. While Jesus was teaching the crowds in the district of Judaea (Mk 10:1), the Pharisees approached Jesus with a question: 'Is it lawful for a husband to divorce [*apolusai*, dismiss] his wife?' (Mk 10: 2). Jesus responded with a further question, 'What did Moses command you?' (Mk 10:3), and the Pharisees replied that 'Moses permitted him (husband) to write a bill of divorce [*biblion apostasiou*] and dismiss (*apolusai*) her' (Mk 10:4). The Old Testament passage referred to by the Pharisees is Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Jesus did not question the Pharisees' interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Instead, he declared that Moses wrote this commandment 'because of the hardness of their hearts'. Apart from this, Moses would not have written the commandment, and the basic 'law' of creation would have been maintained. Jesus then recalled the creation story:

'From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female'(LXX, Gen 1:27). "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother [and be joined to his wife] and the two shall become one flesh" (LXX, Gen 2:24). So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.'(Mark 10:6-9).

The texts from Genesis (1:27; 2:24) do not speak of divorce. They speak of marriage and the way it joins two human beings, one male and one female, into one flesh, making them one single person, as it were. Thus the union effected in marriage arose not from a later historical development but from the beginning of creation. Since the union of husband and wife is from a divine creative act, no human being, that is no spouse, can sever it. In Mark 10:5-9, Jesus spoke to the Jewish context of very early Christianity, where divorce was possible only for the husband. There were exceptions, but these were far too few to influence the moral climate. Jesus explicitly rejected the male-centered aspect of that law which permitted only husbands to divorce their wives. Jesus' radical stance could be seen as defending the position of wives, who were quite vulnerable and could be dismissed for little or no reason at all. The broader intention, however, was to strengthen the marriage institution among his disciples and align social realities with God's design in creating man and woman (LaVerdiere, 1994).

In Mark 10:10-12 and Luke 16:18, Jesus confronts the Greco-Roman setting where divorce was initiated either by the husband or by the wife. The words of Jesus condemning divorce as recorded in Mathew's Gospel [5:31-32] are similar to Mark's version, with an

important exception, translated in the old versions as "except it be for adultery." A number of Christian churches in recent centuries argued that these words permit divorce on the ground of adultery. The Catholic Church, refusing to take the phrase alone as law, does not agree that these words provide authority for making adultery grounds for divorce and remarriage. Modern Scripture scholarship supports the Catholic Church's view. Today's translators agree that the English word *adultery* is a mistranslation of the key Greek word *porneia* used by Matthew, which means "an uncleanness." It is not quite the same Greek word used in two other places in the same sentence to mean "adultery." Thus the *New American Bible* translation for the entire passage in Mathew 5:31-32 reads:

It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce."
But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife [unless the marriage is unlawful]
causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman
commits adultery.

If the words in parenthesis are omitted, this passage means virtually the same as Mark's version (10:11-12).

Today, many Scripture scholars agree that the exception here translated as "unless the marriage is unlawful" did not actually come from Jesus at all. They claim that Mark's version is correct: Jesus made no exceptions, and the particular words were added by Matthew in his gospel. It is likely that Matthew had in mind various kinds of marriages, forbidden by the law of Moses as incestuous but permitted by Roman Law, under which new converts to Christianity had contracted them. An accompanying note in the *New American Bible* points out that the same problem existed in the Jewish community, where some rabbis allowed the couples to remain together. Mathew did not.

This interpretation is supported by recent revision of the *Jerusalem Bible* [*New Jerusalem Bible*], which translates the relevant words as: "I am not speaking of an illicit

marriage. A footnote explains that marriage within the Jewish forbidden degrees of relationship was allowed by the Romans but not by Christians (Matthew 19:9). Matthew apparently added this exception to the words of Jesus in order to deal with problems being encountered by the Christian communities because of such converts. That this exception came from Matthew rather than from Jesus, however, does not mean that it is unimportant. The fact that Matthew added an exception to the words of Jesus on this matter, to meet problems Christians were encountering, is significant; while Jesus' words were taken seriously, they were not regarded as permitting no exceptions.

The view technically referred to as the "Pauline Privilege," is also supported by Paul. Although our copies of the New Testament locate Paul's letters after the gospels, they were in fact written well before the gospels reached their final form. In his First Letter to the Corinthians 7:10-14, Paul quoted Jesus' condemnation of divorce. But, making it clear that he was speaking on his own authority (see v.12), Paul went on to make an exception which seems to predate that of Mathew. He spoke of what Catholics for a long time called the "Pauline Privilege." Referring to a marriage between two pagans, where one partner converts to Christianity and the other refuses to live in peace with the convert, Paul somewhat reluctantly, but very explicitly, permitted the new Christian to leave the pagan spouse and remarry. Throughout the centuries, Paul's exception, unlike that of Mathew, has been used by the Catholic Church to end some marriages. In these instances, the Church gave permission to what is in Church language termed as: "dissolution."

In more modern times, the Church has permitted dissolution in another comparable instance, sometimes called the "privilege of the faith" [formally called the "Petrine Privilege"], in which a marriage between an unbaptized person and a baptized member of

another Christian church has ended. In certain circumstances the Catholic Church will dissolve such a marriage and enable a partner to marry a Catholic in the Catholic Church. Since, reassured by Paul, it clearly recognized in practice that certain marriages – however few – could be ended, the Catholic Church needed to elaborate a theology to clarify which marriages should be recognized as *not* able to be dissolved. It determined that marriages between baptized Christians [not just Catholics] are *sacramental* and once consummated by intercourse, indissoluble. When either or both partners of a marriage are unbaptized, the marriage is seen as *nonsacramental*; the couple are described as joined by “the natural bond of marriage.” The Church teaches that such a marriage can be dissolved – or a divorce granted – in certain circumstances (Hosie, 1995; Zwack, 1983).

The inference that the Church draws, that sacramentality makes the difference, is not drawn precisely from the words of Jesus because none of the people listening to Jesus had received Christian baptism. Their marriages therefore, were nonsacramental. Rather it is a deduction by the Church, which seeks to defend marriage and to be loyal to the Savior’s words. Yet while this distinction between sacramental and nonsacramental marriages offers a clear guideline for interpreting Paul’s exception, it is less satisfactory when applied to the words of Jesus. His words were addressed to *unbaptized* listeners: people whose marriages the Church today would regard as nonsacramental – and therefore to be dissolved in certain instances. It was while speaking to those unbaptized people that Jesus condemned divorce in unequivocal terms. For this reason, many say that there are grounds for suggesting either that Paul and Matthew [and their church communities] were wrong, and *no* exceptions should be made, or that Matthew and Paul were right, and that while the words of Jesus undoubtedly reject all divorce, they express an *ideal* for which the

Church should always aim. In this interpretation, the words do not express a literal law, without exception. The Church may – reluctantly make exceptions.

How literally, then, should the words of Jesus be taken? On that and a number of other occasions, Jesus presented [equally strong, or even more emphatically] principles that the Church does not feel obliged to take literally. Some theologians suggest that when Jesus was talking about divorce, he was once again presenting an ideal. It is unquestionable that Jesus presented divorce as something to be abhorred, and to be true to Jesus' words, the Church today must work against divorce as much as possible. But on this matter as on others, Jesus was aware of human weakness. Paul and Matthew make clear their belief that there can be exceptions.

Concluding Remarks

In the Manner of Jesus: To remain faithful to the teaching of Jesus, the Church has a fundamental duty to reaffirm strongly the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. Personally, I support a culture that defends and promotes the permanence of marriage. The Church must continually, work against a culture that rejects indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity. It is therefore, necessary for the Church to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ the foundation and strength (Eph 5:25). Failure to do that would lead to a break down of the institution of marriage and that would consequently affect family life and society in general. Speaking of same situation, F. J. Sheeds is quoted as saying: "The dignity and stability of marriage is of the greatest importance to the future of families, of children and of society itself. The moral health of peoples is closely tied to the condition of matrimony. When matrimony is corrupted, then society itself is sick, perhaps gravely ill"

(Fernandez, 1992, p.164). That is why the Church has an obligation to bolster the institution of marriage and strengthen the family life (*Gaudium et Spes* nos. 47-52).

But what of those whose marriages have ended in divorce? What should be our attitude toward them? Do we minister to them with a *conventional wisdom* or *compassionate wisdom*? Conventional wisdom is "the dominant consciousness of any culture. It is a culture's most taken-for-granted understandings about the way things are [its worldview, or image of reality] about the way to live [its ethos, or way of life]... It is a culture's social construction of reality and the internalization of that construction within the psyche of the individual. It is thus *enculturated consciousness* – that is, consciousness shaped and structured by culture or tradition"(Borg, 1994, p.75). Borg further claims that psychologically, conventional wisdom becomes the basis for identity and self-esteem. It is internalized within the psyche as the superego, as "that which stands over me" and to which I must measure up"(p.77). Personally, I think ministering solely and strictly with a conventional wisdom would impoverish our ministerial efforts.

