

**NIGERIAN-AMERICANS EXPERIENCING DIVORCE
IN DIASPORA. (Transformative Effects of Group Experience).**

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"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord". Psalm 118:17

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PREFACE

The overall purpose of this project, especially the choice of my topic:

"Nigerian-Americans Experiencing Divorce in Diaspora", is to make a personal contribution to my community. Since I came to the United States for further studies, I have always felt that some of my ideas, understanding, and vision of how divorce should be viewed and approached/handled in Ibo culture and its interplay with Christianity, needed to be explored in full.

Nigerian-Americans are at crossroads. They wear badges of the "Mother-Culture", Faith-Tradition, and that of the Popular-Culture where they live. Unfortunately, none of the badges seems to cling fast on them. They are like people who serve gods they cannot please, hence live in constant fear. Shakespeare Macbeth says: "Curse be the time when we fear ourselves yet know not what we fear". I have decided to unveil the secrecy surrounding divorce in Ibo land and bring it open for discussion. I want to create an awareness of the existence of the problem. Unless we acknowledge the problem, we can not seek for a means to address it.

This project is aimed at discussing the myriad of psychological, emotional, social, economic, religious and legal complexities consequent on divorce issues, by ex-spouses experiencing such emotional disarray.

My methodology can be group into four phases. The first phase reviews traditional/customary ways of marrying and giving in marriage in Ibo Tribe. What is the link between traditional and Christian way of marriage.

The second phase looks at the "DOS" and "Don'ts" of divorce in Ibo culture.

The third phase talks about a sense of "the self" in a group experience. The group members express shared stories of the shock, denial of reality, the uncertainty, anger, fear, hatred, a sense of failure, rejection and other feelings that besiege the divorced.

In confronting these troubling problems, I adopted much of Ivrin Yaloms' theory of group psychotherapy, family system theory, Sigmund Freud's theory of object relations.

My religious principle approach is based on my personal theology, individuation and integration. That is, how my spirituality influences my image of God and my relationship with others. It is the same theology of Jesus Christ who hates sin but loves the sinner. It is the theology of compassion, justice tempered with mercy, love and kindness. My image of God is that of a Shepherd who never abandons any of his sheep.

It is my hope and conviction that helping Nigerian-Americans change the way they view divorce, can profoundly influence the way they live through it.

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Chapter One.

Description of The Issue:

Background/Problem Need:

"A Culture Under Stress"

Marriage and family is sacred in the Ibo tribe (my tribe) of Nigeria. Both cultural and Christian character of marriage can be called "Cultural-Sacramental", in the sense that marriage is regarded as "indissoluble"(according to the Catholic Church, my faith-tradition). Marriage among the Ibos of Nigeria, is a communal celebration. It takes the whole community to give a woman in marriage, or unite a man and a woman in marriage. Once the two have been united/married according to native law and custom, they are married forever; "for better, for worse; in health or in sickness; for richer for poorer; until death do us part" (just as it is in the Roman Rites). The woman who has accepted this commitment has no option of returning to her family of origin as a way of divorce. Her family of origin may not accept her back once she is married. Whatever room she lived in, is given to another sibling immediately after she marries. There is an Ibo proverb that says: " A woman once married, must accept and endure whatever condition she may experience in marriage". By implication, she cannot divorce her husband.

The marriage custom is "two-way traffic". The man is technically bonded to "one man, one wife". Unfortunately, some men ignore this "injunction" for reasons I will discuss under causes of divorce in Ibo culture.

Description and History of Wedding Process:

In the 40s and 50s, "Match-Marriage" was the cultural process of giving in marriage. Parents found suitors and negotiated marriage on behalf of their children. Normally, family friends selected potential wife/husband for their children, based on their knowledge of each family. The arranged/match-marriage could begin as early as when the babies were born. The two families

could agree to have their babies (baby-boy and baby-girl) get married at an adult age. Both families continue to nurture their intentions for their kids while they grow.

The family of the baby-boy (future bridegroom/suitor) could buy a little spoon(the size of a tea spoon) and a tiny plate for the other family, to feed the baby-girl with food and water whenever she needed to eat or drink. This is significant because it wards off other "suitors" who might have the same interest in the baby-girl. It is the family who has a male child that always took the initiative to find a nice family and a nice girl for marriage.

Another form of match-marriage was among grown-ups. When a man declared his intention to get married, his parents would search for good families or families with a good reputation and if they discovered any girl of marriageable age, they would make their intentions known to the parents of the intended.

The Nigeria Independence (1960), marked a dramatic change in the roles parents play in the choice of suitors for their children. Men and women now are able to choose their own wives or husbands to-be. The fact remains that "dating" is not the practice in Ibo tribe. There is no "democratic romance", so to speak! Once you see a woman and feel you would like to marry you ask her "hand" in marriage. If she accepts, he in turn informs his parents and they introduce their intention to get married to the woman's parents. At the first visit, the woman's parents confer with their daughter, to find out if she wishes to marry the man. If after one week the suitor to-be has not received any message declining his offer, he returns with his parents, bringing bottles of wine. The woman's family will not formally agree to the match. This technique is to test the suitor's determination to marry. However, both families are more serious and discussion will explore whether there may be impediments to the marriage. When both sides are satisfied, the marriage proposal is made public. After a week the suitor, with his larger family or kindred, carry more wine to the in-laws and fulfill other traditional demands that go with the visit. Note that a week in Ibo land means 8 days, and is very symbolic. The eighth day has religious connotation. It is the day of circumcision (both in Ibo and Jewish traditions). It is also the day a child is given a

"family-name" (middle name) in Ibo land. The application of such ritual even in marriage, gives credence to the sacramental character of marriage among the Ibos of Nigeria. So, when all the "incidental" requirements have been met, the real and most significant ceremony is performed. It is called "traditional-wedding".

Traditional Wedding:

The traditional wedding (Igba-Nkwu) ceremony is the most elaborate and expensive marriage ceremony in Ibo land. It is different from Christian marriage ceremony because it is not presided over by a priest. Both relatives and friends of the bride and the groom celebrate. Of course with music, dancing, eating, drinking, never to the point of drunkenness. That would be a violation of the norm.

Half-way through the ceremony, there is calm everywhere, and the crucial moment emerges. The bride is given a cup of native/palm wine to find her suitor and share the cup of wine with him. The bridegroom is hiding or sitting at a remote corner of the compound, at times covered by his age-mates/grades so that it might not be easy for his bride to find him. This trick is aimed at testing the woman so that she can prove she loves him exclusively. Some of the youths present would attempt to take or request the cup of wine from her. They want to see if she mistakes any of them for the husband, or becomes tired of searching for her husband. After she wards off all these obstacles, she drinks a portions of the wine and gives the rest to her husband to drink. They hug each other. Everybody cheers and claps. This part of the ceremony is the "seal", the "covenant" (the indissolubility of the marriage). In the eyes of the community, the two are married and "wedded" from this day on. The celebration lasts till dusk, when the bridegroom takes his wife to his family. The father of the bride will bless his daughter and hand her over to her husband. Everybody is a witness that the marriage has taken place.

The mother of the bride in turn gives her daughter a "pre-nuptial" instructions on how to behave in her new home, and the proper way to handle domestic issues and the necessity to live at peace with her neighbors.

Recently, the Ibos are agitating that the church should send in a priest to bless such marriage on the occasion, which can serve for both a traditional and Christian wedding.

The Dictates of Communal Law (to settle crises):

Married-life or marriage, is a vocation. Like any other vocations, it has moments of crises, at times enough to rock the foundation of the institution. The present crises in the Catholic Church (child-abuse by some priests), is a glaring example of such crises. Some of the problems married couples experience in Iboland, which could wreck the very root of their marriage (enough to cause divorce in other cultures), include domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is normally settled by family members of both in-laws. Where the problem is incessant, some selected members of the community, normally from the group present at the time of traditional-wedding, are invited to convene a meeting and invite "waring" husband and wife to air their differences/grievances. At this convention, a likely solution may emerge.

Another way of attempting to bring peace between warring couple is what I may call "jungle-justice". The siblings or relatives of the woman that is abused, may invite their brother-in-law to their home. When he comes, he could be beaten severely by his in-laws and sent back to his home. The message is that he cannot be allowed to beat his wife like an object and get away with it. It is also a signal that his wife has her own people who may come to her defense anytime. Normally, this method works because the husband of the oppressed woman, may fear more confrontations with his in-laws and stop the domestic abuse. The same procedure is taken to address the case of unfaithfulness or infidelity/extra-marital affairs.

Childless-marriage:- Childless-marriage is another reason that may cause divorce or near-divorce in Iboland. A marriage without children is considered a failure, because there will be no heirs to inherit whatever assets the couple has may leave behind. Similar to the worry about inheritance, is the issue of male-children.

A family may have as many females as possible but it is not regarded as complete without, at least, a male-child. The male-child is absolutely necessary to continue the posterity, sustain the name of the family, and continue the legacy of the family. It is only the male child who will continue the linkage after the parents are dead. The women are normally married away, not allowed to raise children in her family of origin. In Ibo land, it is an abomination to be a "single-mother". Should any single woman bear a child by whatever means, she is still expected to marry, it doesn't matter much if she becomes a second wife to someone. When this occurs, the child is handed over to the new husband. A couple who have no male-child, may not divorce. How is the issue taken care of? Both childless-marriage and marriage without a male-child, constitute a disturbing problem in a family. However the best way the Ibos take care of the situation, is to take a second wife. Husband and wife must agree to take this means amicably. The first wife is never divorced, and the second one normally respects her. The community supports this measure and it causes no quarrels or divorce in the family.

In recent years, some women who have experienced severe domestic abuse have left their husbands for the city. Even in such situations, they have not divorced as such but are temporarily separated. The woman maintains connection with her marital-family, especially if she left young children behind. The Ibo custom gives child-custody to the man, not the woman as it is in the United States or in other countries. Hence a woman who has left her husband's home, doesn't go away with her children. This can explain why real divorce is not obtainable in this cultural context. What happens is that when her children grow up and become adults, only then can they can build a house for their mother and bring her back home. In a case where a woman has no male children, her daughter who marries can take her mother and live with her. Also the daughter can build a house back home (her family of origin) for her mother and send her home.

In rare cases where a woman who doesn't have children and refuses to come back to her husband, for reasons of physical and emotional abuse, her parents are expected to pay back most of the expenses her husband spent on her behalf when he was marrying her. Again, it takes the

community to gather and settle what would be still regarded as essential expenditure and how much money to be refunded to the man who married the woman in question. If the settlement is accepted by both parties, the community pronounces the marriage dissolved. This is the only situation one can say that divorce has taken place, but it is very rare.

Caught Between Two Cultures:

Nigerians in America face multiple difficulties. They have to integrate their own culture into the prevailing American culture, which is individualistically based. It is a difficult and evolving task for any new immigrant group. Some of the unique Nigerian-American socio-cultural issues include:

- **Culture-Shock.....**Many men are amazed to see women in pants (trousers) for the first time in their lives. In Ibo culture, women wear or put on gowns, only men wear trousers (pants). However, the trend is changing, especially in cities where you can see some girls in pants. Here in America, people kiss in the open and lovers parade themselves everywhere. This would be regarded as an abomination in Ibo culture. Also it would be abnormal for young boys to put on ear-rings, plait hair, as they dress here and plait their hair.
- **Discipline in families, schools, society,** differ sharply from the Ibo culture, which is much stricter, less flexible. The ways in which children are raised back home, would be regarded here as child-abuse.
- **Food and Diet:** Most of the foods eaten in Nigeria are natural, do not undergo chemical processing, and are fresh, not frozen. Nigerians must adjust to the fact that much food Americans eat is processed.
- **Housing:** In Ibo culture, every house is open for relatives, friends and in-laws. You don't need to seek permission to stay with your relative or town's man or woman in the city, a few days. You need not give prior notice. No matter how inconveniencing, the host doesn't complain openly. Everybody is his or her "brother's" keeper. Here in America, this is not the system.

To compound these cultural differences, a new concept, that of divorce, is added to what was a non existing concept in Nigeria, is a real issue in America. An entirely new set of behavioral systems/codes must be constructed, for the Nigerian-American community to function with any level of cohesiveness in America.

The concept of divorce-a couple splitting up -automatically in Ibo land, blames the woman and not the man. I chose divorce as a topic to address this erroneous impression and explore the complexities of divorce and the stressors faced by the Nigerian community in America.

Obstacle: I am aware that what I'm about to discuss is quite new, for me. I don't know of any person here in America who has ever written any book, article or discussed the topic before now. Hence I may not cover all the grounds in discussing this topic.

A. Statement of the Problem:

Divorce is a complicated response to complex marital problems. That is: what does it look like, sound like, feel like? What does it do to and for the persons who experience it? Some people feel that divorce is about defeat and failure. Others say that it can also be about victory and success. It is about pain, grief and guilt, forgiveness and peace. It can also be about rejection or acceptance. Divorce is about the loss of hopes, and dreams. It can also be about new life. It can be about death. One woman described divorce as the death of a marriage, a crisis, the greatest crisis one may experience in life, apart from the death of a loved one. Abigail Trafford, in her book " Crazy Time", describes divorce as a "Savage emotional journey", in which you rebound between the failure of the past and the uncertainty of the future. It can also be about resurrection.

As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as a "garden-variety" or "typical" divorce. Perhaps the most appropriate response or near definition of divorce, is to re-tell the old tale of the blind-folded men who were asked to describe an elephant, based exclusively on their sense of touch. Each man's description of the elephant reflected what he touched and perceived in that touch. The man

who felt the trunk based his description of the elephant on what the trunk felt like. The man who felt an ear, described an elephant according to what the ear felt like. The man who felt the tail based his description on what the tail felt like. So, the experience of the same reality was different for each person. That is my view. I have interviewed a number of people in my culture who have experienced divorce. Their responses can be grouped into four categories of experiences:

1. Mr. N....."For me, divorce was unquestionably the most painful event of my entire life. It was worse than the death of a beloved one because death has a certain finality to it. Divorce doesn't. It has been ten years now, and I still find myself angry at what happened. I am very aware that the bickering between my former wife and myself, is a manifestation of the fact that I still haven't fully healed from the experience, even though I have remarried".

2. Ms. G...."I'd have to say that for the most part divorce was a good thing for me. I was suffering excruciating pains under a male-dominated culture. I believe it was God's will for me to leave that marriage rather than be destroyed. I would do it again for the same reasons. The divorce opened doors to a better and happier life for my children and myself. My marriage was a disaster, I was living in an abusive situation with an alcoholic husband, who wouldn't seek any kind of help for himself and who took out his illness daily on the kids and me. After trying many things that did not work, I finally realized that divorce was the only option left, the only way I could salvage my sanity and stop the pain my children and I were living in".

3. Mr. J...."I believe I got a divorce too quickly and too easily. Our State has a no-fault divorce law, so we were able to end a nine-year marriage in less than four months. Now I really wish we had worked harder to save it. It has been nearly two years since my divorce, and I would have to say that I still grieve the loss of my marriage. It seems to me, men are too quick to act rather than take time to think about consequences".

4. Ms. R...."I married a man who was opposed to having children. The tragedy was that I didn't find out until after we were married. I was a victim of his lies. I obtained both a divorce as well as a church annulment and have happily remarried. I also have a beautiful baby-daughter from my

second marriage. For me, divorce was the only way out of a deception that I simply could not live with".

The above responses demonstrate the fact that different individuals have different experiences. It re-enforces the story of the blind-folded men.

