

**COUNSELING NIGERIAN-AMERICAN COUPLES AND THEIR
FAMILIES
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NEW YORK AREA**

OKERE UCHE EDMUND

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Preface

This project is primarily for research purposes and in another breath my contribution to the survival of "The Nigerian-Igbos Couples and their families" living in the United States of America. I identify with their dreams for coming and it is my prayer that these dreams, in as much as they are good, will come true.

In the late sixties and early seventies, coming to America was not as popular as it is today. Coming then was for educational purposes. Governments, Churches, Local Communities and rich individuals sponsor academically bright and intelligent students to come and avail themselves of what western education has to offer. The intention is for them to go, get educated and return to the home country to join/rejoin and improve the work force. For some years, this noble ideal was upheld and those that come back look forward to getting well, paid jobs or rejoin their old ones. They were proud to be educated, proud to show off their diplomas, and relatives and friends are proud of them.

Today, things have changed drastically. Most of the Nigerians in the United States today come on their own, or are sponsored by wealthy parents or relations. Governments no longer sponsor many people for reasons not within the scope of this project. As a result, the intentions for individuals and families who come here changed. Education is no longer a priority for coming. Many have come to live permanently, thanks to the American government sponsored visa lottery. Impetus for educational achievement waned, and majority of the population no longer care much for educational qualifications,

in preference for material acquisitions. How much money, as against what is your educational qualification, is asked when people return from overseas. People have the audacity to ask: "Is it degree we shall it".

The poverty level in developing countries increased the desire to live in countries like, the United States of America. It is no exaggeration to say that most Africans/Nigerians settling in the United States today are here more of necessity than of choice. The widening gap between what they need and what their homeland can offer them propels them to come to their dreamland. They want to improve their standard of living, raise their kids and at the same time, help the other members of the extended families back home.

There is more to it. They have to grapple with the intricacies of the culture of their new homes, which are often in opposition to their home culture. Which of the two cultures take precedence. This engenders tension in the individuals and in the families.

Since the American culture to a greater extent, is favorable to the female population, naturally, the Nigerian women take advantage of the situation, much to the discomfort of the men (their husbands), who grew up in a totally patriarchal culture. This is a major source of tension and marital problems, and with it the dreams for coming to America are sacrificed on this unholy altar of marital squabbles. But must it necessarily be so?

This is a major concern for us, the clergy who get to hear about these problems, primarily because of our positions as priests or because most of the marriages were celebrated in churches with religious rituals. Couples come to me for spiritual directions concerning

problems in their marriages. I want to help. This project is therefore my effort at helping the Nigerian-Igbos couples and their families in America to achieve their "*American dreams*" without breaking their marriage vows, in spite of the presenting problems..

I will proceed by looking at two kinds of Nigerian-Igbo Couples: a) Couples that one of them lived in the United States for some years before going back to their home country to marry and then return with the spouse. This group began their life as husband and wife here in America and their children are Americans by birth. They may also have Nigerian citizenship. b) Couples that married and lived as husband and wife in their home country for a number of years before coming to the United States. Their children are Nigerians by birth, but become American citizens by naturalization.

Case studies of real marital situations, support groups, questionnaires and one on one meeting, will be the method.

Family therapy is a western method of mediation in family problems. This method is quite alien to many immigrant couples, including Nigerians. There is therefore the need to provide an alternative that will incorporate methods used in their home culture. A method that is both ethnic and multicultural. The Nigerian cultural method of settling marital problems places a lot emphasis on the role of the extended families. How practical is this within a culture that emphasizes the precedence of nuclear families. Resistance is another obstacle to western therapy. For most immigrants, it is like washing their dirty laundry in public.

Religion plays very important role in the life of African people and will play an equally important role in the resolution of marital issues. Children are very important in the Nigerian-Igbo culture and may have roles to play in the resolution of marriage issues. Elaboration of these issues will, hopefully provide some of the theological, cultural and clinical clues to resolution of marriage problems among the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. This will enable us to make suggestions to couples who are finding it difficult to live out their marital commitments in the America multicultural society, and those that plan to come in the future.

Finally, one of my intentions for doing a doctoral degree is to enhance the care I offer to those I minister. This might be an opportunity to make such an evaluation to see to what extent this has been achieved.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Brief Statement of Problem:

This chapter will randomly state the problems among the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families in the United States. These problems arise as a result of coming to live in a culture different from their own. The problems are real and have contributed immensely to the disintegration of family relationships and so need to be addressed.

The general reluctance of this segment of people to go for the regular family therapy makes it necessary to seek for alternative methods to provide the much needed help. The fact that therapy is relatively new to their culture also makes it important to draw their attention to available means for them to address these marital problems, without divorce. The factors, such as experiences from history, immigration laws and poverty, (these tend to exacerbate reluctance to western therapy) need to be addressed by way of drawing attention to them and encouragement to overcome them. These couples came to the United States of America with dreams they want to live out, but unless these problems are removed, or some how contended, these dreams may turn into nightmares. It should not necessarily be so. Consequently, we make this contribution by way of this project.

2. Background of Problem:

The notion to develop my doctoral project on the theme: Counseling the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families in America is the result of my involvement in what I called at that time "problem solving" with some Nigerian couples in several marital problems.

These encounters exposed how enormous and prevalent marital problems abound among immigrant families, resulting from their migrating to live and work in a completely new culture quite different from their own. These will also provide me with the opportunity to make my contribution towards improving the quality of life of Nigerian-Igbos in diaspora, to help them achieve the goals for which they came to the United States of America, while at the same time keep their marriages and families intact. In this project I will use Nigerian-Americans and Nigerian-Igbos interchangeably since they refer to the same tribal group of Nigerians. The focus will be on couples living in the New York areas of the USA. There are equally many Nigerian-Igbos located in various states. The choice is based on the large concentration of Nigerian-Igbos in this state and as a result of my actual practical interventions in real troubled marriages. It makes it easy for practical purposes and proximately convenient for contacts. Some propelling reasons for undertaking this project include the following:

1. Traditionally, the Nigerian-Igbos, and in fact Africans generally are not likely to go for marriage counseling in the western understanding of couple or family therapy. The reason being that they are not used to this method of resolving marriage problems. In their native culture the two families: that of the bride and the groom, the extended family members, elders, religious leaders, very close friends and relatives mediate in marital conflicts. Unfortunately, there are not enough of these groups here with them. Moreover, not all elders may qualify for such mediations. Integrity, honesty, trustworthiness and the ability to maintain confidentiality are important requirements for inviting someone to mediate in family problems. There are stories of people called in to mediate in a family

misunderstanding who used issues discussed during the process to make mockery of the family. Marriage issues are regarded as sensitive and as such people of integrity are called in to help. People do not generally want to wash their dirty linens in public. It is hoped that this project will encourage them to overcome the inhibitions and prejudices against regular clinical therapy.

2. The issue of resistance to therapy in the western sense is central to any therapeutic process, more so with African immigrant families. This calls for an alternative means of providing help. Alternatives that are both ethnic and cultural will be necessary in dealing with family squabbles. As already mentioned the traditional means for most African families, including African-Americans for the resolution of family problems has been the extended family, church/religious leaders, elders, etc. Emeka Nwadiora (1995), a Nigerian born family therapist in Philadelphia (USA) testifies that in his practice he usually employs the wisdom of elder Nigerians who come in and use stories, jokes and proverbs called "ilu" in Ibo language to encourage analytic thinking and behavioral changes among Nigerian clients. Chinue Achebe (Things Fall Apart 1959), a nobel price winner in literature, said that "ilu" is like the palm oil with which words are eaten.
3. The idea of family therapy is a very new concept and alien to the African culture. Often, questions asked by therapists during a therapeutic process are perceived as intrusive. This accounts for the reason why many Nigerian-Igbo couples in America, instead of seeking for help from certified family therapists, choose to talk to priests from their home country, especially in the absence of elders of integrity within reach. The mutual trust and confidentiality that exists between

therapists and clients does not seem to convince them that going for therapy is not washing dirty linens in public. Priests are mostly trusted to keep secrets. It is difficult for western therapist to comprehend the extent therapy is considered "public" by many people of African descent. Besides, suspicion of the therapist who may be a white person is very strong. This compounds the issue of resistance to therapy, even an out right refusal to go for help except on instances when they are referred for treatment by schools, courts, hospitals or social welfare agencies, often under considerable threat or pressure. Many black people see going for therapy as a process of labeling them "insane". They fear the reaction of the members of the extended family, friends and community towards them when the news goes round that they are going for therapy. It is like a social stigma to be known as going for therapy.

4. Furthermore, the reason for resistance to therapy may be due to poverty. They think there are a lot of other important things to be done with their lean income. In the scale of priorities going for therapy is the least. Consequently, the priest/minister of the church or religious denomination becomes an option. At least it saves them the expenses for therapy. On the other hand, this may be an opportunity for the priest/minister to encourage them to go for real therapy especially if he/she appreciates the importance of referrals.
5. Resistance and suspicion as it concerns family therapy among black and immigrant families should not be categorized as pathological, as some biased western therapists are inclined to assume. Rather their resistance should be seen as the black peoples' reaction to and development over generations to racism,

oppression, discrimination and poverty. The negative experience of many African families with immigration officials, welfare services and other social institutions compounds the issues of resistance to therapy. Those immigrants with expired visas and no legal status are most resistant. Going for therapy may be the shortest means for their repatriation back to their home country.

This project is my attempt at providing a cross-cultural alternative to western therapy that is based partly on the culture they have left behind and the realities of their living in the American culture. It will discuss the myriad of psychological, theological, clinical and cultural/traditional complexities on marriage issues and the implications as a result of living outside their own culture and environment. The goal of the project which is to help them achieve their goals for coming will upper most in all of our considerations.

The understanding of the marriage and family in the Nigerian-Igbo, and in fact Africans sense is an important key to the resolution of any marital problems with them. To provide marriage and family therapy to these Nigerian-Igbo couples, understanding their ethnicity and cultural background of marriages contracted in their culture is important. Derald Sue and David Sue (1990) emphasized that an effective cross-cultural family counseling needs to incorporate the many racial, cultural, class and economic issues inherent in counseling cultural different people. Unfortunately, some western therapist are content with counseling people of their own kind and don't care about others. This on the one hand encourages black immigrants to resist going for therapy and substantiates their suspicions. It must be mentioned that many western therapists are making efforts to incorporate peoples of other cultures in their

practices. They are able to do because they care about the culture and ethnicity of their clients. They do not expect their non-American clients to loose their cultural identity.

Equally important in counseling the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families is a consideration of the roles religion and spirituality play in their lives. The Igbo person is chronically religious and it permeates their marital relationships and family lives. This is particularly important because many of the couples we shall encounter in this project are concerned about the consequences of their problematic marriages on their faith. Secondly, these marriages have been celebrated/solemnized in accordance with the rites and laws of their religious worships and they are concerned when problems arise. It is therefore this spiritual/religious component that makes it all the more important to talk to a priest/minister even ever there is problem with their marriage.

The overall project will specifically be narrowed to consider only two different groups of Nigerian-Igbo couples out of about four groups. This will enable us to focus on specific issues relevant to couples living in America or are planning to live there. It will be designed to provide resource for whoever may be in the position to help these groups of couples in future.

1. The first group will focus on those couples and their families who lived in the United States for several years and decided to go back to their home country to marry and then return with their spouse. This group of couples never lived as husband and wife in their native cultural environment and perhaps do not know the implications of marriage relationships in that culture. Children from this union are Americans by birth; they may also have Nigerian citizenship since

occasionally their parents take them for vacations to their home country. Since the problems are real and affect real couples, there will be a case study involving Couple A B. The marriage between A B is a typical example of the kind of problems couples in this group encounter. Marriages in the group tend to crumble more easily, or are more prone to problem than other groups. This trend raises questions about how they were contracted in the first instance. Were all the rules regarding marriage obeyed? This again makes it necessary to enunciate the principles that guide and inform us about validly contracted marriages in the Nigerian-Igbo culture.

2. The second group will focus on those Nigerian couples and their families who lived a good part of their married life in their native cultural environment; had their children there before they had the opportunity to come to the United States. Their children are Nigerians by birth, but may acquire American citizenship as they continue to live in the country, especially if either or both of the parents become naturalized American citizen. Like in the first group, live couples will be used in the case study. Obi and Nkechi belong to this group of couples and the issue they brought to me reveals the specific nature of the problems couples in this group grapple with. It will be noted that couples in this group have less relational issues than the first group. Their problems are not connected with any failure in their relationship as a couple.

The rate at which Nigerian-Igbo couples are prone to marital misunderstanding and divorce when they come into the United States makes it necessary to consider the reasons for this trend. It is hoped that this project will not only help the couples

involved in this project resolve their marital issues, but also those yet to come in and will serve as resource for those who need such information. It is also intended that foreign priests who serve as pastors and ministers here in America will come to understand the peculiarity of Nigerian-Igbo couples' problem by reading this project. Even young Nigerian born priests who come to the United States to study may find the contents of this project useful in their efforts to help couples that come to them. Therefore giving a general overview of the purported reasons why many Nigerian marriages become problematic soon after coming into America, the dream country. Certain assumptions will be made as regards the theological, cultural/traditional, social and psychological implications of the marital problems as it affects these two groups of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families.

From a theological and or spiritual/religious perspectives, it is assumed that problematic marriage relationships affect the faith and commitment of the couples experiencing problems in their marriage. Since their commitments are made in the presence of their church/religious community, these are also affected. When one member of the community is sick, the whole body is affected. On the part of the couples, it is assumed that the breach of their commitments have spiritual and moral repercussions on their family life and membership in the religious or church community to which they belong. Hence, the relevance of the priests/ministers in peace negotiations between couples and their families. Those for example, who marry in the catholic tradition are told that marriage is a sacrament instituted by God, likened to the covenant between God and the Israelites and that their relationship is indissoluble by any human authority. The church defends this divine enactment by

saying to the couples during the solemnization of their union, 'what God has joined together let no one divide.' The priest/minister in turn has recourse to church laws in an attempt to resolve this marital dilemma. This may warrant ecclesiastical sanctions and /or prohibitions as result of disrupted union.

Culturally, it is assumed that marriage in the Nigerian-Igbo culture is an alliance between two families, which includes the extended families of the bride and the groom. Marriage misunderstands disrupt this alliance and will equally take the entire family to resolve the misunderstanding. There are more assumptions to this perspective.

Psychologically, fear of divine retribution for breaking the law and guilt feelings connected with the role each of the couple played in the disruption of the union is considered and can provide valuable help in the resolution of their marital problems. Secondly, new comers into the American society are shocked to learn how hard one needs to work to make a living. This runs contrary to their expectations and the stories they were told about life in America and American dreams. This unexpected turn of events could be overwhelming and psychologically devastating.

It is the aim to this project to provide as much information as possible to new comers in to the American multicultural environment, would-be-helpers, western therapists so that they may be equipped to help these couples whose marriages are in disarray. These couples will need the help of family therapist, eastern or western in the absence of the extended family network. The project is aimed at providing necessary information about the culture of these people for western therapists that might want to help them. They are far from home.

The analysis and evaluation of the information collected from the case studies, the support group meetings and the questionnaires based on the projected objective of the project: How best to help the Nigerian-Igbo or Nigerian-American couples and their families achieve their dreams for coming without sacrificing their marital relationships on that altar.

The idealization of life in America by immigrants can be viewed from three perspectives, namely, educational achievement, freedom and economic acquisition. These will be considered to the extent that they are the propelling forces behind the surge into the United States of America from all parts of the world. The project is not only for the improvement of others but also of the writer, a self evaluation as to how far this objective is achieved will be made.

CHAPTER TWO

To begin to appreciate the concerns of the writer and the reasons for this project it is important to understand the cultural, religious and clinical principles that will guide and inform readers through the project. To help the Nigerian-Igbo couples with their marital problems, it is necessary to know a little bit of who they are and what marriage means to them as a people. This chapter will focus on elucidating some of the principles that will guide and inform readers through the project. It is focused on the religious, cultural and clinical principles that affect the marriages of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families in the United States of America.

1. Brief background history of Nigerian-Igbo people

The Igbo speaking people constitute one of the largest ethnic groups, third to the Hausa and Yoruba groups. They are located in the southeastern Nigeria (see appendix C), between latitude 5 and 7 degrees north and longitude 6 and 8 degrees east of the equator. They occupy a continuous stretch of territory of about 35,280 square kilometers. Igboland as it is popularly called is bounded in the east by the Ibibilos, (Cross River State), in the north by the Igallas, Idomas (Benue state) and Ojoja people. In the south they are bounded by Ijaws, (Rivers State) and in the west by the Edos known today as Edo State of Nigeria. Today the Igbos occupy the entire Abia, Imo, Anambra, and Enugu states of the present day Nigeria. A very significant number of them are included in the Rivers and Delta states. The population density ranges from 850 to 1,500 per square kilometer. The human population is over 26 million in recent census.

Unlike other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the majority of the Igbos are Christians. They live in villages, towns and cities scattered over the eastern part of Nigeria, south of the River Benue and east of the River Niger.

The origin of the Igbo tribe, however, has been an object of much speculation. It is not until the last fifty years that any real work has been carried out regarding this subject. The ethnic Igbo according to Afigbo (1975), like any group of people, are anxious to discover their origin and reconstruct how they came to be who they are. Their experiences under colonialism and since Nigerian Independence (1960), have emphasized for them the reality of their group identity which they want to anchor into authenticated history (pg 28). From analysis of the sources that are available in the forms of fragmentary oral traditions and correlation of cultural traits, it has been discovered that there exists a major area of Igboland and that waves of immigrant communities from the north and west inhabited the borders of this core area as early as the ninth century. The major areas cover Owerri (where the writer hails from), Orlu and Okigwe. These form a belt and the people in this area have no tradition of coming from anywhere else and therefore are the indigenous Igbos. Therefore the idea of migration is already familiar with some Nigerian-Igbos, even before they came to the United States.

The organization of traditional Igbo society starts at the village level. The village is a community of people who are descendants of one or more male ancestors. These ancestors are usually the founders of the village. These villages are made up of compounds, with different kindred units from various ancestral origins. The village begins as a nuclear family of one man and one or more wives, who live in the same household, which is called "*Obi*". As male children of such household grow and multiply,

they build their own separate houses in the same area. These families form the "*Umunna*" which in turn grow into a bloc..ezi. Various blocs make up the village and villages grow into clans, many of which combine to form Igboland --"Ndi Igbo"(Igbo people).

Marriage institution among the traditional Igbo society is patriarchal, which means that a married couple must live in the husband's home or compound or compound. In the event of a divorce, the woman is the one to leave the house and return to her parents' home. In the traditional Igbo society, family succession is also patriarchal, meaning to say that the father is the head of the family and as such, every descendant is traced through lineage.

Among the Nigerian-Igbos, married life is a normal condition for both men and women. It is something of pride and credit to parents and family of the bride-to-be if prospective suitors propose marriage to their daughters. Having a prospective son-in-law living in America makes it all the more attractive and adds to the pride.

Most parents in the Igbo culture still live in the past when parents decided for their children, when and whom to marry. In those days such arranged marriages could be between one of the parents' family, friends or business associates, or even business customers. Different from the past old days, many more young people live in cities and attend colleges away from home, and as such, are much more exposed to vastly more entertainment and news by radio and television; many more travel abroad to live. These are the group we are focusing in this project and the couples in our case studies.

When 'A' decided to marry he went back to his home country to marry and soon re-connected with his old school friend 'B' and proposed to her. Coming from America is an attraction to many Nigerian girls and makes it easy for them to accept marriage without

asking too much questions. 'B' accepted the proposal but insisted that their marriage must be celebrated in the Church. Once the proposal is made and accepted, they introduced themselves to their parents. In this case again, the parents are not expected to object because the prospective husband is an "Americana". This is perhaps the most attractive qualification. The proper ingredient necessary for a lasting marriage relationship to is sacrificed for dollar. Within weeks, plans for the traditional marriage "*Igba nkwu nwanyi*" and church wedding are underway. The celebrations that follow are unbounded.

2. Traditional Initial Marriage Inquiry: Since marriage in the Nigerian-Igbo culture is an alliance between two families rather than a contract between the two individuals, the parents of both families now take the initiative to inform the kinsmen and women, the "*Umunna*" whose blessing and good wishes are very important and in a way as assures the couple of their support and solidarity. Mbiti John (1991) referring to this support from the extended family said that this has grown out of African view that a person exists because of the existence of other people. The philosophical formula about this saying "*I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am*" (Pg.108). This re-echoes an Igbo saying, "*Umunna bu ike*" which literally means, "Unity is strength".

Whatever the circumstances however, the initial inquiries about the spouses-to-be must be conducted according to Igbo laws and customs. This is carried out through intermediaries or middle person. The role of the middle person is so vital that it could not be omitted. It is the middle person(s) who proceeds to open up negotiations in a very a series of rituals. According to Chinue Achebe (1965), the middle person is called upon to

make a statement in case of any future misunderstanding connecting the marriage. In consequence to his/her responsibility he/she receives a token fee from the suitor. (p.102).