We need to look at the compassionate wisdom of Jesus to inform and enrich our ministerial efforts. Jesus always laid more emphasis on compassionate wisdom. Despite the strength of Jesus' condemnation of divorce, when he met a divorced woman at Jacob's well in Samaria, he did not turn his back at her. Rather, he offered her warmth and acceptance, even though, as he pointed out to her, she had been married five times, and was at present living in a de facto relationship. He chose her to be the channel through whom her entire village was converted. [see John 4:5-42]. Again, when Jesus showed himself to the disciples on the evening of that "first day" of his Resurrection, he had every right to put them in their place. Remember they had disappointed him, denied him and abandoned

him. But Jesus greeted them with: "*Peace be with you*" and added "*as the Father sent me, so I am sending you*" (John 20:20-21). His compassionate acceptance of them, in spite of their failure, enabled them to step out into the world as his true messengers. Jesus was sent by the Father to heal, to lift up, and to help others grow. His followers must also be compassionate healers. The ministry of Jesus was characterized by love that enabled people to awaken to their true potential. His presence encouraged confidence; his understanding and compassion lifted hearts in hope – and healing happened. It is this same healing love that should characterize the work and words of those who minister in the Church in the name of Jesus today.

I am positively certain that in the Church, we have both means of ministering namely: conventional wisdom and compassionate wisdom. *Should there be a tension in our efforts to minister by both means?* It could be but we can avoid unnecessary tension by understanding our true identity as a pilgrim Church – meaning we have all had to make our way through history, sometimes proudly, sometimes painfully, sometimes limping, in a not always successful effort to follow the Gospel. Many of us limp in many different ways. For some their limping behavior has to do with their marriages. Some wanted to make a life-time marriage commitment but found themselves abandoned. Some were locked in a marriage with a partner whom they found intolerably incompatible. Compassion is key in assisting such people to find healing. I think that holding on strictly and solely to conventional wisdom in exercising ministry would only yield tremendous deficits to our ministerial efforts. Ministry in the Church would need both wisdoms [conventional and compassionate] but we must always allow the compassionate wisdom of Jesus to direct, give shape and meaning to conventional wisdom.

APPENDIX A**When Dreams Die**

This statement was first issued by the Bishops of New Zealand in 1982, and then, in their own name, by the bishops of Australia

The Pastoral Care of Separated and Divorced Catholics

Hope and joy are born of compassion. The compassionate show the face of God to a world in which sadness, doubt, and fear afflict so many. Hope and joy are the promise and gift which the Father holds out to his much loved creation. To be compassionate, to be givers of that hope and joy, is the call of the Lord Jesus to all who follow his way. Because we are convinced of this, and because we want to proclaim our own hope and joy in the risen Jesus, we write to you, the Catholic faithful, concerning those of our fellow Catholics who are suffering the pain and loss of marriage breakdown. These Catholic brothers and sisters can very easily feel "left out" and even somehow "second class" when their fellow Catholics are hesitant about befriending, maintaining contact, and making a place in parish for them. This hesitancy, sometimes felt as coldness, may be due to embarrassment or a false sensitivity to the situation. But it may also come about from the mistaken idea that these people have somehow sinned. This need not be so. Marital separation or civil divorce alone do not mean estrangement from the Church.

Belonging

The Church's teaching on the indissolubility and fidelity of marriage needs to be seen alongside her teaching on the need for compassion and understanding toward those in any kind of difficulty. We want our people to understand this, so that the separated and divorced have a sure sense of belonging, and feel encouraged to participate in the

sacramental life of the Catholic community. Pope John Paul II, in his 1981 statement on "On the Family," placed this two fold teaching in a beautiful perspective when he wrote: "As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them..." To bear witness to the inestimable value of the indissolubility and fidelity of marriage is one of the most precious and most urgent tasks of Christian couples in our time (para. 20).

I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the church, for as baptized persons they can and indeed must share in her life....Let the church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother and thus sustain them in faith and hope (para. 84).

We wish to emphasize that, for their part, separated and divorced are among those who most strongly affirm the Church's teaching on marriage. The breaking of their marriage can serve to emphasize, for them, the quality, dignity, and strength that are found only in the permanence and faithfulness of marriage.

Crippling Effects

With divorce becoming increasingly accepted in our society, there is a danger we can become uninterested in, or insensitive to, the effects of divorce on the lives of those caught up in it. We cannot let familiarity minimize the significance of these effects, which can be crippling and emotionally destructive. Increased tolerance of the facts of divorce does not lessen its pain for those involved. It is therefore particularly opportune and

important that our Church community affirms its commitment to those made more vulnerable by the trauma of marriage breakdown.

Death of a Dream

We must avoid the false idea that divorce is always chosen as an easy way out. Separation and divorce mark the death of a dream, and dreams die when hope no longer holds meaning. The result is grief. Further, for those whose marriage began as a life-commitment, there is the realization that a solemn promise has been broken. So inevitably there will be feelings of guilt. Grief and guilt collide in the personality of the separated or divorced person, resulting in a loneliness that some find intolerable. A person is torn from someone who had been accepted as a lifepartner – someone with whom they had hoped and even planned to share all the challenges of living together. Both people still exist, but their life together has died.

This death has been termed “psychological widowhood” – a situation that can, of course, also occur in existing marriages. The stress and sense of loss which accompany and follow psychological widowhood can be compared with the reactions to separation through physical death. This is true also for children. Their tragedy is often greater. Their pain, which they cannot easily identify or understand, is submerged in the confusion of being “caught in between” in the chaos of separation. Bereavement – in literal sense of loss – leaves orphans.

A Time for Grieving...and Forgiving

We wish now to address ourselves particularly to all of you involved in the heartbreak of marriage death. We recognize that there is a real grief process that you have to work through. There may also be a deep anger compounding the hurt you feel. Both

your grief and your anger must meet a compassionate response within the community of the Church. The Church is uniquely placed to help you face your anger and find the courage to forgive, for the Church knows that forgiveness – the reconciling love of Jesus Christ – the foundation of her hope. Anger damages the one who is angry. Like grief it must be enabled to heal. You should not have to apologize for seeking the counsel of the priest. On the contrary, you should find in the priest a ready listener and an understanding pastor. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, speaks through those who have committed their lives to his service when he says, “come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest...for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:28).

Likewise, the parish community should reflect the warmth of a loving family. When the parish opens its arms in welcome and love to touch the disadvantaged, it embraces Jesus. (See Matthew 25:31-46). You must know that your burden of loneliness does not have to be carried alone. The Lord who is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34) wants you to find peace. It is for the community that bears his name to reveal the resting place of peace

Life Needs Love

Much of what we have shared here also applies to those who, after divorce, have attempted marriage outside the Church. We want to add a special word for you. While it is not possible for you, who have divorced and remarried, to celebrate the sacraments as full members of the worshipping community, that community has an important obligation to support, encourage, and nourish your faith. You remain our brothers and sisters. March 1979, in his first letter to the Church and to all men and women of goodwill, Pope John Paul II reminded us that life is impossible without love. If love is not revealed to us, if we

do not encounter love, "experience it and participate intimately in it" then living is "senseless." (See para. 10, *Redeemer of Man*).

These words have special relevance here. Personal faults invariably contribute to any marriage breakdown. No one denies that persons can fail. But, if we understand that failure does not make a person unlovable in the eyes of God, it will be clear that, whatever their failures, people always have a right to our love. The need for love does not disappear simply because a person may no longer be married. Having known love, the need is even greater. If love is not shown by an accepting, open, humble, and spiritually adult Christian community, it may well be sought in a new irregular friendship. We all have a responsibility here.

Vocation

But the separated and divorced are not expected to be mere recipients of support. They themselves have a part to play in the life of the community. Indeed many, from the experience of their own suffering, are already ministering to fellow parishioners trying to cope with their marriage relationships. We applaud this Christlike concern, itself a sign of faithfulness. We feel sure that you, who have been victims of marriage breakdown, are called to share your courage and faith with those who find themselves on a similar journey.

APPENDIX B

Sample Letters

Infant Jesus R.C. Church
110 Myrtle Avenue
Port Jefferson, NY. 11777

December 15, 2000

(Pastor)
Infant Jesus R.C. Church
Port Jefferson, NY. 11777

Dear...

LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION

I send you fraternal greetings!

As we are aware, divorce leaves a good and faithful Catholic in a difficult position. Pope John Paul II challenges "the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and separated with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the church" and to "sustain them in faith and hope." It is in response to that challenge that I intend undertaking this project with some of the divorced Catholics in our parish.

The purpose of the project is two fold. First, I would lead a support group to address some of the pain and ramifications divorced Catholics face, and assist them work through the grieving process and come to experience healing [emotional and spiritual]. Second, I would use the material to meet a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Ministry [Pastoral Counseling] that I am presently, pursuing. I plan having five to six sessions with those who would be interested in the project, and each session would require a two-hour commitment.

In your capacity as pastor of the parish, I am by this letter seeking your permission to undertake this project. Trusting that my request would meet your kind consideration.

Thanking you, and looking forward to hearing from you.

Fraternally,

(Signed)

Pastor's Response

Infant Jesus R.C. Church
110 Myrtle Avenue
Port Jefferson, NY. 11777

December 16, 2000

Dear...

I received your request to begin a support group for some of the divorced Catholics in our parish. I am pleased to acknowledge this request and favorably reply that you have my blessing to begin this work at Infant Jesus. I am sure that not only will those people participating benefit but also your course work for the Doctoral Degree that you are pursuing.

Good luck with this endeavor and please feel free to avail yourself of an needed parish resources.

Fraternally in Christ,

Pastor's name

(Signed)

Letter to some of the Divorced Catholics

Infant Jesus R.C. Church
110 Myrtle Avenue
Port Jefferson, NY. 11777

January 2, 2001

Dear...

LETTER OF INVITATION

Prayerful greetings and best wishes as we begin the New Year!