General Causes of Divorce:

It is a well researched and common knowledge that the causes of divorce consist of the following: poor communication and inability to resolve conflicts, unrealistic expectations, rigid role relationships, defensiveness, "stonewalling" by husbands (stone walling which is lack of communication, can come from the woman also), contemptuousness, and withdrawal by one or both partners.(Fowlers & Olson, 1986, 1989; Laesen & Olson, 1989 reports found to predict with 80-85 % accuracy).

Another area of conflict is separation from the spouse, due to work, travel, or extramarital affairs, which can prove fatal to the relationship. What is often said in couples therapy is, "We have become strangers" (Vaughan,1990). The discovery of an affair, accompanied by a deep sense of betrayal and abandonment, seem impossible for some partners to forgive.

(Rolland, 1994,), contends that financial strains, job loss, and relocation can also shake the foundation of a relationship. Added stressors, such as dealing with a chronic illness, can compound marital discontent, precipitating a decision to separate. Other traumatic losses, especially the death of a child, pose a high risk for marital distancing and divorce, unless a couple can be helped to console and support one another.

* It is difficult and unwise to predict divorce in any particular case. Some couples with many strengths may be unable to reconcile a fundamental difference or regain trust after an extramarital affair. Others in chronically troubled relationships may decide to stay together, especially those

with long and deep attachments, or determination to keep the family unit intact, for the sake of children.

B. Purpose of the Project:

This project is aimed at exploring the acceptance of the concept of divorce. A major shift from the Ibo cultural concept of "married for ever" to a more humanitarian and enlightened understanding of marriage in modern society. My primary goal is to provide a safe group-discussion/sharing atmosphere or environment, which will allow the individuals to hear and listen to divorce-stories, express feelings and deep emotions, identify and express grief, blames, regrets and the courage to go ahead with life. Meaningful materials or texts will be included to enable participants to understand the complexity of marriage, that is, the joys and frustrations of married-life. However, the stories or experiences of the group will be the paramount area of focus. Hopefully, the individuals will be affected by one another, as well as by the facilitator. The project will include therapeutic processes, aimed at healing and applying pastoral counseling techniques. I will help to direct the group to see the face and action of God in what happens in their lives. In other words, what is the image of God, or where is God and his roles in the lives of these individuals experiencing divorce? I intend to read the part of the Scripture relevant to their situations, that is, God's compassion and love, and lead them in prayers and service, greetings and hugs, and encourage continued contacts as a supportive-community.

Another aspect of specific needs to be addressed will include problems facing Nigerians who marry within other cultures while in the United States, say, example, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and African-American. How can I explain the cultural differences in marriage to them and be able to

help them have non-conflict divorce and then be able to minister to them? What about the welfare of their children, who would under Nigerian marital status, belong to their father but here, the woman will likely have custody? These are but a few of the specific needs to be addressed in this project. Others may emerge as discussions progress.

**Relevance of Project to Ministry;
and Counseling in General:**

The intimidating cases and consequences of divorce are enormous. In America, current statistics suggest that 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, and that world-wide recent research also indicates that as many as one out of every two marriages will end in a divorce. In Canada the figure is a little over forty-percent; in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, the numbers range between one marriage in three and forty percent.

In those countries with lower rates of first-marriage failures, the failure rate of second marriages, where one or both partners had been married previously, has been rising more dramatically. The failure rate of the new marriages of those who remarry within a year of divorce, is much higher: more than three out of four in several of those countries; overall about one in two remarriages fail. In the United States, the failure rate of remarriages that involve children is around sixty percent (John Hosie, S.M.; in his book: "With Open Arms"-1991-99. p.3).

More lives have been shattered by divorce than were ever affected by car accidents. The Church can no longer presume that all marriages must work and remain permanent.

Many of our congregants are experiencing family difficulties as a result of marriages that "hit the rock"-separation or divorce. The first place of solace for people experiencing divorce may be the Synagogue or the parish house, to seek out the Rabbi or Minister, for consolation, advice, or counseling. As a minister, this project will allow me to listen to the marriage-stories of members

already afflicted by divorce. As a minister and pastoral counselor, I will be in a better position to minister to my congregants' needs and help them cope with their emotional feelings, denial of the reality, uncertainty, frustration, sadness, resentment, anger, fear, self-guilt, hatred, anxiety, self-pity, loneliness, the sense of failure and rejection; legal hassles, the everything seems-out-of-control and will this-divorce-ever-end feelings.

Again, as a pastoral counselor, this project will enable me to apply pastoral counseling techniques and pastoral care models in assisting men and women of my flock who are going through a major transition in their life- "from couple to singleness".

I know the spirituality of those experiencing divorce is affected for years and may remain powerful and potent in a negative way. At times some Christians not only divorce each other but "divorce" their God and spiritual life too. They feel abandoned by God, disgusted with the Church and even stop attending Church. Divorce tends to be such a turbulent and tumultuous event in the lives of most people. Time alone doesn't heal all the wounds associated with a divorce. The grieving, healing and learning to live again, need the indispensable expertise of a minister and a pastoral counselor.

I must recognize some limitations in trying to assist divorced congregants cope with "marriage-hangover" or post-divorce emotions. Divorce requires emotional and spiritual healing. However, the level of hurt or woundedness and the corresponding need for healing, is different and unique to each person.

The reality is that the divorced still have strong emotional ties to their ex-spouse. These ties may be negative, confusing, and chaotic storm of anger, depression and bitterness. Sometimes one feels victimized by an ex-spouse, the lawyers, or the divorce in general. These fall within my ministry and pastoral counseling skill. I can draw upon these to redirect the individual to alternative way of looking at their divorce and understand that there is always "a light at the end of the tunnel. I believe that the Church bear a grave responsibility to provide spiritual and counseling assistance to those whose marriages have ended in divorce. Talking to a pastor or

trained pastoral counselor greatly facilitates healing. I served at the marriage-tribunal years ago in Nigeria. At that time, I saw marriage with the eyes of my Faith tradition, and cultural background. In both cases, divorce was not possible. Since then I have come to realize and begin appreciate the sufferings of victims of divorce and realize that there should be no need to force spouses who can't live happily as husband and wife, to continue at all cost.

Specific Needs:

This project is particularly relevant to my ministry among the Nigerian-Americans I minister to here in America. From their cultural background, it is as if divorce did not exist. Admitting that a member of the family was divorced, carries a shame similar to that felt when a family member has been convicted of a crime and is imprisoned. I want to be able to give my people a sense of support and much needed education that divorce is not a sin, and never was, even though the Church doesn't not encourage it. This is the first time any minister is gathering Nigerians experiencing divorce here. Previously, they have felt abandoned, isolated, and cut-off from social activities of the Nigerian people. Some have been denied their rights because they are divorced. For instance, one woman was denied being the leader of the women's group because she is a divorcee. This project will offer reassurance to the divorced, speak to them with a compassionate voice of God, give them hope and joy which God holds out to his much loved beings. This project is my pledge to my people, to care for them, attend to their spiritual needs and give them every moral support to forge ahead. I will help these people from my culture remove the shame that goes with divorce.

Another area of my ministry to Nigerians, is how to handle marriage problems among spouses who have married from another culture. "Two flags" (cultures) in the same family can bring some cultural differences and may nurse some misunderstanding and possible crisis. These and other facets of marriage-problems I hope to investigate and explore ways and means of dealing with them.

CHAPTER 11.

Principles That Guide And Inform: A. Religious Principles. B. Clinical Principles.

A. Religious Principles.

In discussing the issue of divorce among Nigerian-Americans in the Bronx, my "faith-theology" will be significant to the group. As an ordained Catholic priest, and the facilitator of this group, my own religious principle is paramount. Therefore this chapter is basically a review of literature, that is, relevant literature that clarifies and supports. For instance, what does the Scripture; the Church law (canon law); and Fathers of the Church (Pope); say or have written about divorce? The second segment will be a review of clinical literature on divorce; and what will be my clinical goals.

The Scripture:

From the beginning of creation, the Scripture points to the permanence of marriage, as intended by God or the Creator. The Book of Genesis says: "God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 27. " Catholic version'). It is divine ordinance that man and woman marry and live together. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (Gen. 2:24).

On Divorce:

The union of husband and wife is inseparable, it is permanent according to the scriptures. The Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 19:3-9 cover the whole issue of marriage and divorce:

"Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?". Jesus replied, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate".

On the question of why Moses allowed a bill of divorce and dismissal, Jesus answered: "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery".

Jesus clearly disagreed with the Mosaic Law permitting divorce. While Jesus (as a Jewish Rabbi), adopted liberal approach to Jewish rituals, he was more strict on the issue of divorce. The letter of the law here, was more important as opposed to the spirit of the law. This is important. However, the central part of what Jesus explicitly rejected was the male-centered aspect of that Law, which permitted only husbands to divorce their wives. The gospel account by Mark, and also that of Luke, makes it clear that when Jesus spoke against divorce, he directed his words to both husbands and wives. (The male-domination concept is still a problem in Ibo culture).

Jesus And The Divorced:

Although the Church's intention is to defend marriage by taking refuge into the scripture, the divorced really experience rejection and abandonment. By contrast, despite the strength of Jesus' condemnation of divorce, when he met a divorced woman at Jacob's Well in Samaria, he did not reject her at all. Rather, he offered her warmth and acceptance, even though, as Jesus pointed out to the woman, she had been married five times, and was at present living in a de facto

relationship. Jesus chose her to be the means through whom her entire village was converted (Jn. 4:-42).

What Christ demonstrated in this scene, is the "Theology of Compassion". It is the theology of my Faith-Tradition, it is my personal theology and personal approach to the group. It is my honest effort to show those experiencing broken families/divorce, the compassion and love of God and the Church. I sincerely wish to demonstrate to the group, Jesus' injunction: "Be you your brother's keeper". How the Church and ministers/pastoral counselors treat broken families, according to the examples of Jesus, who searched for the Lost sheep and restored her back to the 'sheep-fold', will bring solace to the divorced. The Church in the modern world has tried to bring the much needed love and compassion to broken families, especially those that end in divorce.

The Church's Attitude:

The Church (Catholic Church) sees sacramental-consummated (church wedding and couple's sexual intercourse) marriage as indissoluble. The New Code of Canon Law (church law), based on Vatican 11, defines marriage as a covenant by which a man and a woman establish a partnership of the whole of life (canon 1055, &1).

The Church has now a marriage tribunal system in which questions can be raised about whether the consent on which the marriage was based, was lacking in some essential way. If this lack is established, the Church uses such avenues to open a process of setting couples of broken marriages free from any impediments; the canonical word is annulment.

In the past, it was as if divorce did not exist. For ages, the only time most people heard from the official Church about divorce was once a year when the priest spoke about it from the pulpit, often describing divorce as " a cancer on family life". No doubt the purpose of such stance was to try to strengthen marriage and counter divorce. Instead, it had the unfortunate effect of leading many Christians to believe that divorce was sinful. Hence annulment (that is, a process of declaring a marriage, null and void) and the grounds for it, were rare.

But as the 1970s continued, divorce, which had been rare, became common. Most Christians today, including Catholics, have at least one close relative who is divorced and a good many of those relatives have entered a second marriage. Until recently, a divorced catholic has usually felt rejected by the church, by family, and by friends. Clear messages were often given: "This has never happened in our family; you have let us all down". This was almost always accompanied by a feeling of failure: "I have failed. Now I am one of them"-kind of mentality. Then, little or no help was available.

Current Church Stance:

While the words of Jesus undoubtedly reject all divorce, they express an ideal for which the Church should always aim. The words do not express a literal law, without exceptions. Although the society has removed much of the stigma attached to divorce, the Church has not moved as rapidly in that direction. When she does, the process of re-instating and allowing the divorced to enter a second marriage, is called "Annulment" (that means, declaring the former marriage-"null and void").

I will discuss the issue of annulment in details with the group because it is the most obvious way the Church provides "a safe harbor" for them. It is particularly important for the group to know both the meaning and the process of applying for annulment. The process is also important in determining whether a marriage had taken part, in the first place. It will help to convince the group that the church takes their plight into consideration, in making laws and rules for Christians to follow and observe.

On my part, the process of annulment is one of the tools I will employ in counseling my congregants experiencing divorce, or those whose marriages are at the brink of breaking apart. The mechanism of annulment is of particular interest to me because I have served on a marriage-tribunal before, and know what painful agony is endured in this process. I feel that in the past, we were too hard on our people. We were inconsiderate, insensitive to their marital problems. We

were looking at the letters of the law instead of looking at human face and human problems. Hence, with my present group and the people of God I may minister to, anywhere, I intend to view my congregants from a new perspective. I want to use the opportunity of group discussion as an opportunity for confession, repentance, and a resolve-to assist and explore options for healing. them at all costs.

Annulment.

A divorce means that a marriage has ended in a civil court of law. A Church annulment means that a competent Church authority, generally called a matrimonial tribunal (for Catholics) has determined that a marriage in question should have not taken place, in the first instance. Hence such marriage was not a true marital covenant, and is null and void. Unless there are other impediments (like blood relation), the persons obtaining the annulment are free to re-marry in the Church.

Grounds:

There was a time in the history of the church when annulments were rare and the grounds were restricted. Some years ago, the grounds on which the Church grants annulments were extended considerably to include psychological causes. The Church has come to realize that certain factors sometimes may be present that actually prevent a marital covenant from taking place. A simple example will perhaps best reveal the contrast between past and present tribunal practice. Suppose that two Catholics were married in a catholic ceremony, and even though they had a child or two, it became clear that one spouse was homosexual; they separated and were divorced. Until quite recently, no annulment would have been granted by the Church.; the marriage was seen as sacramental and consummated. Today, the tribunal would accept the case. It would be argued

that homosexual persons do not have the capacity to commit themselves to marriage which is, of its nature, a heterosexual state of life: an annulment could be granted.

Psychological

Some other factors for granting annulment are psychological in nature. Mental and emotional disorders, for example, can render a person incapable of a lasting marital relationship. Other psychological concerns are linked to alcoholism, drug addiction, severe immaturity- that is, lack of due discretion. It is a person's inability or incapacity to fulfill the commitments that go with marriage. Lack of maturity may persist for years. If a divorced person can establish that he or she (or his or her spouse) was seriously immature in the sense described, an annulment of the marriage could be granted.

There are still other factors that block or prevent a true marital covenant from ever taking place. Some people seem to be continually incapable of being faithful to their spouses; such marriages lack the necessary qualities of trust and fidelity. Other factors may include an intention against having children, or against a permanent, lasting relationship. Also marriage tribunals can review cases of affinity (direct blood relation); cases where a person marry to escape an unhappy home or where a couple felt forced to married by parents or to marry because of a pregnancy. In both situations, marriage was employed as a solution to a problem, not as a covenant freely entered. Again, where couples can not feasibly live together, (physical and emotional abuse), of them can seek an annulment. Annulments are usually granted in the above cases.

These instances are not at all a full list of grounds, but only examples.

Once a civil divorce has been obtained, an annulment can then be sought. Annulment procedure varies somewhat from diocese to diocese. Generally, the way to begin is to contact a priest/pastor in one's parish. The spouse seeking a divorce will be given a questionnaire/petition with specific directions. For example, you may be asked to provide a copy of your baptismal certificate,

marriage-license, and decree of divorce (civil-divorce). Then the person seeking an annulment will be linked to someone who is familiar with tribunal practice. Major steps are as follows: First, a lengthy interview will be arranged with a tribunal representative. The case proceeds entirely by written statements, prepared with help from an interviewer. During the first interview, the nature of the annulment process is explained, and the interviewer asks the person to make a thorough explanation of the marriage and its breakdown, in order to gain a preliminary idea of the likely grounds. A lengthy statement about the marriage is put together by the petitioner, including the backgrounds of both of the former spouses.