Some of the rules that govern Igbo marriages are based on the Igbo status system or symbol. For example, marriage between an "osu" (cult slave) and a "diala" (free born) is a taboo. The initial inquiry is to make sure that either spouse is not an "osu". Igbo endogamy prohibits marriage outside ones own social group, not in the sense of class created by wealth ownership. An "osu" must marry among people of his/her social kind. This demands has serious theological implications as regards the equality of all people. Unfortunately, the advent of Christianity to Igboland hundreds of years ago has not succeeded in bringing an end to this ancient stigma on people for no fault of theirs, except for the fact that they were born into a family that happens to be "osu". Many die hard Christians have ignored this custom and gone ahead to marry across the boards. However, it becomes a matter of bearing the consequences of one's actions and live with it for the rest of his/her life. Such marriages never get approval from the extended family or the "Umunna" who fear being contaminated by such infiltration. Bleaching this tradition of a "diala" marrying an "osu" often unknowingly have caused marital problems and in many instances led to out right divorce. Even the most vocal critics of this cultural stigma will neither encourage nor support any members of their own kindred to go on and marry an "osu" if they are "diala". In most cases, it is easier said than done. If an individual ignores this tradition, he or she runs the risk of being ostracized by the community and their offspring will inherit the stigma of an "osu". To show how seriously this was taken, early Christian missionaries did not allow an "osu" to join the priesthood until recently. This is taken very seriously when issues like marriage are concerned.

Consequently, initial inquiry before any marriage is contracted is a very important aspect of the marriage process and is aimed at ensuring that problems that might arise in the future as a result of lack of it.

Matters concerning marriage are never hurried in the Nigerian-Igbo culture. Both parties must be thoroughly investigated no matter how much the couple is in a hurry to marry especially that of the girl. One other reason for the inquiry is to verify the character of the girl. Good manners in a bride are the most important of character. Beauty is essential but secondary. Hence the Igbos say "*Agwa bu mma*", meaning to say that good manners is beauty in itself". On the duration of the marital process in Igbo culture, Victor Uchendu (2004) described the process as long and ceremonious; no matter how the Igbo acquires a wife (husband), the process of betrothing and marrying an Igbo girl (boy) is long and ceremonious. It often takes years and is seldom accomplished in months. (pg.51). The reason for the slow process is to ensure that no stone is left unturned and to avoid mistakes that will be harmful to the union in the future. The Igbos believe that marriage relationship is forever, unless for special reasons such as childlessness.

Besides the issue of "osu" and "diala", a person may not marry within a segment of his/her mother's/father's lineage. In theological terms this is called consanguinity, and is traceable to the direct line and in the second degree of the collateral line. (Canon: 1073).

In ecclesiastical law, this constitutes an impediment to marriage and is capable of rendering it null and void. In the Nigerian Church therefore, one of the steps taken to forestall this problem is the "*banns of marriages*" during which period the names and families of the prospective bride and groom are announced in their local churches for

three consecutive Sundays during masses. Within this period of time, objections as to the suitability of the persons wishing to receive the sacrament of matrimony may be raised. Sometimes, genuine objections are brought up. It may be that either of the intending couple had married before, or that they are related, or that one of the issues mentioned above has been violated.

In the case of a suitor living in America, objections seldom arise. If any objections are ever raised, it will be seen as nothing short of jealousy for the girl and her family. This will stand on the way to achieving the American dreams. In this situations people would prefer keep their mouths short and by so doing they cover issues that will irrupt in the future to destroy the marriage. This is typical of marriages between a person living in America that comes back to the native country to choose and marry their spouse. However, genuine and serious objections are taken seriously irrespective of who is involved especially where the church is connected.

Another serious area for investigation is in matters of mental health. It is focused on finding out if there is history of mental sickness in either of the families.

Today, test for the HIV/AIDS virus has become an important object of initial marriage inquiry among the Nigerian-Igbos. Even already married couples are being tested.

The primary purpose of the inquiries conducted traditionally by the families and the middle persons; and ecclesiastically by the local church at the earliest point of marital negotiations is to ensure that the rules are not broken in all counts and that the union will last. The role of the clergy as the custodian of church laws on marriage is very important in case of any problems with the marriage. Couples search out the catholic priest for help. This informs the reason for the choice of this topic: Counseling the Nigerian-Igbo

couples and their families in America. It is also my effort to help couples with marital problems so that they will leave out their dreams without breaking their marriages.

Therefore, at the beginning of any meeting with Nigerian-Igbo couples, I must ensure that the issues listed above are not the problem. They can easily change the whole dynamics of the process to follow in the resolution. For any effective and fruitful counseling of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families the finding of the initial inquiries, (if any), must be put into consideration. They may provide the initial insights to resolving marital problems among Igbo couples. Issues to consider as to whether things were hurried to prevent proper investigation, did wealth play any influencing role on the union, if certain issues that might constitute marital impediment in traditional and church marriages over looked? This in a very significant way differentiates providing family therapy in the western method from the approach that incorporates cultural demands in counseling processes. A culturally different family therapist may not consider these issues as capable of undermining marital unions. Initial inquiries are very helpful in pinning down possible sources of problems.

Because these Nigerian-Igbo couples contracted their marriages under local laws and customs; and church/religious laws, it is important to refer to them in case of problematic relationships. The extended family system practiced by many African cultures is both strength and weakness in marriage relationships. It makes the resolution of issues among couples easy in one hand and tough in another. Underlying marriage issues among many Nigerian-Igbo couples can only be diverged with knowledge of cultural background.

3.Factors contributing to the Disintegration of Nigerian-Igbo Marriages:

In the course of gathering materials for this project, I had a lot of discussions with some Nigerian colleagues here in New York. The discussions often focused on the rate at which Nigerian-Igbo couples are having series of problems in their marriages. Each of these colleagues has their own stories to tell on their experiences talking to them. I felt again that there are reasons for these disintegrations and that it is worth exploring as part of this project. I went further to discuss with two elderly Nigerian men that I have lived here for over twenty years. There was consensus on the following as contributing to these problems:

a.) Deception and Lies:

Many of these marriages are built on deception and lies. Majority of those Nigerians that go back to their home country and returned to the United States do not disclosed to their spouses or parents their means of livelihood. If the spouse or parents/guardians do not care to ask, he/she does not feel obligated to tell anybody. We shall discover in the case study that while the man is happy to know that his spouse-to-be is a registered nurse, he did not care to let her know that he is only a security man in the United States. For many Nigerians at home, it suffices that the spouse-to-be lives in the USA and marrying him/her will offer the opportunity to live there too. There is generally an ulterior motive behind going back to Nigeria to marry a person you hard know instead of marrying other Nigerians living here in the United States. The reason may be that they know they cannot manipulated and deceive

someone who already lives in America. But they are often wrong because no sooner than the new comer arrives than she/he learns about the real situation.

b.) Idealization of life in the United States. There is fanatical desire in many Nigerian girls to marry "anyone" living in America. They fall for this not because they love the person; rather it offers the opportunity to live there too. Many Nigerian girls enter into marital relationship for the wrong reasons. Everything about America is idealized, life here, clothes, jewelries, shoes and in fact anything with the label "Made in the USA", Paris, London etc." Things made in these countries are priced triple what better qualities made in Nigeria are priced. Things made in Nigeria are looked down upon as cheap and inferior. This general mentality of idealizing things made in other countries cannot be far removed from the mass poverty and materialism that has plagued the country since independence. This trend is not limited to issues on marriage. Even the government and her officials prefer going for foreign items even when the same items with the same qualities are produced locally. This is a kind of worm that has eaten into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. It is difficult to reconcile this materialistic tendency and the acclaimed poverty in the country. Nigerian men and women prefer spouses living in America; they have developed inordinate desire for whatever is American or foreign. With this mentality, it is therefore easy to entice somebody into marriage with the belief that everything in America is the ideal. Even when Nigerians go back to their native country on vacations, they are known to show off their dollar power, forgetting how much they suffer to

make such monies. It is a known fact that if an American resident Nigerian goes home to the fatherland, he/she sales like hot cake when it comes to marital issues; whereas their counterparts at home find it difficult to get the right spouse. It is that bad and something needs to be done and soon.

c.) **Pressure from parents and extended family members.** Parents virtually force their girls to marry spouses from America when they do not even know the identity of the man. They also see it as an opportunity to improve their financial status and with the hope that one day they will be invited to visit the United States by the son/daughter-in-law. This is another weakness of the extended family system practiced in many African countries. The good of the many takes over the good of the individual. If a girl refuses to marry someone coming from America, perhaps, on the grounds that she does not know this person well, is pressured by all around her until she gives in. She will be accused of denying them their own share of what America has to offer. Unfortunately, this system does not enjoy a lot of support in the multicultural society of the United States and that marks the beginning of marital problem for the girl.

d.) **Preferences for Particular kinds of Jobs:** Most Nigerian-Igbos (especially the men) prefer to marry certified nurses and people in allied professions when they go home to marry; or they suggest to whoever becomes their wife to take to the nursing profession, without considerations for her own preferences. The new arrival may not know the motive for such suggestions until after sometime in her

stay. Outright refusal may mark the beginning of marital problems. Today more than 80% of Nigerian women coming into the United States are nurses or in allied medical jobs. The reasons are nothing short of financial gains. It is a known fact that people in the nursing profession among immigrants make more than their counterparts in other fields. This has caused a lot of problems between couples especially when the new comer begins to make more money than her husband who is not in that profession. There is nothing wrong to seek for a job that pays well but to make it the sole reason for entering a marital relationship is quite dangerous. This has predictably led to the disintegration of many marriages between Nigerian-Igbo couples. It has proved that the motive for marriage is financial welfare not love. They have always made a joke with this especially when they say "we do not eat love".

- e.) **Cultural Shock on arrival from Nigeria:** Many immigrants coming into the United States from other countries are culturally shocked by the way things are in comparison with what they are used to in their home country. This initial shock can be minimal depending on where they stay and with whom. If one is lucky to meet people from his/her home country on arrival, the shock may be minimized. If on the other hand one finds him/herself in the midst of completely strangers, it can be really unsettling and disorienting. The existence of the extended family network in the port of arrival is most valuable. This shock may, sooner or later turn into advantage, especially for the female who discovers all the opportunities open to her that were not in her home country.

f.) **The role of women in this new culture:** The variety of opportunities for women and new perceived role as "bread winners", aided by the feminist movement is very empowering to the new comer. Sometimes if this unexpected powerfulness is not checked and respected, it could be the beginning the first cause of marital problems. If for example, the woman who has always believed that the man should be the head and "bread winner" of the family now becomes the "bread winner", roles are reversed. This can be an overwhelming experience when compared with the role of women in her home country. The issue of who is the "bread winner" of the family ranks highest among the causes of family problems among Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. The significant effect of financial strength in an environment of abject poverty and want can be overwhelming for the "new bread winner", and unsettling for the "designated bread winner". Financial power can lead to the corruption of the power that comes with being the 'bread winner' of the family. Often the man is not happy to loose this position of being the provider of his family. On the other hand, the wife discovers new ideas through associations with co-worker and the husband worried that the traditional understanding of marital relationships that, in his home culture runs in his favor, is being eroded by over exposure to the new culture. In the American culture, the Nigerian male is at a disadvantage. The pivot of the traditional marriage in the Nigerian culture is the understanding that the man is the head of the family and, so the protector and provider of his family. In the event that he is not able to fulfill these obligations, his pride is hurt and this may

result in aggressive behaviors, often targeted at the presumed beneficiary of the culture that has rendered him incapable of performing his duties. This beneficiary is the woman and therefore the target for quarrels. Rather than worry about who is and who is not the "bread winner", or provider and protector of the family, responsibilities must be shared among couples and the one that has a better job gives more support. No doubt, this poses a threat to the position of the man in the family.

g.) Family Secrets: In a group process, two women have admitted that their intentions for "marrying" their 'so called' husbands is not actually for marriage in the proper understanding of the word. Rather as a means to circumvent a culture that is unfavorable to being single and remaining single. These may not be isolated cases. There may still be more that have not had the courage to make similar admission. Such an admissions can only be made when such a person is well established and completely independent of the so called spouse. As secrets these intentions are not disclosed to the spouse. However, there are situations where by the intentions are made known and there is mutual agreement between them but never disclosed to outsiders. This is different from entering into marriage with full knowledge that, either the man is impotent or the woman is barren, and the spouses agreed to keep these secrets to themselves and away from others members of the family. In this case, they will never come to the counselor if the source of their problem can be traced to this unholy alliance. There are however, situations whereby one of the spouses hides an issue that is certainly to

prohibit marriage if known. If, for example, the man hides the fact the he will never be able to fertilize a female egg, due to some sickness or accident before marriage, it poses a serious threat to their marriage especially if the women wants to get children of her own and vice versa. If this situation is discovered in the course of their cohabitation and the aggrieved party does not want to live with it, the church teaches that there was no marriage in the first place since it was built on lies and undisclosed circumstances. It is declared null and void. It is therefore not to the best interest of any marital relationship to keep secrets. Secrets should be led bare for the spouses to choose if they can live with such circumstances or not. Medical reasons hidden from a spouse-to-be but known to immediate family members, so that the sick spouse or family member will use the opportunity of coming to America to receive better treatment destroys marital relationship as soon as the secrets are known. This is another form of deception and lies mentioned earlier in this chapter.

h.) American laws on Marriage and Immigration policies: Some American laws on marriage tend to favor single parenthood and encourage couples to divorce in order to get some help from the government. A Nigerian couple filling for their tax-returns as married could not get as much money as they got when the woman filled alone. The easy with which divorces are obtained in the United States tend to suggest that the government encourages couples to go for it, as if it is a solution to marital misunderstandings. This is a deterrent to the survival of marriage as an institution and discourages singles from aspiring for it. This sends a dangerous

signal to immigrants to this country who from their home culture have appreciated marriage as an important institution. Sooner than later they begin to apply these laws to their own marriages. They are equally more or less, forced to abandon their ethnic heritage in order to become acceptable in the new environment. The work of the therapist to help them out in the dilemma is very vital in this situation. As two therapists, Monica McGoldrick and Joe Giordano (1996) suggested, therapists should act as cultural brokers, helping families to recognize their own ethnic values and resolve marital conflicts that result from different perceptions and experience (pg.21). This will be in reference to the implications of the American notions on marriage on their cultural understanding. Therapists have the obligation to encourage and help couples to stick to their indigenous cultural values on marriage, even when the American multicultural environment suggests otherwise. Sometimes they may be enticed by the favorable conditions against the marriage institution. That the government in some instances gives extra support to mothers with a non-resident fathers, speaks eloquently of their non-support of the institution of marriage. Mothers that have no intentions to enter into marriage as a relationship are captivated by such conditions. They take advantage of the situation in favor of broken relationships, especially in the face of economic hardships. The government can do more by encouraging those already in marital relationships, thereby making it attractive for those who look forward to such relationships. Unfortunately, many American citizens are not aware of the plight of most immigrants in this country and what they go through on daily basis to survive even when they are against their own

cultural values. It becomes a matter of doing whatever it takes to survive. On immigration policies, many immigrants are not able to visit their home countries because they may never be allowed to come back into the country. Some have lost close relatives in their home countries but are unable to witness the funerals, afraid that they may never be allowed back into America especially if one is of the black race. This tends to suggest that segregation and racism is taking different forms. Again, the interpretation of marriage laws to include unions between persons of the same sex gives mixed signals to new comers and married couples. It affects their relationship as they attempt to conform to the demands of the society in which they now live.

- i.) **Poverty In Underdeveloped nations:** The ever increasing gap between the rich and poorer nations, developed and developing nations which has continuously attracted the influx of immigrants into the United States, has taken its toll on families, especially newly weds who did not have any experiences of marital relationships before coming to America. Those immigrants that come into the United States to live and work, do not just have their immediate families to support. There are also members of the extended family, other relatives and friends in their home countries who need their support. Those that are not able to succeed here are afraid to return to their home countries due to so many reasons. They may not get back the jobs they left behind when they left their country. Relatives and friends who have encouraged them to go and have led their hopes on the success will be disappointed. They are seen as disappointment to the

family and lazy. As a result, they prefer to hang around even if they are to die. Those with families are devastated, and marital relationships broken. There is a story of a Nigerian-Igbo couple that arrival in the United States with the hope of living their American dream. Unfortunately, the dream became a nightmare for the man who cannot cope with the situation on the ground. The man suggested going back home, but the wife refused to go with him. He eventually left and that signaled the end of the marriage. Thing would be a lot different if developing countries are helped by the rich nations to sustain their own economy, instead of ignoring their plight. Rather they are encouraged to migrate to the United States and other western countries to do jobs citizens of those countries will not do. However, a lot of the immigrants are appreciative of the opportunities to make their dreams come true even though for some others, dreams turn to nightmares.

4.Theological Principles:

Most of the people that come to priests when they have marital problems may not be expecting him/her to solve their problems. Rather they may be concerned about the connections between their marital problem and their relationship to God and their religion in the light of their problems. They are seeking for answers to spiritual and theological implications of marriage problems in the light of their faith belief. In assuming to provide counseling to Nigerian-Igbo couples in America, therapists must be sensitive to the role religion and spirituality play in lives of African people generally, and in marriages contracted in a religious/Church and spiritual contexts in particular. We may attempt to separate religion and spirituality in this context for the simple reason that; although many

of the couples mentioned in this project have been raised in one religion or another, and internalized a sense of spirituality, not all of them are members of organized religions or churches, at least since their arrival to the United States. While some of them continue to claim a belief in God or to be religious, they do not attend church regularly. Whatever caused the loss of participation in organized religions, their belief in God is alive and well. This is applicable to many Africans in the United States. Though they are baptized Catholics through receiving the sacrament, they no longer practice their faith. They however vigorously maintain a conviction about spiritual powers and believe that something greater than themselves is watching over them. The issue of religion is a strong factor in marital relationship among Nigeria-Igbos generally. Some marriage proposals have been cancelled as a result of one of the parties' refusal to celebrate the union in the church/synagogue/mosque, that is, with some religious rituals. Even after the traditional marriage, which according to native laws and customs authorizes the man and woman to live together, man couples and families have insisted on the church wedding before this union finally takes place. Blessing the union is of grave importance and significance to the couple. It is a gesture to invite God into the relationship.

In the Catholic church, for example, if a union between two members is not officially celebrated in the church before a validly ordained clergy (that is, receive the sacrament of matrimony), those members are said to be living in sin until they bless their union in the church. They will not be allowed to receive the Holy Communion, a sign that they are not yet in union with the church and her members. The Nigerian-Igbo couples are well known for their elaborate church weddings and subsequent dedication to religious matters from then on. They are generally very religious and spiritual people. Unfortunately many

of them abandon this practice soon after arrival in the United States, thereby calling into question the depth of it all.

John Mbiti (1969), a well-known author on African traditional religion and philosophy wrote that the sense of spirituality has its root in the tradition of African religion. This they carried over to the Christian religion with their conversion. Consequently, any effective marriage therapy with them must have a **psycho-spiritual approach**. This will incorporate the basic belief systems of the people into the therapeutic process for best result. Many, if not all the Nigerian-Igbo couples here in the USA still practice their Christian faith, majority of them being Catholics, a few Anglicans and a handful of the new Pentecostal Christians, many of whom are former Catholics. One thing common to them all is that their marriages are solemnized in their respective churches with very elaborate ceremonies. They therefore believe that there is spiritual component to their union. When a marriage celebrated in the Catholic Church is threatened, it follows that the sacramental, and by implication, the spiritual is also threatened. The priest, who is the ordinary minister of the sacrament and representative of the Church, is called upon to intervene. Even if the priest is a qualified counselor, the general reasons for calling on him is in connection with the sacramental/spiritual component of the marriage.

Paragraph two of Canon 1055, states the fundamental juridical truth about marriage as a sacrament. That every valid marriage entered into by two certainly baptized persons is of its nature a sacrament. Canon 1056 went on to give an essential property of marriage in the Catholic tradition as Unity and Indissolubility. These may sound very technical but couples asking for marriage are expected to accept them if they must be married in the Catholic Church. Some take them seriously and allow them to influence their lived

relationship. For them there is a spiritual component. These are concerned about the consequences of marital problems and of divorce on their spiritual life; on their relationship with God and the Church. It is for these concerns that the priest is sort for help and clarification. What are the implications to them?

To many others it is just to satisfy the demands of the church at the time. It is a mere ceremony in a beautifully decorated Church. For this group, there is no spiritual component and divorce can be sort for at anytime without recourse to the Church since it was a mere ceremony.

The Holy Bible admonishes those in marital relationship to model their relationship on the relationship between Christ and the Church. **“ You who are wives, be submissive to your husbands; this is your duty in the Lord; husbands love your wives. Avoid any bitterness towards them; you, children, obey your parents in everything as the acceptable way to the Lord. And fathers do not nag your children lest they lose heart” (Col. 3: 18-21). Also in Eph.5: 22-32).**

Love is an important ingredient in Christian marriage and when this is lacking, it undermines the relationship.

5. Cultural Principles:

Nigerian-Igbo marriages can be classified as traditional, church and civil marriage. All these form are validated by the payment of the so-called bride price (bride wealth). Both the Church and civil forms have their foundation in the traditional marriage form and are validated by it. The church wedding will not take place unless the traditional form has been performed. This is rooted in the knowledge that marriage is between one family and

another – the bride's and the groom's. We can never overemphasize the role of the immediate and extended family in the choice of partners in the Nigerian-Igbo culture. The alliance between by the two families is threatened when the relationship isn't working; and just as the two families are involved in the choice and approval of marriage partners, they must come together to resolve marriage differences. It is therefore assumed that it is the responsibility of the extended family to settle problems among couples when they cannot do it themselves. The extended family includes the two families of the bride and groom, kits and kin, friends and close elders. The inclusion of elders is re-enforced by the overwhelming respect for elders within the culture. However, since respect for elders is not as strong in the American multicultural society, the elder's function is very much undermined. Today, the Nigerian society places more emphasis on wealth and social status rather than on age as used to be the case. This further diminished respect for age and their ability to be mediators in marital issues. As I mentioned in the first chapter, mediation in marriage problems require integrity, honesty and ability to maintain confidentiality. This is further compounded by the fact that there are not enough elders from Nigeria living in America from whom to choose. It makes the intervention of priests/ministers of religion crucial especially priests with the same cultural background with the disturbed family. Knowledge of both the cultural background of the couple, the understanding of marriage in the American culture and family therapy as a process is of great advantage. These are necessary because, the Nigerian-Igbo couples are not likely to go to a western family therapist for help. Combination of the traditional method in the light of the environment in which the couples now live will better equip the priest

mediator. In addition, the theological background (if the wedding is celebrated in the religious rite) will help immensely.