Divorce leaves a good and faithful Catholic in a difficult position. Pope John Paul II challenges "the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and separated with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the church" and to "sustain them in faith and hope." As a response to that challenge, it has become increasingly necessary for me to conduct this ministry with some of our divorced Catholics in the parish.

The ministry I intend to conduct has dual purposes. First, it is to address some of the pain and ramifications divorced Catholics experience, and receive emotional and spiritual support needed in your journey toward reformulation of yourself again. Second, I would be using the material to meet a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Ministry [Pastoral Counseling] that I am pursuing.

In all, I intend having five to six sessions with you, and each session would require approximately a two-hour commitment. If you consider being part of this wonderful opportunity, I would be glad of being a recipient of the honor of ministering to you.

Thanking you heartily, and looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

Letter of Consent

Infant Jesus R.C. Church
110 Myrtle Avenue
Port Jefferson, NY. 11777

January 22, 2001

Dear...

LETTER OF CONSENT

Peace, joy and love!

I am glad that you have accepted the invitation to participate in this ministry. By this letter, I wish to seek your permission to tape record our sessions. I deem this process to be an efficient way for me to transcribe the content of our sessions. If you please agree to this, kindly append your signature, authorizing me to tape-record our sessions.

Client.....

I would like to assure you however, that to respect and protect the individual's privacy your real names would be withheld. In other words, your real names would not be disclosed in the project. Once again, I take this opportunity to thank you for your kind understanding in this matter, and I look forward to ministering to you.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

APPENDIX C**Verbatim Account**

M = Marcia; **G** = Gina; **L** = Laurie; **S** = Sherrie; **R** = Rhoda; **T** = Tom; **D** = Dan;
C = Counselor.

Session I

Theme: Gaining an understanding of what led to the failure of the Marriage

Opening prayer:

Jesus was broken on the cross. He lived his suffering and death not as an evil to avoid at all costs but as a mission to embrace. We too are broken. We live with broken bodies, broken hearts, broken minds, or broken spirits. We suffer from broken relationships. Jesus invites us to embrace our brokenness as he embraced the cross and through that found healing. May we not reject our brokenness but ask for an understanding heart into our life struggles. We ask for the strength to endure and so turn our brokenness a gateway to new life. Amen!

M1: I felt extremely frightened when he told me he wanted a divorce. My world completely changed in a moment. I felt like an empty shell. It was the most devastating thing that ever happened to me. I had no clue whatsoever.

C1: You were shocked! What may have caused his leaving?

M2: The things that were happening were so miniscule but they got big over time. Looking back, I begin to understand that certain comments and behaviors I just excused or that didn't mean anything at the time, now I begin to realize there was a message there. But I wasn't picking up. And obviously, he didn't tell me earlier that he wanted out of the marriage. He just left. It was about him.

C2: You are beginning to blame him.

M3: He didn't give the marriage a chance. As long as I went along with what he wanted, everything was great. But I couldn't do that all the time. That was when he would beat me to the ground. When I was no longer useful, he discarded me.

C3: How did he beat you to the ground?

M4: He complained that I don't make love right. You can only say that if you have another woman in the picture. He was probably right. What's the point of always going to bed and sexually pleasing somebody who wouldn't give what means most to me? I probably didn't want to fulfill his.

C4: Perhaps, you didn't want to satisfy him sexually because you felt he wasn't fulfilling your needs.

M5: I asked for little things but they were very important to me. I asked him to fix the house and make it a nicer place for us to live. He knew I wanted that more than anything but he wouldn't do it. For ten years I asked him to buy me a necklace but he didn't. If that would make me happy why wouldn't he do it?

C5: I can imagine your frustration.

M6: We haven't spoken for about two years because I am a non-entity. The last time we spoke, I happened to ask if he was happy. His leaving bothers me. I make the most out of my life and to a degree I am happy but I am not content with my life. I miss my husband. I miss the family unit. He told me he regrets leaving [She started crying].

C6: It must be painful to miss your husband and the family unit.

M7: Call me crazy! He may have disappointed me but this is the man I chose to be my husband and have children with. No matter whom I may find in my life, it would never replace him. There will always be a special place for him in my heart till I die.

C7: He told you he regretted leaving. How does that make you feel?

M8: In a way it bothered me to hear that he wasn't happy. But I can't grieve for the torment he may be having because he chose it. What about me? When a spouse doesn't leave this world to go to the other world, you constantly have to address it. I remember the good things we had together but the bad things are killing.

C8: There were good things but the bad things are killing!

M9: The bad things are killing. When I was no longer useful he discarded me. He even got remarried on the Island where we went for our honeymoon. That's so hurtful. I feel it would have been much simpler had God taken him away instead of him doing something so cold and callous without any regard for anyone else's feelings other than his own. I honestly wish I had a grave to go to. That I could put flowers and grieve instead of knowing that someone chose not to be with me.

C9: You feel rejected. It pays to mourn.

R10: My mind went blank when he told me he wanted out of the marriage. My initial reaction was: was it something I did? I even suggested we go for counseling but he had already made up his mind. I was in total shock.

C10: You couldn't believe it was happening to you. Now looking back can you identify some warning signs?

R11: Towards the end, we weren't seeing much of each other. And every now and then, he humiliated and belittled me. He was out of the house most of the time because of his work. Even when we were with people, I never got the respect from him. One day we had gone to a wedding party and the woman he is now married to also happened to be there. He had a few dances with her and paraded her round like she was the bride. I really felt humiliated.

C11: You didn't feel respected enough. Would you talk to him about how you felt?

R12: I didn't address it. We never discussed it. He had the power to leave me. I don't know if I would ever accept it. [She started crying].

C12: You find it hard accepting that he left you for someone else.

R13: He stripped me of everything that I had. I had to start from zero and work to where I am now. It has been a long road. He should have died. Two years ago, there was a rumor that he was dead. I thought he left because he was sick and wanted to spare me of pain.

C13: You feel it would have been easier to accept if he had died.

R14: Yes! But it sounds so weird. Even though I resent him for putting me in this situation, sometimes I can't help thinking about him. I mean things like: what he is doing! What he is thinking. May be he doesn't care as much as I do.

C14: That's an emotional attachment. Some people get over it quickly. Others may need more time. It's a normal feeling but too much of it can prevent you from moving forward and starting a new life.

G15: My decision to divorce wasn't an over night type of thing. I was in a thirty-year mentally and emotionally abusive marriage. He constantly accused and embarrassed me even in front of the children that I was cheating on him. I never cheated on him. I never strayed. The intimacy and everything got worse. I was totally consumed. It reached a point and I knew I couldn't take it anymore: the abuse, drinking, and other embarrassments. I was totally petrified of him and at that point I knew I couldn't survive it. I lost my whole "me" in the marriage. No matter how bad the situation is the person who leaves is going to be the bad guy.

C15: It must have been a stifling relationship. How do you feel about your leaving?

G16: I had the fear that he was going to harm me. I had to protect myself, which I eventually did by leaving. But I must say that it was hard for me to give up on my marriage, but certainly I did everything I could. He refused to seek help. I knew I couldn't survive that kind of marriage.

C16: You left to protect yourself but nonetheless you feel guilty about leaving.

T17: She told me that she wasn't happy. I was shocked and I cried. I was totally distraught when she left.

C17: It must have been very painful for you. You said your wife told you that she wasn't happy. What was going on in the marriage?

T18: We disagreed. We had conflicts. We fought a lot. Once she nearly stabbed me with a knife and I had to punch her on the face. I was financially supporting her but I wasn't around much. I found ways to avoid her because of the fights. We drifted apart. Even with all of that going on I wasn't prepared to end the marriage. There were times I knew it was coming but I wouldn't accept it. When she left, I was very angry with myself and everybody else. And I made sure that the children were angry too.

C18: You were very angry and you made sure the children also got angry with their mother. Why is that so important to you?

T19: I wanted them to know the reality of what was happening. As long as they don't cause harm or hurt anybody, they have the right to be angry. Being angry is good in a certain sense. It keeps me going.

L20: I thought I married a perfect man who was going to do everything right but he turned out to be verbally and mentally abusive. We fought constantly over money. He made me beg for simple things in life: clothes for the children, heat in the house. He would lie to me that there was no money.

C20: You thought you married a perfect man.

L21: It was all an illusion. There was no discussion between us whatsoever. That was the way our whole life was. What he said was final and had to be taken no matter what. I left because I didn't want the arguments, lies and fighting over money to continue.

C21: There was no healthy communication going on.

L22: Yes! And it was my son's death that broke the camel's back. His death gave me the strength to leave the marriage. If I could live through the death of my son, then the death of that marriage that was over long, long time even before leaving was nothing. My divorce was harder than I thought but it was a lot more relieving.

C22: Your son's death motivated you to leave the marriage finally.

D23: I have been divorced twice. My first wife and I argued constantly. She hates me and I don't know why. Then I married my second wife. We got along pretty well but again we would argue. She also left me for another man. I was shocked. We had arguments but I didn't think it was going to end up like it did. I didn't see it coming.

C23: Would you feel comfortable sharing what you usually argued about?

D24: We argued about a lot of things. My first wife was the type of woman whose make-up was to cut and push down.

C24: It appears there were signs of contempt, belittling and insults going on.

D25: We had all of that. Once she threw a cup of coffee at my face. She was going to grasp my throat and throw me out of the window. I don't remember exactly how I reacted. May be I also threw my cup of coffee at her. I was very angry.