The second part of the process asks the petitioner to name people (witnesses) who would be prepared to be interviewed. These may include parents, close relatives, and friends. The former spouse is also interviewed, and if there is no cooperation, the case can still proceed.

The witnesses are then invited to get in touch with the tribunal, to be interviewed. After witnesses have been interviewed, the grounds on which the case will proceed to judgment will be finally chosen, on basis of the petitioner's lengthy statement and the evidence of the witnesses. The grounds may primarily relate to the petitioner or to the former spouse, or may concern both as regards each other.

At a late stage, the petitioner is asked to approve and sign the necessary application, and the case proceeds to judgment. If the judgment is favorable, it proceeds to a higher regional tribunal and, following on that body's approval, the annulment is granted.

Petitions that are not progressing usually dropout. Cases may be taken up again later if, for example, a witness becomes available. If refused, an appeal is possible, though not easy.

A number of tribunals in the United States average six months for cases-and some take less time. Many other countries (like Nigeria) are much slower. For example, for the four years I served on the marriage tribunal, only four marriage cases were annulled. However, the unavailability of witnesses and other factors can cause frustrating delays. Any annulled marriage is based on the conviction that the marriage was not one which ought to be seen as valid and binding. Tribunals are scrupulously careful in collecting solid evidence before granting annulments.

Integration:

Annulments are not meant to be exercises in cutting red tape to free an individual/s to remarry, one can choose to, remarry or not; they are not "Catholic divorces" either. Annulments are signs of the Church's compassion and concern for "family members" (the church as a family) who have gone through the experience of divorce. Annulments can be an invaluable means to facilitate healing and assist in the rebuilding of a new life. Many congregants who have gone through an annulment have stated that they felt the Church was truly listening to their needs. Others say that annulments they obtained have enabled them to leave the past behind with dignity and move forward into their futures with a sense of peace about their lives.

When it comes to divorce, both God and the Church are primarily concerned with forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and renewal. This action of the Church explains the theology of the Church as the family of God.

The Theology of the Church as the Family of God:

This image of the Church as the family of God, is an ancient one. It is rooted in the Sacred Scriptures. John's Gospel says that those who believe in God are given the authority of being God's children (Jn. 1:12-13). The first letter of John 3,1 gives further evidence that the Johannine community understood the birth of believers into Christ as being given the status of the children of God: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God".

Furthermore the concept of the Church as the family of God is reflected in patristic (Fathers of the Church) writings. It is found in the writings of Didymus the Blind (Johannes Quasten, p. 97, Patrology, vol.3, p.111); St Cyprian (De unitate ecclesiae: 23, ibid., p.374); and St Augustine of Hippo (cf. Row W. Battehouse, A Companion of the study of St. Augustine, p. 185).

From the third Eucharistic Prayer one reads: " Father hear the prayers of the family you have gathered here before you. In mercy and love unite all your children wherever they may be".

The Second Vatican Council calls on the human family to become the family of the children of God (Lumen Gentium, 51). It further teaches that the Church is the house of God where his family lives and that God wants to enlarge his own family using married couples.

The salient point this verse makes, is that the Church cares for human families, more so married couples who may be experiencing marriage breakdown or already divorced. It is necessary to drive home this point to my group, to assure them that the Church they belong, truly and sincerely cares for them and listens to their marriage problems. Accordingly the Vatican Council employs images such as sheep fold, flock, the field of God, the spouse of Christ, the Body of Christ, etc. to portray the Church's contrasting facets as a communion. Family of God, is a family entirely open to the world, from which absolutely nobody is excluded. Its members should work toward values of fraternity, solidarity, openness and inclusiveness. The Church will help to foster inculturation, break down barriers, and treat concrete problems of life, such as divorce, in the light of the Gospel.

The Image of God.

The question may be asked: "What Image of God does the Church want to present to those people experiencing divorce and its emotional pains?". Before now, "what image of God have the group, for example, experiencing grief, shock, denial, anger, fear, depression, and rejection; even shame that their marriage failed, conceived? Is God seen as a law-giver without exceptions? Is God seen as one who is not interested in the suffering of his people? These and other unresolved issues are possible "waves" splashing through the minds of those couples going through the devastating agony of divorce.

I hope to lead the group to "gaze" at the compassionate face of God. The attributes of as merciful, loving, forgiving, understanding, and so on, will help to make them understand that hope

and joy are the promise and gift which the Father (God), holds out to his much loved creation. My call and duty as a minister and pastoral counselor, is to identify with their problems, and be giver of that hope and joy. Among other things, one of the goals of my group sessions is to help those coping with divorce-survive, forge a new identity, assume responsibility for a new life, build new relationships and begin healing.

The group sessions intend to provide education, spiritual guidance, and sharing to help people through their grief and sorrow, linked to the Paschal Mystery, Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

In sum, encouraged by the unspeakable richness of God's own compassion, "with our unrest, uncertainty, and even our weakness and sinfulness, with our life and our death" (cf. "Redeemer of Man", para. 10), the group will be able to encourage one another and so draw nearer to God, our lasting hope.

B. Clinical Principles:

Divorce can be a very humiliating experience. Many are especially vulnerable to "falling apart" in relation to the shame they feel when their marriages fail. Learning to live again and the possibility of "re-marrying", are areas of clinical concern. There are many psychological principles one can engage in this discussion, and many psychologists, therapists, and marriage counselors, have written volumes and literature continues to grow on the emotional, physical, legal and custody-battle experiences divorced couples go through in their lives. Pertinent clinical works include:

Rev. William Rabor, ACSW; and Vicki Wells Bedard- talk about the psychological/emotional impact of grief that comes from "Coupleness To Singleness". In their book; "Catholics Experiencing Divorce" (1991) they state "following a divorce, you are suddenly no longer a twosome; you're a onesome" They advocate that the high psychological price a spouse pay for

sudden singleness, is a case for clinical therapists and professional counselors, in helping the divorced grieve, heal and learn to live again. This is one of the clinical goals of the group experience.

Kay Talbot, Ph.D. in his book: "When Grief Brings Depression and Hopelessness"; Abbey Press, 1999-deals with facing the reality of what is lost. He asks these guiding questions: What is lost? What is left? What is possible? As Talbot rightly asserts, these questions (for the divorced), bring a variety of symptoms like recurring migraine headaches, anxiety attacks, insomnia and depression. To heal or help a spouse in this situation, one needs a therapist/counselor, working together to help one's mind heal the body.

Melba Colarove; in her book: "How to Survive the Loss of a Love"; says clinical intervention or professional help may not eliminate grief, but helps one learn how to live with it, and find the will to pursue a meaningful life again. Again, her point is pertinent in a group discussion.

Current Clinical Research relevant to this project include: "The Beginning Experience"; International Ministry Center; 305 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI48226-2605. The Center is a Catholic program that helps couples cope with the end of a marriage. It sees the process of recovering from the grief of the end of a marriage in terms of "death and resurrection". The death has been termed "psychological widowhood". Grief and guilt collide in the personality of the divorced person, resulting in a loneliness that some find intolerable. Such clinical principles will be explored in this project.

Banschick, MD. (my valued mentor), has written a wonderful article on: "The Costly Consequences of Divorce". He covers a spectrum of emotional consequences of divorce in general-depression, characterized by feelings of sadness and loss of interest in life; sleep and appetite disturbances-which often interferes with people's ability to function at home as well as at work. Dr. Banschick goes on to discuss how men and women of all cultures are affected or

experience the same consequences of divorce. However he makes distinctions according to gender.

In the group discussion, individuals will be free to narrate how divorce affects their personal lives, and the lives of significant others, like their children's emotional functioning and physical health.

Anne Newton Walther; MS. in her book "Divorce Hangover"; discusses a successful strategy to "End the Emotional Aftermath of Divorce". She states that the divorce situation can be psychologically punishing. "The emotional doesn't go away", she writes. Anne suggests using a wide variety of strategies to deal with the emotional abyss. The different techniques work for different personalities.

Freudian and other Object-relations theorists suggest that a healthy psychological environment for Child-development includes the presence of both parents. Hence, divorce is a serious source of anxiety for the children; fear, abandonment by one parent, confusion over alliances with each parent. Object-relation theorists believe that children of divorced parents are overburdened by the parent who has custody of the children. For instance, narrating negative or hate stories about ex-spouse, expecting the children to understand and accept thoughts and feelings they are not yet mature enough to handle.

Personal Reflections:

The following reflections are meant to underscore and highlight approaches to coping with a divorce; approaches that have proved helpful to many others who have passed through the "gate" of divorce:

1. The way an individual views divorce can profoundly influence the way he/she lives through it.
2. Traditional roles of "men-favored" divorce in Ibo culture has discouraged divorce and the exploration of the devastating emotional feelings and hassles that accompany divorce.

3. We can no longer deny the reality of divorce. The transition from "Twosome-to-oneness" must be acknowledged and embraced.
 4. Divorce is a crisis, more of a crisis for the woman ("fallen woman, a diseased person to be feared, scorned, and avoided in Ibo culture); hence women are apt to suffer greater emotional damage than the men. On the medical aspect, men suffer more than women.
 5. Sharing experiences in a group setting can enable participants to realize they are not alone, they can be supportive to one another in a non judgmental way, hence experiencing the group as a "flea-market" of positive emotional possibilities and options.
 6. From the religious point of view, the group process can help one to see that divorce is not a sin, and they are not sinners. The Church does not abandon them or ex-communicate them; rather the Church receives the divorced with open arms and God shines on their faces with love and compassion.
 7. The divorced need to learn more positive ways of viewing themselves that may restore self-esteem, limit self-blame, anxiety and self-pity, and restore some coping styles and emotional assurances.
 8. The divorce situation is challenging but needs the challenges of spiritual upliftment: "Do not be afraid" (as Jesus assured his disciples).
 9. The group experience may also be helpful in challenging traditional values (especially Ibo-tradition) of marriage that seem obsolete at the present time.
 10. The individual confidence in the group discussion may enable him/her to know more about his/her personal divorce experiences and develop the capacity to fully understand the confusion, trauma, and pain one may be experiencing. There is indeed a "pony" (falling apart) after divorce, hence the individual first has to clear away the debris.
 11. Although divorced people experience enormous loss, they do not get the support that society extends to people whose spouses have died.
- Infact the last statement makes the clinical goals of the group clearer. As common as divorce is today, and as frequently as couples believe it will bring greater personal happiness or relief, at best

it still represents trauma and loss, helplessness, self-esteem (threatened, lowered or destroyed already).

12. Parenting- brings a traumatic change, from marriage contract to a new type of contract. Ex-spouses are still "together" for their children but now as business partners.

So, I will organize the group function as "a Thermostat" to regulate and stabilize self-esteem (threatened, lowered or destroyed already). Another way of understanding thermostat is to see it as "spiritual holding" to sustain the divorced through the transition. It offers hope. In other words, through their own self-discovery during the group experience, they will be able to realize that they still possess the power to overcome some of their negative feelings, or image of themselves.

Bray and Hetherington; 1993, used another approach called "Homeostasis" to "navigate" many pathways to divorce. They stress how important it is for clinicians and divorcing couples to track the developmental passage of their relationship to understand when and how it broke down. The principle of Bray and Hetherington, is that divorce sets in motion a series of transitions in family roles and relationships, residential arrangements, and economic circumstances, all with strong impact for adjustment. My role as leader, pastor and facilitator will be an effort to protect, explore restore, and repair a cohesive sense of self. In the group discussion , I will encourage a sense of empathy, assuring members that their feelings are understood and not judged. The group will provide a base of common, shared experiences, enabling a closer and more intimate relationship among members.

Another clinical approach I will use to understand the complexity of marital problems, is McGoldrick and Gerson; 1985 (The Genogram-family system). It traces past marriages, ex-relatives, and positions of various members or subsystems in relation to others; which can assist the

person in sorting out the complicated network of relationships: noting conflicts, cut offs, and replication of dysfunctional patterns.

Important contributions of Irvin Yalom: "The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy"; will form an essential part of my focus in the group experience. The sense is to utilize all members as players-hence a variety of techniques may further my objective; every member of the group becomes part of the organism that makes a successful group. My clinical goal is to utilize techniques that evokes meaningful talk between group members. My aim is to develop emotional connections where they didn't exist before.

I will also use ideas from R. Ormont, Ph.D.: "The Group Therapy Experience". I will allow group members to supply insights and support to one another and draw strength from the recognition that they are no longer alone in their marital hazards. The group will be free to feel the need to have members talk about themselves, about each other and their experiences. According to Louis R. Ormont, it is the group itself and not I, the leader, that is the true instrument of cure. I will help to get the group started by what Louis Ormont calls "Bridging". My role is to facilitate talk because when there is talk, there is life. My "bridging-technique" is guided by the fact that there will be "Resistance". Some of the spouses invited for this discussion have expressed resistance, saying that they wouldn't like to reopen "old wounds" and relive an experience that has been so traumatic. According to Louis Ormont, every therapist should recognize the potential dangers of prolonged silences. Hence my bridging (intervention) approach is to help members convert the energy used for "defiance" into the constructive energy that is needed to do creative work in the group. Hence I could put some questions to the members, to release their pent-up energy, enabling them make contact with one another.

I will use Yvonne M. Agazarian's group therapy approach, from her book: "System-Centered Therapy for Groups" (The Guilford Press; 1997. 72 Spring Street, New York, NY.10012).

System-Centered therapy is an innovative approach to psychotherapy that synthesizes a finely tuned awareness of the defensive roles of anxiety, depression, and other common presenting problems, which will certainly be the case with my group. Yvonne M. Agazarian introduces the theory of living human systems and maps out its operationalization in a structured treatment model applicable to work with any group. He shows how active intervention in the group process can direct the energy of members toward the goals of the therapy. The therapist does this by bringing defenses to group-members' attention, while simultaneously teaching them the skills they need to modify them. I intend to play this role, since my group members have never participated in any group discussions on the subject-matter: "Divorce".

System-Centered therapy work as a partnership in which the therapist governs the structure of the therapy and group-members make a series of manageable choices at different levels. The therapist needs to understand the structure, function, and dynamics of the group-as a living human system; which include individual members, subgroups, and the group-as-a-whole.

Learning from Agazarian's system-centered theory, I will approach each session with a focused, centered stance, keeping in mind the following goals:

- * Heighten the level of communication between members, by avoiding distancing behaviors.
- * Bypass pitfalls that are often believed to be generic to group development, such as scapegoating and the creation of identified patients.
- * Discriminate between members' defensive reactions and their primary experiences of reality.

In other words, the system-centered therapy, presents a powerful modality that enables group-members to safely "sit at the edge of the unknown" and transform their way of relating to themselves and each other. I will make use of the clinical and psychotherapeutic approaches reviewed in the literature books.

Chapter 111.

Methodology:

A. The Approach and Procedure.

My first step was a recruitment exercise. Any one I called wanted to know the purpose of the group experience.

I explained that the group discussion, was aimed at coming together for the first time, and express their experiences of "divorce- drama"; share their stories with one another.

I told those invited that the group experience was not meant to get information to be used against anybody, nor judgmental, but to help them confront the issue of divorce, and let out their emotions, and be supportive of one another.

I promised that graphic explanations for forming the group discussion would be revealed during the first session.

I reached those invited through e-mail, oral invitations, and telephone calls

I invited 12 persons but ended up with 6, four men and two women.

One of the members I approached was highly sensitive. She did not want to hear anything about "that man".

This shows a very powerful resentment and resistance. In my culture, ex-spouses are never friends as it sometimes happens in America and other Western cultures. My culture views divorce as "unheard of", and ex-spouses are warring enemies.