In doing marriage counseling among the Nigerian-Igbo couples, it is important to note that divorce is an extreme rarity. Counselors should not venture to suggest divorce to Nigerian-Igbo couples even if it is the only alternative or solution. Part of the reason is because issue of divorce is not limited to the individual husband and wife. It affects the two families, the middle person, the community and all persons that played significant roles in bringing about the union. The elaborate wedding rituals and ceremonies as it were, eternally joined the entire families and the community in the marriage. The temptation to suggest divorce should be resisted. It will be a last resort and not within the competence of a therapeutic process. Many couples believe that marriage is for life and that they will be able to work things out. Rather than encourage divorce, efforts should be made to remind the couple of their responsibility to teach one another, their family and the community. They are encouraged to resolve their marital misunderstandings within their sealed marriage relationship without bringing in a third party.

It is worthy of note that in African cultures generally, marital relationship ending in divorce does not favor the woman, unless there are clearly defined reasons for the divorce. It is generally concluded that it is the fault of the woman. This will in turn affect her chances of re-marrying. Nigerian-Igbo men are generally scared to marry a divorce woman or even from her entire family. All the unmarried girls in the family of a divorced woman are at risk of no man coming to ask for their hands in marriage. It is expected that, a woman once married accepts and endures whatever condition she may experience in marriage, at least for the sake of her children. This suggests that she may not divorce

her husband of whatever reason. It is almost like the Christian teaching on marriage. This may be overly sexist but it is in line with the patriarchal orientation of the Igbo culture. The Nigerian-Igbo woman accepts it when she accepts the hands of the man in marriage and is aware of the implications. Problems may arise when the woman who feels this culture is oppressive to the female gender lives outside that cultural environment where this is practiced. This may account for the reasons why many Nigerian-Igbo couples begin to experience problems with their marriages as soon as they come into the United States. The woman feels liberated from this oppressive culture. This feeling is exacerbated by feminist environment that has become part of the American society. The women begin to look at their own culture from the lenses of the American culture on women. It is then seen from the overall perspective of the oppression of women all over the world, even in religious circles. Consequently, the "liberated" Nigerian-Igbo woman takes advantage of the environment and begins to operate against the principles of marriage in her home culture because they are not in her favor. Hence, many Nigerian-Igbo women threaten to divorce their husbands and talk about kicking them out of the house. It is almost an abomination for a woman in the Igbo culture to say such a thing about her husband. She will be called to answer, not only to her husband but also to the "Umunna"- the extended family. In the American environment, this is not only allowed; it is encouraged and supported.

On the other hand, the African or Nigerian-Igbo male does not see it in terms of oppression of women but as their culture, which happens to be patriarchal. The more he tries to protect this culture in a foreign land, the more he is frustrated. The environment does not support his culture. This results in family problems.

Secondly, divorce is like a social stigma on a divorced woman in Igbo culture. It does not only affect the divorced woman but all un-married girls in the family. If, for example, a man is interested in marrying a girl from a particular family, and during the initial inquiry it is found that one of the girls relatives had been divorced once, this casts a lot of doubts in the minds of the interested man and his family. The doubt may be out of fear that the family may have unresolved issues about marriage. Could it be a family issue, people may begin to ask. Many interpretations are speculated as to the reason for the divorce. If for example, it is speculated that she has planned to poison her former husband, or that is she is a way ward women, she may well forget the idea of ever marrying again.

This goes to support that, in the Nigerian-Igbo culture, divorce does not favor the woman. But in the American culture, it does and even provides for it.

Moreover, because the Nigerian-Igbo culture on marriage is patriarchal the children belong to the man in the event of a divorce. There are no processes for child custody battle to be engaged.

The Nigerian-Igbo woman that has no prior agenda before marriage, and for coming to the United States is very slow when it comes to issues of divorce. Those who threaten their husbands with divorce here in America are merely taking advantage of the situation of the marital status in the American society. They know in their hearts that it is not to their best interest. It may be a way of calling the may to order, especially if he is not living up to his responsibilities as the head of the family. Those who actually carry out the threat, by implication, will not want to go back to their home country. It is not a very respectable thing for a woman to be divorced in the Nigerian-Igbo culture. While here they are protected by the environment and have nothing to worry about.

Most women do not like to relinquish the custody of their child to just anybody. The Nigerian-Igbos have a cultural understanding that **"the child belongs" to the community**". The extended family members take it as part of their responsibility to intervene and possibly take custody of the child without resort to legal actions. In the American legal system, this is called "informal adoption" and there are legal implications to the person seeking the custody before this can be effective.

Rather than give away a child to the larger society by way of adoption, or foster homes, the extended family members in the Nigerian-Igbo culture take up the responsibility of taking care of the child especially if the parents are incapacitated.

In the American culture however, there is no guarantee that the extended family will be granted custody of a child whose parents have marital issues. This is a cause for concern to Nigeria couples that have marital problems. They would prefer to keep it within themselves. It will be very shameful for the extended family if one of their own is given out for adoption or worse of all, put in a foster home. Children always lose out in the event of marital problems and probable divorce. They are torn apart between two parents and may begin to wonder what roles they played in their parents' problems.

Linda Jacobs and Carol Wachs (1996) observed that the particularly problematic issue in this situation is that children may be thinking they are responsible for their parents' marital problems and blame themselves for the rupture of the relationship.

The extended family system sees to it that children are saved this feeling by providing within this net-work, the love and care they need to move on with their lives. This is one of the strength of this system among others. Children are given out to capable members of the system, who take care of them as they would their own children. Wherever the

Nigerian-Igbos live, there is always a meeting of the "Umunna" in which the plan and prepare for some unforeseeable circumstances like we have mentioned above.

6. Psycho/Social Principles: Confronting marital issues connected with Nigerian-Igbo couples in America, one observes a lot of mixed feelings: Sadness to be away from home and the other, happy for being away from the same home. How things have changed. The man is nostalgic. When he was in his home country things were different and better. There, he is in command of situations. In America, he is not and so **he is under Pressure.**

The patriarchal system of his Nigerian-Igbo culture gives him an edge as man. This system is not designed to oppress women but rather a matter of culture. He is determined to protect this culture whatever it takes him. The culture in the American society in which he lives is oppressive and he wished he were home. Yet he cannot get himself to decide whether to stay or to go. These feelings evoke in him anger and frustration and he often vents his frustration on his family, especially the wife whom he considers luckier than he is. The American culture is on her side. The byproduct of these feelings is embittered marital relationships and the need for family therapy. He even resists therapy because it is not his culture. He barely accepted to show up before a priest because he is one like him. That he is not able to provide for his family drives him crazy. He is helpless and until he decides to leave, things are not likely to change. He is ashamed of himself. He cannot provide for his family. What kind of a man am I, he often would chide himself.

On the other hand, his wife feels differently. Things couldn't be better for her. She feels relieved, escaping from an oppressive culture to a land of freedom. A feeling of being

liberated from decision-making process that does not put her into consideration. She now has her way. At the same time **she is under Pressure** as result of the new role she must assume. She is very distrustful of her husband who feels very uncomfortable with her new role. She is often burdened with the task of being the 'bread winner' of the family. This frustrates her. It all means she has to work extra hard to accomplish this. She is not used to this way of life. The American culture assures her that she does not need the man to survive without the man, especially if he cannot be the man of the house- the protector and the provider. She doesn't even need his protection. The law protects her. She can provide for herself. Of what use then is the man to her. "You are better off without him", her friends tell her work place. She comes back home stressed out, she must go straight to bed so that she will be able to work the following day. It dons on her that the children have not been fed. They are not used to eating out. She has to cook. But why won't he do the cooking, she thought for a while. Very angry, she stumbles in to the kitchen area and there he is watching the television. She cannot continue to live this way. I am not his slave, she said to herself and finally, she summoned the courage to speak to him. I want a divorce, she threatened. She knows it is not a solution. Their culture does not look kindly on divorced women. Meanwhile, the children are watching the silent drama. They learn very fast and before you know it they are acting out.

This is nothing short of culture clash resulting in the reversal of roles, favorable and unfavorable, wanted and unwanted.

It is hoped that these feelings will be resolved in a counseling process before a priest. This is the reason for this project. How can I save a marital relationship like this, helping them decide to stay so that their dreams for being her will come true.

7. Children And Family Life:

Children are greatly valued in the Nigerian-Igbo family. They are the seal of marriage. If a marriage does not produce children, it is very likely that there will be a divorce in the future, either arranged or demanded. It is very rare to see any marriage that has produced children break up. It is right to say that children in a marriage safeguard the relationship.

Consequently, an erring child in a family is a cause for great concern, not only for the immediate parents, but all the members of the extended family. As a family, they will go to any length to bring the erring child to sanity. Depending on the gravity of the offense, gifts, amicable talks, or physical threats and even the denial of some necessities may be used to win back the delinquent child. If the immediate parents feel unable to call the child to order, he/she may be sent to live with a distant relative who is not likely to tolerate any nonsense from him or her.

If a child commits a really serious offence, parents will report him or her to the teacher/principal who has the authority to use any disciplinary measures to correct the erring child. Teachers are very well respected in many African countries, and somewhat of reverential fear, until recently. Regrettably respect for teachers in the Nigerian-Igbo schools/culture, and their contribution towards the upbringing of children has waned over the years. However, no matter how much it has waned, it has not reached the level where pupils can call cops on their teachers for the flimsiest reasons. Instead of parents objecting to such behavior, they win their parents' support. Parents in the Igbo culture are very appreciative when an extended family member, friend or even neighbor, corrects their child. Parents feel that individual has concern for their child's future. Actually, it is

a manifestation of interest in the well fare of that child. Refusal to do this in the Igbo culture means you do not love the child and do not care about his/her future.

Children particularly play very important role in Nigerian-Igbo families. They prolong the life of their parents (when they are well behaved) and through them the name of the family is perpetuated. Children, therefore are the glory of marriage and family, the more the number of children, the greater their glory. In view of the present economic reality, the number may not be such a great idea. Mbiti, John (1975) had this to say, "the economic conditions of modern life are beginning to undermine this view" (pg. 112).

Another strength in the extended family system is evident in a situation when a particular parents of a child passes, a member of the extended family will undertake to provide for the education of that child to whatever level he /she is capable of achieving. Most of us are beneficiaries of this kind of arrangement. The Igbo say that, **"one person does not own the child"**, suggesting that "the child belong to the community".

Against this background, the Nigerian-Igbo couple is worried if a member of the family is not living up to expectations and there is concern that he/she may not be able to honor the family name. This is really a cause for great concern for parents, not only because the family name will be disgraced, but most importantly, it means that they will have nobody to take care of them in their old age. High value is placed on having children who, among other things, will later take care of the aging parents. Parents therefore leave no stone unturned to rescue an erring child, not only for the child's sake but also for their own sake, in old age. It is propelled by both fear of failure and abandonment at old age. When parents become old and weak, it is the duty of the children to look after the parents and the affairs of the family. Finally when the parents die, it is the duty of their surviving

children to bury them properly, to remember them, to look after their graves, and to keep a good relationship with their departed parents who are now spirits of the living dead. This explains part the reasons why most Nigerian-Igbos, and in fact Africans generally tend to have more children than other cultures. All things being equal, some of the many children will carry on the family name. Having only one or two children is so much of a risk to take, in case of death.

Many parents in the American society have problem correcting their erring children. Non- family members cannot even dare, or risk being accused of children abuse. Nigerian-Igbo parents sometimes threaten to send their children back to the native country where they will be taken care of properly. Members of the extended family take up the challenge of taking care of the child, instead of loosing him or her to social services that are alien to their way of life. It is part of their effort to prepare their children to live responsible adult lives.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Description of Methods:

This chapter will basically be made up of two parts. The methodology of carrying out this project will consist of two case studies. Each case study will focus on one of the two types of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families in the parts.

a.) Those Nigerian-Igbo couples who married after one of them had lived in the USA for a while, the goes back to the home country to marry and returns to the USA with the spouse. The case study for this group is about a couple, A B. A is the husband and B is the wife. B came to complain to me about the state of their marital relationship, which she said is not very cordial. She requested that I intervene. This necessitated my inviting A for a one on one meeting. Finally I met A B together as a couple. Eventually, a support group is formed to serve as a resource for future references and help for couples who may have similar marital problems like A B. The process is by one on one meetings with clients, support group sessions, and the use of questionnaires prepared to reflect the problems common among couples in this group.

b.) Those Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families who married in their home country, lived for sometime there as husband and wife before they had the opportunity to come to the United States. The case study is about the family of Obi (husband), Nkechi (wife), Emmanuel (their son) and two other unnamed daughters. They all arrived to the USA and started life here afresh. Obi came in to see me about their son, Emmanuel who was

accused of the possession drugs found in his school locker. Both of his parents were devastated and requested that I talk to Emmanuel. It turned out that Emmanuel's problem originated from his family. The parents, Obi and Nkechi have been so busy with their jobs and had no time to look after their children. Emmanuel was not actually into drugs but his acting out sends a message to his parents and pointed out to them how negligent they have been with their children. Obi blamed the American culture of work, work and the need to provide, not only for his immediate family, but also the extended family they left back in Nigeria. These people need their help and he is not ready to let them down. This eventually left him no time to take care of his immediate family. The process will be through one on one meeting. First, I will met each of the clients, Obi and Nkechi (as a couple). Then with Emmanuel. Finally, I will meet with the three of them, Obi, Nkechi and Emmanuel together.

2. CASE STUDY 1: Couple A B: A as the Husband; B as the wife.

The following is the case study of a Nigerian-Igbo couple in the first group focused in this project. A B in this study are all Nigerians and have lived in America for ten years as husband and wife, with three kids all born in this country. They have some problem with their marital relationship and have requested that I help them find a solution. B came to me first to complain about the state of their marriage. Subsequently, I invited A for a meeting alone. This is my first meeting with A in the therapeutic process.

A B met in college in the early seventies and dated for a while before A had the opportunity to come to the United States of America to pursue his studies. B meanwhile studied to become a registered nurse. They were not keeping any kind of communications while A was away from home. There was no commitment whatsoever.

A spent a long time in the USA and still was unable to complete his undergraduate studies all these years. When eventually he wanted to get married, (after receiving many strongly worded letters from his parents reminding him of how he is not getting any younger) the message is clear enough; it is time to get married.) , B was a natural choice. It was necessary that he goes back to his home country, first because he has not been home for ten years. Secondly, his parents had warned him against marrying a white woman. So he had to travel and soon on arrival, he reconnected with B. She was at that time working in their state hospital as a nurse. A was attracted to his old college friend, mostly especially because of her profession as a nurse. As will be discovered as this case progresses, B's profession as a nurse, was the main attraction for reconnecting with her. He wants to marry a nurse. If he did not find one, he will suggest to who ever he marries to become a nurse. This is the general mentality among Nigerian-Igbo men and women in the United States. It will not be long before the intentions for their choices; to take advantage of the lucrative nature of the medical and allied professions in the United States for monetary gain. This has constituted the greatest cause of marital misunderstandings among Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. Alex Kabba, writing in the newspaper, ABROAD-USA" numbered this issue as one of the dumbest mistakes immigrants from Nigeria make.

He writes that many immigrants make the mistake of thinking that their fellow immigrants are not good enough to be their spouse. They now undertake the very expensive odyssey of going back to the homeland to marry wives and husbands and import them to the USA in a very expensive exercise. Some feel that because they married their spouse, whom they hardly know from Africa, they would be able to control them. They are indeed mistaken! Experience has shown that it takes exactly six months before these spouses get on the ways of America. (Africa; Abroad-USA, January 30, 2005, page 30).

This is a bitter truth and it is applicable to many couples like A B in this case study. It takes this much time because since America is a land of freedom, it takes that amount of time before the green horn spouse who you brought from Nigeria begins to claim their rights in the home. With all these in mind, and not knowing the ramifications, A proposes marriage to B after a few dating. B was glad to accept the proposal. After all she too wants to marry someone living in America. Only very few Nigerian girls can resist such marriage proposal from a suitor living in America. However, since she comes from a good Catholic and influential family, and her father being a member of the Knights of saint Columbus, she demanded that their wedding must be blessed in the Church. A agreed to this demand. He wanted an opportunity to show off his hard earned American dollars. Moreover, his prayer to marry a nurse has been answered, and he would not need to educate one himself. He has very short time to accomplish all this before going back to the USA and so no time to be wasted. A B quickly arranged to meet their parents formally. As is to be expected, their acceptance is a foregone conclusion. Which Nigerian parents in their right mind would refuse to be

the father/mother-in-law of a suitor living in America, an issue that plays an important role in the future of A B's life together. There was no expression of love between the two intending couple, which is a very bad sign. Except for the ceremonial offering and acceptance of a glass of palm wine, (according to tradition it indicates acceptance of the proposal), there was not formal profession of love. For A, the more important thing is that he got what he wanted, to marry a woman of his dream that is a nurse. For B, it offers an opportunity to share in the American dreams. Unfortunately, love that ought to form the foundation of any marital relationship was not talked about. This oversight will manifest itself a few years into their married life in the United States. Among the Nigerian-Igbos, marriage is a normal condition for both a man and woman. It is a thing of pride and credit to parents and family members if a prospective suitor proposes marriage to their daughter and vice versa. The pride is enhanced when the suitor is living in America.

Within a couple of weeks, plans for the traditional marriage, 'Igba Nkwu Nwanyi' and Church wedding were well underway. Nothing will delay the process. The young man living in America came back with enough money to take care of all expenses. Unfortunately, the most important ingredient for a successful marriage has been sacrificed for wealth and pressure for time. It will inevitably be required, if the marriage must work out, but by then the harm has already been done. The celebrations that followed are unbounded.

3. Meeting with B:

When B walked into my office that evening, she looked very worried and unkempt. From her appearance it is easy to tell that whatever was bothering her must be serious.

Efforts to crack some familiar native jokes to make her smile proved unsuccessful. This is an indication that this problem is weighing heavily on her. I quickly moved to offer her a chair and motioned her to sit down. I asked in Ibo language if she would prefer to speak in our native language. She, however choose to speak in the English language.

B: Good evening Fr OK. I am sorry to disturb you with my problems. It is just that I can no longer keep them to my self.

Fr OK: Good evening to you too. You are not disturbing me at all. How can I be of use to you? You look worried. How may I help you?

B: It is about my marriage with A. I am fed up with the way things are between us and I am ready to call it quit any moment from now, unless something is done fast.

Fr OK: What is happening? I meet you and A during the last Igbo cultural evening and you both looked so happy together. The problem did not start overnight, did it?

B: Not really. We have been pretending for five years out of the ten we have been married, or should I say, I have been pretending for five years with the hope that things will improve. Instead, it is getting worse. I have endured all the mistreatments from A for the sake of peace and our kids. We go to church every Sunday but I cannot go for Holy Communion because I am not happy with the situation of things in our marriage. I am afraid that the kids have noticed what is going on between us and they are acting out.

Fr OK: For sure, it will affect them. For five years, you said? Why did you wait for so long? Were you hoping that time will heal the problem? Perhaps.

B: You see, Fr, when A came from America and proposed to marry me, I was intrigued with the idea of marrying a man living in the USA. Inwardly, I was not very comfortable because I did not love him and he never asked me. He persisted, and you know how our

people behave. My parents pressured me, lecturing me on how with time I am going to cultivate love as we live together. My mother gave me a long talk on how she did not love my father initially and now how much they love each other. She even called in her brother (my uncle) and his wife to talk to me about my feeling. Eventually, they succeeded in breaking my will and trusted them. I wish I didn't. And here I am after ten years of marriage and nothing has changed. I am not even getting close to loving A. Unfortunately, none of them is around to talk to about what is happening. Even A himself assured me that the situation here is different and that I would in a better position to help my family. Now I understand what he meant when he said "the situation is different". The love he ever showed me was during my first five years when I was having the kids and preparing my nursing certification examination. Every other time is focused on knowing how much money I am making as a nurse and how independent I have become. To make matters worst, he quit his job, complaining about how mean his female supervisor is to him. I thought he completed his degree program. He quit as well. I did not know of this until recently. I have come to discover that he told me a lot of lies about how he now prefers to be a cab driver instead of a regular job, and how it gives him time to bring up the kids properly. All that was lies. The truth is, he has not got the academic qualifications to look for a good job. The whole family is now dependent on whatever I can make as a nurse. He realizes that he is the man in the house when it comes to giving orders and not in providing for his family. This is killing me. I have to do a lot of overtime to meet up with our expenses. I cannot explain what he does with the little money he makes with the cab driving work. If we did not marry in church, which was all my

suggestion, I would have gone for divorce. Fr Ok, will you help me go through this process?

Fr OK: (I was overwhelmed by her story. I have heard similar stories before but this is like an eyewitness account. B has raised a lot of issues not uncommon with many Nigerian-Igbo couples. In want of where to start, I asked her. What process? Referring to the question, will you help me through this process?

B: (Apologizing for using the word process, she said, I am referring to marriage annulment in the church).

Fr OK: B, you have raised a lot of issues about your marriage. I wonder whether annulment is a solution at this point. Would you rather not prefer we try to address some of the serious issues you raised with A? Annulment, I think should be as a last resort. What do you think?

B: I did not think about it that way. I have been through a lot of pressure with A, so much that all that comes to mind is how to get out of his life. At one point, I suggested that we see a family therapist in our hospital but he would have none of that, saying that there is nothing wrong with him and so does not need a therapist. It is waste of money, he said. Even if he accepted to go, I will be made to pay the cost and that would mean that I would have to do some more extra hours of work. Please, Fr OK, help me.