C25: You were both not communicating well enough. Do you still have no clue why she hated you?

D26: I guess she was unhappy with me. She even poisoned my son against me. We had a three-month-old baby when we divorced. He is now 30. The last time I spoke with him I was really arguing and yelling at him because he was pushing hard to say: I am wrong. I have told him several times that I don't feel guilty for what happened between his mother and me and I think that is making it hard for him. That was the end of our relationship. We haven't spoken for about three years.

C26: You not only lost your wife, you also lost a relationship with your only child. Do you hope to have a relationship with him?

D27: I don't feel it's right that I go and look for him because it would make him feel that he is right. If he wants a relationship I am ready.

S28: For three years, I was married to a physically and mentally abusive husband. We fought constantly. I even lost a six-month pregnancy out of that. [She began to cry].

C28: I imagine how difficult it might be for you to relive that painful experience.

S29: Very, very painful. And it changed my life. I was never ever the same person I was before. From that time on each time we fought, I would do so with much anger and vengeance, and less fear of him. He threatened many times kill me. Once in a fight, I broke his head with a bottle. We tried therapy but it didn't work. Towards the end, I realized that if I continue to stay in the marriage it would be disastrous. That is either he kills me or I kill him and I saw myself coming close to that. To prevent that from happening I left.

C29: It was a hostile environment. What responsibility would you claim for yourself?

S30: He tried to blame me. He would say something like: it was my fault because I provoked him. But that wasn't true. The only responsibility I would claim for myself is: I should have left sooner. For the most part I will blame him because I was the only one who each time tried to understand, worked things out and made peace. He didn't do that.

C30: You all went through something very painful. And certainly, you all deserve to grieve. It's normal to grieve. You have to go through it to heal.

Closing prayer:

We all have dreams about the perfect life: a life without pain, sadness, or disappointments. But sometimes it doesn't happen the way we would normally expect. These would be moments we feel like giving up on life. The spiritual life challenges us to not give up because there is always hope for God's children. The courage to face our brokenness always opens the doors for healing. St. Paul writes: "We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us; always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus too, may be visible in our...mortal flesh" (2 Co 4:8-12). Through our brokenness, may we find comfort and healing!

Session II

Theme: What they learned about themselves through their Divorce

Opening prayer:

Creator God, we pray that you let us know and feel your abiding love running through us. When we feel so alone, so powerless, so sad and so desolate, the promise of your love does not enthuse us. Take this empty spirit of us, fill it with a deep belief in your abiding presence; allow us to bid farewell to whatever keeps us from relying on you. Help us to see that all our losses can be a blessing because we can learn from them and they can put our life in perspective and allow us to see you as the source of all inner energy and fullness. Amen!

D31: Last week Marcia and Rhoda mentioned that they don't want to be treated as non-entities. I treat my ex-spouses as non-entities and expect them to treat me in the same way. If we don't we could embarrass each other. By that I mean we can become sexually involved. If we are no longer married then we don't have to be fond of each other. If I want to remember past memories, I would do so on my own. I don't need an ex-spouse to help me do that.

T32: I totally agree. She wanted us to be friends. If after all those years I wasn't good enough for you why would I want to be your friend. She doesn't deserve my friendship. I treat her as a non-entity. There should be no communication.

L33: I don't want my ex-husband to treat me as a non-entity. It may sound weird but we are friends now. We both remarried but we are doing some of the things we should have

done. I enjoy having contact with him. There are children involved and for that I will never, ever sever that connection. I am the one he came home to when things were going right and we had a wonderful life. I don't want to forget that past. I don't want to keep it in memory only. I want to share it sometimes with him

C33: What do you mean by you are both doing some of the things you should have done?

L34: He calls to tell me that I am in his thoughts. Before he hangs up he would say: I love you and will always love you! And I would say I know. We were married for thirty-eight years and had three children and it's difficult to forget about it. The biggest bond between us is that we buried a child together.

C34: You both miss each other.

L35: I allowed myself to be put there because I trusted and believed all that he told me rather than opening my eyes to see what actually it was. I wanted to believe that he was going to be truthful, take care of me and not harm me in any way – mind, emotions and finances. I allowed that to happen to me even more for a second time because I wanted a fairly tale marriage.

C35: You wanted a fairly tale marriage!

L36: I thought I married a prince charming and that we were going to work together and that it was going to be happy. And yes, we will hit a bump on the road but yet together we will struggle to work it out. And together we will pull the horses forward to get things done. And when he comes home, we will take a ride together, and be happy together. It was an illusion.

C36: Don't you think your expectations were too high?

L37: I would be very disappointed if I have to lower my expectations. You are supposed to do things together and not go in two separate ways. I left because I needed to find who I am.

C37: What have you discovered so far about yourself?

L38: I have strong shoulders now. I have learned to open my eyes more and not allow myself to be persuaded by first sight. I have learned that I don't have to throw away my past. You learn and grow from it. The past is part of us and to look at it once in a while makes a difference. It helps you to see things differently.

C38: Those are profound insights. You learned from your past broken pieces.

D39: I have learnt a lot about myself. I think on different levels. At one level, I can argue that my ex-spouses abandoned me. And to a greater extent, that is how I feel. They

abandoned me. I can argue that I am the innocent party. At another level, I would say I contributed to the failure of the marriage.

C39: You don't totally blame your ex-spouses. You are also claiming some responsibility for yourself.

D40: I was raised to be right always. I will say that advice was wrong. I think the advice should be to try and make things around you happy, and not be right always.

C40: How did your upbringing influence your marriage?

D41: Definitely, in a big way. For example: if I thought my wife should clean the dishes I would really stick to my guns. If she asked me to change my son's dipper, I wouldn't do it because that's a woman's job. Today I am willing to sacrifice and come to a compromise. I know that I don't have to stick to what is right but I have this feeling of being right always.

C41: It's good that you are aware of yourself now.

M42: He was very charming when I first met him. I never questioned him. I trusted him more than I trusted myself. He was not what I perceived him to be. I have to say that even with the bad relationship and as hurtful as it was, it has taught me a valuable lesson. Words are very cheap; actions tell you everything. It's more important for me now to watch what someone does than only to listen to what they say. I have learned that I am a decent person. I don't feel inferior anymore even though once in a while I go back. To tell you the truth in the marriage, I was beginning to feel that I was worth nothing. That was a wrong thing to do. When you over-compromise, you slowly but surely lose value of yourself. I lost my self-respect. When I think of the way I served him, I get very angry with myself.

C42: You sound very angry with yourself.

M43: I am trying not to be angry. But there are times I am very angry with him too for treating the children and me the way he did. We didn't share our daughter's wedding together, and we aren't going to share our grand child together. And financially, I am struggling too. At this stage in my life I shouldn't be going from paycheck to paycheck. I shouldn't live this way. I helped him to be who he is today. [She reached out for tissues as she cried. We gave her some time to recover].

C43: You suffered multiple losses. It's okay to be angry and talk about it. It's part of the healing process.

R44a: When he left, he just ripped the paper out of the typewriter and threw it into the waste bag. That is how I feel to a certain extent about my situation. But I try to live happily. I go to work. I socialize with friends. I laugh and I cry too. This is how I try to make inner peace. I still can't imagine why he resented me. How could I just become non-existent? I was a very important part of his life and I am nothing anymore. Forget about

me but what about the children and grand children? I don't think I can inflict that much pain to anybody. I also resent loosing the house I occupied for thirty years of my marriage. He gave me the house but I had to sell it because I didn't make enough money to maintain it. It's a sad state of affairs. I don't want to get emotional. [She started crying].

C44: You still feel rejected. You suffered many losses. You don't have to deny or cover up your pains or hurts. You just can't snap them off. That wouldn't be real. It's healthy to revisit your hurts and even cry. But at the same time you don't want to get stuck with them. You would like to go forward.

R44b: I am not saying I haven't grown because I have. My position at work right now [office manger] is a big achievement for me. Another thing I have also been able to achieve is going back to my maiden name. It was difficult and it took me a whole year to decide on that. I needed to do it for myself and pursue a new identity. I am in a stuck mode for a moment and then move on.

G45: I have learned to talk and be assertive. And there is a goal for that. I don't want to be consumed again. I know that it's painful to be left. When we broke up I realized that he was hurting. I couldn't get near him. I couldn't get a word to him. When I finally spoke with him I said to him: it wasn't all you. I think it made a big impact on him. This past month was our grand son's birthday and he called to find out how we were doing. Why can't the rest do the same? It takes just a little human kindness.

C45: You sound forgiving!

G46: I don't totally blame him because there were two people involved in marriage. I was passive and didn't speak out very often, so how could he have known that things were that bad? I shouldn't have allowed that to go on for such a long time as I did. So of course, I take part of the blame.

C46: You are claiming some responsibility for yourself.

G47: We are all divorced for a certain amount of years. Have we learned to move on? Have we learned to open up to get married again? Are we ready?

R48: I have met someone. I am trying to be hopeful that this relationship would work. I find it hard expressing myself because I don't want to offend him. I didn't have that in my first marriage. I really want to learn to open up and be a better communicator. I have learned to some extent but I am still sitting on the fence. I need to jump off the fence.

C48: Just go for it!

G49: Shortly after my divorce, I was in a four year on and off relationship. It didn't work. I didn't know what a relationship was because I didn't have one before. Do I know it now No! I am afraid to make a commitment. I have the fear that if I open up it's going to happen to me again. I guess I am very cautious or skeptical of men. It's like a wall I have

built. That's what isn't going to let me get passed. Perhaps, another reason why I am not interested in new a relationship is that I have a good paying job and I don't have to depend on a man to make a living.