My group consists of Catholics and Angelican spouses alike; however the Catholics in the group are more in number. The group will enable me to bring my personal theology and faith tradition to help others in a more positive way.

The group will meet on a weekly basis for eight consecutive times. We have agreed to meet on Saturdays at 5pm, one and half hour each time.

The first two sessions will deal with the essential goals (part one) that is, divorce and its effects on members here, in a popular culture (America), as opposed to their culture of origin; how does it affect work life and life-style in America.

Section B. Proposed Working Outlines:

Introduction.

Session 1.

I will explain what the project and group discussion is all about, and why it is important to talk about divorce, for example, no group from the Ibo-tribe has ever discussed divorce in public or shared experiences openly. One of the reasons for such secrecy is that people at home will "taboo" any person, especially a woman (the accused, most times) who has not only braved divorce but have the boldness to discuss it openly; such a person has no shame, they would say. I will let my group/people know that I have always thought about their predicaments, the silence, the suppressed emotions and isolation they go through. This is an opportunity to go "public", within the confidential bonds of the group: experience their feelings, and share such feelings with another by opening up with free flow discussions. I will try and assure them that I'm the right person, as their minister and counselor, I am not influenced by any cultural-leanings or sanctions.

Session 11.

We shall name the theme and allow the group to address it. Someone currently experiencing divorce or have recently gone through one, may want to start. Yet there is no programmed way to begin, we go where the "spirit" moves us. Indeed anybody may open up the discussion, in a free and calm atmosphere.

Session 111.

This is another day of free flow of personal experience, how is life different now! I will have themes and texts in mind for each session which will be used flexibly and always in the context of the group process. A supportive text of similar experience may be read. I'm thinking about the

Genesis account where Sarah, Abraham's wife, contrained him to send away Hagar (the mother of Ishmal), and how God intervened on behalf of Hagar and changed her life for the better. This story may help them make sense of their experience. Again, it is not compulsory, especially if the group doesn't feel citing biblical verses to deal with their problems at moment.

Session IV.

Free flow and/or team discussion or break up into smaller groups with or without supportive text. The continuation of free flow discussion is essential because my people sometimes like to talk only when they see others speak, especially in this sensitive area of "divorce". One reason I know is that no one would like to be singled out as the person who started the discussion. Again, breaking into smaller groups is necessary. The Ibos function freely and comfortably when they are organized according to age-grades. So, group members will be free to choose one or two persons to discuss issues with, even though our number is small.

Session V.

Stock-taking or inventory of what has been discussed, and experienced, insights gained, feelings realized, renewed, or conflicts resolved. I will suggest to the group that we use the next session as: "emptying of self" in the form of a ritual/worship. It is "service without a priest", which means it is not Mass or service presided over by a minister in an official capacity. The nature of the service is the reading of relevant texts (like the book of Ruth-where God repaired her broken-heart). During the service, participants will offer prayers for themselves and other people who are divorced.

Session VI.

We shall discuss the composition of the service and prayers. The readings may or may not be taken from texts strictly speaking. Participants will be encouraged to bring their own compositions and their own prayers for divorced spouses and families experiencing difficulties in

their marriages. Since the service is not a "traditional way of worshipping, participants can say a brief homily/encouragement, or advice.

Session V11/V111.

The group-members will react to the idea of conducting the service, praying for divorced families, and evaluate the whole process; will discuss feelings about the conclusion of the group. Members will fill out termination questionnaire. We will have closing circle of sharing of parting thoughts and feelings; more kiss of peace will be encouraged.

In-between each session, Texts, Reflections, Illustrations, if used, will be identified.

B. Assessment-Method of Outcomes:

As Yalom states, it would be a hypocritical assumption if I believe that the difficulties divorced spouses are experiencing , are going to go away simply because they are discussing their problems in this group, in 8 sessions.

- a. Hence, using Yalom's process of the "here-and-now" experience, I will ask participants to express their sense of growth and new awareness; in other words, what the interaction conveys about the nature of the members' relationships to one another. Would they continue to communicate with one another and their children-for example, after the session.
- b. Feedback...at the end, participants will be asked to complete the termination questionnaire; or write brief statements about their experiences in the group, observations, suggestions about the process.
- c. I will invite participants to express their attitudes or vision toward the future

Chapter 1V. Transformative Results.

Description of Outcome.

I sent invitations to twelve divorced spouses-two are newly divorced. Initially, all of them agreed to join in the group experience but later some declined, describing the topic of discussion as "emotional-no-go-area". I followed the means of communication stated in chapter 3, that is, telephone calls; oral invitation; e-mail; and personal visits to some spouses, over a period of two months. One person attended the first session and withdrew, because of time constrain and his busy schedule. He was apologetic. Personally, I observed signals of resistance and anxiety, from this person; of course the whole group manifested the same in the unfolding group process. This is expected of the group in sessions (as Yalom warned in his book: "The Theory And Practice of Group Psychotherapy"). Each participant was reminded the reason for forming the group: to address specific needs of Nigerian-Americans experiencing divorce in diaspora; something seemingly strange and difficult in their native land. They were also informed that the group experience will be used in my Doctor of Ministry Project. Inadvertantly, they are helping me to fashion out the best way to minister to them. At this point, the participants are introduced.

1. Mercy- 47, married 12 years; has two children-ages 9 and 6 (one boy 9; and one girl 6). Mercy came to the United States as a young girl. She followed her uncle who was murdered while she was still in the High School. Her own marriage failed because, according to her, her ex-husband was unfaithful-having extra-marital affairs, cheating, bossy, and abusive. She regretted that she didn't take more time in the courtship because the sudden death of her own uncle, left her feeling she needed a home and love and hoped the man she married would provide her "a safe haven".

2. Eugene-49, born and raised in the United States; an engineer by profession. He was born in North Carolina but moved to New York to further his education. Eugene married a Nigerian woman. They had no children. He had a son from his previous marriage, which he claims was purely on a friendship basis; that resulted in getting a child. He has custody of the child because the child's mother left and didn't want custody. The current marriage failed because Eugene accuses his ex-spouse of being noisy, quarrelsome, and mannerless; "most often we got into physical fights".
3. Lilian, 36, married 10 years with three daughters; each girl is two years older than the other in succession. Lilian said she lived with an abusive husband and his intruding relatives who contributed to the breakdown of the marriage; "they always ganged against me". The marriage ended in divorce because Lilian didn't have "male" children.
4. Ambrose, 56, married an African-American; the marriage lasted for 15 years. They had three children from the marriage-Silas 10, Rita 7, and Lydia 4. Ambrose has since remarried but has no additional children to the three by his former wife. Ambrose believes cultural differences caused the breakdown of his marriage-"two flags" in one family. "My ex-wife had 'do my thing attitude', Ambrose concluded.
5. Cyrina, 42, married her husband. They are Nigerians and lived together for 13 years. They had two children a son, 8, and a daughter, 5. Cyrina said her suffering started with the arrival of the first child. The ex-husband became abusive verbally, physically, and emotionally. He was alcoholic and wasteful with money.
6. Rosemary, 36, was the youngest in the group. Her ex-spouse married her in Nigeria and brought her to America 7 years ago. He claimed he was a medical doctor and needed to marry a nurse. On arrival to the United States she discovered that the man was nowhere close to what he claimed, but a security guard and worked in a gas station during the day. The husband depended on Rosemary's salary and at the same time was abusive as a defensive way of covering his lies. However, the marriage produced a son, 3 years old. When Rosemary couldn't take the physical

abusive and emotional agony anymore, she called the police. Her husband later left the house and filed for a divorce.

The Group Experience started (Sept. Thur. Nov. 2002).

First Session of Group Experience (Week 1).

Seven participants came, including the person who couldn't continue after the first session. The first session was an introductory process. As soon we sat in a circle-formation, members gazed at one another and at me. I liked the eye-contact, for group therapists recommend it as a sign of a good beginning (eye-contact and emotional connection). I expected the gaze (Resistance) because group-members weren't sure what they were in for. None of them had ever been in a group experience, sharing personal and emotional post-divorce experiences.

I began with a brief introductory statement about the purpose and method of the group discussion, as I stated in Chapter 111. I took time and effort to explain my vision about the importance of discussing their marital problems as a group; to express themselves without hindrance or fear of embarrassment, criticism, or judgment. I urged the group not to regard themselves as strangers, but as a family, from the same tribe, same culture, and familiar with group assembly as a way of discussing and resolving problem in Ibo culture. Hence the key concepts that have acted like rudders have been "expressing the emotions, support and healing. Rosemary, fresh from the "wound" of divorce, asked me: "who would make 'this broken heart' heal?" Her question showed how concerned she was, searching for the rationale of the group's activities to their personal goals (Yalom envisaged that; Cf. P.295-The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy). Rosemary at first felt awkward with the group, because her divorce was new. She was a bit ambivalent about whether or not her marriage was over and how to break free of the past. I encouraged her to join the group, both for her own benefit and serve as an example to the others of the importance of facing and dealing with fresh emotional issues that come out of a divorce.

The first session lasted longer than I anticipated. One man in the group expressed gratitude, that someone from the same culture, a son and a minister, has remembered them. He felt the Church has at last, decided to address their problems.

At the end of the session, I sensed a positive sign that the group would survive. Members started interpersonal conversations like-where they come from, what part of the Ibo-tribe one has come from; and some said they discovered a linkage or close relationship with one another.

Again, this is a sign of focusing their energy or relationship to one another, as achieved in group discussions.

Second Session of Group Experience (Week 11):

I started the second session by way of activating discussion, based on a "here-and-now" technique.(Yalom calls it 'activating phase in the 'here-and-now technique, page 139). I summarized some of their main concerns they addressed in the previous session, reminding them that the history they share, with its bitter or sweet memories, is important.

There was a spontaneous outburst of stories, clouded by a tone of hurt! Cyrina related her own story: "My husband's elder sister didn't want us to marry. She had wanted to introduce her school-mate and friend to her brother. She succeeded in 'poisoning' her siblings against me. Luckily my husband went ahead and married me. So, when we got married, we clung together like two 'shipwrecked souls'; hoping we were there for each other. In fact the marriage floated, strong, and buoyant. Gradually, my ex-husband became autocratic, commanding, possessive, and fault-finding. I knew something worse was on the way. He came back very late from work, almost regularly and had no appetite for me. Later, I discovered my husband was keeping a woman outside the home. What happened from here, is a long story", she sobbed.

Eugene related a similar experience, and said that his "well-behaved wife, later turned into a scorpion". Other forms of emotional expressivity flowed. They all expressed initial happy beginnings, hopes, then sudden negative changes, and dreams that hit rock bottom.

Lilian regretted how most spouses start their marriages with intense emotional expressions like: "Sweetie! Mine! Darling!; only to hear from the same spouse: "Stupid! Rat! Cheater!".

I was empathic as I listened to the out-pouring of their hearts; at the same time happy that the group process and focus had become a natural part of the group-life, and what the interaction conveys about the relationship to one another, here-and-now, in sharing divorce experiences.

Third Session of Group Experience (Week 111):

The third session seemed more involving for every participant. It is what I have termed the "Flea Market" session. As soon as we gathered in a circle, I noticed some members whispering into others' ears, perhaps trying to communicate some feelings before they could express them! Then I activated the group discussion by asking a question: "When a spouse has contemplated divorce emotionally, are there mixed feelings within you that may completely surprise you? A member asked me to explain further. I reframed the question thusly: Even though you have told yourself that divorce or living apart from each other, is the only logical answer to your marital problems, do you have some reservations about taking that action?

The group came out with "deadly emotions" that can turn that decision into a nightmare.

Fear was a factor: First person: "I thought my savings and income would disappear and I might live in poverty; I had to carter for myself and children alone, pay house mortgage, fight for child-custody, and so on. Frankly speaking, fear of surviving on my own dominated my being", she concluded.

Cultural Influence....Another person responded: "I thought of our culture. Divorce has never happened in my family before; my family would reject me, and my relatives and friends won't want to see me any more. Oh! my parents will have heart-attacks when they hear we are divorcing".

Guilt played a role in taking a decision.

3rd person: "I don't know what I did wrong. I lived in misery for years, yet the feeling of guilt delayed the timing of my departure. I reasoned that my children would think I'm not a good parent.

I even at times, felt for my ex-husband and felt the fault came from me. Really that is unfounded, but I was racing with such imaginations".

Anger was loud and clear here. A man in the group turned stone-faced and said: "I was very angry with my ex-wife. Yes, we have come to America where the woman tells the husband where 'to sit, where to go, what time to come back! My wife came to America and forgot that I married her and brought her here. There is a limit to what a man can tolerate. Fierce arguments between us were the order of the day. Back home, I would order her to leave my house, but I left without thinking about a house or apartment to move into, or how to take care of myself".

The man's remark inflamed debate about the protection and rights the law gives to women over the men. Of course, the women defended the law, while the men criticized it.

Hatred was another factor. The second man in the group translated his hatred for his ex-spouse into punishment: "My method was different. I allowed my wife to feel the hatred. She wanted to visit her sister one weekend. I set a date for my leaving and the children started crying. She saw me searching the newspapers for a separate rental apartment. She really felt the torture as her children cried. I did that to hurt her because for so long she treated me with disdain". What this did is an example of setting the children at a cross-fire. He was using the children to hurt his wife, thereby subjecting the children to emotional torture.

Again there was murmuring of disapproval and approval; a conflict one must expect in a group-setting.

Personal Assessment:

From the above discussion, I learned there are "promptings" to divorce; emotional-divorce may have occurred long before the physical act of leaving takes place, and that can reinforce the irrevocability of the decision to live permanently apart from each other and divorce legally.

Unique to each couple are the evolving beliefs created from each person's perceptions of the partner and self, as well as their views of cultural and familial values about committed relationships.

Personality differences are deeply embedded in the emotions; mostly irritating qualities.

In some cases, it appears as if one person wants out of the marriage, while the other doesn't.

"Surprise"...seems the typical reactions of the spouse who hears: "I-want-a-divorce news" from his or her spouse and then feels like the victim. Some of the group-members explained that the "surprise" might be a fear-reaction to the fact that you must now assume total responsibility for the direction of your life on your own, rather than a desire to hold on to the wounded pride, and emotion can have on your life as a single person. Some of the people who have fanned the flames of these emotions for many years, have lived bitter lives as a consequences.

Fourth Session of Group Experience (Week 1V).

"Breaking News!". A new person joined the group. He is Providence. Age 53, married for 19 years and with 4 children. Narrating his marriage story to the group, he gnashed his teeth. "My wife walked away on me a few weeks ago and filed for divorce at once. My wife severally asked me to leave the house, but I refused; for the sake of the children". Providence said he felt guilty. Voices from the group asked: "Why? Why? Why?. I asked him the same question.

He replied: "I discover now that I had punished my wife for the 19 years we were married. She was not in the marriage 'heart-and-mind'. We spent time separately, no coversation, no intimate relationship, no love. My wife abused me often in front of my children, and we got into physical struggles. All she did was a strategy to get out of the marriage".

Eugene asked Providence what he thought was the main problem. "I guess money! Her pay-check was fatter than mine. She started to keep her separate account. I looked diminished before my wife and she felt I should be treated as a servant, not as a husband", he said.

How do you feel now, Providence?, I asked.

"Terrible!. I agonized a lot. My greatest problem was how to tell my children in plain language, what was going on. They knew something was wrong with the marriage, but they could not interpret the signs", he concluded.

Cyrina asked Providence how he knew about the group. He said that someone in the group told him about it, and asked him to join and talk-out his suppressed emotions and stress. He was welcomed to the group and praised for his courage to come and share his story with the other members; and hoped he would benefit from the group experience.