Fr OK: I will surely help B, if you let me know how. Do you want me to speak with A first before we know what to do next?

B: I will appreciate it very much. That way you will get to know some of the things I spoke to you about. Though, I am afraid he will accuse me of reporting him to the priest but I don't have a choice. I have to find a solution to my situation. What all he is putting

me through, he pretends to be serious about going to church and receiving the sacrament. I don't. He may be willing to speak to you because you are a priest and not a therapist. I am even more worried about how the whole thing is going to affect our marriage as far as the Church is concerned.

Fr OK: Okay, B. I will make out time to talk with him alone and see where we go from there. If nothing changes, I may have to call the two of you together. How about that?

B: That is a good idea. I appreciate all the help and I look forward to hearing from you.

Fr OK: It is my please. I am glad to help. I will get back to you as soon as I speak to A.

(B left the office brightened up, a lot received and cheerful than when she came in. I was equally relieved, knowing that I am able to help her, even momentarily. More meetings with the couple is anticipated. Perhaps all she needs for now is someone to talk to, and ears to listen to her story without being judgmental).

4. Meeting with A:

Armed with all the information from my meeting with B, I am ready to invite A for a chat. B raised a lot of issues that could form greater part of our discussions. I am also aware that religion and spirituality play an important role in his life, as is generally known of African people. B even referred to his religious sentiments. I had met A in different occasions and circumstance but hardly enough to guess what type of personality he is and how he is likely to respond to situations as this. However, I called his house to set up an appointment. That was my first time calling him and it is bound to raise questions. He was not at home at the time, so I left a message that he should call me as soon as he came back. He did call and as I expected, expressed surprise that I called his house. I was relieved that he did not ask why I called his house considering his relationship with B. We agreed to meet by 7.00pm the following day in the rectory office. He would have loved that I come to his house, he said, but I think it would be more convenient for me to talk to him in the parish office. I did not want B to know about our meeting at this point.

A arrived at the rectory promptly, full of expectations and not knowing the reason for my inviting him. Being a catholic, with some marital issues, he must have suspected something. It appears like a cultural thing with men generally, that they would not want to be the first to report marriage problems outside their immediate family. It will mean he is not man enough to handle his family affairs. I welcomed A and offered him a seat. I noticed he was eager to talk and as soon as I sat down myself, A asked:

A: I hope there is no problem Fr Ok. I was surprised when Chidi (A B's son) told me you called my house and wanted me to call you back. Is everything okay with you?

FR OK: Everything is okay, or do you suppose otherwise?

A: Not that I know, Fr Ok.

FR OK: Good. Then relax. You look so tensed as if you have done something wrong. Anyway, how are you doing with your job and how is your family? I know how hard you guys work in order to pay the bills.

A: Fr Ok, I must be honest with you. You are my own person. I stopped work almost a year ago. I am now driving a cab. I can no longer bear the insults in my work place. I don't want to get nervous break down.

Fr OK: Wow, sorry to hear that. How are you coping with the family expenses? Do you make enough money driving cab?

A: Not enough Fr Ok. It is better than being treated like a slave in my job everyday.

Fr OK: Did you consider getting another job? You really need a good paying job to enable you take care of your family.

A: The fact, Fr is that it is difficult for me to get a better job at this time until I do something about my education. I didn't finish my degree. You know, when I came to this America, things were okay for me until the Nigerian government terminated the scholarship under which I studied. Even before I traveled home to Nigeria to marry, I was doing a security job, a job available to most immigrants on arrival or with no substantial education. But that job sustained me then because I was alone by myself.

FR OK: Does B know about your educational situation and that you cannot get a better job as a result of that?

A: Yes, I had to tell her, but not until we came back to the United States after our wedding otherwise she would never have agreed to marry me.

FR OK: Does it mean that you intentionally deceived her into marrying you? How did she feel when you finally told her?

A: Five years ago, it would not mean so much to her. I worked and supported her and she respected me a lot. But now that she is providing almost all the money for our domestic expenses, I am "Mr Nobody". She completely forgot that if not for me she would not have come to the United States.

Fr OK: Do you feel she owes you for bringing her to the United States?

A: Not at all, I am not one of those men who hold it against their wife or husband. After all, Is she not my wife? She is the one reminding me of how useless I am. In the Nigerian culture, she is absolutely right. If a man can no longer provide for his family, he is no longer the man in the house. If ever there is any problem with us, this is the cause. She has threatened me many times with divorce. I am not going there with her. I need your help to this regard, Fr Ok. We got married in the Catholic Church and are both communicants, even though she recently decided not to go and that worries me. Divorce is not in accordance with the laws of the Catholic Church on marriage, isn't it? I know I have made mistakes but that is not enough reason to call for divorce. This is part of the American factor. She is listening to a lot gossips from her friends and co-workers advising her to get reed of me. Whenever she comes back from work, the situation changes, she begins one trouble or another. I have finally decided not to talk back at her. Imagine that since after the birth of our last child, we have not had any sexual relationship. That is how bad it has gotten. Yet we live in the same house, yet we are husband and wife. One day she threatened that she will call the cops to eject me from the house. All because I no longer can support my family as

I used to. If not for my kids, I would have moved out on my own. She forgot that for five years, she did not work and I supported the family all by my self. I did not sue for divorce then nor did I complain to anybody. Fr Ok, please I will appreciate it very much if you bring us together to talk about these issues. It was like God sent you to make that call to my house. I do not know who to talk to again. I once called in some Igbo elders to mediate but she got offended and told the men off. She does not want them to intervene. I acted in accordance with our traditional means of settling marital issues. Now these elders are reluctant to get involved. They feel insulted. I do not know who else to call in because there are not many of them here in America. I must tell you this, Fr Ok, that there are similar problems in many Nigerian-Igbo families in this country today. Mine is just a tip of the iceberg. I will therefore appreciate it if you will decide to help us to address these issues in my family. I don't think divorce is the answer. It may be the American way to settle marital misunderstandings but in our culture, we believe in family intervention and dialogue, especially with a person of your calling.

Fr Ok: Okay, A. I will do what it takes to help your family. Before then, may I request that you speak with B on the issues you raised with me once again.

You will be surprised to hear that B initiated this meeting. She has complained to me the state of your marital relationship and that required that I meet with you.

A: I have tried to talk to her many times before our relationship began to deteriorate but each time she became very aggressive and I stopped. Now I prefer to be silent otherwise she might carry out her threat of calling the cops to eject me out of own house. You know the law in this country. I love my children very much and would

not want to be separated from them. I know she cannot care for them properly by herself. I cannot afford to loss my children to this system, my own children being put in a foster care when I am still alive. I would be better dead when that happens. Since you have suggested that we discuss these issues once more, I will try my best to bring it up one of these days. I am not sure about how she will react, but I will do it.

Fr OK: Are you scared about what is going on?

A: I am scared to death, Fr Ok. Look at my children. We may be giving them the wrong messages. What about our sacramental life as Catholics? How can we be receiving the sacraments when we cannot talk to each other. This is unchristian. Don't you think so?

Fr Ok: I appreciate your concerns, especially about your children and your sacramental life in the church. Children can easily become victims in situations such as this; that is why the government steps in to protect them. I must thank you for responding to my call. Probably, B is as worried about the situation as you are. If that is the case, there is hope for a peaceful resolution of this conflict. I will get back to you as soon as I can.

A: I should be thanking you, Fr Ok. I am looking forward to hearing from you. Our meeting has given me a lot of relief and I am encouraged to face B. Thank you and God continue to bless you.

Fr Ok: Take care and you have a good evening.

(A truly went home in a brighter mood than he came in I am impressed by the outcome of the session without reference to my meeting with B. Since both are willing to talk, I will soon arrange a meeting with them.

5. Meeting A B Together:

Having heard from A B and analyzed the dynamics of their relationship, and the issues raised by both of them, I feel comfortable to meet them as a couple. After all they both expressed the desire to discuss the issues raised during the separate meetings. I therefore called their house to set up an appointment and behold A B were at home. B picked the phone and when she heard my voice, she requested that I give her a second so that she can take my call from the bedroom. I guessed both of them were in the sitting area and she perhaps does not want A to hear our conversation.

However, I suggested that she puts A on the line since I want to speak to both of them. She must have been very surprised, judging from the sound of her voice. When I insisted, A answered from the second phone line, equally surprised. Not wanting to prolong the drama, I asked them both to choose any day convenient to them so that we can have a talk together. I wished I were in the room with them to observe the reactions. However, A said that they will choose a day and call me back. They called back a few hours later to inform me that they are ready to talk with me the following day. B will call off from work and they will arrange to leave the kids with the day care center. I was excited that they are making the arrangements themselves. It means that they are communicating with each other. I prepared my mind for the meeting by reflecting on the issues raised during my individual meeting with them. Mistrust, deception and lies, anger, low self-esteem/image as a result of A's inability to provide for the family, stress under pressure evident in B's life, threat with divorce and guilt feeling. A B arrived promptly the following day as promised by 5.00pm. They arrived in the same car. I was relieved by the

fact that they rode in the same car. On entering the office, I offered them seats opposite each other, making sure they cannot avoid making eye contacts.

Fr Ok: You are both welcome to St Augustine's parish. What is the name of your parish in the Bronx? (I asked, not addressed to any particular person).

A: We are members of Saints Simon and Jude parish. I have belonged to that parish all our time living in New York.

Fr Ok: Do you belong to any special group in your church, like lectors, Ushers or Eucharistic ministers?

B: I wish I did, Fr Ok. I have a lot to do these days. Between doing my regular job and house keeping. Some times I do over time.

Fr Ok: Okay, I just wanted to know. How are you two doing? (There was a period of some uncomfortable silence. B, expecting A to answer first. Finally, A answered).

A: We are fine, Fr Ok.

Fr Ok: Great. Though I called for this meeting, may I give you this quiz about your relationship as married couple. About what percentage would you rate your relationship? 90%, 70%, 50%, 30%. B, kindly answer first.

B: Fr Ok, to be honest with you, I will say that there is no relationship between us for the past five years. We happen to be living in the same house.

Fr Ok: How do you mean? Has it come to this extent, A?

A: If by that she means from the time I have not been able to provide for my family, then she is right. If she is equating our relationship to material acquisition, then she is again right. Otherwise we are still married and there is a relationship. Even though she was at first reluctant to marry me when I proposed to her, but for the first five years of our

marriage, things moved okay until I lost my job and so the role reversed. It is since she has been the sole breadwinner that everything fell apart.

B: That is not true. It is since I discovered that he deceived me. He did not tell me that he did not finish his education; he did not tell me that he was working as a security officer. He lied that the supervisor in his work place was mean to him. He did not let me know of all these facts until I had to find out by myself. When I confronted him, he still did not want to come out clean. My anger is not because I am working and supporting the family all by myself, rather because she has been deceiving me with lies upon lies. He is taking me for a fool. I hate to be deceived like that and more so by my so-called husband. If not for matters of faith in God and our sacramental marriage, I would not have come to meet you, Fr Ok.

Fr Ok: There are litanies of lies and deception. It sounds like you no longer trust A?

B: How can I and who can ever trust a person with this history of deception. When two people in a marital relationship cannot be honest with themselves, that relationship is completely destroyed.

Fr Ok: I see your point. Trust is important in any relationship. (Meanwhile, A sat quietly with his head bowed down with his left palm supporting his chin. Looking towards A, asked): How do you feel about all B said.

A: I am dumb-founded by these allegations and B never confronted me with these issues.

Fr Ok: Are you suggesting that they are not correct?

A: I am not suggesting that, Fr Ok. All I am saying is that we should have discussed these issues between us.

B: That is not correct. We have talked about them several times, remember? That was why you called in some elders from your hometown. I rejected their mediation some of them are the same people opposed to our marriage from the beginning.

A: I am surprised that you are still carrying this in your mind all these years.

B: I neither trust you nor your people at this moment.

A: I am sorry about giving you the impression that I cannot be trusted. The situation in this country can make one appear to be what he actually is not. You may have noticed that there are a lot of similar situations in most of the Nigerian families living in this country. When roles are reversed, what do you expect? No man is happy if he cannot provide for his wife and kids. It puts him in an awkward situation. Most of us are trying to take advantage of the position of women in this country to keep our pride.

Fr Ok: (I interrupted A and asked). Who are the "most of us"? There are three of us in this room. How do you mean?.

A: I am sorry for making that reference, but I hope you don't presume that only B and I are the only ones having marital problems in this country. It is common among most immigrant families, arising from the kind of situation most men find themselves in this multi-cultural society. It is an issue worth addressing in most Nigerian-Igbo families in the USA and those who are planning to come here from home. It is a known fact that some laws in this country favor women, which some of them often use against their husbands. This situation makes the Nigerian-Igbo male from our own kind of patriarchal culture feel humiliated and left out. Some try to get over it sooner than later, others never.

Fr Ok: (A digressed from the marital issues between him and B to cultural matters as if to say that they are contributive to his family's and other families' problems.

Transference from the issues at hand to the presumed cause of the problems. "It has rendered us impotent to perform our duties as men in the house, this culture is to blame" he said. It is clear that A is not accepting responsibility for what is going on in his family. He is rather blaming the culture for all the woes, which he has ascribed also to other Nigerian families. I thought about calling A back to the issues about his family for which we are here, but on second thought I held back, to allow him talk more about his feelings on the American culture that is causing the whole problem in his family. At this point, I remembered the story of Uche. *Uche has scheduled an appointment to talk about vocations to the priesthood. On his way to the venue he was stopped by a police officer, who gives him a lecture on how not to drive and a ticket for running a red light. Uche arrives for the talk late and very agitated. He tries to talk about vocation to the priesthood but cannot help being preoccupied with his feelings on the encounter with the police officer, which left him unfocused and anxious. He failed to address the main issue for which he was invited. He blamed himself, saying how he should have been paying more attention, and how his superiors will be very disappointed with him.*

These concerns expressed by A are worth exploring even when they sound off the point of discussion. Since he is psychologically okay, the emotions he expressed are invariably pertinent to his struggle to focus on the issues at hand. I felt awkwardly sympathetic towards A but could not show it. I rather promised to help address this problem on a wider scale. The encounter with the police officer prompted a fresh edition of Uche's worries about himself. On the same level, our focus on marital issues prompted A to revisit his feelings about the marriage of the American culture and his home culture, two cultures that will never merge except by compromise. This is applicable to his marital

relationship with B. It is a marriage of compromise, resulting from the two cultures. A's feelings about culture is pertinent to finding the means to resolving the problems in his marriage. He strongly expressed prejudice against American culture's understanding of marriage in comparison to his own culture. B, on the other hand was listening with rapt attention to what A has been saying. I thought she would have been agitated for the diversion from the main issue. So to make sure my conclusion is correct, I asked B.

How do you feel about what A is saying?

B: I never thought he felt this way. This is a man thing, may be. I am really touched and concerned about the way he is feeling in spite of all I am going through myself. It is not my intention to undermine his status as a man. I am happy as a woman. These issues need to be discussed in their specific contexts anyway. You cannot log everything together. We need to be specific.

A: (Looking directly at B, said). You can't imagine how I feel when I realize that I am not able to provide for my own family. Sometimes, I have thought about ending my own life on this account. Life is no longer worth living if you cannot live up to your responsibilities. Some men have gone into drugs business and have been caught and imprisoned. (A named a few people in prison for drug related offences). It is in their struggle to provide for their families that they got involved in such shady deals. Some take drugs and alcohol to drown their feeling you know those are temporary solutions. You should be happy for me, B that I have not taken to drugs. That is why I said, Fr Ok, that marital misunderstandings are common among Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. If it is not between husband and wife, it is with members of the extended family, either from the wife's side or the husband's. Honestly, we need all the help we can get to

this regard. I hope we can find the way to live in this country without breaking our marriages. I wish you, Fr Ok can help by organizing workshops to talk about these issues or form groups of interested couples. In our culture, if couples have marital problems, they invite members of their families to mediate when they cannot handle the matter themselves. In this culture we are expected to go to a family therapist who knows nothing about our concept of marriage.

B: I am overwhelmed by these feelings. I never knew how real they are except in gossips. I think we have to go back and try to make things work. There is need for better communication between couples, if not many important issues are not discussed.

Fr Ok: What do you mean by gossips?

B: It is girl's talk about how Nigerian-Igbo men are ever complaining about how the American multicultural society is destroying their culture on marriage. We are aware of it but it happens to be to our advantage.

Fr Ok: But it is also destructive to your marriage. Don't you care?

B: That is sad. I support what A said about seminars and groups to help couples. Many of us, I admit, have carried the idea of freedom too far without accepting the responsibility that goes with it. We need to be advised, most especially those just arriving newly in the culture. Divorce is not a solution. Generally, women don't get a lot of support from the extended family when there are problems between husband and wife.

Fr Ok (I was intrigued by the turn of the discussion and the suggestion for seminars and support groups. So I asked). How shall we go about these suggestions?

A: Fr Ok, I will provide you with a list of couples I know will appreciate this help.

Fr Ok: I will appreciate that very much. That will make you apostles of peace in families.

CASE STUDY 2 – The Family of Obi and Nkechi:

The couple arrived promptly for our meeting, looking friendly, without any signs of marital problems. Obi appeared anxious to talk, perhaps about his family. It seemed to have been a burden in his mind for a while and he wants to let it all out.

Obi and Nkechi are two Nigerian-Igbo couples. They arrived the United States of America about ten years ago after he won the diversity immigrant visa lottery, with three kids aged between five and nine at the time of arrival. Emma (6), Ogechi (4) and Ugo (2). All together they lived for fourteen years as husband and wife in their home country before coming to America. Said Obi, "Our coming to America is a dream come true. I had longed to go overseas for my graduate studies but my parents could not afford to pay for my passage. I had other siblings that must take their turns to get the basic education. So I did my bachelors degree in University of Nigeria, Nsukka and worked with the ministry of education as schools supervisor for a number of years. I married Nkechi, my wife for fifteen years. I met her during a seminar we organized for science teachers in my local government area. Nkechi was then a graduate teacher in one of the High schools under my supervision. We courted for six months and got married at a very beautiful church wedding in our parish church. It was a one in town wedding and we have lived very happily thereafter. We have since then taken our marriage vows seriously and before we got the opportunity to come to the United States, thanks to the visa lottery, I was a lector in our parish church. Nkechi was the leader of the Christian mothers. God has

blessed us in various ways and we experience God's presence in our lives. As a family we have kept our faith since we recognize that fact that we need God's help more and more, mostly now that we find ourselves in a different society and among people of different cultural backgrounds. We have three wonderful kids, of whom we are very proud of until we arrived in this country. I am telling all these stories to let you know that it has not always been this way. Our lives have been turned upside down because of our son. As Obi told the long story, I could not pick anything to suggest that anything was wrong with their marriage. I was tempted to cut in with a remark when he mentioned "and now our lives are turned upside down because of our son".

This statement offered me the opportunity to interrupt the story and a way of asking him to make his point.

Fr Ok: What happened? Tell me about it, if you don't mind. (Nkechi, who all the while was itching to say something, came in right away).

Nkechi: Our first son, Emmanuel has been suspended from school because his teacher found drugs inside his school locker. We are disappointed and outraged by this development. We spoke to him in confidence but he keeps denying that he has no idea how the stuff got into his locker.

Fr Ok: Do you trust your son to tell you the truth?

Obi: If it were two to three years ago, I will almost swear that he does not know anything about it. Today, Emmanuel has changed so much. He has been influenced by the environment and peer groups, so much so that I can no longer vouch for his behaviors. This discovery is like the last straw that broke the camel back. Last semester, the teacher wrote in the report that he is most of the time out of the class. I don't remember any day

he did not go to school. I personally drop him off to school every morning before I go to the office. I have done this religiously. His other siblings attend a different school. This is to give him a better opportunity to improve his grades. Being my first son I want to offer him the best opportunity to equip him for life. He made his first communion at the age of seven, one year after our arrival to the USA. He is sixteen years old this past June and we went out of our way to mark the occasion for him, with gifts and celebrations for him and his friends. We have as parents tried to set him in the right path, providing whatever he needed to be the best he can be. It will be a shame on my family if my first son turns out to be a disappointment. I don't know how Nkechi and I have offended that God to allow this to happen to us.

Fr Ok: I am sorry about what your family is going through. I don't think that either you or Nkechi has offended God in any way, for this to happen to you. I hope you don't mind if I ask you a few questions. Is there any history of drugs use in your family?

Obi: Not that I know. I can't even finish a bottle of alcoholic beverage. Nkechi does not drink anything except soda. We never abused drugs in our family. I am in the medical profession and I understand what that means.

Fr Ok: Now, the issue at hand is "how are we going to help Emmanuel in this situation. What do you suggest, Nkechi?

Nkechi: (Apparently uneasy with my inquiry concerning drugs in the family. She said);I wish we could find a place where he can get some help; where we can visit him regularly. Do you know of any mission-managed facility we can send him. That will be better than any of the ones run by government agencies or private individuals.

Obi: (interjected). That will ruin him completely. Instead of that I will send him back to Nigeria. My parents will be willing to take him in and they know how to handle him in that situation. People that go through any of those facilities never recovered. He is only sixteen.

Fr Ok: I understand how you feel and concerned about your son. We will put head together to find what is best for Emmanuel. Let us not rush into conclusion. Remember, he is just sixteen. This is a very critical age in the life of any teenager. By the way, how much time do you spend with your children?