C49: How are learning to get passed it?

G50: I keep trying hard but I don't know if I would totally get rid of it. More or less I feel I need to open up more.

L51: I got married again trusting that it would be different this time but it's not working out well. He is a liar like my first ex-husband. I am in the process of getting a second divorce.

C51: You seem to be attracted to liars.

L52: I have learned that you always tend to go to the same type of man in a different dressing box. I don't understand why. May be they found it easy lying knowing I would believe everything they told me. They have destroyed my heart. Now it's hard to trust anybody.

C52: It takes time and patience to trust again.

M53: Someday I would want to get married again. But statistics will tell you that people quite often gravitate to the same people they married and broke up with. The person may look a little different but you are actually dealing with the same type of individual you had before. And that's scary.

C53: That's is an important observation. Most second marriages fail because people tend to bring along their old hurts and certain life patterns that sabotage the stability of marriage. You are not doomed to repeat the past. The key is to learn from past mistakes and not repeat them.

T54: I learned a couple of things. First, if you marry too early you are bound to get a divorce. People shouldn't be allowed to marry until they have acquired some values. You can only value the other person if you acquire values for yourself. Secondly, I have been in a couple of relationships and there is the fear that you are going to be hurt again. But I would like to believe that every relationship is different. You have to take a chance. If you are afraid to take a chance you are taking away from your life. If you hold on to the past you wouldn't go forward. I have learned that no matter how much it hurts, there is the courage to go on.

C54: That's an important learning. [Almost everyone in the group believed that even though they also married while they were young [between 16-23] they claimed they were sufficiently prepared or matured enough to marry].

C55: [I spoke to Sherrie]. You look very quiet today.

S56: I am not feeling well. After my divorce I was very angry because I did everything for my first husband. And I wasn't going to do it for anybody again. Later on, I changed my mind. I don't have to punish myself and for that matter any man who might be interested in me. I like to do things for people. So I chose to be the same person that I was and it turned out well when I married my second husband but he died. Now Dan and I have been in a relationship for about five years. We were afraid in the beginning at least I was. We tried and are still trying. I didn't want anything of the past to sour me for the rest of my life. I have learned to trust again.

C56: You have learned to trust again. At times fear can paralyze us from moving forward.

M57: Yes! For years, I was very scared to let men into my life. I built a wall around me. It has only been the last couple of years that I have gotten into a place where I can even risk. I want to trust and believe that there are good men out there. I just haven't been fortunate to meet them. I really try but the few men who have come very close have disappointed me. May be I am looking in the wrong places or there is an issue about me that I have to look at. May be I am attracted to the wrong type of individual. I really don't know the answer but I really try.

C57: You feel disappointed by men. At the same time, you are reaching inward to consider the possibility of what you might be doing to contribute to your disappointments. It takes a lot of courage to do that.

Concluding Prayer:

God of strength, we are in need of your strength. We are weary, tired, and unable to soar in our skies of life. Dispel our fears. Teach us how to trust again. Renew our strength. Give us the energy for the going and create in us an openness to future flying. Great God of eagles' hearts, we want to trust that you will bear us up, that you will support us. We look to you to renew our strength just as surely as eagles' wings are wide in the sky. Amen!

Session III

Theme: How it feels to be a Divorced Catholic

Opening prayer:

Creator God, we thank you for the gift of life. We thank you for the fellowship we share with you and one another. And we thank you for bringing us together tonight to share some of our struggles as Divorced Catholics. We ask for the strength and courage to share our feelings and experiences on what is affecting us in the

Church. Help us to be open to the feelings and concerns of one another and so gain some understanding, support and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen!

R58: After my divorce, I went to see a priest. It was something I needed to do for myself because I had been away from the Church for a period of time. The priest advised that I shouldn't be too hard on myself. I didn't blame my divorce on God or the Church. But when I went to Church, I didn't feel comfortable in God's House. I can't believe it's six years since my divorce and I am still going through these emotions. [She started crying].

C58: It's healthy to cry because you are still going through a very painful experience. You felt uncomfortable in the Church. What was happening?

R59: I stopped going to Church because any time I went I felt uncomfortable in God's House. Not that anybody singled me out but I was ashamed of being divorced.

C59: You were being harsh on yourself. And that is not a healthy thing to do.

L60: My generation was taught that if you divorce, you no longer belong to the Church and you can't receive communion. When my mother died I wanted to receive communion but I knew I couldn't because of Church teaching. It was my sister-in-law who advised me to say my act of contrition before receiving communion that day. We are supposed to be God's children and you send us to wander on our own? We should be taken under the wings of the Church and supported more. You preach tolerance. Where is tolerance for us? We didn't receive tolerance. So now we are struggling with going through separation of family, separation of home and separation from the Church. And about annulment: what effect would it have on my children?

C60: You said your sister-in-law helped you decide to receive communion. Do you feel you made the right decision?

L61: I said my act of contrition before receiving communion. I am sorry for my sins. I believe God forgives me.

C61: In the Church we have what is called the "internal forum" or the "conscience decision." If in the exercise of conscience you make a decision that for some reasons your previous bond was invalid, you can come to peace with yourself and you may receive communion. If a conflict arises between your conscience and Church law, you are obliged to seek enlightenment.

G62: After my divorce any time I went to Church, I had a different feeling. It was a feeling of just going to Church. It was like walking in and praying and just going through a service. But in this small group I feel that I am part of it. You feel that somebody is going to help you. When you are out there you are just wandering about.

C62: You feel a sense of belonging in this group than in the wider Church.

G63: Yes! What is the usefulness of annulments? There shouldn't be annulments at all.

C63: It sounds like you have some concerns about annulments.

G64: I think the Church is forcing it [annulment] on us.

C64: You think the Church is forcing it on you. I will share my understanding about annulments later but for now let's give others the opportunity to share their concerns.

S65: I was angry at the way the Church treated me after my divorce. I couldn't receive communion. They wouldn't baptize my son from the second marriage because I wasn't married in Church. I was even refused an absolution. It's terrible. As far as annulment is concerned, I don't believe in it. I think it's the way you people make money in the Church. If I am wrong tell me. How much is charged for an annulment?

C65: How do you feel right now?

S66: Angry! I am angry because I felt the Church abandoned me. It was as if God had turned His back on me. But I didn't give up my faith. I continued to pray at home. My marriage was sacred to me and I tried my best to make it work but the abuse was more than I could bear. I couldn't change him.

M67: After my divorce, I wasn't going to Church. Not that I lost complete faith in the Church but I felt that nobody wanted me. If I decide to come today, I wouldn't hesitate to receive communion. I am not going to let anybody judge me including priests. I don't care, who! The Church is extremely narrow-minded. Take those rose colored glasses off. This [divorce] may not be what we wanted but it's the reality of what is going on in the world. We want understanding. A priest once told me that if I want to do it in the proper way, I should go for an annulment. That's not acceptable to me. This is what I am angry about. Someone already made a decision about my life without my approval. When I took my vows, I meant every word so for what reason should I go for an annulment?

C67: You feel judged and forced to do something against your wishes. You may as well be having some fears about what an annulment could do to the marriage you still cherish.

D68: I felt ostracized by my family, society and excommunicated from the Church. I still feel excommunicated by living with Stella without being properly married. This is what the Church teaches. About annulments, I understand you have to be a multi millionaire to get one. What are the grounds for annulments? I heard you have to prove that the other party committed a fraud. They bring in other people and you have to revisit the past with all its pains. At my divorce proceedings, none of charges brought against me was true. I accepted those charges to get out of the marriage. Twice I lied under oath. I am guilty of lying. These things need not be revisited because they bring up a lot of unsettling and painful memories.

C68: You feel guilty about lying twice in your divorce proceedings. That perhaps may explain your anxiety about the annulment process. You are probably thinking you have to lie to get an annulment.

D69: Yes! They [ex-wives] wanted divorce and to deny the charges they brought against me would in effect mean we were still married and I didn't want to remain married to them. May be I shouldn't have lied but it was the practical thing to do at that time.

T70: I understand the annulment process is difficult. It goes back to when you were dating. They go too much in detail. My marriage commitment was to God and not the Church so why should the Church annul my marriage? What right has the Church got to annul my marriage?

C70: God works through Church. It is not as efficient or certain as if God personally made known all decisions, but it is the way we believe God works in our Church. The Church is a community and like any community it is entitled to have its law concerning marriage. Sometimes the decisions are very difficult. The human decisions are fallible, but the individuals entrusted with the responsibility of granting annulments can only do the best they can on the basis of the training and experience they have received.

R71: I was told that my ex-husband remarried in the Church six months after our divorce. Why should the Church do something like that? Should the other partner not be at least informed? It's not fair for the Church to do that [intense anger].

C71: Both partners are usually informed. The marriage involved two people and both have a right to know that an annulment is being sought. You may want to find out more about it whether he really got married in the Church and you weren't contacted. You have a right to know.