In the previous week, the group was not able to break into subgroups as planned. Now the group broke into two subgroups. Members were free to choose the subgroup they wanted to belong. They asked for a single topic for discussion, so that each subgroup could look at the same aspect of marital problem.

All agreed to use a text from the Scripture that talks about the relationship between husband and wife.

The supremacy of the husband and father, more often than not, has been a characteristic of family life in Ibo land. Social customs and structures of the land give clear priority to the man, as the head of the house.

Then I read a portion of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical (Letter) on Christian Marriage: "The husband is the chief of the family and the head of the wife".

St. Paul approved this idea when he wrote: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church" (Colossians Ch. 3: 18-19; Ephesians 5: 22-24).

Discussion:

How does this concept promote harmony or otherwise, between husband and wife?

I went around to listen to the direction and flow of arguments and reasoning. I also jotted down some points in my notes. There were views and contra-views; areas of agreements and disagreements.

Immediate Outcome:

What was unexpected was the emergence of a leader for each sub-group. One sub-group was led by a man, while the other was led by a woman.

The group recognized that Ibo structure of the home and the roles of family members are often dictated and determined by custom, geography, and needs of the times; investing more powers on the man, and subordinating the woman. In the past, the husband's role as the breadwinner, gave him a natural and necessary right to make "the big decisions", since the future fortunes of the family depended upon his job and salary. Even today, there are flourishing remnants of that pattern in some Nigerian-American families.

The group disagreed with the biblical concept of "male-patriarch and breadwinner". They reasoned that the 21st. century woman, one-third of our American mothers hold jobs themselves. Occasionally, the woman's income is larger than that of the husband. The woman sometimes makes financial decisions for the family, because she keeps abreast of changing prices and shifting budget patterns.

They raised the point that the work-habits of the modern Nigerian-American husband make it increasingly difficult for him to take decision-making initiative in other areas formerly thought to be his prerogative.

Ambrose protested and raised his voice: "Man is fitted by nature to be the provider and protector of the family". A woman interrupted him. This manifested how heated their debate/argument went.

The group cautioned psychologists, family-experts, and Church authorities to be clear about the kind of roles husbands and wives ought to play; that the authorities' bewilderment and lack of conviction are threats to healthy relationship; sometimes ending in divorce.

Finally, Ms. Mercy asked me: "Pastor, how do you apply a theoretical biblical concept to the variety of needs which today's modern families must meet?" (I guess, Ms. Mercy saw me as the Church and rightly expected me to provide the answer. Transference!).

As a way of clarifications, I touched some key notes on tradition and the understanding of the biblical text.

Tradition: The traditions of the Ibo society, and indeed many societies, in many ages and cultures, cannot be lightly set aside. There is something inherently significant about the role of a

husband. His unique contributions are sometimes difficult to pin down, but there are several senses in which some sort of a priority may be accorded to him. A woman seems to look quite naturally to her husband for some sort of guidance, assurance, and love.

Yet the wife keeps the independence of a human person. She remains free in her personal conduct, in her practice of religion, in her goings and comings, with due consideration for the conjugal pact and order of house and family. She preserves the right to demand of her husband, whatever her qualities as wife entitle her to; as the husband and wife were equal in giving themselves each to the other. So, they remain equal in regard to the right which flows from this mutual self-surrender.

Understanding of the Biblical text: I explained that the Church has never preached the distorted dogma of "female inferiority". Official Church teaching has stressed again and again that men and women are different, not unequal; that each sex has been destined by nature to perform a specialized role.

Pope Pius XII defined a wife "not, indeed, as a servant, but as a companion, so that her obedience shall be wanting in neither honor nor dignity. He said that the wife should claim for herself: "the Chief place in love". However, the Pope warned against over zealous false liberty advocated by some feminists who claim that a married woman should have the same liberty as her unmarried sisters: "You lead your life and I will lead mine"; means the ruin of husband, wife and family.

Futhermore, I explained to the group that even where St. Paul talked of "subordination", he made it reciprocal: "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph.5:21). St. Pual also admonished husbands to love their wives (Eph. 5:25). I understand this verse as an earnest exchange of ardent conjugal love. As both husband and wife serve the same God, both are bound by the same obligations.

I concluded the session by reminding the group that it is really dangerous to spell out, too precisely any universal expectations which husbands and wives should have of one another.

The Fifth Session of Group Experience (Week V).

Inventory (Stock-taking):

- Some members of the group expressed satisfaction with the timing of the group experience. They said that time had elapsed since their divorce. Right out of divorce, they were too angry, emotional, and self-absorbed to benefit from the group process; they couldn't see beyond themselves at the time of divorce. Now, the "cloud" has cleared a bit, they said.
- The group process helped some to discover their sense of self and issue of loss. They felt free to share without restrictions, especially their vulnerability in a group setting and challenging them to express their inner feelings, own those feelings and gain insight into healing old hurts.
- Almost all the members expressed surprise for the wealth of experiences shared in the group. They also expressed disappointment that their ex-spouses were not in the same group to listen to the stories.
- I observed that any devout woman, no matter what her particular faith, may find herself torn between what she interprets as the teachings of her religion on the one hand, and her own safety and freedom on the other hand. Cyrina said she felt she had a double dose of divorce-guilt because her religion forbade divorce, "It seemed to take over my whole mind and absorbed all my thoughts", she said. I noticed that self-guilt was a common feeling.
- Some spouses are stuck by fear-fear of being neither here nor there, is what keeps most people stuck in bad marriages and in divorce hangovers.
- Bridges....after divorce, some spouses bury themselves in work in an effort not to feel the emotional pain. They may need some diversion from the chaos, but it doesn't keep them from facing the facts. For example, Eugene narrated how he resorted to staying longer hours at work and in the office. He said that he became a workaholic, as an escape.

I know that this practice is a dangerous bridge (like alcohol, overeating), because it doesn't remove one's connectedness to the past.

- The women in the group had the perception that they suffer the most while men become instant happy bachelors the day the divorce-decree arrives.
- Many spouses felt like victims and experienced a divorce hangover-loss of beautiful homes, standing in the community and connection with family members.
- The group agreed that when a marriage has deteriorated beyond repair, to the point that everyone in the home is miserable, divorce is the healthiest solution.
- Some members of the group experience said that the way the media handles divorce makes it more difficult for those seeking divorce. They said that all the newspapers, magazines, radio, televisions, carry news of legal battles and pictures of spouses engaged in divorce tussle.
- While children suffer when parents divorce, they suffer more from exposure to prolonged conflicts in the home or highly conflicted divorce.
- Even under the best of circumstances, divorce makes children afraid and anxious. When parents divorce, children lose their sense of security and protection. While parents often see divorce as primarily an issue between themselves, with the impact on the children as incidental, children view the divorce as something happening to them. They see the family splitting apart, and their own identities changing. Cyrina narrated how one of her children, in particular, was reluctant to attend school and started performing poorly in class-tests.
- The Nigerian woman feels the loss of love of her ex-spouse's family, if they regard the woman as the "culprit" in the divorce. Traditionally, the Ibo-society teaches women to stand by their men, hence blames any woman whose marriage fails. This is reinforced by the Ibo strong conviction that children should have a father-figure, and divorce sometimes deprives children of their fathers.
- For the divorced, there is general feelings of the loss of value-system. That is, the once taken for granted assumptions that "your marriage was for life and that your spouse was your most trust-worthy friend have turned out to be illusions", as one woman put it.

The Sixth Session of Group Experience (Week VI).

Outlines of the Service:

This session was organized as a worship entitled "service without a priest" described in the proposal. I observed that the rings of their thoughts, emotions and memories of divorce, affected the way they look at life and God, at others and their relationships.

Two persons in the group asked me how they could compose a sincere form of prayers when they still felt angry and not sure how to take care of some emotional hangups. (Resistance and lack of self-esteem!).

Lilian confessed that she had a great crisis experience of God, who seemed hiding during her divorce tussle.

I explained to them that salvation does not give instant emotional healing. Certain areas of our lives need special spiritual healing. God has some repairs for us. When we ask help from God, one meaning of the word "help", has a medical connotation; suggesting the way a nurse helps in the healing process. Hence, God, the divine counselor, the divine psychiatrist, gets ahold of our problems on the other end.

Then the group agreed on the following outline:

- The service would begin by reading short verses from the Scripture, relevant to the relationship between husband and wife. We agreed that each person should choose his or her own biblical verse, study it, and give a brief homily/sermon of his/her understanding of the portion chosen, or ask questions.
- Other members of the group were free to react to the readings, or add some thoughts to the explanation given to the readings.
- Each person would say the prayers he or she composed, over the group who would be standing or kneeling.

- A moment of silence would be observed.
- End with a kiss of peace!. Closing remarks by the minister/facilitator.

This first part of session six ended abruptly.

Providence was beeped (phone call). He was told that a very thick cloud of smoke was coming out next door to his house. He ran out immediately with another man whom he gave a ride. Providence's reaction warranted a sudden group behavior to adjourn the group and go home for other cares.

The Seventh/Eighth Session of Group Experience (Week V11/V111).

"Service Without A Priest/Minister".

The Service began with short readings from the Scripture, as proposed.

Ambrose read his own biblical text: " The Bible says, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church".

"My own interpretation and sermon is that, our women should accept this portion of the Bible, as a commandment from God", he said.

Mercy challenged him! "That means that the husband is to love his wife, to nourish, and cherish her. I read Col.3:19, which says: "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them". That is the right interpretation, she concluded.

Eugene quoted St. Matthew: "What therefore God has joined together let no man (human) put asunder", (Matt. 19:6). "Why then do some women easily divorce their husbands?", he asked.

Lilian: "The interpretation is that a man who brings abuses and violence into his family-life, is putting asunder the marriage, and he is responsible for the breakup. The woman must take steps to remove herself and her children from the destructive situation."

Rosemary read her own verse and remarks: "Religious conscience kept me long in a situation that has destroyed me emotionally. The Bible says that the wife must submit to her husband: "Be

subject to one another out of reverence for Christ", (Eph.5:12). Does this mean I must obey, no matter whatever?".

Mercy explained the quotation as meaning: "To be subject means that we should all, including husbands and wives, seek to be flexible with each other".

Providence interrupted her and made an inflammable remark: "When the man dies and the wife becomes a rich widow, that is when you agree that husbands are flexible".

There was a momentous revolt against him. Even another man in the group blamed Providence for making the remark. However, some others understood his remarks as jokes.

I felt satisfied that the healthy rivalry from the texts afforded the group mechanism to connect with each and one another; to relate their emotions with their faith, and help in the healing process. The group was able to hold the conflict. For example, the insensitive remarks by Providence, did not make them to disperse.

I suggested we observe some moments of silence, to reflect on the readings, the explanations the group offered, and our reactions to them. We observed five minutes silence!

The Prayer-Phase:

The prayers had been composed by the members themselves. Each individual composed his or her own prayers; but offered on their behalf and other families experiencing marital problems.

At the beginning of the prayer session, I applied Dr. Richard Mallory's method of forming a circle, with the first person to start the prayer in the middle, and then praying together. This is to energize the group and the person or persons who pray for others.

Rosemary:

"James 5:16 says: 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed'. Lord, we have confronted the awful memories of divorce and deep feelings of anger, hurt and the resentment. We have shared our experiences with one another in the group

process, as a way of confession. I still find it difficult to get through what I suffered. God, give the courage to face the reality and find the strength and light to see the bright light ahead of me. Please God, do the same for my other brothers and sisters in my own situation.

All said...Amen!

Cyrina:

Dear Jesus, you understand human situations and how we feel as a group, abandoned by spouses we once loved, and hoped to spend life together. We offer our tears to you and hope on you. I wrestle with feelings that nearly tear me apart. God, be with us and the children left into our custody. You are the "Emmanuel, God with us". We have come to you with loud sobs, yet with confidence. Kindly send us away at the end of this group discussion, comforted, and spiritually satisfied as when you fed thousands of people with only a few bread.

All.....Amen!

Eugene:

Jesus Christ our Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I pray particularly for the children of the divorced. They are victim of circumstances. Protect them. Some of their custodians have no easy way to maintain them. Lord, provide for them, help them understand the unexpected situations that have affected them in their families. All of us here cannot adequately express or put into words how we feel. May your affection for us be our shield.

Providence:

Made only ejaculatory prayers: "In Jesus's Name! In Jesus Name! Amen! Amen!

Kiss of Peace:

Somenoe started a song: "God, Beyond my wants, Beyond my fears, from death unto life! Everybody picked the tone. The song went on, as each person gave a kiss of peace to the other person.

I gave my group the kiss of peace too.

At the end of the service, we sat down. I noticed some of the members breathed as a sign of relief. I asked them how they felt during and after the service. I got a lot of reactions. Rosemary in particular told me that she wept through the whole exercise. A few others expressed the same sentiment. Some said that they were shaking their heads while praying and that connected them to their emotions and to the experience of the Spirit.

Lilian asked me: "How did you see our attitude, or how can you judge us?".

I replied that I was there as a part of the group, not as a judge. I shared with them my observations, that each had different perspectives about being a man and woman and struggles about how they felt the Church would perceive them. I assured them that we did was to ask for God's strength in our weakness. I offered to tell them a story that reinforced our need of God in all circumstances.

The Story of Ruth and Naomi:

The Book of Ruth begins with sadness and pain. In the story, Naomi felt rejected and abandoned by people and by God. She couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel. She told her townspeople not to call her Naomi, which means "Sweet", anymore, but to call her Mara, which means "Bitter", (Ruth 1:20-21). The story continues and ends with Naomi, no longer bitter; now holding the child of Ruth and Boaz, her own grandson, while the women of Bethlehem gathered around her blessing God for his faithfulness.

The book tells us that we can turn things around, even when they appear bleak. The Book of Ruth is a story of being lifted out of suffering (as the divorced experience it now), into the goodness of God. It is the story of how God can pour out strength into you too. The ways of God go against what logic may tell us, I told them.

B. Assessment Outcome (Feedback).

This was the last day of the group experience. I asked the members to express their feelings and evaluate the whole process.

The members requested that their names be omitted in whatever they were about to say or reactions on certain issues.

I asked them to explain why they would want their names to be omitted, so that I could appreciate their stand.

The members told me that they were prepared to talk, not only to themselves, but to husbands, wives, brother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, and relatives out-there.

The group said their reactions would send a message to Ibo-Tradition, Customs and Culture.

They also said that the Church wouldn't be an exception in their remarks.

I granted them all the "dispensations" they asked from me. I entitled this "free-for-all"

sittings/session, or as "Community Forum". In Ibo land, communities assemble at market-square or village-square to discuss issues bothering the community. At the assembly, every one is free to express his/her feelings or opinion about the issue at table. The process is democratic and no one is held responsible for whatever one may say, even if it may not be relevant. Members preferred the title: "Community Forum". I suggested whether we could use "M" and "F" to designate male and female respectively. The group refused, saying that some characters could be known from their tone and manner of presentation. Hence we chose the letter "V" for each speaker.

"Community Forum".

V.....(represents any member's voice).

F.....(Facilitator; "me").

V. From the Scriptural readings, marriage seems to be one of the most powerful archetypes and psychic symbols.

F. Could you make it simpler for all of us to understand what you mean?

V. It bothers me that Jesus presented divorce as something to be abhorred. I feel worried also that the Church has "sinned" grievously against those whose marriages ended in divorce.

F. Can you give any specific examples?

V. The divorced experience rejection. The annulment process is very slow, laborious and expensive. There should be more compassionate way of treating the divorce cases of those seeking an annulment.

V. The way the Church, even the "Prayer Group" I belong to, treated me immediately after my divorce, was shocking and unbelievable.