Nkechi: Fr Ok, we must be honest about this issue. We spend little or no time with them. Most of the time, they are by themselves. Obi drops them off in the morning to school and by then I am already at work. I feel guilty about it and I am sure Obi feels the same. Some days, they are already in bed by the time we finally get home. It is difficult to know what they are doing when they are by themselves. I feel bad about it but what will I do. The only time we spend some quality time with them is when there is holiday and we are not working. Some of it is again taken up by house chores that cannot be done during the week. You know Fr Ok, I have not thought about it that way, that our not spending time with them may be responsible for what Emmanuel is going through. Oh my God.

Fr Ok: I am happy you are realizing that. Obi, what do you say. We may have discovered the real problem. It may not be with Emmanuel after all.

Obi: That is America for you. A country where both parents must work to make ends meet. I feel bad about not spending enough time with my children but what will I do. I can't afford to pay for a nanny to look after them while we are at work. Even all the money we make barely pays the bills, not to mention the incessant request from people at

home. We try to help them but they don't seem to understand what we go through here to make a living. It is real tough. I love Emmanuel very much. He is my first son "Opara". He is the one to take care of us when we are old.

Fr Ok: You have both expressed deep concern and sentiments about not spending time with your kids. As you have said, Obi, this is America. If you don't take care of your own the government will take over and I know you don't want that to happen to any of them. However, there must be something that we can do, especially to help Emmanuel. How do you feel about sending him to see a therapist for adolescents? This can be very helpful to kids. I have made similar referrals and the young boys are okay today.

Obi: Fr Ok, are those boys Nigerian-Igbo boys? I have already said what I feel about going for counseling. We don't normally go to counselors at home, do we? This is part of the reason for keeping the extended family relationships and elders among us. They help erring teenagers to know the do's and don'ts of our culture and traditions. They do not do it as a means of making money like therapists do. To be very frank with you, I feel negative about western therapists. Our values and the values we want inculcated into our children are different from western values. Most of them do not know much about African families. Some of them are biased against black people.

Fr Ok: I am not going to argue with you, Obi. You are entitled to your opinion. I will only say that you have over generalized and in a way as biased as the ones you are accusing. Many western therapists understand the importance of including the cultural identity and traditional values of their clients in the therapeutic process. Counselors today are making a lot of efforts to reconcile the cultural similarities and differences of their clients vis-à-vis the multicultural society they live in. However, the main concern now is how to help

Emmanuel get the help he needs, so that he can get back to school. Do you want me to talk to him? How comfortable is he with priests?

Nkechi: That will be wonderful, Fr Ok. That is precisely the main reason for coming to see you. He used to be an altar server right after he made his first communion. I am sure he will be happy to come and see you.

Fr Ok: And you Obi, what do you think.

Obi: I am in support of that idea. I have got to talk to him and pray for him specially. He needs a lot of prayers. I believe prayer changes things. More especially, you know our cultural and traditional values. You are in the best position to reconcile our cultural differences and similarities better than any one who does not know our culture and values.

Fr Ok: Here you come again with your ideas. Anyway, I will arrange to talk with him. How soon do you want him to come?

Nkechi: As soon as you want him to come, Fr.

Fr Ok: Okay. I will look through my schedule and give you a call as soon as possible. After meeting with him, I will know what to do next.

Obi: Thank you so much for all your trouble. I feel already relieved. God is good.

Nkechi: I feel happy too. I wish we had come to you earlier than now.

Fr Ok: I am glad to be of help. Meanwhile, treat him with kindness and love. As I said, Emmanuel is in a very difficult stage of his life as a teenager. He needs a lot of support from you, his parents. Do not try to be judgmental.

Obi: We will do our best to support him. We look forward to receiving your call.

Fr Ok: See you again very soon and thanks for coming.

(B.) Meeting with Emmanuel:

Besides his dressing, which is typical of any teenager of today, Emmanuel looked calm and innocent when I motioned him to a chair in the parish office. I was determined to let him know that I have all the time for him. I sat at a reasonable distance from him but close enough to make him feel that I am not keeping away from him. I greeted him in the Igbo vernacular just to know how much he remembers of the language he spoke before coming to the United States. Surprisingly, he responded in clear ethnic Igbo dialect, indicating that he is very much at home with his native language. I praised him for this effort. He informed me that his parents made it a rule that must speak Igbo language when they are at home. I am also aware of many Nigerian parents that have similar rule for their children. This is to ensure the survival of the ethnic Igbo language among future generations. I am also aware of some Nigerian parents that forbid their children from speaking the Igbo language. This may be out of ignorance. No knowledge is a waste.

I asked Emmanuel if he wished us to discuss in the Igbo language. He declined, saying that he would not be able to express himself properly in the vernacular. With this preamble, our meeting formally began.

Fr Ok: How are you doing?

Emma: I am doing okay, Father.

Fr Ok: And how is your schooling going on?

Emma: Not bad, except for the recent problem I had with the class teacher in my school. Somebody had put some drugs into my locker. It happened that at the same period, one of my classmates lost some money. The teacher reported to the principal and she instructed her to conduct a search of our lockers immediately. It was during this process that the

drugs were found in my locker. I can swear by anything that I have nothing to do with it. I don't even know what a drug looks like if I see one.

Fr Ok: You must have felt very bad and unjustly accused.

Emma: I feel awful. But do you know what makes me feel really hurt?

Fr Ok: Please tell me, if you don't mind.

Emma: That even my own parents do not believe that I am innocent of this whole thing. I tried to make them understand that some student may have put it into my locker before the search to make it appear it is mine, but it is not.

Fr Ok: I am sorry about that. I am surprised that your parents do not believe you. Have you any idea of the reason why they don't believe you? This is very painful, isn't?

Emma: I guess they do not trust me. My mother trusts me but not my father. He is very strict with us, always talking about not bringing shame to his family.

Fr Ok: It must be hurtful not to be trusted by your own parents. Do you suspect why he does not trust you?

Emma: He does not believe that children of today can be well behaved especially in this society. He is always threatening to send us back to Nigeria if we do not behave ourselves. I guess it pains him that he no longer can beat me as he used to do when we were in Nigeria. That infuriates him most. He is always saying something like 'spear the rod and spoil the child'.

Fr Ok: Are you saying that your father really beats you?

Emma: Not any more. I think he is not happy with the way the American system interferes with the way he wants to run his family. I all started one Sunday afternoon

when my sibling said that her teacher told them to dial 911 if anybody ever abused them. He was very angry and locked himself in the room for hours.

Fr Ok: I am sorry that your father feels this way. But let me ask you. Do you doubt that your father loves you?

Emma: I know he loves me very much. May be that is why he is not happy when we do something wrong, but in this instance I have not done anything wrong. I suspect that one of the students put it there to implicate me.

Fr Ok: For what reason? Do you know? Why does he want to implicate you?

Emma: I have been thinking of one boy living in the same building with us. He wants me to hang out with him, but I don't like the other boys that hang out with him. So I said no. He told me that he will deal with me. I was afraid and one day I decided to hang out with them. My father was at work. We entered the park and the other boys began to light what I thought was cigarettes. They offered me one, which I refused, and left the park immediately. That was the last time I hanged out with them. I guess they were not happy with me. I suspect that one of them must have put the thing into me locker.

Fr Ok: Did you let your parents know about it?

Emma: That is the last thing I will tell my parents. My father would ask me why I went out with them in the first place. Believe me, Fr I have never taken any drugs all my life and I don't intend to take any soon. I already know it is bad.

Fr Ok: Emma, I believe you. I really do, do you think you are not telling me the truth?

Emma: Tell lies to a priest? I know that is the reason why my parents came to see you. My mother, at least believes that I will tell you the truth.

Fr Ok: I honestly believe you. All we have to do is to find the way to convince your parents that you have nothing to do with that drug found in your locker. I will talk with your parents soon so that we can arrange a meeting. Would you like to be present?

Emma: I will love it. I want them to know how I feel and to tell them to spend sometime with us as a family. I am the eldest son and many times and many times I have to look out for my siblings even when I am not able to look after myself properly. They are always at work. I know they love us and may be that is why they are working so hard to provide us with our needs. But we also need to spend some time with them. May be that is why my father thinks that we are always doing things behind his back.

Fr Ok: Emmanuel, I am really impressed and equally touched by your remarks. I promise to meet with you and your parents soon.

Emma: Thank you very much father for listening to me. My father hardly listens to me the way you did. Please, believe. I know I have told you the truth.

(I was very impressed by the intelligent conversation I had with Emmanuel. I am inclined to believe that he has been looking for an opportunity to express these sentiments. His parents, I think have judged him wrongly due to the fact that they don't know their son very well. I did also mis-judge him based on the information I got before our meeting. The problem does not seem to be with Emmanuel, but rather with his parents. They are influenced by their perception of how dangerous the American culture is to the upbringing of kids. I decided it is better to talk to the three face to face.

(C.) Meeting with Obi, Nkechi and their son Emmanuel: My meeting with Emmanuel ,who was referred to me by his parents, Obi and Nkechi in connection with his alleged

drugs possession raised some issues that needed clarifications in the presence of all concerned. I called up Obi and Nkechi , and invited them to come with Emmanuel.

The following is the verbatim of our meeting in the parish office.)

Fr Ok: During my meeting with Emmanuel last week, he raised a lot of issues that concerns you, as parents. He also expressed some feelings that I would like him to say to you directly which I think will help you as a family to build up your relationship. Emma, you want to address your folks?

Emma: Thank you very much for making it possible for me to talk to mum and dad about how I feel about certain issues. My sisters and I sometimes feel like we are orphans. We don't have them around to express our feelings especially my sisters who may want to speak to their mum from time to time on issues concerning women. My father does not trust me not to join bad groups, yet he does not make the time to know what is going on with me. It is not about us. It is always work and work. About two times I acted out just like any teenager just to attract some attention but that didn't work. You yelled at me all night and dropped me off to school the following morning without a word. You didn't care to ask me what was wrong with me. I told you one day that the boys in our building planed to beat me up because I will not go out with them; you just said, "keep away from them". You did not know how frightened I became after that threat. I felt abandoned and alone. If I had an elder brother or sister, may be I would not need them that much. I would talk with them. But my case is different. My siblings rather look up to me for protection because mum and dad are never there. That is too much for my age. Some times we watch the TV and see how Cosby and Claire joke and play with their kids, we wished dad and mum would do the same. I begin to think whether they

love us. I know they do otherwise they will not be working so hard to provide for our needs. If you spend sometime with us, you will know us better and when I tell you that I don't know anything about the drug found in my locker at school, you will believe me because you trust me. I was very hurt that even my own parents cannot trust me in such a serious matter. Let me say it again that I have nothing to do with the drugs found in my locker at school. The boys may have put it there to get back at me for refusing to hang out with them. They already told me that they will deal with me and I told you, dad and you said, "keep away from them". They are in the same school with me dad.

(I watched Obi and Nkechi as I listened to Emmanuel on and on, his eyes focused on the floor, avoiding any eye contact with his parents. Obi and Nkechi looked shocked, and reading their faces one will notice how guilty and remorseful they feel about they heard. I was equally shocked. I was also grateful to my advisor (in this thesis) who suggested that I call the family together. I looked at Obi and said very carefully, what is your reaction?

Obi: I am dumfounded, Fr Ok and short of words. I would never have looked at Emma's problem from this perspective. I think he is right. That is not how I was brought up myself. I am very sorry for giving the impression that we do not care. Your mother and I love you very much and we care. I am sorry for not trusting you.

Nkechi: (Already in tears, got up from her seat and hugged Emmanuel). I am sorry. I promise to be a better mum. Will you forgive us?

Emma: Yes mum.

(The whole situation became so emotional. There and then, I can see a family discovering their mistakes for the first time and ready and willing to make amends.

Fr Ok: I am happy that Emma is able to express his feelings. As it sounded to me, he spoke on behalf of his siblings. "We think our parents" don't love us". The ball is in your court Obi and Nkechi. You have got to make them feel loved. They need you and if you are not available, they feel "abandoned". Emma feels you don't trust him. How do you feel when someone close to you does not trust you?

Obi: I am very sorry. I really am. I have nobody to blame but myself.

Fr Ok: How do you mean?

Obi: If I knew this is how things are in the United States, perhaps I would never have come. You work slavishly and yet cannot get all you need to support your loved ones. I wish those desiring to come to America will hear the true story of how things are really.

Fr Ok: You seem to suggest that you regret coming to America.

Obi: Yes and No. It is really difficult to live and raise a family in this country. In our home country, it is not possible that my children will feel abandoned, with the members of extended family around and willing to help even when you are not there. Here you are on your own. Individualism is a big problem for us coming from an extended family system in which, even if you are not around, there are people looking out for you wife and kids.

Fr Ok: I see what you mean. However, I am glad we had this talk. We have identified this particular issue. The best and next thing is that you find the way to address it.

Nkechi: We thank you very sincerely; without you we would not have had this opportunity to listen to Emma's feeling. It is because you are one of us.

Fr Ok: I am glad that I could help. Do please plan your work schedule in a way that you can spend quality time with your kids. It is very necessary. Otherwise, you will never get to know who your own kids are and what they are up to.

Obi: I don't even know how to begin to thank you. I appreciate your help. I promise to be a better parent. I admit we have failed them and I promise that it will not happen again.

Fr Ok: It is my pleasure.

(As the family left the office with Nkechi and Obi holding Emmanuel on both sides, I had the feeling of a family determined to learn from their mistakes. Obi has since informed me that things have changed for the better. Emmanuel is back to school. They had to put him in a different school to help him forget those experiences. Obi and Nkechi have also visited me to show how much appreciative they are about my meeting with them and how much it has changed the dynamics of their family relationships. They feel challenged to spread the message of improved relationship between kids and their parents. Unfortunately, some parents have little or no time for their kids until they begin to act up. I wish they borrow a leaf from the Obi family.

On my part, I felt a sense of accomplishment, for being able to help a Nigerian-Igbo couple to keep their family, which is the mission of this project..

Chapter Four

i.) Results and Developments: The method applied in the execution of this project applied in chapter three consists of two case studies of couples from the two different groups of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families targeted. Some of the results were expected. Couple A B were reconciled and ready to move on with their marital relationship. Obi and Nkechi in the second case study realized at the end of the study that the problem with their son, Emmanuel has to do with their not spending time with him. Obi blamed it on the society that has no respect for elders, threatening to send Emmanuel back to Africa if he did not behave himself. He was oblivious of his responsibilities as a parent.

However, I am totally surprised that at the end of my sessions with couples A B, in case study 1, they on their own initiative suggested the need for a support group. This group they said will help many more couples that may never think of going for help, or are yet to come into this country.

Couple A B, took the initiative to inform all the members of the support group. I guess they did this because of how my meetings with them have imparted their own marital relationships. The psychodynamics of their own marriage relationship, (which will follow this description) before my meetings with them changed completely. They are able to identify their mistakes and lapses. The most astonishing of all is the voluntary initiative and commitment in the formation of the support group. When I was starting the project, formation of a support group is an option, but my handicap was how to gather enough interested couple. I could say that the support group, which is still meeting two times a month, is a direct result of the case study with the family of Couple A B.

When the group was formed, I was equally amazed at the openness and fraternity with which the meetings were conducted. Although there are more woman than men in the group (this is not unexpected), the few men were challenged to put aside their patriarchal mentality in their home country to monopolize the discussions. Many of the men concede that the American culture is sympathetic to women and so they have got to live with. Those who accept this fact have happier marital relationships; those that don't and thereby live in the shadows of their homeland culture are in constant struggle with reality. I am aware of the enormity of marriage problems among Igbo couples in the United States generally, but the type of interest engendered by the support group, and the number of attendances tells me that the problems are real and much larger than I anticipated. For me, this is a successful outcome. Being able to identify the scope of any problem is progress towards resolution and a great advantage. The more people that come out to identify with the problem, the more they are ready to talk about them and the easier it to find the solution. Besides the individual couples that benefited from the case studies, the formation of the support group is the climax of the project.

I gave out ten questionnaires to each of the different groups, male and female. Results revealed that most women in the first group (case study 1) were reluctant to fill out the questionnaires. Instead, they form the majority in the support group and indeed are willing to talk about issues concerning being married in the American culture. In as much as women are willing to take advantage of the position the American culture has given them over their husbands, they recognize their role in family life. It is in the nature of women to remain subdued even when they are making the most active contributions and sacrifices in their families. Could that account for the apparent refusal to put things on

paper? I asked "Udo", one of the active participants in the support group why she did not fill out her questionnaire. Instead, she submitted her husband's filled out. Her answer is thought provoking. She said, "*To fill out the questionnaire is not going to solve marital problems, talking about the issues that cause them, will. Some of the men want to fill out the questionnaire as quickly as possible without thinking about it. They don't want to be present to discuss the issues*". So much for the exaggerated accusation that Nigerian-wives' characters change when they come to America. Udo's comment does not support the view that Nigeria-Igbo wives change when they come to the United States. Rather, it suggests that the women now look at issues differently and are able to make contributions. Of course, they feel liberated from the clutches of a patriarchal culture.

In answer to a question in the questionnaire with regard to going back to their home country, all the men said that they surely intend to return home. This answer is not unconnected with the Nigerians men's feeling of being oppressed by the American culture that favors women. Most of them feel very uncomfortable with the way things are here. This is the same feeling expressed by 'A' in case study 1.

The only two women that answered the same question were very blunt in their answer. One simply wrote, "For what". The other said, "I don't think so", meaning, I have no such plans. These answers, no doubts are representative of the feelings of many of the women. They don't intend to go back to live permanently but it is okay to visit their kits and kin. This is the exact opposite of how the majority of the men feel. Another unexpected outcome is the turn of events in case study 2. Obi had reported what he thought was misbehavior on the part of his son, Emmanuel but only to admit at the end that he is part of the boy's problem.

This introduces the issue of who the real victims in the event of marriage instability are. The children are, and actually feel guilty about it. Often they think they are responsible for the problems between their parents. Emmanuel was hurt more than anything else because his parents did not believe him when he told them that he has nothing to do with the drugs found in his locker. Most parents do not spend enough time with their kids to the extent that they do not know them well. It is easier for them to blame the larger society for the ills of their kids. The Nigerian-Igbo immigrant parent is inclined to blame the culture that disallows the whooping of kids when they misbehave. The relationship between Obi and his son, Emmanuel is topical of the relationship between most Nigerian-Igbo male and their sons. The emphasis is more often on the good name of the family, the pride it bring to parents, the expectation of parents to be care for in old age, The child is therefore expected to be manly. The father must not be overly emotional about raising his son – “opara”. The issue of a male child is a very important and sensitive element in the Nigerian-Igbo family life and affects marital relationships to a very large degree. The expectations and responsibilities of the son is always in the forefront and he is made aware of them as he grows up using all means available. Indirectly, the Nigerian-Igbo male is afraid that the American culture does not prepare their children sufficiently for maintaining the family name. It is customary to dread the possible extinct of ones family. When the Nigerian-Igbo men in the questionnaire said that they intend to go back to their home country, part of the reason is to keep the family name alive. One of the answers read, “I cannot stay here till old age, I must return to my father’s compound. I am the eldest son of my parents”. It is the responsibility of the eldest son to take over the headship of the compound when their father passes on.

(ii.) The Dynamics In A B's Relationship:

The feelings manifested by A B during my meeting with them speak loudly about their intention for asking for help. Here are two persons with stories of deception and lies in their marriage that has lasted for years. **Trust** within the marital relationship has eroded. Those that live this kind of life can tell better how important the issue of trust is for the survival of relationship. My primary aim is to help A B rebuild trust in each other. Even though I mentioned earlier that deception is common with marriages contracted in the manner in which A B did, it does not suggest however, that it an acceptable practice. It is by no means. Rather it the result of corruption and the effect of sacrificing morality for wealth. Here, I refer to a society where couple A B married. For A, to marry a nurse to boost his financial well being is considered by this low moral standard as more important by an already corrupt society. As for B, obeying her parents and family members for material gain is more plausible than disobeying them for her future peace of mind. This is rather troubling. I only hope that both A B will accept their wrong doings and be prepared to make amends rather than blame the society and parents. They want to console themselves by saying that everyone is doing it. A already referred to it as a general problem with many Nigerian-Igbo couples living in the USA.

B showed a lot of **anger** when she was telling her story and referring to A's inability to provide for his family. This anger may be justified, but with the reversal of roles that is part of the America society, where women can become breadwinners in the family, it is hardly justifiable. Her role is no longer that of a housewife or sit at home mum.

A, on the other hand is ashamed of the fact that he cannot provide for his family, which seriously undermines his position in the family as the man and provider. The feeling of

shame has a lot to do with the man's cultural baggage, which designates the man as the sole breadwinner in the family. The componential aspect of marital relationship must be emphasized. They are married to compliment each other. If in their home culture the man is the sole breadwinner, he also has the advantage of more opportunities that enables him to perform his role. In the American society where they both men and women are supposed to have equal opportunities, the role of being the sole breadwinner is shared. They are expected to join hands to improve the standard of living for themselves, their kids and members of the extended family in their home country.