C72: I would try to clarify a couple of issues. Our Church has always said that when two people meet and marry the ideal is that they stay together. However, the Church also recognizes that sometimes marriages just don't work out due to many factors. A divorced person is not excommunicated from the Church. He or she may still receive the sacraments particularly the innocent party. However, a person must receive an annulment before he or she can remarry in the Church. Our Church teaches that just because someone gets married at a Church ceremony and they are baptized does not mean that everything that was required for a sacramental marriage was there. The process of looking deeply at a life and a relationship and what happened at the beginning of the relationship began to be a norm as the Church looked at who should get an annulment. An annulment is saying there was something missing that prevented the union from being a sacramental marriage. Only in a loving relationship can a marriage be a sign of Christ's life-giving, grace-giving love. Hatred and fighting, violent psychological and physical abuse, or mere loveless co-existence, these are countersigns rather than signs of Christ's love.

To be granted an annulment, many factors are taken into consideration. In a sacramental marriage, the couple must fully and freely consent to enter into and live out their Christian

marriage. They must agree that their marriage will last forever, that it will be with just that one person, and that in their marriage they will welcome children as being sent by God. Even though they may have given the right answers to the priest's questions and pronounced the formula of consent on their wedding day, were they completely honest in expressing their consent? Were they acting freely and not being forced into the marriage? Were they mentally and morally able to enter into the marital union? Were they sufficiently mature, physically and psychologically, to undertake the duties of Christian marriage? If the answer to any of these question is "no," then it is possible that a true Christian marriage [sacramental] does not now and has never existed between the two people.

In the annulment process, there are usually three judges on each case. There is an advocate to advise people. There is a defender of the bond [defends the bond of marriage]. He takes the side opposite to the advocate. You would also need two witnesses. There are no formal hearings as in a civil court. What would be expected of you and the witnesses is the plain truth. The tribunal is not a way of passing moral judgments or deciding who was right and who was wrong, who was to blame and who was innocent. It works solely on the basis of whether one of the grounds of annulment is proved or not. The diocese asks a contribution of about \$1000 to help cover the cost of the process, but no one will be turned away if they cannot pay. Arrangements to make payments in installments can be made.

As expressed in different ways, facing the past can be scary because old wounds are reopened. I agree with you on that but I would like to add that many who have approached it [annulment] in the right spirit have found it a most helpful experience in putting the past behind, heal and continue with their life. The official teaching of our Church is that the legitimacy of children is not in any way affected by an annulment. You don't have to rush into any decision. Give yourself some time and think about it.

Closing prayer:

"Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden light" (Mt 11: 28-30). Dear Lord, you have assured all who are weary and are finding life burdensome to come to you and you have promised to refresh them. There are moments when we struggle with many things including some of the teachings of the Church. We come to you tonight, bringing before you our concerns and struggles as divorced Catholics. Don't let us despair. We trust that you will walk with us and give us inner direction. Show us the way in which we should walk. We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Session IV

Theme: The role of Religion in their life and their relationship with the Church

Opening prayer:

Dear Lord, we can be so harsh, so severe with ourselves. We make demands of ourselves – demands we would never make of others. Demands we should never make of ourselves. Then when we can't live up to our expectations, we become our worst critics. We want to change. We want to love ourselves in a healthy, positive way. Show us how to do this Lord. Help us to remove the obstacles to healthy self-love. Teach us how to be gentle with ourselves, to love ourselves; for in loving ourselves, we become the healed and the healer. You have loved us with an everlasting love. Lord, help us believe in and absorb that love so that we can better love ourselves. Amen!

C73: Last week I spoke about annulments. Have there been any surprises so far? What have been clarified? And what are still your contentions?

G74: The money part of annulment has been clarified. Now I know it isn't all that expensive. But I consider annulment as another process of divorce. Spiritually, I don't need to divorce. Besides, I have to appear before a board and they would go through every detail of my marriage. Because I don't want to go for an annulment, is the Church going to shut the door on me?

C74: You feel that spiritually, your marriage would be wiped away. You are also concerned about the invasion of your privacy. Even if for some reasons you can't go for annulment, you are not ex-communicated from the Church. You can use what is called the conscience decision. That is if in the exercise of conscience you make a decision that for some reasons your previous bond was invalid, you can come to peace with yourself and you may receive communion. If a conflict arises between your conscience and Church law, you are obliged to seek enlightenment.

M75: Certain things have been clarified for me too. The monetary aspect of annulment is now clear. It's quite manageable. I am also glad to hear that being divorced doesn't necessarily mean you can't receive communion. But I still can't go through an annulment. I believed in my marriage and I still do to a degree. I find no reason whatsoever to break that bond. Whether I ever get married again or not, in my heart he will always be my husband.

C75: You are probably afraid that an annulment is going to wipe away the marriage you still cherish.

D76: The Church teaches that I am excommunicated especially now that Stella and I are living together and not married. But I feel it isn't sinful. I go to Church and I receive communion, and that brings me some comfort. I don't even confess that we are living

together because I don't believe it's sinful. Being with Sherrie makes me emotionally happy and healthy. We play a low key. I love the Church but I don't believe certain things that the Church teaches. But I don't go about complaining. I just know how to live with it.

C76: I would like to clarify that the Church does not encourage people to be living together without being married. It does not say they are automatically separated or excommunicated. You said you keep the relationship on a low key. How come?

D77: I know that it troubles some people when they see divorced people receive communion and even more so in our case living together and not properly married. We try to keep it on a low key because we don't want to cause a scandal. Right now in my life it's so important for me to go to Church and be part of it.

S78: I don't feel I am living in sin by not getting married but living together with Dan. I love him. When I go to Church I receive communion because I don't think I did anything wrong. The Church means a lot to me. I go to Church because I love God and I think it's the right thing to do.

C79: Do you have any intentions of getting married?

D80: I doubt if I would go for an annulment to get married in the Church. We do responsible things but a lot more is at stake when you begin to talk about marriage. For instance, I have a son, and Sherrie has her own children and grand children. Emotionally, I am not prepared to deal with all that. Besides, we each have different life styles. What is important for me right now is to make each other happy. We are healing each other.

S81: We haven't really discussed about marriage. We are happy at where we are. I don't feel I committed a sinful act by divorcing. Giving the circumstances of my first marriage and the way I tried to make it work, I never once felt guilty about my divorce or that my divorce was a sinful act. No guilt! My divorce was a decision I made after many beatings, after many tears, and after trying and trying.

C81: As I mentioned earlier, if in the exercise of conscience you make a decision that for some reasons your previous bond was invalid, you can come to peace with yourself and you may receive communion. If a conflict arises between your conscience and Church law, you are obliged to seek enlightenment.

T82: The Church puts a lot of restrictions on marriage. You teach that what God has joined, let no man divide. You fear to leave a bad marriage because of religious beliefs. The teachings make you think that no matter how bad the marriage was you are obligated to one another and must make it work. How I feel toward God is more important to me. I believe I can divorce and God will still love me. I try not to leave too many things for the Church to decide for me.

C82: You feared leaving your marriage because of religious beliefs. Now your guide is how you feel towards God.

T83: When I go to Church I receive communion because I feel I am entitled to it. It gives me a feeling that Jesus died on the cross for me. I like going to Church because it makes me feel good about myself. The Church is very important to me even though I don't leave many things for the Church to decide for me.

M84: When I divorced the last place I thought of going was the Church because I didn't think they would even want to discuss my divorce. I was ashamed to associate with people even with my friends. The stigma attached to it is almost unbearable. Now I feel I have come back to the Church.

C84: Why is coming back to the Church so important for you now?

M85: I feel it's the good thing to do. I feel I have to go to Church and pray and feel that I am not alone and facing the challenges of life all by myself.

R86: Being part of this group has brought me a sense that I need to come back to the Church. May be God is bringing me back into His life.

C86: You find this support group helpful and you are thinking of coming back to Church. Why is that so important for you?

R87: I am at a place in my life and I feel I have to begin going to Church. I pray to God everyday but I actually need to go to Church often to express myself more to God and become part of the community again.

L88: I have been away from the Church for a long time. When I started having problems in my second marriage, I went to see a priest. He told me that may be God is bringing me back into the Church. Since then I have been saying my rosary every morning. If it weren't the rosary and certainly help from other people I probably, would have jumped out of the window. They have kept me grounded. Now, I go to Church by myself and it gives me some sense of peace even though I am still on the edge. It's important for me to start going to Church again to show that I am embracing my religion.

C88: You find yourself on the edge but you definitely, find going to Church very helpful.

G89: Going to Church makes me feel better inside but it doesn't last because there is this feeling that I don't actually belong.

C89: This feeling of relief doesn't last. Would you like to talk more about it?

G90: Most of the time, I come to Church not during service hours but on my own to pray. That's because at times when I see families I kind of isolate. In my mind, I think I am the only one who is divorced. I know it's not so and that this feeling of strangeness comes from within. I am working on that.

C90: You are learning not to be overly self-critical. Why is going to Church so important for you?

G91: Going to Church relieves me of all kinds of burdens. It's my way of talking to God about my troubles. It strengthens my belief in God and assures me that I am not alone. I don't go to Church only to pray for things even though there is a lot of that implied. You just can't handle everything on your own all the time. So going to Church helps.

M92: The Church embraces marriage so anyone who has a broken marriage, is considered a threat to the Church. But the fact remains that a good number of marriages fail. Is the Church going to turn us away? That's the time the Church should embrace. There are not many support groups in the parishes. What does that say about us? Does it say the Church is embracing?

G93: Coming to this support group has made me feel a little bit back in the Church itself. It has helped me to understand some things better. We need more support groups. We need a little bit of embracement.

L94: I was very surprised to find that there is a divorced support group in the Church. I was shocked because I knew the Church frowns on divorce. It certainly helps to have that support from the Church.