"Father, I will be pleased if you allow me private audience after this session.

F. If you want to see me separately, that's okay. (See Appendix 1)!

V. For me, the whole group experience offered me a sort of social recovery. My first foray into the social world was unsettling. I felt awful presenting myself to those who knew me as part of a couple, in the role of a newly single person that looked awkward for both me and them.

Now, I'm trying to change my perception of self and the real world.

V. You wouldn't believe my own experience. I was the chairperson of the women's group, a branch of Nigeria Community in U.S. Barely three months after my divorce, they removed me from that position. Shame to them, not me!

V. Women like yourself?

V. Yes! Horrible!

V. In how many ways can I be myself? Pastor, that's the question I ask myself.

F. I guess when you are sure that you want to make a drastic alteration in your life!

Perhaps this is the best time to begin that life alteration.

V. The group process has helped me to reflect, dialogue and I say to myself "Yes". It is time to begin. I know it will need a lot of muscles.

V. As for me, the group experience renewed an old wound. However, when I heard the stories of the other members, I recoiled to myself, and began to feel consoled. Really after the group-prayers, which I composed one myself, I felt my cry has gone up to Haeven, to that man.

That man is God!

V. During the group experience, I felt a bit frustrated and angry at the man, all the men who manipulated tradition to suit their crafts. When traditional-spells fail them, they resort to "American-way". At another time, they would remind you about how it works in Ibo land, where a woman must prepare the meals, no matter what her health-condition, sick or well.

V. The women made very many upsetting remarks. They reminded me how the legal system rendered man hopeless and helpless in this country. The law gives custody of the children to the woman and she feels the children belong to her alone. She forgets the man was there from the beginning of the child's life. I gave her the pregnancy, my blood, my 'image and likeness'.

V. Yes, you are God! Mr. God! (the women reacted sharply).

V. In a way, you are right! I had to beg for visitation arrangements. The best deal a man gets from the court, is how to pay child support.

F. What would be the best arrangement?

V. Well! It is important to give your children good life. At times I wonder why should I worry about custody and child support. Here in America, children grow up and have little or nothing to do with their old parents. You receive no "old age" support from them. The best thing they can do for you is to send you to a nursing home, where you languish and die. When they bury you, they search for your "Will".

V. You are correct! However, it depends on the individual. Some children who came here as adults, remember the Ibo custom and tradition; that children take proper care of their parents in their old age.

V. What I think now is not about anybody but myself. The question I ask myself, is-how I can relate to the world I almost abandoned when my divorce occurred? I feel better now than when I cut-off from my friends and relatives. I didn't want their friendship then.

- V. Be courageous! Give them a call!
- V. I have been trying to frame this question! Pastor, why can the Catholic Church not adopt this formula of service we used in this group service? I was exalted to read the text myself and give the homily. The Church should allow this type of opportunity to the congregants.
- F. I guess I don't have all the answers. However it is not the practice or tradition of the Catholic Church. One of the reasons is that reading the gospel account and preaching thereafter, is a "Proclamation" (Announcing the Goodnews), which is reserved to the ordained.
- V. Whatever the reason, church authorities should reconsider the roles lay people play during worship. "The Service Without A Priest" has given me a lift in my life. I used to feel shy (stage-fright) in facing the crowd. I felt empowered when I stood up and read my text, and explained what I understood as the content of the verse on "subordination"
- V. Actually the type of service we had, gave me, and I think all of us, a sense of belonging and inclusiveness.
- V. All echoed: Yeah!
- V. I'm thinking of forming a miniature group experience of this nature. Some of our people have already learned we are in a group, discussing divorce as peculiar to us in the United States. It is now proper to have a place where people who may face this "scorpion" (divorce), can turn for help. Survivors of cancer or domestic abuse have formed support groups, in order to offer advice or help to others. Why not us, form something like that from this group process? Divorce will take place, whether or not we bargain for it. Any of you who likes the idea can join me.
- V. I buy the idea. What we have gained from this group experience may fade away soon, if there are no coordinated efforts to continue the process.
- V. Well, the idea is wonderful, but be prepared to stomach criticisms from our people. Perhaps more critics will come from our women, the type of women who removed me from the "chair" (chair-lady). They will say that you are enjoying your divorce, and now you have formed an association of the "divorced".

- V. If you wait to gather people's opinion, you are going nowhere. I wouldn't like what happened to me immediately after my divorce, to happen to any other person. I had no place to look for help. The so-called people from your place run away from you once you are divorced.
- V. Pastor, permit me to ask you this question. If you didn't need this group experience for your project, as you explained at the beginning, would you have thought about us and our predicaments?
- F. That's a good question. The answer is: "Yes!". I thought about you and your predicaments, 90 percent of the time. I had other options. For example, I could have formed the group experience with other organizations or groups like: The Prayer Group in my parish; The Youths; The Scout; Senior Citizen Center, and so on. Any of the topics could have enabled me to write volumes, but I'm looking for something meaningful to me and you, now and in the future.

You are personal to me and the experiences we have shared together, means much to us and our situation that is very peculiar.

Remember that the topic we are discussing is quite new, a "virgin forest". The originality of our group discussion is a "gate-way" to a broader exploration of the issue.

We have just awakened a "sleeping Lion". I mean, many of our sons and daughters from Ibo tribe are likely to pick up from where we have stopped, and investigate extensively on the problem of divorce and produce more work on what we have started now. I will be glad to see that happen any day.

- V. My thinking had become so distorted and irrational that it was destroying me. With this group experience, I have learned how to see and interpret things differently. I seem to know now, who I am and who I will be; a single parent, with no thought of remarrying at the present time. A new relationship may not ease the pain of the past.
- V. If your divorce is recent, as mine, you may not yet have access to the kind of feedback and information that will help you fully understand yourself. I was afraid to face myself. My understanding now is, facing the truth is definitely better than living in fear.

- V. Many divorced persons refuse to do what you are saying now. I, for one; I was afraid to face myself. The way I coped with not being honest with myself was to drink. My life was spinning out of control for missing my children. One day, my brothers summoned me and warned me of the dangerous steps I was taking to deal with the aftermath of my divorce. It seems I listened!
- V. The role of families and relatives can be uplifting and destructive at the same time. I experienced the destructive side, with the family I married into; my so-called sister in-law preferred her girl friend as a wife to her brother. She ganged up with her whole family against me. What was going on in my mind during the group experience was, "who would educate Ibo families to steer clear of others' marital lives?"
- V. That's the problem! I wonder when that mentality can go away. As long as the cultural "logo" of family extension is enforced, relatives will always intrude in marital cases.
- V. Pastor, is that right?
- F. It is not totally wrong or right. We need family solidarity. Also we need space in our marriages, where couples can relate, discuss, and decide line of actions for themselves. I think what is important is to set up a limit. There are areas that may require families to work closely with other members of the same family. They should also know where to stop or read the "stop sign".
- V. It is hard for relatives to listen and mind their own business when divorce occurs, especially the Ibo people. They always tend to support their son against his wife. For example, my ex-spouse use the children to get even with me. He carries propaganda campaigns against me. He tells the children that I, their mother, caused every problem. Worse still, my ex-husband's relatives support him in his campaign against me.
- V. The man is exploiting the children and feeding them with lies against me. Is it not child abuse, pastor?
- F. I know it feels to you like child abuse. Propaganda campaigns against one parent by another destroys children. I interviewed some teenagers whose parents divorced. They said it was harder for them than their parents, because there is always the tendency to take sides.

I feel the quality of life after divorce, devoid of propaganda, is the key to how well and how quickly children recover from divorce.

Constance Ahrons, in her book: "The Good Divorce", said that the messier the divorce, and the more hostility involved, the longer it will take everyone to recover and heal, moreso the children. Really, the children are caught in the "cross-fire!".

V. My children are beginning to understand, thank God! Initially, their mother turned them away from me. They refused to talk or call me. Now, they are realizing that they need their father in their lives. I get along with them, pretty fine. Guess what! Their mother is very jealous and disappointed. She thought it would be so for ever, setting me at edge with my children.

F. Does any person here have the same experience?

V. Yes! I didn't want my ex-husband to come close to my daughter. I wanted to block anything that would bring us face-to-face, children or whatever. One day, he came to visit his daughter and I didn't let him in. He went to the window and my daughter saw him. She ran to the window and lifted the glass, put out her head for her father to hold her. He pulled her out and went shopping with her. My daughter was 8 years old then.

I was shocked! From that day, I stopped keeping her away from her father.

V. Ha-Ha-Ha-a! (all laughed!).

V. Nature is wonderful! In every family, some children either love their father more, or their mother. Inadvertently, they show it by their behaviors or actions.

How do you explain that, pastor?

F. Yes, at times it seems like children may favor their father or mother over the other, but this does not mean they don't need both. Parents are psychologists as far as their children are concerned. They understand their children's signs and behaviors more than any other person.

I guess that is one of the factors spouses may consider before making final decisions. However, I know that in such difficult situations, "fury out-runs its pursuer, reason"; as Shakespeare would put it. Yet, we need to make some serious efforts at keeping the children out of the "battle".

- V. What Ms. V. said about her daughter reaching out to her father, can teach us a lesson.
- V. What a lesson? What a lesson? (the women shouted).
- V. I'm right! While the legal system most of the time, gives custody of the children to their mother, for what ever reason, it can't give the children's heart and mind to the woman. They need their father, more than they need their mother.
- V. Keep quiet! Who told you children love or need you more than they need me, their mother? How many men are home to look after their children? Rarely, if any!
- V. What you are doing is just attack! Can my children change their father's name because my wife has custody? Of course not! Hold the children, but the children know what they want in life, and how much they may need their father or their mother in achieving their dreams.
- Pastor, I think I'm right? Nobody can rob the children of their soul and thinking-faculty. They need their father or fathers in their lives.
- F. I would like to offer a bit of personal advice, not based on who is right or wrong, needed most or otherwise.

It is crucial for both parents to stay informed about what is taking place in important areas of their child's life; school, friends, interests, and health. It needs establishing a cordial relationship that allows for regular communication, maintaining flexibility and responsibility in visitation, and respecting rules of the other household. Really, some animosity between ex-spouses is normal, especially soon after divorce. According to Constance Ahrons, during this phase, wounds are still raw and emotions are likely to erupt. It is also a part of the grieving process.

Let us remember that divorce is traumatic to children too. Hence, parents (you, here in my group and others), should try to construct an effective, peaceful relationship with former spouses, as difficult as that can be. The focus is on your children. If parents are able to focus on their love for them and are willing to put aside their animosity, it may take time, toward each other. Under these circumstances, most children adjust well after the initial dust has settled, and bounce back.

- V. What pastor has said is the ideal, but difficult to begin or achieve.

F. V, Why do you think so?

V. (Many hands up!). Because of pride; Because of anger and unforgettable memories; Because of the "difficult other"! The other person may be very wicked and will not allow any leeway. Because of shame! Some of us are self-conscious and sensitive to the opinions of others.

F. The opinions of others?

V. Yes! Some of us may feel uncomfortable communicating with the ex-spouse. Our people can easily talk behind you. They may say: "if you can still communicate, why did you divorce?". Here in America, ex-spouses can remain friends. Granted we are in America, we still regard an ex-spouse as an enemy; a carry over from our culture.

V. Pastor, you know what I'm saying? They are your people.

F. Yes, they are my people, and all of us in this group experience are from the same Ibo-culture. However, some personalities simply do not mesh, and it may take two or more tries to connect with the other spouse. Yet, it is important that both parties to confront their personal ego and work for the good of the children. Nothing substitutes working together as parents to effectively raise healthy children.

V. There is a problem there! I mean communicating with my ex-spouse, it is hard to get both so close. For example, I met my ex-spouse in a supermarket one day. As soon she saw me, she detoured and went to the opposite direction. I wondered if she ever collected or abandoned her food stuff !

(All laughed!).

V. Perhaps, your ex-spouse thought you had a short-gun.

(Another loud laugh!).

V. I had a similar experience. My ex-spouse saw me recently and hid herself. I saw her too, but pretended as if I didn't see her. When I passed her, I heard her ask her girlfriend: " Is he gone?" (more jokes!).

V. My ex-spouse has a way of reaching me through her children. Whenever the children need certain items that may be a bit expensive, she will ask them to call me. While I'm talking with

my kids, their mother would be prompting in the background. She is like the ostrich, that buried head in the sand but other part of the body are exposed.

V. That's right! The Ibos say: "half bread is better than none!"

V. Half Italian bread? I like that!

(More jokes!).

V. Pastor, I'm not really hostile to my children's mother but we cannot discuss at all.

F. I feel parents who are not hostile but find it difficult to reach a workable relationship, can benefit from the assistance of a counselor or mediator.

V. Pastor, you referred to an author who wrote a book entitled: "The Good Divorce". I'm wondering what is a good divorce? Divorce is divorce, no matter how you look at it.

F. Constance Ahrons, the author of the "Good Divorce", is a professor of sociology and assistant director of the marriage and family therapy program at the University of Southern California. I have read her book. She sets forth the principle that while no divorce is actually "good", we must accept that divorce is a fact of our society. Ms. Ahrons defines a "good divorce" as one in which the couple is able to part without destroying their lives, or the lives of those they love, especially their children. She considers a continued close relationship of both parents to the children to be the key factor.

Ahrons stresses the importance of establishing and maintaining at least a "limited partnership" when couples with children divorce. According to her, it means forging an egalitarian relationship between parents, setting basic ground rules, and being realistic about the problems that must be addressed. Ahrons emphasizes the importance of parents keeping sight of the many good choices available for effective coparenting after a divorce and seeking professional assistance, if required to establish a plan that will minimize the family's loss and maximize its gains. She feels a good divorce doesn't require that parents share child care responsibilities equally. Rather, whatever living arrangements and division of responsibilities parents decide on, they cooperate within those limits.

The question one may ask is, has Ahrons' principle been successful?

Ahrons admits that 50 percent of the couples she studied have been able to forge some sort of cooperative parenting relationship, with 12 percent true friends and 38 percent what she deemed "cooperative colleagues". However, 50 percent of the parents were still in various degrees of conflict with one another.

The bottom line, to state it both harshly and simply, is that conflict between parents must be resolved, in order to protect the children from harm. Parental cooperation sets a fine example for children to emulate as they grow into their own adult years.

As one of you mentioned before, many psychologists believe that the use of children to get even with the former spouse is a form of child abuse, and the greatest danger of a hostile divorce. They emphasize that anything that creates a sense of conflicting loyalties in children is very painful for them. This may range from forcing a child to choose with which parent to live, to grilling a child who has been visiting the noncustodial parent about that parent's habits and lifestyle. Such messages make the child feel as though he or she must choose one parent to love, and reject the other.

Some of you have experienced that already. In such an environment, children experience fear as the core emotion. Children need a safe environment. Otherwise, therapists recommend counseling, in which the children are encouraged to talk about feelings of anger, sadness, worry and guilt.

V. All that makes a lot of sense!

V. Pastor, I'm eager to help other Nigerian men and women who may face what I'm going through now. Ms. V. has agreed to join me form this type of group experience. We may have to call you from time to time for advice, direction and clarifications. However, are there other established support groups we may ask for help or refer cases that an inexperienced person like myself, can not handle?

F. It is good you asked, I was going to provide you with some information.

A wealth of excellent books, videotapes, the Internet, and other materials that provide information on various aspects of divorce recovery and related issues is now available. some of such materials include: Judy Lawrence "The Budget Kit" and Peter Favaro's 'Divorce Parents' Guide to

Managing Custody and Visitation' (2nd ed. Chicago: Dearborn Financial Publishing, 1997). The books are filled with forms and worksheets that help organize practical facts.