Constant **threat with divorce** that has so much annoyed A, did not strike me as serious. I have personally mediated (on a problem solving level) in a relationship in which the woman threatened the man with divorce for almost five years but every nine months she is pregnant with a baby for the same man. This assumption may be wrong because as Clifford Sager, M.D. wrote in his work that couples who fight, disagree on most values, have power struggles, etc, but continue to have an intense sexual attraction for each other are able to enjoy and satisfy each other sexually. (p.214). This may or may not be applicable to the couple sighted, but certainly not applicable to A B. They have not slept together since the birth of their last child who is already two years old. B's refusal to have sexual relationship with A may be vindictory (to maintain or defend against opposition). I have already mentioned that threat with divorce in most relationships may be a way of conveying a strong message to the non-conforming partner to live up to expectations and responsibilities. Secondly, A may be concerned about what the cultural attitude towards him will be if B divorces him because he cannot provide for the family. This is too shameful to bear. There are names for men who cannot provide for their wives and

children in the Nigeria-Igbo culture and real men dread to be referred to by such demeaning names. Such name as 'Odogoro Nwoke' simply translated, lazy, speaks a lot. B mentioned that she is very much under pressure from A, so much so that all she can think about is how to get away from him. This is not the first time she is under pressure. She said she was pressured to marry A by her parents and extended family members. This does not exonerate her, rather it raises the question about how well can be perform under pressure. It must be mentioned that the situation and the type of job many immigrants do put them under a lot of stress, which they take home to vent on their partners. Psychologically speaking, it is clear that most people cannot perform adequately under stressful situations. There is the need therefore to look out for signs of stress in marital related problems like the case of A B. Is it possible that B has not the capacity to withstand stressful situations and it is affecting her marriage? Is the threat with divorce an escape from a stressful relationship, or an attempt to stand on her original position that she does not actually love A. B also mentioned that her parents succeeded in breaking her will. Many couples' dreams of what America can offer them turns to nightmare when they actually come in to live and work in this great country. For many people, their idea of America is that the streets are littered with dollar notes and it will be your fault if you don't pick enough to care for your needs. You don't have to work this hard, they thought. This is why the expectations from parents, relatives and friends in the homeland are so high to meet. There is always the psychology not to be a disappointment to these expectations at work in every immigrant. Consequently, they work extra hard, sometimes two jobs, even doing jobs they would never have done in their home country. With all they go through, yet they are ready to show off with their hard earned dollars as a sign of

success and achievement. They have **"arrived"** and young girls desperate about getting married to an **'Americana'**, fall prey to them.

A's reference to how he supported his family for the five years before B got a job is disgraceful. It is aimed at making B feel **guilty** for apparently turning against him now that she is the breadwinner. As if to say **"biting the finger that fed you"**. This is a common phenomenon. B did not manifest any feeling of guilt. After all she is the one carrying all the family responsibility and should be proud of it. She is even the victim in this circumstance and should revenge by asking for a divorce. B may have thought this way. But the circumstances are quite different. I had problem with my own feelings about A B based on my experience with other couples with whom I have worked. The problem is that most couples have become more **"American"** than the original owners (I don't mean the Indians) , portrayed especially in their manner of speaking.

The amazing turning around of the relationship between A B is a major outcome of this project. They not only turned around for a better marriage relationship, but are also helping to identify other couples that they know are having similar marital problems. They have become, as it were apostles for the family. Even when I leave this country for home, sweet home, A B will continue with this ministry among the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. They are now in the position to directly to couples with marital issues and they will be doing it with their personal experience as a couple. They turned around the negative feelings manifested during my meetings with them; distrust, anger, shame, guilt, stress arising from them, and threat with divorce, to a relationship that reaches out to others. Above all they will provide new immigrants with the much needed information about how things really are, what to do and what not to do in particular circumstances. It

is intended that this information will be made available to our kits and kin in the home country. This will help to dispel the idealism of life in America that begins all the marital understandings. The joy of it all is that they are not alone. There is a support group.

(iii.) A SUPPORT GROUP IS BORN:

Consequent on the progress in the relationship, and corporation of A B, I concluded that my meetings with them as couple needs to give way to a larger group. Since they will form the core membership of the new group, there will be more opportunities to address their issues, if they so wish. I noticed that A B feel a lot at ease with each other and engaged in lively conversations as they never did for a long while. The idea to form a larger group came from them and was welcome to me. I needed it for sampling in my project. I thanked them for their wonderful insight that would benefit not only themselves but also many more families. B, on behalf of A and her family thanked me for inviting and discussing their issues with them. A promised to get back to me as soon as possible with a list of interested members, and he did. This support group is to be an on going process and resource for them and others in marital problems. It will also focus on newly wed couples especially on those that went home to marry and return with their bride.

Within one week, A called to inform me that he has made the contacts and was ready with a list. I was eager to get started, not because it is important for my project but also because it will benefit a larger percentage of the Nigerian-Igbos in the New York area. Between A B and myself, we scheduled the first meeting of the group on the second Sunday of the month. I also decided to incorporate the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (Mass) as part of the process. This will be just for the beginning since the member would

want it as part of the process. This is because membership is open to all, and not just Catholics. I want it to include as many cultural groups from Nigeria as possible.

On the first meeting, about twenty people were in attendance for the mass. Seven couples, including A B stayed back for the group process after the mass. I am aware of the task ahead especially working with a group of Igbo. They are not an easy people to deal with, not including controversial marital relationships. I am however strengthened by the fact that A B have given their support and I believe that they are not alone in the issues raised.

First Support Group Meeting:

Irvin Yalom, (1995) a renowned author on group psychotherapist said in his book, *The Theory and Practice of Practice of Group Psychotherapy* that the work of the group therapist begins long before the first group meeting and that a successful group outcome depends on the preparedness of the group leader. Douglass B. Clark (2000) also a psychotherapist said that for the clergy of all faith, one fundamental uniting fact is that ministry puts us in the company of people, and that although we do meet with congregants in individual settings, most often our encounters occur in groups. (*The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care*. (page 243). These guidelines and position put us at an advantage. Even though we have not undertaken a group process before this we are equipped for it. This group is special because it is made up of people with similar problems, willing to discuss them on a larger platform and it is result oriented.

The agenda of this first meeting consists of the introduction of the member couples in attendance and an explanation of what the process is all about. The purpose is of course to discuss marital issues that tend to break up relationships among Nigerian-Igbo couples

and their families. It is to serve as resource, as well as support group for Nigerian couples in their efforts to save their marriages under threat by the American marriage culture. They will share experiences from their own marital relationships and jointly seek for remedies. Concerning who joins the group, there are no restriction, except that would-be-members must be interested in the objectives of the group. They are also expected consider that the group will enhance their own marital relationship or if they are not married, that it will help them in the future. It is preferable that both husband and wife joins but in case this is not possible, either of them is welcome. People already divorced can also join as a way of support to their family member, even if they do not intend to remarry. To be divorced among the Igbos can be a big Cross especially the woman.

Contributions:

1st Member: I am delighted to be part of this group. I lament how long over due the initiative has been.

2nd Member: My only fear is that the good intentions of this group can be hijacked for other motives.

Leader:(This remark attracted my attention. So I asked 2nd to elaborate on the fear factor.

Kindly explain what your fears are. How do you mean?

2nd: I know our people very well. The good intention can be destroyed by gossips and distortion of people's view in sharing their marital relationship in a group.

Leader: It is very important to emphasis the need for confidentiality and mutual trust in this kind of group. One of the aims of the group is to boost trust and respect between couples. Some of you still carry around years of injury inflicted by deception and lies by your loved ones in a marriage relationship. The intention is to help to heal these wounds

of deception and lies. They will not healing if more are inflicted by the group member through gossips or what one person called "girls talk" or "boy talk" as the case may be.. In other words, things discussed in the group remains in the group.

3rd: How frequently will the group meet so that we can plan our work schedule around it?

Leader: This is an important question but I want to leave the decision to you, members. My work will be to create the machinery for therapy, set it in motion and keep it operating with maximum effectiveness. (Irvin Yalom). Such matters about frequency of meeting should be yours to decide.

4th: I think meeting two times a month, at the beginning and at the end will be reasonable. (A consensus was reached and it was agreed that the group will meet on the second and fourth Sunday of each month by 6.00 pm. Every meeting lasts for an hour and half, at most two. To give every couple or individual the chance to raise issues that concern them specifically, each person is allowed to speak for a duration of time determined by the leader).

The openness that characterized this first meeting encouraged me and shows how much people have longed for a forum like this, to express their mind about what is going on in their marriages. It is no longer a secret that about two out of every five Nigerian-Igbo families have one problem or the other, ranging from problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, girls sleeping with their sister's husbands, men engaged in extra marital affairs to get back at their wives and the woman vowing to revenge, etc. This is different from couple counseling with a therapist. Below are some of the individual problems expressed in words during the meeting:

Mercy: My marital problem started when my husband and I invited his mother to the USA just before I had my first baby. The idea was that she will baby sit my child while we worked. This is cheaper than paying a nanny, we had thought. Now she is asking us to pay her as much as we would have paid a nanny. For a time, my husband refused, but now he wants us to pay her. I complained that it isn't fair. For that I became an enemy to my husband and her mother. She forgot of course, that she lives in our home, we feed her and clothe her without charge. This is the kind of pressure that comes from the extended family and brings misunderstanding between couples. Mothers-in-law are known to be one of the greatest sources of marital tension between their children. This is common to most cultures.

Bill: (The only man in the group that did not come with his wife. With evidently heavy heart Bill told his story). I caught my wife in our matrimonial bed with a complete stranger. As if this was not enough, she turned around to accuse me of not able to satisfy her sexual desires. She has never complained of this before this incident.

(There were subdued murmuring among group members, mixed laughter, sigh, and grumbling. The women in the group remained reserved. There was a wide condemnation of such behavior. Two members were assigned to arrange to mediate before bringing it to the group for the next meeting. Again, A in our case study 1 was given the assignment.

Tom: Marital problems among our people in America are contagious. New arrivals from the home country still respect the laws guiding the marriage institution until they begin to work, communicate and interact with those that have stayed for a while. Through these contacts their behaviors begin to change and finally, respect for the institution is eroded. Then one problem or another begins to emerge. In other words, those already here teach

new comers how to relate with their husband or wife. That is why I said it is contagious. It spreads on contact. (Again, this caused stirs of laughter among group members. some in agreement and other, especially the women who thought it was directed at them. disagreed. However, no one took it personally and the remarks were non judgmental. I was thrilled by, the lively, openness and jovial demeanor that pervaded the room).

Time up, announced one member and it was time to go home. Before that I reminded member of the date of the next meeting and the assignment to A, (B was asked to join him by general acclamation since the presence of a woman will make a different and serve as support for Bill's wife. Since the incident they have not lived under the same roof. Bill said that he is waiting for the time when he will make a formal report to her parents, the extended family and the intermediary. This will initiate the mediation by these groups. However, A B will go and try to bring her to the next meeting. Bill may have decided on what to do but he must act in consultation with their two families. He said that he does not believe in divorce anyway. "I have nothing against my in-laws".

I also reminded them of the need to get more members, the issue of confidentiality and trust. As to whether we shall start the next meeting with mass, all member even two people who are not Catholics said yes. So the next meeting starts with mass followed by the group session. I repeated what I consider an important slogan for the group: **"What is said here stays here"**. With that the meeting came to a close at 8.00 pm.

The entire session was lively and enjoyable except for some touchy side of some of the issues raised. Providing this kind of opportunity for them to talk on issues that concern is

very gratifying. The idea to celebrate mass to begin the sessions proved a worthwhile decision. It serves to cater for their spiritual need and helps them to fulfill the obligation to attend mass on Sunday. Some were honest to admit that they have not attended mass for a very long time. Now, they can kill two birds with one stone – fulfill Sunday obligation to attend mass and discuss issues affecting their marriages. This idea resonates very well with their work schedule.

(iv) Finding Personal Theology of Work:

One of the commonest excuses Nigerian-American couples give for failing to attend cultural organized occasions or even to attend mass on Sunday is always job related. “I am working” you hear people say all the time. Incidentally it one of the factors that directly or indirectly contribute to the disintegration of marital relationships and child delinquency, ref - Case Study 2 – The family of Obi, Nkechi and Emmanuel. Children are left by themselves and unsupervised because their parents are at work. Work for them is therefore an end in itself. They as it were, separate work from other aspects of their lives and allot it a bigger share of their time. Everything circulates around work. This is, of course the condition in New York, the city that never sleeps.

Almost all the couples I spoke to, complain of lack of time to do the things they would like to do. They complain of how increasingly difficult it has become for them to pray at the end of the day as a result of bodily fatigue. “I work so much that I don’t have a spiritual life any more”, said Monica, a 45 years old mother of three. She claimed that she used to be deeply spiritual until she came to this country. Many blame this change on the pressure to do more work and make more money. There is the tendency to be a workaholic at the expense of other aspects of life. Some people are doing as many as

three jobs at a time, going from one job to the next, as if they live to work instead of working to survive. They do all this at the detriment of their spiritual life. They have lost the identity with which John Mbiti (1991) described the African people when he said that it is as if Africans do not know how to live without religion. Nobles (1980) states religion permeated every aspect of the African's life, that religion is such an integral part of man's existence; that religion accompanied the individual from conception to long after death. (Page25). These ancient observations do not seem to be true of Africans today, especially those of them that come over to the United States. This turn of events has been blamed on life in the America society. However, the importance of some kind of spirituality in the mist of all the rustle and bustle of life cannot be over emphasized. Spiritual life completes the whole person and in its absence, a vacuum is created. Nature, they say abhors vacuum. The vacuum created by the absence of some kind of spirituality craves to be filled. The issue may also be that of realizing our need for God and the role God play in our daily work. Without God we can do nothing, the bible says. Even when we think we are being creative through work, we still need the assistance of the Creator.

Carol Ochs (2001) supported this notion when she recommended in her book that need for a kind of a theology of work. She emphasized that – *a theology of work – any theology for that matter- should make us more receptive of God's guidance, presence, and love; that is, it should increase our spirituality. (103).*

A theology of work, she said engages us in the world, allows us to experience the gifts of creation and bring us closer to God. This closeness to God will in effect enhance our work and make us more productive. This wise admonition evidently is working in the opposite direction with most of the immigrant couples encountered in this study,

especially when they alienate work from spirituality. It is necessary that creatures, especially those who profess one faith or another, to reflect on their identity to see how their work fits into their spirituality; how connected we are to the rest of creation and God when we work. Work does not necessarily mean exclusion of spirituality. It is rather the opposite. After all there is a Latin saying- *to work is to pray. (laborare est orare)*. God is the master worker and to work with him as a partner is to enhance our work.

The frequent use of work related excuses as reasons for nothing living up to ones spiritual obligations can be ascribed to the misplacement of values and the complete absence of God in one's life. Counseling the Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families must of necessity put into consideration their spiritual background in relation to their work schedule. An uncontrolled long duration and frequency of work, not doubts, results in fatigue and stresses of the body. This in turn affects the physical contribution and presence to other members of the family. This affects marital relationships in a special way. When the stressed out partner is no longer be interested in sexual activities with the other partner. This is one of the easiest means to start marital misunderstanding especially when it becomes the order of the day.

Nigerian-Igbo couples should not allow the quest for material acquisition come in the way of their identity as deeply religious people. It is such a precious special gift to be sacrificed for material achievement. A neglect of this precious gift may signal the beginning of failed marriage relationships. Like the saying goes – *If you are so busy that you have no time for God in your life, it means you are more busy than God wants you to be*. There is the need to make time for a personal relationship, between the creator and the Creator.

(V.) Counseling Adolescent Family Member:

The outcome of my meeting with the Obi's family was a good experience and offered the prospect of counseling a teenage member of the family. I have not actually had the opportunity to enter into a counseling relationship with any teenager. Even though I once formed a community youths' group as part of my ministry in the parish, and had the opportunity to interact with young people, there was no counseling relationship as such. In my conversation with Obi and Nkechi (case study 2), there was nothing to prove to me that Emmanuel was actually using drugs even though Obi thinks otherwise. The only issue is that drug was found in his locker. How it got there is yet to be found out. I may have to refer Emmanuel to a teenage drug counselor if that becomes necessary. Meanwhile, I read up texts about what to expect in a teenage counseling process.

I consulted with one or two colleagues on children and drugs or alcohol and their possible effects on the teen. What are the possible reasons why a teenager may take to drugs or alcohol and the effects on family relationship? This is a special case for me and requires some special preparations. It is special because, even though Obi and Nkechi are living happily in their marriage, they least expected that one of their children could be a source of problem for them. Never did I expect that my meeting with them will bring me face to face with teen counseling, and how parents' neglect of their kids could cause marital disharmony if not handled with care. In my meeting with Obi and Nkechi, they suggested differently on what is the best way to help Emmanuel. The extent to which they differ could constitute reason for misunderstanding. I am concerned that the couple did not realize that their not spending enough time with their kids is potentially dangerous to the kids and to their marital relationship. Leaving kids by themselves without supervision

allows them to do some things they would otherwise not do, including associating with people of questionable character or gang groups. The welfare of children is often sacrificed for material pursuit, which was really the problem with the Obi family. Parents like Obi feel contented with the fact that they work and that they are able to provide for the needs of their family. On the other hand, children like Emmanuel feel abandoned and rejected when they do not.

In counseling adolescents therefore parents must be involved and should initiate the process. In that way the counselor would be able to discover the role the parent(s) plays in the adolescent's life. Writing on counseling adolescents, William Van Ornum and John Mordock (1990) said that adolescents with problems are worried about being stigmatized and referral to a counselor can intensify this feeling and add to their alienation. The counselor is viewed as one who deals with weird people and are to be avoided. That was part of what raised doubts on the possibility of Emmanuel agreeing to see me. To many adolescents, psychologists are nosy people who will tell them what to do and tell them that they are not okay. The counselor is not only viewed as one who deals with weird people but also as an authority figure and is doubly feared. An authority figure will discover their thought and private actions, intimate details about themselves that they feel are too horrible to mention. No wonder then the adolescent can reveal themselves to everyone but to counselors. I have an edge in this situation because I met with Emmanuel as a priest, not a counselor. Adolescents in problems tend to turn to teachers, athletic coaches, supervisors or church youth group coordinators as their first line of defense against the crisis they face as part of their growing up. One issue very important to the adolescent is confidentiality in a counseling relationship. From the onset the counselor

will always hear a similar question like "Are you going to inform my parents about what I tell you?" Suggesting an answer to this question Gardener (1975) said that he will tell the adolescent that if he/she is involving him/herself in some kind of behavior that is extremely destructive and that he /she cannot stop after discussions with me, then I may very well have to resort to divulging what he/she tells me, even though he/she may not wish me to do so.

It is interesting to note that Gardner did not commit himself as to what kinds of things will make him to break the confidentiality, giving the adolescent food for thought. This is also a lesson for counselors to learn. They must not commit themselves to make promises to their clients that will be difficult for them to fulfill. For the adolescent-client as well as an adult, it can breed distrust and mere the whole counseling process.

Adolescents with problem tend to be negative and attuned to recalling negative and unpleasant memories than positive and pleasant ones.

The work of the adolescent counselor will be that of focusing on positive, hopeful feelings rather than taking their lead of negativism. The work here is that of an enabler, facilitating the development of strength and making the adolescent feel able to confront whatever the problem may be. Adolescent often have what appear to others as silly ideas. It is better to share with them your personal thoughts and feelings in an effort to help them understand theirs. Confrontation will only compound their feelings about themselves.

It has also been suggested that one of the most effective ways of facilitating discussion with adolescents may be to share some in-depth background about your self, either presently or in the past. While I do not object to the method of counseling adolescents, I

do not intend to use it for fear that it may be understood as preaching or presented in a manner of "I am better than you". Counseling the adolescent in a 'preachy fashion' is likely to turn them off. As adolescents, resent counselors so do the resent being preached to and detest moralizing. However, if wisely applied it is useful to show the adolescent that you understand his/her situation because you have been there. It is meant to convey a sense of solidarity with the youngster, in spite of the age differences. It can be a starting point for further discussion on how the adolescent experiences the world around him/her. This method is known as 'self disclosure' in psychological terminology. Some sources caution against becoming too 'personally involved' with youths in a counseling process especially in the wake of the priests sex abuse scandal that rocked the Catholic Church in the United States. It is even more dangerous when it an adolescent of the opposite sex.

Experience however, shows that those who are willing to share personal material are more effective with youths than those who are reserved. Self-disclosure, they argue provides positive role modeling as well as invitation for further discussions on the issues already raised. Some even suggest that counselors could encourage written expression, especially with adolescents who have difficulty in directly relating their feelings in a one-on-one situation. Such people should be encouraged to write down in words their feelings. It helps them to pay more attention to the situation they find themselves in and to differentiate among their various feelings.

Listening to Obi and Nkechi tell the story about Emmanuel's case did not reveal any empathy for him. It was all about themselves, and about their disappointment on the boy's behavior. How Emmanuel's behavior, as their first son will bring shame and disgrace to the family name. I did not notice any sign to give him an benefit of doubts,

nor was there any evidence to show that he has been behaving badly of late. Every thing they brought to me was an accusation that has not been substantiated. It pains them more that they are working very hard to provide their kids with good education without caring about the effects on the so-called beneficiaries of their hard work. It is true that some adolescents in crisis often behave in ways that elicit punishment from parents. It is however, important that when punishments are applied, that it be communicated to the youngster in a way that makes him/her understand how his/her behavior has brought about the punishment. It is also important that the punishment must be commensurate with the misbehavior. This is a way of being empathic. Unfortunately, some parents give out punishments simply because they are parents, and that it is their duty to do so. This may send the wrong message to the adolescent. Punishment by parents may convey to youngsters a feeling that they are hated. This may compound their problem.

Obi and Nkechi were more concerned about their reputation as parents without considering the peculiar emotional feelings and peers pressure on their son. How they will be uncared for in their old age. This is a very wrong reason to be good to ones' children. Even Obi's comparison of his home culture and American culture in terms of child up bringing is misplaced and self-serving. Indirectly, Obi and Nkechi are addressing their own issues of concern as parents and not Emmanuel's problem. Could it be a projection of their dissatisfaction/displeasure with their situation as parents that are being mirrored and magnified as Emmanuel's problem? This raises the question as to who actually needs the counseling? Is it Obi and Nkechi or Emmanuel?

It is true that most parents are overly concerned for the success of their children in life. The concern may also arise from fear of their own failure as parents and the feeling of

guilt for their inability to be good parents. I decided to call Emmanuel personal to set up an appointment with him. Since Obi and Nkechi introduced the case to me they did not present it as if they needed any help. They were asking for help on behalf of Emmanuel.