D95: I feel the Church let me down when I was having trouble with my marriage. There was no place to go to within the Church.

C95: Did you go to see a priest?

D96: I didn't think I could go to the Church to talk about my problems. Before I got married, the Church required a three-week marriage preparation course. Nobody said to me if you get into trouble, call this Catholic hotline that deals with marriages in trouble. What I feel cheated out was the Church wasn't there when I was in trouble. And now that the marriage is over, you are saying I should go for an annulment to get married in the Church. I could have gone to the Church and I believe they would have told me to be sweeter to my wife or go and see a counselor.

C96: You thought the Church wouldn't be there for you. Don't you think that perhaps, it might have been different if you had gone to see a priest?

D97: At that time, there was nowhere in the Church I could go to. The issue is it was after the breakdown of the marriage that the Church began to show more interest. If it had been advertised that this [parish] has this program and people whose marriages are in trouble, come on this day and we would be there to help you, it would have been helpful. It may also strengthen the Church's position to say we recognize people who are facing difficulties in their marriage. It will help all of us.

M98: I think that's a great idea. Look at even today how in certain instances divorce is just unacceptable. Can you put yourself back thirty-five or more years and just imagine the type of acceptance we would have received? Do you really think we could have to a Church and talk about our divorce thirty-five years ago? Absolutely not! It was totally a taboo. So really there was no place to go for help in the Church.

Closing prayer:

God, we thank and praise you for what you have done for us in the past, what you are doing for us now, and what you will do for us in the future. Through your gift of Divorced Catholics [mentioned their names], we make new friends and shape new relationships that lead us to wholeness. Open our hearts to experience your love in the Church. Give us the peace and strength to see the beauty in each new day. Help us to be gentle with ourselves and to walk softly with one another. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen!

Session V

Theme: Their Relationship with God

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, your children: [mentioned their names], have gathered in your name. We pray and ask you to bless us with your divine presence and strength as we journey with you and with one another. Our wounds may heal God, but our scars may never fade. Through our relationship with you, help us to embrace them, not despise them. Teach us how to live with our broken pieces, how to tend to them, how to learn from them. Remind us that we possess the power to turn our struggles and difficulties into blessing, our shame into confidence, our sadness into strength, our pain into compassion. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!

G99: I felt guilty for my divorce. From that guilt I tried doing something extra. When I finalized the divorce papers, I was willing to delete a certain paragraph that he found particularly troubling. I also gave certain things that we owned together back to him. I didn't want to rip him off totally or make the situation worse. But I think there shouldn't have been guilt in the first place.

C99: You tried to compensate for your guilt. Do you feel your guilt was a healthy one?

G100: My feelings fluctuate. At one moment, I feel I did the right thing. Another moment, I feel I did something terrible. What I possibly did wrong was for not speaking up. I was too passive. May be if I had spoken up things would have been different. I lost a whole lot of contact with him. That I still miss. But in everything you have to give up

something to gain something. There shouldn't have been guilt because I left an abusive marriage to gain my peace of mind.

M101: When my marriage ended I felt very guilty. Had he not left, I probably would have gone to the depth to do whatever to salvage my marriage – the most sacred thing for me.

C101: What could you have possibly done to keep your marriage intact?

M102: That's a hard one. I don't know what more I could have done for a person like him. I have to stop blaming myself because no matter what I did I couldn't make him change his mind. It takes two people to salvage a marriage.

R103: I felt guilty too. He didn't want to be with me any more and that made me feel I did something wrong. No matter what you do the guilt will always be there. Guilt is a very bad thing.

C103: Would you like to talk more about this guilt?

R104: I felt guilty in a thousand different ways. May be if I had done this or that he wouldn't have left. You always think you could have done something to save the marriage.

C104: Do you feel your guilt is healthy?

R105: I don't know!

C105: Guilt could be a wake up call. However, constantly berating yourself is unhealthy. Forgiveness is a powerful remedy. Do you feel forgiven?

R106: I do feel forgiven but once a while I still get those guilt feelings. I pray to God to help me get some peace of mind.

C106: How is your prayer life like.

R107: Even though I sometimes feel like walking through a cloudy day, I picture God as a Sun in my life. He gives me warmth. Somebody loves and cares about me. I pray that I make the right decisions in my life.

T108: I felt guilty too. I began drinking heavily.

C108: You drank to hide your guilt and shame.

T109: I felt I must be not much of a man for her to leave me for another man. I started having affairs with several women. Every woman I took to bed I did it out of anger. Eventually I stopped because I realized that I was using these women and they were using me. I began praying to God for help.

C109: You were hurting badly. Would you like to talk about your prayer life?

T110: In the beginning I was angry and blamed God. But eventually I realized that God gives each one free will. I came to the realization that why should I be angry and blame God for something that someone chose to do. Now I pray and rely on God more because I realize how little and weak I am without Him. Prayer gives me strength knowing that if I pray God will hear me. May be not exactly the way I would want it but I would like to believe that God hears my prayer. I feel closer to God than I was in my marriage.

G111: My divorce probably, made me have more belief in God. I have started going to Church and I pray more. God is very reliable. He gives me strength to keep going.

L112: God is so compassionate. He gave me two things to deal with – my son's death and my divorce. God gave me the strength to cope.

C112: God gave you strength to persevere. How is your prayer life like?

L113: I pray my rosary. When I pray, I feel that God is by my side. I got passed the guilt of my divorce. I divorced for my survival. My inside was dying and probably dead. I felt that life was too precious and that it was time for me to move on. I suffered too much abuse – verbally and emotionally. And that really kills the human spirit. I don't believe God put me on this earth to be tortured and die at somebody's hands. I mean emotionally and spiritually.

C113: You feel you made the right decision leaving a relationship that was emotionally and spiritually crippling.

M114: When he left, I was very angry and blamed God. God was a taboo for me. In my mind God is there to protect you. If you live a good and decent life, God wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I felt God did something to hurt me. At that time, I was totally devastated and I couldn't see clearly. I needed to blame somebody and God was handy. I don't blame God anymore. He gave us free will. Whatever the reasons now I know that I contributed to what happened in the marriage. I have taken responsibility for it.

C114: You have learned to claim some responsibility for yourself. Would you like to talk about your prayer life?

M115: I really feel closer to God than I have ever been. I pray everyday asking God to help me find peace and contentment in my life. Years ago when I got upset about something, my husband would always put his arms around me and assure me that everything will be all right. Now when I pray, I feel God has His arms around me with the assurance that everything will be all right. God is giving me what I miss most in my life. That's comforting but I am human and sometimes I need to connect with somebody. I am missing that in my life. My biggest struggle right now is reaching a point where I can accept the possibility of being alone and coming to peace with it.

D116: When I divorced I felt like I had failed God and myself. When you go through divorce, there are moments when you don't know and see things clearly. Divorce heightens the fears of uncertainties about life. The future seems bleak. You don't feel positive or good about yourself. The loving God helped me through. It's terrible to go through divorce and if you survive, you have a certain feeling that God is with you.

C116: How is your prayer life like?

D117: I pray to God that I make the right decisions in my life. Years ago, I might have been fearful that if I do wrong God would strike me dead. Today, I am not fearful of God in that sense. I believe God loves me and I love Him.

C117: You mentioned that after divorce you felt you had failed God and yourself. What was going on?

D118: I think I was too strict with my ex-wives. I am guilty of that. But God is merciful and I believe He forgives me.

L119: Sometimes you don't treasure the things you see everyday until you loose them. I love my other children but the one who died I can't hug him. I can't kiss that one. The only way I can get to him is to mention his name and feel his presence. He is at home with God but not with his mum [She broke down crying].

C119: It gives you some comfort to say he is at home with God. At the same time, you are hurting that he isn't with you. Do you visit his graveside?

L120: Tomorrow is his fifth [death] anniversary and I am going to lay a wreath on his grave. When my son had his first heart attack, my ex-husband asked me to speak with the doctor and find out what was happening. I didn't because he was already an adult. When he died, my ex-husband blamed it on me that if I had spoken with the doctor, my son would have probably been here today. That's the guilt I have. I pray and ask his forgiveness always. He is my angel. I know he is protecting me [She started crying].

C120: It's very painful to bury a child. You feel he might be alive if you had acted differently.

L121: My ex-husband said if I had spoken with the doctor perhaps he would have told me something and I could have intervened to save my son. May be he is right. I don't know.

C121: You are blaming yourself for your son's death? How are you dealing with it?

L122: From the time of my son's death, I honestly think I didn't have enough time to deal with it. I think I need to look at it well. I could have gone to the doctor and my son would still have died.

C122: You need more time to look at your son's death and deal with it. It's not healthy to bury your emotions. You need to grieve well to heal.

L123: For a long time I kept so much inside. I wouldn't let it come out. I feel good talking about it.

S124: I also lost a son to an automobile accident. I felt I could have prevented it. [She started crying].

C124: I imagine how painful it might be to bury a child. What could you have possibly done to prevent the accident?

S125: I know! As a mother I felt I could have done something. I just couldn't understand why God took away my son.

C125: It sounds like you are blaming God!

S126: Yes, I did. I was very angry with God. I took a crucifix that was hanging on the wall and smashed it against the floor and broke it into pieces. I am very sorry for what I did. My son's death brought me closer to the Blessed Mother who also lost her only Son, Jesus Christ. I know she will understand my pain.

C126: Identifying with the Blessed Mother helps you deal with your son's death. At the same time my impression is you still blame God for your son's death.