One of the most unique publication now available is by: Dan Courvette "Divorce Magazine", for those dealing with divorce and its aftermath. Dan Courvette, the publisher, was divorced himself. He realizes that while there were scores of magazines dedicated to helping couples plan their wedding day, no periodicals existed to assist with the complexities of a divorce, arguably the most stressful and traumatic time in a person's life. So, in 1996, Courvette launched Divorce Magazine, billed as "help for generation 'ex'".

Another book I found interesting is written by: Bolick, Nancy O'keefe. "How to Survive Your Parents' Divorce". (New York: The Changing Family, 1994). I hope your children will find the book useful.

-Berger, Stuart, M.D. "Divorce Without Victims" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983). I like both the title and the contents of the book.

-Trafford, Abigail. Crazy Time: Surviving Divorce and Building a New life. (New York: Harper Perennial/HarperCollins, 1992).

-Luhrs, Janet. The Simple Living Guide. (New York: Broadway Books, 1997).

The three last works are published in New York and you may find them quicker.

The next chapter, section B, on clarification of religious principles, will carry more information about religious and other organizations or groups that offer assistance to divorced spouses.

V. I very much appreciate the information provided to us, and this session on "Community Forum". It has allowed us the opportunity to ask the pastor a lot of questions.

V. I feel the same myself. Many uncertain issues have been clarified to me.

Assessment:

My assertion of this real "Community Forum", is that it enabled participants to engage in their life crisis, whether it is getting the divorce or healing with the divorce hangover.

I feel members saw the group experience as a chance for managing attitudes, for growth, insight, freedom, power, and a fresh start in life. As a facilitator, my role was to help participants work

through what they were feeling and move beyond where they are stuck. I observed that there are some women who would feel very threatened by more egalitarian roles and freedom. Their dependency needs may be so great that they want a spouse to have total authority and take care of them.

The community forum afforded us more opportunity to address the emotional dispositions of children affected by their parents' divorce.

Chapter V.

Clarification of Clinical and Religious Principles raised in Chapter 2.

Both clinical and religious clarifications are the dance of psychodynamics.

According to Vivienne Joyce, psychological/clinical insight and awareness of unconscious motivation brings a sense of one's self, and helps to access religious tradition and deploy it to promote emotional growth(Article on Religion and Psychodynamics. The Guide to Pastoral Counseling And Care, by Gary Ahlskog. page51ff.). I understand Vivienne as saying that turning to God includes and expresses turning to the other, our neighbor, which has a useful clinical parallel. In other words, the next place the emotionally perturbed person normally turns to , is to God. That is, the group members' sense of self, God, and the church, are deeply related. Therefore, the counselor/facilitator's ability to use psychodynamic understanding promotes psychological and spiritual growth. That is what I want to demonstrate in this chapter.

A. Clinical Clarification (expected and unexpected).

Most of the clinical dynamics anticipated have already been outlined in chapter 5 under "Inventory". I will more distinctly describe the dynamics as they were observed.

- The group members had influenced one another through their participation. They functioned as a family (family-system), which was manifested in the way they talked about their relationships and method of resolving troubling situations in their lives.**
- I encouraged the group to communicate with one another, which resulted in a sense of cohesion and family. The free flow of the similarities of their divorce experiences, created for them a sense of community. Among the Ibos, the support they get from families during the time of loss, illness, misfortune, and now divorce, is very crucial and healing.**
- I directly related to this family through the group process.**

- During the sessions, members offered advice based on experience rather than clinical expertise, providing an immediate and real-life model of dealing with emotional issues, letting go of the past, and anger-management. The Ibos easily resign to fate with such advice as: "take the world as you see it ! ". Those who have been through a particularly challenging phase of divorce offered a special "brand" of empathy and support to the newly divorced members of the group.
- **Conflict.** The projection of Ambrose's own self to contempt of Nigerian women in America, generated some antagonism (harsh reactions and counter-attacks), wherever such remarks surfaced in the group experience. Conflict cannot be eliminated from groups, or families. This is the rebellion stage or conflict dominance (Yalom, page 297). It is a developmental sequence in the therapy group (Yalom. page 345).
- **Dissonance.** Ambrose's remarks or private statements and the group's interpretation of his intentions, created much discomfort. I reminded the group how they shifted from structure, meaning of our discussion to a preoccupation with dominance, control and power.
The group functioned as a "hall of mirror" which aggravated hostile and rejecting feelings and behaviors.
- **Resistance.** Providence's reaction to the phone call, which warranted a sudden group behavior to adjourn, is an aspect of resistance that indicates that within this group experience, there was a successful eliciting of both unconscious and conscious process.
- **Transference.** I observed the prominent role transferences and countertransferences played in the group process. Their problems affected one another, their children, relatives and in-laws. For example, Ambrose's distortions, made the women in the group respond to him not on the basis of reality, but on the basis of an image of him (man) distorted by their own past

relationships and current interpersonal needs and fears. The man spoke as if he was ignorant of the autocratic behavior of the Nigerian man. By contrast, another man disapproved of his insensitivity, and retained his identification with the Ibo man being the real "head" of the family. This other person admitted that men needed to undergo a radical change.

- **Countertransferences.** Culture played out in the transference and countertransference dynamic. I felt inadequate and some sense of guilt at various points of the discussion. It is what I call "Cultural-Countertransference", that is, my feelings, thoughts, fantasies and identification with my people's sufferings and interpersonal pressures, behaviors that are constructed and perpetuated by Ibo cultural view and treatment of the divorced, especially women.

I imagined myself caught between "finger-pointing" and felt self-accused. I am a man, born and bred in the same culture. In case I married, would I be different?. I doubt it! For example, I still remember when I was in the Nigerian-Biafran Army. My mother wanted me to marry, instead of continuing in the seminary. She loved me and would have been extremely happy to see and behold my own wife and family. I might have been divorced, now Mom is not alive to be a sustaining link between me and "my wife". What I mean is that such marriage would have been a way of pleasing my mother, and not what I freely wanted to do. Again, I would have expected unqualified submission from "my wife", no matter what type of ill-treatment I might have given her, no divorce!

Would I know what I have known now about the plight of our women abandoned by their ex-spouses, in a foreign land? Of course not!

- **Projection/Transference.** At some point, I felt the women in the group saw me as "man-archetype". I was asked to approve or disapprove of the behavior of some Ibo men and the cultural justifications for the same. I compared their struggle to my own weakness and imperfection as I struggle daily in my ministry.

There was a leap of faith during the group experience. Adopting the spirit of spirituality, say generosity, was not easy, especially when one first starts dealing with divorce trauma. All instincts and habits tell one the opposite-to protect, defend, and strike out at the other person. Again, from time to time, I was seen as God's representative (rightly so!), and the Church (authority-figure). Hence many questions were directed to me to answer. Of course, I tried to provide some insights, without judgment or taking sides.

- **Sense of Self.** Members of my group emphasized varied emotional concern about themselves. It was especially painful to accept that the ex-spouse could love and share his or her life and home with someone else. This sentiment was expressed by one woman in the group thus: "It is shocking that my ex-husband has close relationship with the woman I regarded as my 'best friend', she lamented.

A good number of women in the group expressed many conflicting feelings that they described their emotional lives as "a roller-coaster ride". They felt embarrassed, financially anxious, powerless, numb, depressed, despairing, hostile, and a whole range of feelings, most of them contributing to a sense of self that was hurt, unhealed and not positively integrated.

- For both men and women, changes in self-concept were pervasive and enduring. The emotional toll is so enormous that it is hard to calculate, and can gravely affect all of future relationships.
- Some divorced men and women , from the remarks members made during the group process, waste their energy, spend every waking moment plotting revenge, worrying about what he or she will do next, or agonizing over the future. I noticed through the group experience, each member struggled with his or her weakness and imperfections. I remembered how weak and imperfect I feel too. I struggle with lack of colleagues to join forces with me now and later in reforming the way our people view divorce and treat the divorced. I struggle with the incpt way some marriage tribunals, especially in Nigeria, handle cases of annulment. At times the

process is so slow that it seems a tactical way of frustrating the applicants. Many get tired and impatient with the tribunal, and abandon the cases they file. They felt angry with the whole process.

I tried to explain that the slow process was and is not to discourage the plaintiff, but to make sure that the accurate basis for an annulment is established.

Effect of Divorce on One's Future.

- Divorce doesn't end emotional ties, especially when children are involved. For example, during the group experience, both men and women referred their ex-spouses as: "Papa (dad or father) Goddy; or Papa Edy; Mama (mom or mother) Nicole; Mama Berna.". Images of the ex-spouse dance in their minds at work and at home, some times poignant, sometimes hateful. Cyrina told the group what happened one day when she was looking for her car. She got confused where she parked and became hysterical. Spontaneously she exclaimed: "Papa Ngozi, where are you!".

All laughed!

Ambrose (the defender of Ibo culture), reminded her of an Ibo adage: "When a snake jumps on a woman, she remembers the name of her husband". Exactly that was what happened. Literally, that means that no matter how strained a relationship may be between spouses, the woman must shout her husband's name for help in case of danger/threat.

By implication, dramatic remembrances of past togetherness and separateness, arguments and sadness were replayed over and over on the mind of each ex-spouse.

Another major issue was how the divorce will affect the children in their future relationships.

When I asked the group if there were any "imaginings" on their minds not yet expressed/shared, Lilian pointed out how her daughter is scared going into marriage. "Her experience of my marriage is nothing to be desired", Lilian concluded. It proves the saying that what affects parents affects their children.

- **Social.** The group experience provided an opportunity for participants to learn about each other's problems in social relationships. Contacts outside the group between members emerged. One good example is the woman who volunteered to continue the group process, and asked others to join her. Extra-group relationship may be extremely important in the therapeutic process (Irvin Yalom. page 286).
- Some of the women in my group said that after reassessing their lives, they came to the conclusion that marriage isn't for them anymore.
- **Fear.** The women expressed fear of putting their children under stress and risk. They expressed regret that their ex-husbands may have greater resources (money) and access to lawyers. They are afraid that their ex-spouses may fight for and gain custody of their children. They said that although the courts most of the time, give custody of the children to the woman, the law is "an ass", (it is unpredictable).

This consideration, reinforced by pressure from traditions, beliefs, and values of the cultural group, made many of the women, and Ibo women in general, remain too long in abusive marriages.

- **Object-relations.** In the principle of "Object-Relation" theory, these institutions (family, culture, church), and God, had great influence in the people's formation and beliefs.

I allowed the group to question the "mother-culture" which treats their desire for a change with rejection and exasperation. Group members seemed to have internalized the "bad culture" which failed to function as an adequate "container" of equality and dignity.

- The group questioned God, the Church Authorities, and their families of origin.
- **Unexpected.** I never anticipated, nor did the men in the group realize the pains that flow from their internalized sense of manhood- "ordained" to rule and dominate the women. They often

failed to integrate this position with empathy, comforting concern and expression of emotions for the indepth wounds of the women.

- The request Rosemary made, to have a one-to-one counseling session with me, was unexpected. It is not the ideal in a group process. However it is allowed both by Irvin Yalom and Potter. They emphasize that there is seldom a quick fix and making a major transition is always a process. While there were commonalities among members of the group, every situation was different. Hence it was necessary for me to explore what was going on and create a process Rosemary could use. The individual session helped her to realize that other members of her faith-community elsewhere were ready to welcome her. She was able to know other places she could join prayer-groups.
- The "Community Forum" was unexpected but was important because it was a group with common issues. As a way of continuing the forum and the process, I still call some of my group members , to offer a listening ear, if they need clarifications.
- The "Divorce Ritual" that appears at appendix 11, was unexpected too.

However, these 'surprise' outcomes are consonant with the rhythms of psychodynamics.

- I felt that the group experience accomplished the goals of sharing pain, problem solving, though not entirely. It helped them to form relationships, see other perspectives, and at the end, "healing had been facilitated. I felt that the success of the group is proven by their wish to continue the process.

ADDENDUM.

Consequences of Divorce on Health.

One of my mentors, Dr. Mark, asked me specifically to include some of the common consequences of divorce on health. It would benefit those who may read my work.

After reviewing some of the books written on the topic, I borrowed much from Dr. Banschick's track/article, himself an expert on divorce issues.

Bray and Hetherington (1993), emphasize that for both men and women, divorce causes high rates of illness, depression, suicide and drinking because of the loss of an emotional caretaker. Divorced spouses experience extreme fluctuations in mood, causing repressions, and outbursts of rage, even death-wishes toward self or ex-spouse.

Neil S. Jacobson and Alan S. Gurman. Talk about the structural and physical dislocation as a result of divorce. They said that the hangover of divorce could result in loss of bedtime ritual, loss of stability and continuity, lack of behavioral guidelines, can cause despair and sickness or eating disorder.

(McMurray, 1970). He emphasizes that divorce doubles the chances of involvement in automobile accidents. A study by McMurray found that the accident rate of people undergoing divorce doubled during the period of six months before to six months after the divorce.

Mark Banschick, M.D. (article on consequences of divorce). Dr. Banschick gave startling statistics on accidental death among divorced people: the risk of being involved in an automobile accident increases dramatically especially for the newly separated or newly divorced. Banschick quoted a study by the National Center for Health Statistics (1970), which found that automobile fatality rates for divorced people were 3 times the rate of the married

Various studies have shown that the rate of chronic and fatal diseases increases significantly among divorced people. In his re-examination of the Hamond report, a long term study of the smoking habits of half a million men. Morowitz made the staggering discovery that men who were non-smokers but were divorced, had almost as high a risk of dying from cancer (only about 9% less), as that of married men who smoked one pack or more of cigarette a day (Morowitz, 1975).

Diane Fassel. Holds that divorce can cause ulcers and wake up-shouting. He explained that divorced people are under a great deal of stress than married people.

Lynch, 1977. concluded that divorce is linked to higher rates of cancer, and the premature deaths from hypertension and cardiovascular disease among divorced men. Also the premature death rate due to pneumonia for white divorced men was more than seven times that of their married counterparts.

Physical health of children.

Dawson (1991), found that compared to children living with both biological parents, children living with formerly married mothers have a 50 percent greater risk of developing asthma. The same study found a 20 percent to 30 percent greater risk of injury of children from divorced families compared to children living in intact homes.

Research has shown a correlation between family disruption and maladaptive behavior. A study of 522 teenage girls found that girls from divorced families committed more delinquent acts (drug abuse, larceny, absenteeism) than did their counterparts from intact families (Kalter et al., 1985).

Adolescent suicide rates and family structure.

It appears that adolescents and young adults who have experienced divorce as children are more prone to being suicidal. Boys are at greater risk of suicide than girls (Macall and Land, 1994).

*David B. Larson, M.D; Susan S. Larson books: "Public Health Impact", are useful readings.

B. Religious Clarifications.

"I will be with you till the end of time. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

The religious clarification attempts to explore how the group relates to God and how God is present in their life. In other words, how has divorce affected their relationship with God, or has their faith helped them to cope with their emotional feelings? Where do they see God who has promised to be with them until the end of time.

"Where Is God When It Hurts?"

This is the sum of the questions asked during the group experience. Also it is asked most of the time by people who are going through difficult times in their lives. I agreed with my group that sometimes we have to remove some theological wrappings, to uncover the terrible disappointments, hurt, and real resentment they felt, and ex-spouses still feel against one another. They deeply affect their concepts, thoughts, the way they look at life, and God.