The realization that Emmanuel's problem is totally because they neglected their duties as parents should challenge them to re-evaluate the whole issue of parenthood. That being a parent does not consist only of providing amenities. It requires that parents show love and spend time with the children.

My call to set up appointment with Emmanuel was met with an initial resistance and question. 'What did mum and dad tell you', 'It is not true', 'I did not do anything wrong'. The defense was spontaneous, suggesting that he may be used to being put on the defense. Evidently Emmanuel is not happy that his parents reported him to a Rev Father. Which means that he is a bad boy. This is typical of adolescent reaction to therapy. Aware of his reaction, I was able to dispose him and assured him that I am not biased against him just because of his parents told me. That he agreed to see me on the condition that he is not dropped-off by his parents, shows reaction against parental authority; that he is grown up and can take care of himself, contrary to what his parents think. I assured him that the meeting is between the two of us if he promised he is able to get to the rectory safely. After assured him of some kind of parental independence, he took initiative to give me time when he would arrive at the rectory, in an effort to prove that he is grown and does not need a chaperon. Again this is typical of kids of his age. At sixteen most adolescents think they already know what adults know. Emmanuel arrived promptly, evidently trying to prove a point; that he is not that person his parents have presented in a bad light.

No wonder he showed such strength before his parents. When Emmanuel arrived for our meeting he looked like any other sixteen year old. He looked very calm and relaxed with an unassuming look that is so impressive in a kid of his age. There was a remarkable difference between his looks and his dressing, his pants left to drag on the floor as he walked along. I know that much that it is fashionable for young people today to dress like that otherwise he is still living in the past. That manner of dressing does not depict good or bad behavior in a teenager. It is just being fashionable. I am not even worried about his dressing except that it could be an outward identification of those connected with some kind of behavior or orientation. Members of a gang group dress in special fashion as a means of identification for members of a particular gang. A lot of thought went across my mind when I met Emmanuel face to face. He does not really look like somebody doing drugs, I thought to myself. Someone must have done it to put him into trouble. On the other hand, is he a victim of gang ploy? As an immigrant boy in a south Bronx neighborhood, it is difficult to operate independent of a group without becoming a target. It is really tough for adolescents to live in neighborhoods that are infested by gangs. Sometimes, it is a matter of, "if you cannot beat them, you join them", as a means of self-security. Many adolescents go through a lot of difficult times growing up in very tough neighborhood. Rather than blame them, it may demand that we be sympathetic. Some of the things they encounter in these so-called tough neighborhoods affect their self-esteem and if nothing is done to arrest the situation, it often leads to depression. A majority of the victims are immigrant kids from African countries who are not used to such environments. Unfortunately their parents are busy at work that they don't know what these children go through. Hence the need to help them.

CHAPTER FIVE.

1. Evaluation And Contribution:

The results in this project, anticipated or not, as reported in chapter four will not be complete until personal contributions and evaluations are offered. I have no doubts about the success of the project because of the evident and practical results. It also leaves on its trail a legacy for the future. I will make personal suggestions to couples that may want to enhance marital relationships, those preparing to marry or come into the USA. This chapter therefore will focus on the evaluation and analysis of the issues raised in the support group meetings, one on one meetings and questionnaires 1 and 2 and suggestions for future reader. While I am not presuming to show that this project has resolved all the problems identified in its two parts, it is important to show that it is worth the try. A survey of two types of Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families living in the United States of America show that each group's problem differ from the other, yet the reasons for migrating to the United States are basically the same. I would like to explore these reasons realistically under three specific headings and attempt to find out if these have been followed through. The idealization of life in the United States by many immigrants stimulates in them dreams that they wish to make come true. Dreams such as: better education, economic independence and to some the idea of freedom with its various attractions and misunderstandings. Freedom as reason for migrating has been exaggerated and misconstrued to suit personal agenda in some instances.

In the mid-seventies, the main reason for going overseas from Nigeria, whether to Europe, the United States or other parts of the world is for the acquisition of education

and knowledge. Governments award scholarships to intelligent students to go overseas to study in different fields of learning like science, politics, economics, and even theology. It is under this category that A in our case study 1 of this project belongs. The idea is that these students go overseas to study and improve/specialize on their area of interest and then return to contribute to the development and education of their own country. Today things have changed. This noble idea has been overtaken by events of the past decades. Education is no longer a primary reason for immigrating especially to the United States. Even those who had government scholarships never returned to their home country either because they have found other goals or did not pursue the education for which they were sent. Consequently the government withdrew this provision for her citizens. The aim for it has been defeated. Besides governments, communities and wealthy individuals used to make contributions to award scholarships to intelligent students from their communities. They appreciate the necessity of education and so are willing to make sacrifices to make sure their children had the education they could not have themselves. These good intentions have been sidetracked. Those sent did not return. They found better opportunities in those places and did not bother about the chances of their fellow countrymen and women who could benefit from the same opportunities they had. Following these trends of events even communities began to withdraw these scholarships and individuals are left to fend for themselves if they want to be educated. The result is that only the children of rich parents or relatives get educated.

Unfortunately those who are patriotic enough to return back home had no jobs to apply whatever knowledge they had acquired. They are frustrated by the system into which they can no longer fit. Consequently, they desire to get back to Europe or the United States.

The value and importance of education as a weapon for national and personal development is undermined.

On the other hand, peoples' expectations of those who go overseas for further studies changed in the last decade. They were not only expected to obtain the academic degrees for which they went. Rather their success is judged by the wealth, economic achievements, the extent of their financial empires and how many family members or relatives they were able to help to go overseas. Above all, the type of car you drive and mansions become yardsticks for measuring success in the eyes of the Nigerian populace.

In other words, education as acquisition of knowledge is sidetracked unwittingly by economic/material achievements. This line of thought does not argue well in favor of those who want to improve their academic standard. You will be embarrassed by derogatory comments such as "Is it academic degree we shall eat", even from family members. They now measure success and achievements in terms of material acquisitions. Consequently, many Nigerians who have come overseas to study abandoned this noble quest for knowledge and education to turn to things that give immediate gratification, that is, wealth. They are conscious of the fact that today, they will not be judged as successful solely by their academic qualifications, but by how much money they have amassed. Therefore, whatever will make the achievement of this new objective come true is acceptable, including the choice of a life partner. Issues of the choice of wife or husband are, to a large extent, no longer influenced by love or education as the case should be but rather by whatever or whoever can best help to achieve this material goal. Deceptions of would-be partners, drugs peddling and other atrocious activities are considered legitimate means of achieving these unorthodox goals. This line

of thought unfortunately finds solace in a world that has become overly materialistic and capitalistic in her dealings, a society where wealth has become might.

In the Nigerian society where couples focused on in this project come from, the issue of freedom has not been generally accepted as cogent reason for immigration. There are no wars or persecutions. However, freedom as an issue may have to do with individuals who have problem with certain aspects of the Nigerian cultures. Going to another part of the world where the culture does not affect them would be victory for freedom. Nigerian-Igbo society/culture is traditionally patriarchal, and so a lot of the applications of this culture are not very favorable to the feminine gender. This is not aimed at denial of freedom to women but an inbuilt component of a patriarchal culture/system. Those who therefore claim that coming to the United States is as result of the denial of freedom or non-existent of it, only have issue with the culture. Such issues as regards the role of women in the society/family, expectations from the society of them as mothers, refusal to procreate as against childlessness, single mother-hood, homosexuality (not necessarily peculiar to women only) etc. are issues of culture and not purposely designed to denial freedom to women or those who favor them. It is also largely connected to religious and spiritual belief of the African person that certain things in life are men's prerogative and some women's. A woman is to live out her life as a woman and man as a man. The African is religious by nature. African culture generally does not condole or are not very sympathetic to some states in life. For example, that a woman decides to remain single all her life is not regarded favorably in the African culture.

If a woman refuses to procreate, what else is her duty? That is a God given-duty and she ought to perform it or the gods will not be pleased with her.

If therefore a woman comes over to a multicultural society like America or Europe where remaining single is acceptable, such a woman can rightly celebrate her freedom to live her life according to her choice, to be single.

As Mbiti, John, a well-known author on African religion and philosophy rightly said in his book, "*For the African, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born... Marriage is a drama in which everyone is an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society... Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return*" (page 130).

In another instance, if a man is inclined to homosexuality, which is considered an abomination before God and the African people, such a man is hardly welcome in any African society. The gods will not accept such people in sacrifice. This same man on the other hand, is free to live in the American society without neighbors raising an eyebrow. Such a person again, can be said of as having gain from if he comes into a society that condoles homosexuality. He is free from a culture that has no tolerance for his or her sexual orientation. The idea of freedom as reason for immigration to the United States is therefore relative. It is important to note that these issues are not primarily "man-made" or intentionally formulated to deny freedom to a particular set of people in the society. Every people have their own way of life, which is of course what culture is all about. That again brings us to the topic of the project, the struggle of Nigerian-Igbo or African couples to live in the multicultural society of the United States without breaking their marital relationships.

2.): Clinical And Religious Issues Raised:

The clinical and religious/spiritual issues raised in the marriage between A B (case study 1) and the information gathered from the questionnaire 1 show that the extent to which the United States' understanding of marriage affect couples depends very much on the following:

B. Family Values: Much of the effects of the United States understanding of marriage on Nigerian-Igbo couples depend on the background of family in question and what their values are. What is their attitude towards marriage as an institution, culturally and theologically? Families that respect the cultural values of marriage as an institution see to it that these values are carried on in their children. It does not therefore depend on where the couple lives, whether in the United States or any other part of the world. In other words, marriages that have problems in the United States are also very likely to have problems if they were in their homeland. It is true that a multicultural and sophisticated society like America may provide more chances to ferment marital problems than anywhere else, yet the society does not impel couples into problem. It is only those who have the propensity for problem that fall victims. Values associated with marriage as an institution are helpful in difficult situations only if the couple ever appreciated or lived by them. Kids brought up in families where parents love, respect, care for, and appreciate one another grow up to do the same in their own families.

Marriage as an institution has values that aim at protecting families wherever they may exists. Tensions in marriages as a result of advent into a new culture are easily contained because there are fundamental values already inbuilt in the union that must be protected

from being eroded by the new culture. Again if couples recognize in their marriages the sacramental component/character, (if they are Catholics) they are more likely to take it seriously. They work hard to make it work and slower to push the issue of divorce. As I said, it is only as a last resort, a matter of life and death.

B. Marriage as "CONTRACT":

On the other hand, families that see marriage as a "contract" easily succumb to pressures arising from knowing other views of marriage. If marriage is understood to be contract, like any other contract it is durational; a contract is terminated as soon as the purpose for which it was contracted ends. If I award a contract to a company to supply me with some items, as soon as the supplies are made, the contract ends. In the same manner, if marriage is contracted with the sole reason that it is an opportunity to come to the United States of America, the marriage ends as soon as this is achieved. Couples with this kind of motive or understanding begin to work hard to terminate the union soon on arrival. It is only a contract and expires.

C. Marriage As "Covenant":

The Catholic Church in the 1983 code of Canon law re-defined the sacrament of marriage as a "Covenant." a matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life. (Canon:1055; #1). The emphasis here is specifically on duration.

A covenant, or *b'rith*, was in Jewish tradition, an agreement that formed a relationship which was equal in binding force to blood relationship. Consequently, their relationship does not cease when the consent to the covenant is withdrawn, by one or both of the parties. The most profound covenant is that which exists between God and the Israelites;

and in the New Testament by the totally faithful and unending relationship of Christ and His Church. (Ephesians 5:21-32.) It is a sacred union. The apostle Paul said in his letter "This mystery has many implications, and I am saying it applies to Christ and the church". Catholic marriage is likened to the relationship between God and the people of Israel and or the relationship between Christ and the Church. Just as God will never break His Covenant/relationship with the people of Israel and Christ with the Church, no matter what sins they commit, in the same way the relationship between husband and wife cannot be broken on account of offences committed by either of the parties. So when the Catholic Church teaches that Christian marriage is indissoluble it is to be understood in the context of sacramental marriage defined as the intimate community of the whole life. Indissolubility is therefore not only an essential property, rather a necessity for a covenant marriage. This is based on scriptural teaching. (Gen.2: 18-24). The Catholic Church affirms this teaching when she said "*what God has joined together, let no person put asunder*". It is not merely an ideal but a norm of life. It is in opposition to Roman notion of marriage, which is intrinsically dissoluble simply by the withdrawal of consent by either of the spouse, often of the man. It is because marriage is considered, as in the Roman sense, a contract in the American culture that one party can sue for divorce and it is granted, with or without the consent of the other party. This law overwhelmingly encourages divorce.

The term, covenant therefore replaces the term contract, generally used in the 1917 code and other related literatures. Covenant is therefore the more appropriate and accurate theological description of marriage consent. With this teaching the Catholic Church does not consider herself qualified to annul any marriage celebrated as a matrimonial covenant

unless it can be proved beyond reasonable doubts. In that instance, the proof here will be to prove that it never existed. In the Catholic Church, couples entering into matrimonial covenant have six months to notify the pastor of the church where they intend to marry. This is to give the couple enough time for pre-marriage instructions to enable them understand the implications of what they are about to commit themselves and that this commitment is a covenant and not a contract. It is therefore presumed that couples who come to priests in times of marital turbulence, like A B in the case study 1, know what they have committed themselves to and want their union to work. On the other hand, couples that take marriage as a contract and want to get divorced are not likely to come to the priest. They already understand during the pre-nuptial instructions that the church teaches that marriage is permanent, it is an indissoluble and a covenant. It's for keeps. So when A B came to me in the middle of their marital problem, I understand that they want the relationship to work despite whatever each thinks the society and culture has contributed to make it dysfunctional. The lack of support for the marriage institution in the American culture almost directly suggests divorce as an alternative to couples. Consequently the high rate of divorce makes couples see it as a way out of marital problems. Getting divorce in the American society is easier than getting the marriage started. That couples whose parents are divorced are more likely to tend towards divorce should problems arise in their marriage. But as I mentioned earlier in chapter two, in dealing with Nigerian-Igbo couples, therapist should be slow to suggest divorce to the couple. This is because divorce is not viewed favorably in the Nigerian culture especially with women. The patriarchal orientation of the culture tends to blame failures in marriages on the woman. That is why during the pre-marriage inquiry, issues of divorce

in families are taken seriously. As mentioned in chapter one, if there has been any incident of divorce in a family, men are scared to go back to that family for marriage. There is as it were a "social stigma" attached to a woman who has divorced, even once. The American attitude towards marriage and divorce therefore protects them from this social stigma. This is another way in which coming to America could be for freedom from this type of stigma.

D. Hurried Marriages: Couples who rush into marriage without adequate information and knowledge of their would-be partners are not likely to tolerate marital problems than those who marry their long time friend. Going back to one's home country as many Nigerians do, just to marry a person you hardly know increases the risk of marital problems in the future. The marriage of A B shows that if they had spent some more time together, they would have discovered how incompatible they are in terms of marriage.

Rushing into marriage increases the danger of being deceived with lies as is evident in the marriage of A B. The general suggestion to immigrants is to marry here. Imported wives and husbands carry with them bag-gages that will be unpacked sooner than later and you may not like its contents. It is advisable to marry the person you know here rather than the unknown in Nigeria who will stay for a short time and sooner leave you, or use you as a visa by marrying you to get to America only to dump you on arrival here. For all care, issues that are for life ought not to be rushed into otherwise the participants are likely to rush out sooner than later.

E: The Role of parents: especially mothers-in-law. Mercy's contribution in the support group session points out one of the commonest cause of marital problem among couples, whether in a nuclear family system or in the extended family. Seven out of ten people in

the group process and five out of seven sampled opinions admit having problems in their relationships because of the interference of fathers and mothers-in-law. It has almost become customary and competitive among the Nigerian-Igbo couples in the United States to invite either the mother of the woman or the man from home to help them baby-sit their kids. This plan they said is less expensive than getting a baby-sitter here and paying per hours. Unfortunately, it does not work out exactly as they planned it because sooner than later, the visiting mother-in-law demands to be paid for her services. Sometimes she begins to insinuate how she is being used for cheap labors. This begins after she has spoken to one or two people who suggest to her how to make some money. This brings serious misunderstanding between the couple, especially the son or daughter of this mother. Of course, if it is the mother of the woman, she will support her mother to the annoyance of her husband and if of the husband the same is applicable. It is common knowledge that some parents, whether in the Nigerian-Igbo culture or American, are reluctant to let go, believing that their son or daughter needs their support and direction. By so doing they meddle into the relationship of their sons and daughters-in-law. When Mercy made her complaint at the group, it raised a lot of side comments as if to say, thank you for raising that issue. This again undermines the so-called strength in the extended family system. For those who practice this type of system as the Nigerian-Igbos do, meddling into your son's/daughter's marital affairs may be seen as a duty or right. In this stance, some mothers do not see anything wrong in telling their daughter-in-law how to behave towards her husband and vice-versa. Refusal to say something at sometimes may be understood to mean that she has not the interest of the couple at heart. These mothers or fathers come over here with this mentality and really meddle into

relationships to breaking point. Some parents still do not understand that their son or daughter has responsibility towards his wife or her husband, not them. There has been incidents of couples that decided never to invite to the United States any of their parents for the interest of peace in their family. They will prefer to pay baby-sitters rather than pretend to save money by inviting the mother or sister-in-laws and disrupt their marriages. Except for reasons of medical attention, it is advisable not to bring ones' parents to live in the same place for a long time.

The danger is that after sometime they begin to claim right over their son or daughter, or which of the two is cheating. This is without prejudice to the beauty of the extended family system. It may be a quicker means to get a divorce from your spouse.

Moreover, some of these mothers have no intentions of going back to Nigeria especially those who are already widowed. They have in many circumstances caused immigration problems for themselves and those that invited them. Often they over stay the period allowed them by the American consulate in Nigeria or refuse to go back to Nigeria.

Again bringing one's parents over to America has recently become unhealthy competitive among Nigerian-Igbo couples to the point of causing marital misunderstanding. One issue of contention between couples each time someone is to be invited is whether it is the parents of the woman or the man. Often, they settle for alternating the invitations between their parents. By engaging in this process the couple is impoverished, going back and forth in inviting their parents and neither the man nor the woman wants to give up to break this vicious circle of inviting parents. At what point or whose parent will break this circle. It would be better to take care of them in their homeland where they have lived all

their life. They may be acting with the best of intentions but that is not for the best interest of their marriage.

F): Clash of Two Cultures:

Reading through the responses to the questionnaires, it is noticeable that most of the men expressed anger and frustration at the American culture that so empowers woman. Some of them expressed resignation to a situation that they cannot change while others hope to go back to their homeland. This dream to go back is very illusive because it never comes true for many. Those Nigerians who came to the United States of America with the plan to spend only a couple of years and then return to their homeland soon found that twenty years has passed by and they are not yet ready to go. They still dream of the time when they will return to their homeland and be welcomed as successful people, "a been to" and as a one who has "arrived". There is nothing wrong in dreaming of a better future, but this type of dream creates internal conflicts between the dreams of the homeland and the American dream. This conflict causes indecision as to whether to live here until retirement or if they want to return to the homeland in the next five years. It will be better not to form fantasies of returning to the homeland that disrupts ones capacity to make reasoned decisions that will enable him compete effectively in the American society. Meanwhile the family bears the brunt of these conflicting dreams. The wife who is generally considered favored by the American system on marriage is targeted as object for venting frustration, thereby contributing to marriage problem. This not only leaves the dreams unfulfilled but also makes it a nightmare. They regret their loss of control in most family matters as a result of living in another culture and are sustained by the hope that someday, they will go back to their homeland. Most of the men live here in the body

while their standards as to how families should be run is the African way. This is often not realistic. It is this unrealistic approach that prevented Obi in case study 2 from noticing how much his kids need him. He was preoccupied with the idea of sending his son home if he didn't behave himself. All the time Obi blamed the American cultures and environment for his son's ills instead of playing his role as a parent living in America. Such ideas of living in a dual world can be frustrating and can lead to marital problems. This will also affect their productivity at work. They are stuck in low paying jobs and are not interested in improving their academic qualifications. In a divided state of mind, the individual is not going to rise to his/her potential and that compounds the situation. It is this indecision as to whether to go or stay that makes the Nigerian male not take immigration status seriously. There are immigrants who have stayed more than 20 years in this country and are yet to get their permanent residency. It is important to get documented as a legal immigrant rather than continuing to entertain the hope of going backing to the home that may never materialize.

On the other hand, many of the questionnaires given to women were returned unanswered. Rather they form the majority in the support groups and are more vocal than the few men. The issues that interest them however, have nothing to do with going back to the homeland. They want to buy houses here to settle, they want better jobs, drive expensive cars. Even one of the woman said she prefers that her kids not bother to speak or learn the Nigerian-Igbo vernacular reasoning that it will not help them secure a job in City hall. This may be considered an extreme case for no knowledge is wasted. They are also interested in "visiting" the homeland, perhaps for an opportunity to show off their freedom, and equality with men. They are in a way resentful of the culture that has

undermined their freedom. A Nigerian friend of mine once told me that he was planning to take his family to Nigeria for Christmas in 2003. His wife immediately sounded a note of warning that she was not going to stay in her husband's family home but rather in a hotel. He decided to drop the plan. This would be so un-cultural. Even if there were no decent housing in the particular family, any member of the extended family would be pleased to have them.