S127: Initially, I blamed God but now I would say I rather question God. I would like to believe that things happen for a reason but at times we find it difficult accepting it because we don't see the bigger picture. Now I feel my son is in a better place, even though if somebody had said that to me in the beginning that would have made me very angry. Now I can say for myself that he is in a better place with God.

C127: You said something very important. There are reasons why things happen to us and there is always a bigger picture. I believe you arrived at this profound insight through questioning God. Sometimes questioning certain events in our lives opens the way to deepening our relationship with God.

S128: I forgave my ex-husband long time ago. He died a few years after our divorce. I prayed for him when I heard of his death. I am sorry for what happened all over the years between us. I am also sorry for smashing the crucifix. I pray and ask for forgiveness. I hope the Lord would forgive me.

C128: The Lord is rich in compassion!

G129: For me forgiveness is having an understanding for the other person. Now looking back, I can understand that my ex-husband didn't know better and so I can forgive him and come to peace with myself. And I feel God forgives me too.

R130: I don't know if I can forgive him.

T131: I know God is merciful but I can't forgive my ex-wife. Why should I forgive her? I am not Jesus Christ. I don't forgive the sins of the world. I don't want to forgive her.

C131: You sound very angry.

T132: I am not a stone. Why should I forgive somebody who hurts me? It's my choice not to forgive her. I pray and ask God for my own forgiveness.

D133: It's very rare to truly forgive yourself and not forgive others. Usually you are the last person to forgive yourself.

T134: It doesn't apply in my case. I hope God forgive her. I hope she doesn't burn in hell. I hope she will understand that I can't forgive her.

C134: How would you feel to say you forgive her?

T135: Forgiving her will take away everything – all the damage she did to me. I don't want to set her free. Many people think if you don't forgive the other person you will not be happy. That's not true for me. It makes me happy to be mad at her. I don't want to set her free.

C135: You are not yet ready to forgive.

M136: If there is any forgiveness that should be given, it's forgiveness that I have to give to myself and not to him.

L137: Truly, I haven't forgiven him because of what he did to me.

C138: It's difficult to forgive if you are still hurting. Forgiveness can't be rushed. It takes time to get there but certainly it makes healing easier.

T139: We are all sinners because we are human. Whether we like it or not people sin. With all the stuff that was going on in my marriage, I know that I sinned. I believe in confession but I haven't been to confession for a long time.

C139: You believe in confession but have not been to confession for a long time. Would you like to go further with that?

T140: I believe in confession but I don't go to confession. I believe in confessing to God directly. I feel more comfortable with that than doing it through the priest. I have nothing against the Church. I go to Church every Sunday and I believe the Church is good but because of the many restrictions the Church sometimes puts on people, I prefer confessing

directly to God. The priest is not God. The priest may have the greatest intention in the world but he is not God. So why not go to God directly and hope that I get an answer?

Closing prayer:

Good and gracious God, we thank you for being with us throughout our meetings. Now as we bring everything to an end, we once again solicit your support and guidance. In and through prayer, we make a promise to you and ourselves. We promise to strive with all that is within us to heal our hurts. We would not allow ourselves to be emotionally crippled; we will not be maimed by what happened. God, we are going to get through this. We are going to get through this – with your help – restored, renewed, and re-created. We are going to be better persons, living better lives. We will not always wallow in pain. We reject self-pity and self-hatred; we may become discouraged – but not damaged. Strengthened and supported by your grace and love along with our own determination, God we will heal. We will become healthy, happy, and whole persons. This we promise to you and to ourselves. Amen!

APPENDIX D

Learning from our Broken Pieces

No matter how hard we try to recover from a hurt, no matter how much time has passed, there will always be pieces of ourselves that will remain broken. We may search for ways to erase all traces of our painful past, but we will never succeed. Our wounds may heal, but the scars that are left behind are indelible. They will be with us, in some form, for the rest of our days on this earth. The scars may not be visible the way that battle scars are, but they are just as real. Sometimes I wish that emotional scars could be seen. At least that way it would prevent us from denying them.

What are we to do with the broken pieces of ourselves? All too often we try to ignore them, never realizing that they will be with us for the rest of our days on this earth. We try to bury our shattered parts because we see them as signs of weakness, as a painful reminder of our vulnerability. But our broken pieces are a seat of wisdom and insight and compassion within us. They are holy and sacred and ought to be preserved.

What did Moses do with the broken tablets? The ones he threw to the ground when he saw the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf. What could he possibly have done with those shards of stone? They were useless, unreadable. They were in pieces. Moses went back up the mountain to carve out a new set of tablets and to receive the words of the Ten Commandments once more. He came down from the mountain with this replacement set of unbroken, freshly hewn tablets of stone, and he presented them to the children of Israel, who built a Holy Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, to house them. The Israelites carried the ark with them throughout all their journeys in the desert. They brought it with them into the Promised Land, and eventually placed it inside the holy temple that king Solomon built.

But what became of the broken pieces? Legend has it that inside that Holy Ark stood the tablets of the Ten Commandments, and right beside them there rested the *broken* tablets which Moses shattered on that fateful day. Moses understood that the broken tablets could not just be discarded or ignored. He saw that, even though they were broken and illegible, they were holy because they came from God. They were holy precisely *because* they were in pieces. They were an important reminder of an awful experience of idolatry and betrayal which he prayed would never be forgotten. *Should* not be forgotten. The teaching they imparted was just as powerful as the teaching of the Ten Commandments themselves.

Let us not forget this simple truth: the broken pieces of ourselves are often our greatest teachers. It is from them that we learn compassion, wisdom and understanding, devotion, faith, and insight. It is from them that we learn how to pray, how to cry, and how to listen, how to reach out for help. It is from them that we learn how to strive for better, how to empathize and offer help.

Naomi Levy

APPENDIX E

Closing Interviews

C141: How did you find the sessions?

M141: I learned that a lot of things that are still raw in me. Do I deal with them better than I used to? Yes! Talking about those things that happened in the marriage really got me. I just didn't think they could still hurt so much. The sessions helped me look at the whole picture of what happened to me.

C142: Did you find it helpful revisiting even those painful memories!

M142: Yes! It was painful but it's worth doing it because it has given me a better understanding. If you don't take the time to look at the whole picture, you aren't taking care of it and it will come back to hunt you. I needed this time to find: who I am, what I like and what I think.

C143: What spiritual needs was met?

M143: The prayers were comforting. They reflected the kind of things I was going through. I am glad that I was able to talk about how I feel about the Church. I like to go to Church more; light my candles and pray. It doesn't solve all problems but it makes me feel much better about myself.

C144: How did you find the sessions?

R144: It blew my mind to see how I am still emotionally hurting inside. It's about six years since my divorce and it's still painful.

C145: Were some of your emotional needs met?

R145: I felt relieved to let the emotions come out and realize that I am still in pain. I thought I had moved on but I learned that I have suppressed a lot of feelings. But I must say that even though it was very emotional and painful, I feel some inner peace. I felt like healing the broken pieces. I wish the support group would continue.

C146: What was spiritually helpful?

R146: Finding out that I can go to Church and be accepted is comforting. Now I have the feeling that I am not an outcast. I have laminated the prayers and I pray them everyday. I was having trouble sleeping but since coming to the sessions and saying the prayers the every night, I have been sleeping well.

C147: What are your concerns right now?

R147: I think I have to try and accept my divorce. I have to understand that the other person didn't want to be with me and I can't force him. They say if you survive after five years, you would get over it but it's six years now and I am still struggling. I have been thinking of seeking a professional help.

C148: It works differently for each person. You probably need more time. I think you would benefit from seeking a professional help.

C149: How did you find the sessions?

L149: They were very enlightening and supportive. I learnt that there is still much pain in me. It was painful sharing my story but it helped me to understand myself better.

C150: Spiritually, were the sessions helpful?

L150: The prayers were spiritually comforting – speaking about everything that I was feeling. That was very important for the human spirit. I felt a heavy load has been lifted off my shoulders when I learned that divorced people are still part of the Church. There are many Catholics out there who don't know this. If I had not come to these sessions, I wouldn't have learnt these things.

C151: How did you find the sessions?

S151: The sessions brought up many things I have tried to drown for many years. You think you have gotten passed it but not really. It was relieving when I braved myself and talked about it. I found the prayers emotionally and spiritually helpful. I have laminated the prayers and I say it everyday.

C152: How did you find the sessions?

D152: I haven't spoken about all that happened to me for a long time. I tried for so many years to forget about it. The sessions brought all these up which I think was helpful. It helped me to listen and understand myself better. I felt relieved talking about things that mean a lot to me especially how I feel about the Church. And honestly I learned a lot about the Church. It was edifying. I could relate to the prayers because they spoke directly to what I was feeling. The first prayer really touched me. 'Jesus was broken. Our marriages are broken. People are broken.' It meant a lot to me because I also felt broken when my marriage failed.

C153: How did you find the sessions?

G153: The sessions were great and I felt good being part of the group. My eyes were opened much more to many things I didn't know before. I enjoyed the prayers immensely. We need things like that to support us. I particularly enjoyed talking about forgiveness. Any time I forgive I feel a whole lot better about myself.

C154: How did you find the sessions?

T154: They were emotionally and spiritually supportive. I understood myself better. I was glad to talk about my religion and my beliefs and to hear what others also believed in. A lot of people turn away from the Church after divorce because there is no opportunity for them to talk about some of the things we did. I liked the prayers too. Prayers can be used to save many lives.

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