I am inclined to conclude that the disparity between what the men and the women want exacerbates the marital problems faced by many Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. This may be a useful clue to helping them solve marital problems. The men are ever dreaming of the day when they will go back to the homeland, and their cultural positions as head of the family restored, while the women are satisfied with where they are, probably because it provides them with those things denied them by the culture in their homeland. For the men, they are unprepared to risk it. One answer to the portion of the questionnaire that asked whether he/she intends to return home, the man answered *"Yes, this is certain and must take place as soon as I accomplished my goals and aspirations of my coming"*. To that same question the woman answered simply, *"Who wants to do that, not me"*. These answers speak eloquently about where some couples are in their relationships and intentions. Can a counseling process help bridge the gap between what wives want out of America and what their husbands want? The African/Nigerian male in answer to some of the questionnaire manifest their anger and frustration at what the American culture has done to their marriages. The women on the other hand are grateful to the American culture for delivering them from an oppressive African culture. This is a bad thing to happen to any relationship.

111.): Suggestions:

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1. At every point through this project I noticed the importance and relevance of this topic to real life situation among Nigerian-Igbo couples and their families. At the same time I feel that it would require a lot of time and energy on my part to do justices to this very important project. In view of my discoveries in the course of executing this project, allow me to make the following suggestions as my contribution to improving the marriage relationship of Nigerian-Igbo couples in America with particular reference to New York city.
 2. The formation of a support group as part of the project seems to me one of the highlights and perhaps success of this work. As an on going resource group it will help those couples who are yet to come into the American marital culture, those still in their home country and those that have been carried away by stories they heard about life in America which has been very much idealized.
 3. This project may not reach as many people as may find its contents useful. I therefore intend to research more on the issues raised in this project and publish them for a much wider audience. Most of the problems now encountered by Nigerian couples in the United States could have been avoided if there were publications and resources that tell the real story on the life and problems of marriage in America. Reading such publications will encourage them to overcome some of the inhibitions against clinical therapy. The group therapy then becomes a preferred alternative to the one-on-one therapy with a therapist they don't know.
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4. Nigerians and in fact Africans as whole (African-Americans included) resist family therapy as I mentioned in parts of the introductions. This is by any means a pathological issue. They have had their stories to tell and share of racism, oppression, discrimination, poverty, bitter experiences with immigration services, welfare agencies etc. If these suggestions are accepted, Nigerian-Igbo couples will be better informed of their rights as immigrants and will know where to go for help when they have immigration or marital problems.
 5. In addition, Nigerian ethnic group meetings (organized by people from specific ethnic areas of their country or kindred) could serve as forums to educate and review the Nigerian marital culture in the face of a different culture that is so impelling on the members. Nigerian-Igbos are advised to become members of their ethnic group meeting instead of distancing themselves. In the questionnaire, all the people answering the question whether they like to associate with people from Nigerians answered in the affirmative. One person answered, "*Associating with people from Nigeria makes me feel I am home*". Such forums could provide opportunity for reconciling marriage issues. It will serve as a kind of extended family.
 6. So far the use of Nigerian indigenous priests and ministers of the different religious denominations has proved helpful in resolving marital issues. This practice should be encouraged since it is inexpensive and qualitative. These ministers while living here in the United States are knowledgeable on the Nigerian/African understanding of marriage.
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7. Indecision as to whether to stay in America or go back to Africa has robbed many Nigerian-Igbo men of the many opportunities available to immigrants. It is advisable to make the best use of the opportunities that exist here. There are chances for one to become an American citizen. Go for it. This will increase the chances of making better living. The nostalgic attachment to ones' homeland is a natural feeling but should not be allowed to rob you of the many opportunities where you are for the time being.
8. Family vacations to the homeland will go a long way to resolving some marital issues and reduces the tensions that have mounted over the years. Since the women are willing to visit, taking the kids every couple of years (depending on your financial strengthen) will help to heal and fill the vacuum created by being away from home. It will help the kids to identify with their nationality and culture. It gives them a sense of belonging and ethnic identity which otherwise will be lost in the multicultural environment of America.
9. Couples will witness the beautiful life of couples in the homeland and enrich their own relationship from interactions with them. One of the greatest problems is that these couples have not the slightest idea of what marital relationship outside their immediate environment entails. If this suggestion is applied the entire family will return to America refreshed and hopefully live happier married/family life. It will also ensure that parents won't need to travel to America, thereby exposing their children's marriages to danger. This will also mean that they will try to provide most of the things that make life more comfortable to live. They will plan providing such amenities like water, life and toilet facilities (where they do not

yet exist) before they embark on such trips. This will ensure that their children are comfortable and will have nothing to regret about their trip. Some have taken such preparations for granted and had the sad experience of being ordered to bring the children back to the United States by the American consulate in Nigeria. Consequently these children (who are now Americans by birth) never want to go back again.

10. In the event that one partner feels that he/she can no longer bear to live within the American culture because of the marriage laws, the couple could agree among themselves that the one who can no longer stay goes back to the homeland while the other partner undertakes to provide some of the needs to the one in Nigeria. To be very honest, not every person who has lived in other cultures and know what marital relationships are can tolerate some ideas of marriage in the America culture. Struggling with the American is not just a problem for Nigerian or Africans. It is goes beyond that boundary.

A thirty year old Brazilian man sharing his dilemma about his life in the United States had this to say: *"The opportunities offered in the United States are offset for Brazilians by the loss of a nurturing and stimulating culture, which they have had to leave behind and for which they continue to yearn. The dream of return is always present among most Brazilians, even when they are well adjusted to this society"*²¹.

Try as the may not every couple can tolerate the notion of marriage in the American context. Following the arrangement suggested above is a difficult one for many reasons. It suggests separation of couples for the welfare of an uncomfortable partner.

It will require a lot of sacrifices on the part of couples, but if this will save their marriage it can be an acceptable option or a choice between two evils.

I have already mentioned that it is preferable that people should marry those they know, at least fairly well rather than going back to the homeland to marry somebody they don't know. However, marrying someone you know does not insulate marriages against problems. Though this does not in any way guarantee an all round peaceful marital relationship, but as the saying goes:

"The devil you know is better than the angel you do not know". At least it is easier to handle a known situation and an unknown one.

Above all efforts should be made to educate those intending to come over to the United States from the homeland. There has been over exaggerations of America as a bed of roses. They should be warned against the unavoidable cultural shock that is part of advent into a culture different from yours. There has been a lot of lies and misrepresentation of many things about life in America, surprisingly by those who go to Nigeria on vacations from here. The manner in which they spend their hard earned dollars give people the impression that the streets are littered with dollar notes and the only thing you need to do is picking as much as you need. This deception is compounded by the exchange rate of a dollar to a naira (Nigerian currency - presently, one American dollar is equivalent to about one hundred and thirty-five naira or more). It is sad to recall that in the early seventies, one Nigeria naira was worth more than one American dollar. At the present exchange rate therefore, traveling to Nigeria with only about three thousand dollars is a huge amount and gives the impression that the one coming from America is rich. Evidently, these

Nigerians forget how many hours they had to work to make such amount of money. Unless these errors in managing resources are corrected and the value of the Nigerian currency improves, immigrants will continue to come into the United States with the impression that dollar is plucked from trees on the streets. For example, six months into my stay in the United States, a distant relative wrote me from Nigeria requesting for one hundred thousand naira, (which at that time was an equivalent of about a thousand dollars). Where on earth does he think I would raise such amount of money within short a space of time if not from the mentioned "myth" of plucking dollar from trees in the United States of America. Living in America is now synonymous with being wealthy. Until these flaws in peoples' imagination of " the ideal life in America" are exposed, (by those that have experienced it), this idealism will continue to pose major problem for people coming to live here. Unfortunately there is always the problem of trying to explain to people Nigeria how difficult it is to make a living in the USA when you are still living there. If it is as difficult as you say it is, why are you still there, is the question often asked. There are no better ways to expose them than by writing about them for people to read as we have tried to do in this project and by trying to act on the suggestions proposed in this chapter. The writer of this project does not pretend to have exhausted the suggestions. However, this is one foot in the right direction.

1V: Self Evaluation:

I choose to do this program primarily to improve myself and enhance the quality of care I can give to my parishioners. It is my conviction that if I know who I am much

better, I will be able to provide a much qualitative care to my people. The success of the entire program and of this project (for me) will be measured on how much I have improved myself, the changes I have made in the way I look at the world as different from the way I saw them before I started this program. If I have changed, (as I think I have,) the methods of providing care will also change. It is in view of the set objective that I consider self-evaluation a necessary part of the conclusion to this project. Has this program made me a better priest and has it helped to enhance my ministry in the priesthood?

I did mention at the beginning of this project how I used to engage in '*problem solving*' with Nigerian-Igbo couples that called on me for help in their marital problems. This was during the first two years of my arrival to the United States. This is a carry over from my ministry in Nigeria where counseling as career had not developed to the extent as it is in the west.

As a parish priest back in Nigeria I considered it part of my responsibility and duty to find answers to marriage or family problems. Of course, this was my parishioners' expectation. You are expected to fix problems brought to you. There are no professional counselors/therapists to make a referral. Some of the methods used consist in reference to the scriptures and church traditions. Sometimes sanctions, threat of loosing communion with the church and penance may be solutions to problems. These were accepted solutions.

Today, I have learned that not all problems brought to a priest are necessarily spiritual in nature. Emotional, psychological, social and cultural problems are often manifested in spiritual forms or under the cover of spirituality.

Going through this program has made my work as a priest more inclusive, not only concerned with the spiritual welfare of my parishioners but the whole person, made up of the body, mind and spirit. It has also enlarged the scope of the help I can offer to my parishioners.

I have become more aware of my own inadequacies and limitations, not pretending to have all the answers to all problems. Counseling has become a therapeutic process not problem solving per se, a process in which the client and the counselor contribute to arrive at an acceptable solution. This process may take longer time to arrive at a solution but it is more reliable and enduring.

I now can appreciate the necessity to make referral to a more competent and qualified colleagues, without the fear of being seen as incompetent by my parishioners, thereby avoid giving spiritual remedies for acute psychological or emotional problems. There is no need trying to be *jack of all trade*. That is exactly what many priests/missionaries try to be. This ends up in counter productivity. Many priest in the effort to help their parishioners have opened spiritual clinics, when in actual fact their parishioners is suffering emotional issues. They dabble into the spiritual sphere when actually the parishioner has some psychotic disorder or even is suffering from depression.

Just like there is the need to educate Nigerian couples coming to America of some of the dangers that might constitutes problems to their marital relationships, there is also the need to educate the parishioners on the differences between spiritual direction and psychological counseling. The priest is by his/her calling/training a spiritual leader/director but not necessarily a counselor. However, a priest can train to be a counselor. This is precisely why both the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health and

Hebrew Union College focus on these two important aspects of the priest's/minister's work. While the Postgraduate Center focuses on the psychodynamic component, Hebrew Union College concentrates on the spiritual component thereby educating a priest/minister who is able to discern both the psychological and spiritual needs of his/her parishioner/congregants. The parishioner is not a mere religious entity but also psychologically and emotionally endowed. Acquiring this knowledge, priest/minister is better equipped to help his/her parishioners. If a parishioner/congregant is emotionally disturbed and the priest/minister offers him/her spiritual remedies, it is like the biblical saying of offering your child a stone when he or she asked for a piece of bread. A psychological malady must be given a clinical cure. This can only be done when, and only when the priest/minister can know the difference. Over the years many priests/ministers have opened prayer houses in response to the imagined spiritual/religious needs of their parishioners/congregants, when in actual fact these parishioners/congregants need to undergo clinical therapy.

The best way to help a parishioner might be to identify what type of problems he/she has and be able to differentiate emotional problems from spiritual problems and so make referral to an appropriate professional for early treatment. This program provides the opportunity integrate the spiritual needs of my parishioners and their psychological needs without bias to my religious affiliation. Theologizing in a multicultural setting has thought me to appreciate other religions' theologies. In actual fact, I will not be inhibited to refer members of my catholic congregation to a Rabbi for spiritual or counseling needs. I have personal assumptions that the "human person" comprises of the body, the

mind and the spirit. Any cure of the human person must take into consideration these essential component, the needs of the body, the mind and the spirit.

On another level, in addressing most of the marital problems between Nigerian-Igbo couples, I took cognizance of the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian culture and how its many aspects are oppressive to the female population. I maintained neutrality without allowing my personal sentiments as a Nigerian male to obstruct my judgment in favor of the man who feels oppressed by the American culture. I could not guarantee such neutrality four five years ago. This weakness was evident in my problem solving stages especially within the first year of my stay in the United States. Like a typical Nigerian man I found the women guilt of the offences as charged. The men were aware of this and took advantage of it. Unfortunately for them, with my training I now see things differently and would not jump into any problem without an alliance. Knowledge of my culture played a very important role but I was not subjected to it in my judgment.

I notice that I have become less emotional in my handling of issues and very slow to propose solutions to marital or any type of problems without following the therapeutic clinical process. Yet, I foresee an uphill task in attempting to introduce changes into a system that has used particular methods that aren't necessarily working for decades. Even colleagues are sure to resist such changes. I am not likely to be the first to meet with resistance to change. It is my wish to make a change in the life of the people I minister for the better and not working on old assumptions or methods.

Therefore I will without reservations, recommend this program to any priest who desires not only to improve his/her ministry but also to improve him/herself as a person. It is not only an academic experience but also a way to achieving wholeness of the human person.

APPENDIX A – Questionnaire 1 sample

Please, Fill and Return to:

Rev Fr Edmund Uche Okere

St Augustine church Rectory

Bronx, New York 10456.

Thanks and may God bless you for your help.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUPLES IN TYPE ONE:

Those Nigerian-American couples who lived in the United States of America for some time before going back to their homeland to choose their spouse.

1. How did you come to know your spouse-----
2. How long did you court before marriage-----
3. Which of these factors influenced your choice to marry her/him.
 - A- She/he is beautiful/pretty.
 - B- He/she lives in America.
 - C- She/he is a professional (Doctor, Nurse, Engineer, teacher etc.)
 - D- She/he is wealthy.
 - E- Parental/Family pressure.
 - F- None or all of the above.
4. If none of the above, what other factors influenced your choice-----

5. What important factor is not listed above-----
6. Did the fact that he/she lives in America influence your choice and why-----

7. Did your family/extended family members support your choice of spouse.....
 - (A) Large support
 - (B) Partial support (C) No support

8. If No support why did you go on with the marriage -----
9. Did it affect your relationship with your spouse and his/her family-----
10. Did you try to win their support yet, and did you succeed.....
11. What did you do to win their support.....
12. Do you need their support to live in the USA?
13. Did you have a traditional wedding, "Igba Nkwu Nwanyi".....
14. How did you celebrate your traditional wedding?
(A) Normal... (B) Big celebration... (C) No Celebration.....(D).Not yet.....
15. Was that your choice or your spouse's and why

Religion Related Questions:

16. Was your marriage celebrated in the
Church?.....

17. Is Church marriage important to you and why:

18. Do you still go to the same church you got married in?

19. If Yes, Do you receive the sacraments-----

20. If No, why did you change-----

21. Do you prefer the church worship here to the one in Nigeria -----

22. If Yes, what is the difference-----

Job related Questions:

23. Are you a professional?..... What work do you do.....

24. Were you in the same type of job/profession back home in Nigeria.....

25. If yes, why did you change job.....

26. Did your spouse or anyone suggest to you what job to take?

27. Do you like the job you are doing now or do you do it because you have got to pay the bills.....
28. Are you planning to change your present job by furthering your education-----
29. If you have a choice, will you do the same job you are doing now ? -----
30. Would you have done the same job in Nigeria if you intend to go back home ?-----
31. Do you intend to become a professional in whatever you do now ?-----
32. If yes, how do you intend to do it? -----

General Questions:

33. How would you rate your marriage relationship:
 - (A) Very Stable..... (B) Stable...
 - (C) Not very stable..... (D) Dysfunctional...
34. Would you consider your marriage as:
 - (A) Very successful... (B) Successful
 - (C) Not working.....(D) Non
35. How does your relationship affect your children?
36. Do you have any regrets coming to America?
37. If you are to do it all over again, will you still marry the same spouse?.....
38. Please give reason for your answer-----

APPENDIX B - Questionnaire 2 sample

Please Fill out and Return to:

Rev Fr Edmund Uche Okere

St Augustine Church Rectory

Bronx, New York 10456.

Questionnaire for couples in Type Two:

Those Nigerian-American couples who married and lived as husband and wife in their home country before coming to the United States of America.

1. Apart from your improved financial standing, do you consider your marital relationship since you came to the United States of America as:
 - (A) At its best
 - (B) (B) Better
 - (C) (C) Good
 - (D) Not good
 - (E) It was better in Nigeria.
2. Please explain why you choose your answer-----

3. Are you more faithful to your spouse now than you were in Nigeria-----
 - (A) More faithful
 - (B) Less faithful
 - (C) Unfaithful
 - (D) Still the same
4. What about respect for each other: (A) Still the same
(B) No longer the same
(C) No more respect
(D) More respect now.
4. Is the extended family important in your marital relationship: Yes or No...

6. Does the system enhance your relationship or it is an obstacle to your happy marriage-----

(Please explain why your choice-----).

7. Since you came to the United States, do you think the extended family system should have any part to play in your marriage: Yes-----No-----

8. Why do you think the way you do (please explain briefly)-----

9. What particular effects has the American Multicultural society had in your marriage relationship.-----

10. Good and Bad effects-----

11. Are your children better behaved and more respectful to you here in America or in your home country?-----

12. What aspect of the Nigerian culture do you consider most helpful to your marriage since you came to the United States of America?-----

13. Which are not helpful at all?-----

14. Were you married in any church before you came to the United States-----

15. Does God and Religion have any part to play in your marriage and affairs as a whole-----

16. What do you regret most, if any, about coming to America?-----

17. Do you intend at any point in time to go back to your home country to settle-----

18. Give two reasons for your choice-----

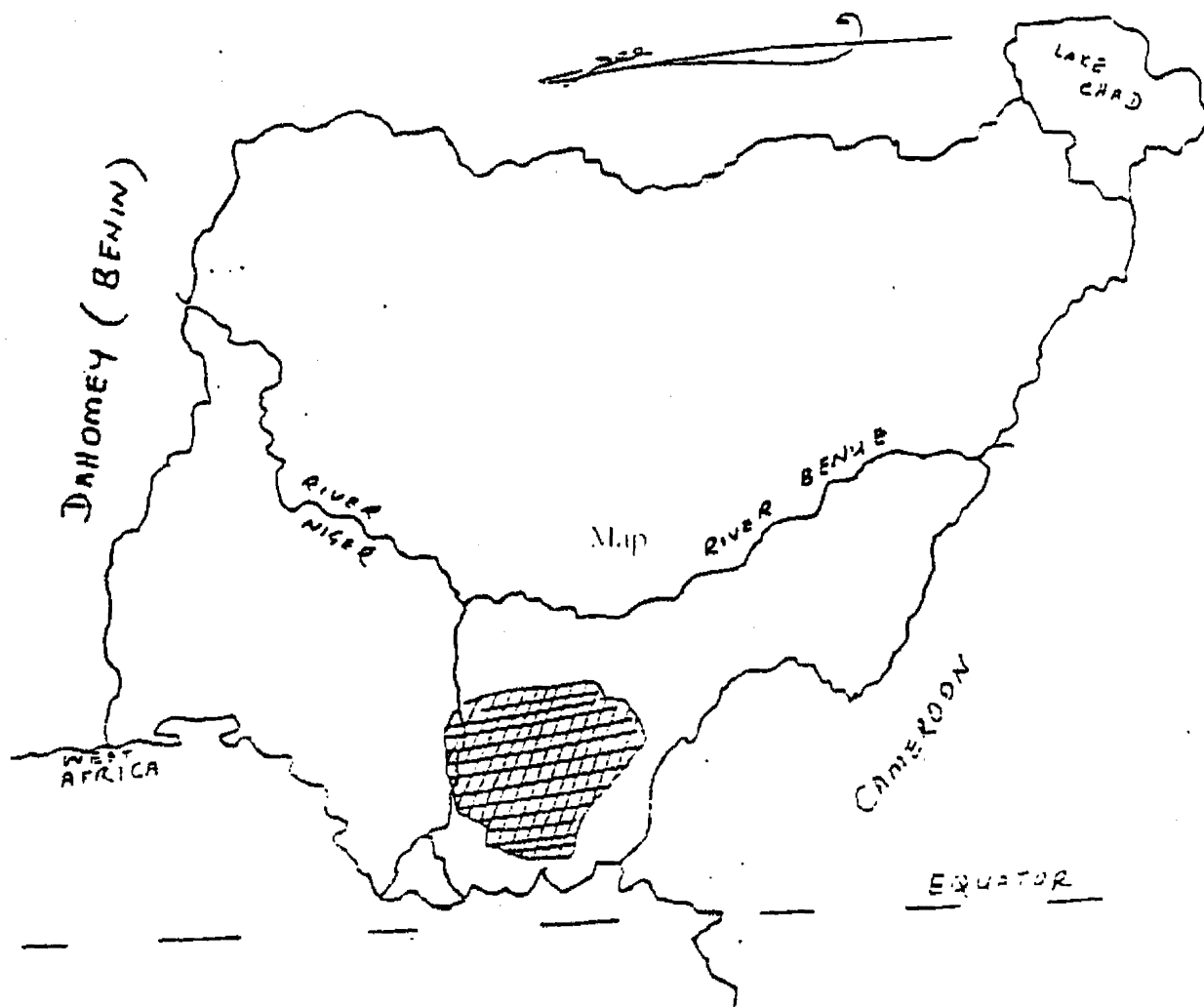
19. Do you like to relate with fellow Nigerians living here in America-----


Please explain your answer-----

20. If you have to do it all over again, will you marry the same spouse again-----

21. Give reason for your choice-----

APPENDIX C - Map of Nigeria showing Igbo Speaking Areas



Igbo speaking areas shown above. 

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