The question asked demonstrates the tension between theology and authority; justice and mercy; and between guilt and anger. It is a resentment against the "oughts", against the Christian faith, against others, against oneself, and against God. Hence the whole mixture of bad and good theology, legalism and salvation become frozen. In other words, many of my group members and other divorced spouses go through a number of important spiritual issues with both God and the Church. The one is basically inseparable from the other. Two prevailing feelings the group expressed are guilt and anger. Guilt from the belief that by getting a divorce you have somehow failed God and others. Anger from the feeling that God let you down by not intervening to save your marriage. As one woman in the group put it: "I stopped going to church, stopped praying, and stopped doing anything religious".

Again, I agreed that it was proper to admit and acknowledge anger at God when we are hurting.

It is not uncommon to make God the scapegoat and blame him for letting us down.

My image of God as a minister, pastor, and facilitator was vital to how my group members viewed their experience of God (what Mark Banschick calls "God-Representation").

My personal theology, individuation and integration, mirrors my developmental sources and growth. I used and still use Jesus as my model. Jesus' approach to the woman at Jacob's Well guides me. Jesus elevated the woman who had divorced five times. He also commissioned her to announce to her whole village that someone who cares, was around and waiting to welcome them. It was a balance between justice and mercy. In justice, Jesus condemned the woman's licentiousness but in mercy he welcomed her. He reformed and transformed her life completely.

I presented Christ to them, as the Good Shepherd, who never abandons his sheep. The image of God is manifest in Jesus Christ. He understands what it is to be alone, to feel that a part of the divorced has been literally turned away, as his was turned away on the Cross. I tried to convince my group that Jesus understands when a single parent is trying to be both husband and wife, mother and father, all in one man or woman. It was necessary for me to assure my group that God knows about their terrible battle and inner emptiness, and experiences of the blackest bouts of depression. Yet I know that when one (the divorced) is in the pits, the hardest thing to do is to pray, because one doesn't feel God's presence. I reminded them that Christ felt abandoned by God-his father: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

I told the group that Jesus must have longed to move. To change his position (as you waited so long to change your position), to redistribute his weight somehow, but he couldn't move.

Intuitively, some people in the group were shocked. They felt for themselves and for Jesus. One woman in the group started crying and narrated how she was really helpless and desperate one night. She begged her friend to give her some pills so that she could die. When her friend refused, she thought: "I can't even die on my own. At first life was hell for me after my divorce; rage, bitterness, and emotional pain shook my spirit; piercing sensations racked my nerves and ran through my body. This went on for three years".

I asked her how she feels now. She replied: "I have seen what a difference the love shown me by friends and colleagues. I began to realize that God also loves me since he didn't allow my friend to give me pills. I feel God has become incredibly close to me".

"That was Christ's own experience!", I told her. I cited the Book of Hebrews 5:7-9: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and was heard..... Having known suffering, he is now in the position to intercede for us before his eternal father and he became the source of eternal salvation for all...". Then I continued to assure the group that there are scriptural and spiritual ways to deal with all these hurts from the past. God takes failures in marriage, emotional groans and wraps his loving purposes around them. How does that happen? I asked myself aloud!

Like the clinical principles, God's formula cures all three symptoms: mental, physical, and spiritual. The first formula is, "Talk to God about the your burden through prayer". The first step the psychiatrist uses is: "talk it out". This linkage helped me to explain to the group how the clinical approach flows into religious principles. A strong spiritual life is a powerful shock-absorber during any crisis, especially during a divorce. That means God is the Higher Power and the Higher Friend, who walks with you through every circumstance of life.

Some people in my group experience still felt brutally wronged by the other spouse and seemed to find no reasons to forgive him/her.

Again, I read a portion of the Book of Genesis, illustrating the life of Joseph who had been so brutally wronged by his older brothers. Joseph forgave his brothers with these words: "Truly you planned evil against me, but God planned it for good, to bring about what today is fact, the keeping alive of much people" (Genesis 50: 19-20, BERK.). In other words, God took what, from a human standpoint, was the worst injustice and deepest tragedy that ever happened, and turned it into the most sublime gift human beings have ever known: the gift of salvation. I encouraged my group to use the energy generated in the group therapy or process

as an "amour" to set in motion grace and love necessary for healing. I explained the relevance of the story to fit their situation.

The kernel of the story, I explained, is that ex-spouses should be part of a debt-free community of Christians. Divorce should be free of "debt-collecting" or revenge. "Owe no one anything, but to love one another" (Rom. 13: 8). Divorce produces anger, memories of slow-motion video replays of destructive emotions among members of the group, consequently, presented a distorted picture of God, a "God you can never please!". That was why it was important for me to read some scriptural passages to the group. My aim was to make them partners in the healing process, healing their own minds. I realized that they needed the help of a counselor, the affirmation, the support, and the ministry from pastors and fellow members of the community of believers.

In other words, while I realized that nothing may easily soothe the painful memories, harmful resentments, and sense of injustice ex-spouses feel, I tried to convince them that God can change the meaning of their damage, even crippling emotions and weave them all into his design and healing, which is the miracle of God's "recycling-grace". Finally, I reminded the group that they could not get rid of their deep-seated hurt overnight. The change requires time, process, understanding, and reprogramming of former ways of coping. Above all, they should pray, for prayer brings the renewal of the mind, which in turn brings transformation.

I buttressed my point with this Biblical quotation: "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt.11:28-30).

Legalism VS Salvation.

The group I facilitated expressed disgust, disappointment, frustration, and anger against the Church. They complained bitterly about the rigidity of church laws, precepts, and rules, which stand in sharp contrast with the salvific mission of the Church. They accuse the Church of abandoning them in times of crisis and crucial transitions of their lives. They were left without directions, felt the church treated them as sinners.

Mr. Providence reminded me how Jesus Christ, the church claims to represent, gathered sinners, tax collectors, and even prostitutes and ate with them. Others said that even when the church seems to be doing something for the divorced, it is mere camouflage. They cited the annulment process as an example. They regarded the annulment setup as a system of gathering the divorced, and making a mockery of their situations.

On another note, Rosemary reported how the prayer-group in her church treated her with disdain after her divorce. She felt the church has no "pews" for the divorced.

There were other complaints against the church. Then everyone directed his/her gaze at me. In other words, they group placed the burden of proof on me, "Prove how your church feels with us!" I accepted the challenge. First and most importantly, I tried to be where they were, and acknowledged their suffering. Then I informed my group about the programs churches and synagogues have established to offer spiritual recovery assistance to the divorced. Such programs offer classes, seminars, groups, to help those healing from divorce. The church-related programs include counseling, workshops, and group sessions, covering an incredibly diverse array of topics. Such topics, I assured my group, include: forging a new life identity, assuming responsibility for a new life, building new relationships, and letting go.

Again, I provided information on specific church programs. For example, Hill Community Church, New Mexico offers classes on related topics including anger management, building self-esteem, forgiveness, overcoming fear of intimacy and specific programs on healing after

divorce. Hillside also offers one-on-one counseling with people, by the associate pastor, Dr. Susan Nettleton, who is also a psychiatrist. Since my group was made up of people of different denominations, I told them about an Anglican Church in Michigan.

The Church is in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and provides a support group for men and women at any stage of recovery from separation and divorce. Participants in the program have the opportunity to share experiences, learn new coping skills, and begin the process of rebuilding their lives as single adults. Other topics covered in this program include understanding the legal and emotional process of divorce, grieving, and understanding how the marriage "died". I advised my group to search Web sites. Many churches have Web sites on the Internet that provide information on available programs.

The Catholic Church, my faith-community, have developed other types of divorce recovery programs. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe has established a support group called DOVES. The DOVES ministry is open to both Catholics and non-Catholics. The ministry addresses various topics, including understanding the grieving process and coping with common emotions such as shock, denial, anger, fear, depression, and rejection.

Dawn Bradley Berry, author of "The Divorce Source Book" (NTC Contemporary Publishing Group, 1998), has extensive source of counseling programs for the divorced.

I emphasized to the group, the riches of "The Beginning Experience", an outstanding program to help people experiencing the grief of a divorce or the death of a spouse. On a live-in weekend, it invites them to deal with grief and, putting the past behind, to look forward to the future with renewed hope and confidence. The Beginning Experience, though Catholic in origin, it is available to people of other religions or no religion. The program is widely available throughout the English-speaking world, including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.

At the local level, information about The Beginning Experience weekends and when they are scheduled is usually available from the Catholic Family Welfare, or Catholic Social Services of the local diocese.

Another area my group worried about, was the annulment process. They accused the Catholic Church of playing pranks and tantalizing them with the hope of success, which often doesn't come.

I tried to explain how the annulment process works. According to information provided by the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese of New York, annulment doesn't deny that the relationship existed, nor does it imply that the marriage was a product of ill will or moral fault. It also does not have any civil effect in the United States, or render any children born of the marriage illegitimate. Annulment is an instrument the Catholic Church employs to help ex-spouses enter a second marriage, if they choose to remarry. It is by no means intended to punish or frustrate the divorced.

Ms. Cyrina asked me why annulment takes such a long time to come through, if it is meant to help the divorced enter a new relationship, if one chooses to do so.

I agreed that the process takes a long time and much money too. I informed the group of the New York Archdiocese caution: that the process may take more than two years to complete. Those seeking an annulment should not plan a church wedding until the final decision is rendered.

Personally, I joined with the group members in advocating that the Church needs to educate and convince congregants it is taking seriously the concerns of its suffering members. However, while the church needs to show more tangible compassion, I reminded my group that the church has come a long way addressing their problems and the process is on-going. I read to them a portion of: "The Evangelization of Peoples", Pope Paul VI, 1975, para. 79. "In reaching out to our separated, divorced, and remarried Catholics, we offer an assurance that you are loved. If your present difficulties sometimes seem insoluble, we pray that the care with which you are held in your respective parish communities will be the seed of hope and joy in your own lives, and that you will find peace. The soothing touch of Jesus comes in the spirit of hospitality which, ideally, enlivens every parish".

APPENDIX A

D. Min. Project Verbatim

Student: Alex. N. Iheonunekwu

Mentors: Dr. Mark Banschick

Ms. Lynne Jones

Feb. 3, 2003

Client: Rosemary was a participant of the group process who requested one-on-one counseling.

I didn't know her except during the group experience. She was the youngest in the group and newly divorced too. Rosemary initially found it difficult to feel comfortable with the group, and didn't open up easily. I made reference of her request for personal counseling in chapter 4.

Rosemary continued to express her shock about the way her ex-spouse deceived her. He claimed he was a medical doctor, only to find out he was nothing close to what he had claimed. The deceit and the abuse that ensued afterwards, caused the divorce.

In this counseling session, what was most troubling to Rosemary, was the appalling treatment she received from the members of her prayer-group in her own parish church. She was angry with the whole Catholic Church and she came to let me know how disappointed she felt. She had been coping with daily experiences of life, now as a single woman. The first place she turned for help was the church but the type of prayer her group offered on her behalf was one of rejection, hostility, judgment, and non supportive.

Rosemary contrasted the non-supportive attitude of her church-community with the loving support she witnessed another community showered on their member who was bereaved recently.

R. Rosemary

A. Fr. Alex.

A1. Welcome Rosemary. I'm glad to see you again. You told me you would like to have this private session with me.

R1. Yes father. You noticed I was almost not physically present during the group experience, especially at the beginning.

A2. I was wondering why it took you so long to open up!

R2. I was going through a new type of life altogether, most times very difficult to express. I did not know how to express myself initially.

A3. Were you frightened by the group, or did something else hold you back?

R3. A bit of both! However, as the group experience progressed, I felt integrated. But that is not the main reason why I requested this interview. I have accepted the divorce but I have not forgiven the church.

A4. What about the church?

R4. I am here to express profound anger, traumatic experience, and disappointment, with my church community.

A5. What's happening, could you tell me more! (Rosemary burst into tears and I gave her time to express her anger).

R5. In one of my efforts to seek for sources of strength to deal with the aftermath of my divorce, I turned to the church and asked the prayer-group to pray over me. I was shocked into tears at the "Prayers" I received: "Lord, show them (husband and wife) the error of their ways....., bring them out of their selfishness....., forgive their sins against you and the institution of marriage".

A6. That seems a strange formula of prayer for you.

R6. I could hardly believe my ears! The decision to divorce came slowly and carefully and I grieved a lot over it, I was hurting and needed loving support of my church. I didn't need to be scolded with guilt for giving up or throwing away a gift from God.

A7. How does that make you feel?

R7. I was pissed off! I was numbed, angry, depressed, remembered the day I was deceived by believing that the person I married was a medical doctor, and wept. (she started weeping).

I allowed her time to cool down. She came back with some sort of apology: "I'm sorry, father!"

A8. It is helpful to vent your anger, especially sharing your feelings with me. You are free to express your emotions any way you like, even against God.

Rosemary began to make a contrasting comparison.

R8. About a few months after our divorce, an acquaintance of my lost her husband to cancer. At the funeral luncheon I was shaken by the mix of emotions flooding through me. I grieved with her and her family at the seemingly pointless loss and the ending of so much. And then I looked around and saw out-pouring of love and affection she was getting from people, more so from members of her church. They held her and cried with her. Nobody blamed her or her husband. No one said that the man who died was at fault because he smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. People just wanted to be supportive.

A9. What was your reaction?

R9. I am ashamed to admit it, but suddenly that made me jealous. Not one of the persons I knew from my church or tribe had asked me how I was doing or if my child and I needed anything. It was if I had gone through something enormously embarrassing by getting a divorce.

The widow could be object of compassion, but I could not be. Could you imagine that!.

A10. You sound frustrated! has the group experience meant anything to you?

R10. I now feel calculated and connected to God, I have forgiven the Church. The church needs to be instructed on how to feel the pains of other brothers and sisters in Christ. I still want to

belong to a prayer-group in the church, but not the same group that humiliated me. I would want to join another group but I don't know which group that may be welcoming.

A11. Would it be helpful to let your prayer-group know how hurt you feel by their action or behavior toward you? Perhaps now that you have participated in a group experience, you are able to advise them on how to be in touch with other people's feelings. You also know how to reach out to others who may go through the same rough times you've gone through.

As for other prayer-groups, there are some at Church of St. Lucy, in the Bronx; St. Augustine's at 1183 Franklin Ave. in the Bronx; and other parishes. It may be helpful for you to visit these places and decide for yourself which group you may like to join.

R11. Father, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of the group experience. I'm taking one step forward everyday since after the group experience. I hope to call you again when I find the prayer group I want to join.

A12. Rosemary, feel free to call me whenever you need my assistance.

She asked for blessings. We said a few short prayers together and I blessed her.

APPENDIX B

Divorce Ritual.

The idea of incorporating divorce ritual in the group experience was unexpected and came from a member of the group. The suggestion received overwhelming approval, as a way of "putting to rest", a dead marriage and as a resolution to get on with a new life.

I was not surprised that someone in the group would come up with this idea of a ritual. The Ibos are familiar with ritual practices, as transformative powers to manage through transitions. While the Ibos have rites/rituals to celebrate transition into eternity (death), communion with ancestral spirits, birth, puberty and so on, they have none to mark the end of a marriage (divorce).

Again, while the Church has a lot of rites/rituals to mark a transition in one's life, like the rite of baptism, marriage, funerals and other sacraments, the church has no rite of managing the tensions that result from divorce. The absence of any ritual established by the church to cushion the emotional pains of divorce, is unfortunate.

Many therapists who work with people recovering after a divorce believe that ritual can be a crucial part of the process to help healing, to help solidify newly acquired roles. For example, Constance Ahrons in her book; The Good Divorce states, "I'd like to see us get to a time when a parting ritual for divorce is part of our culture". Yet the church doesn't know it. Ritual is meant to hold a person through a transition, especially during difficult times.

The divorce ritual performed by my group experience took the form of a memorial service. In Ibo culture, the end of mourning for a departed spouse is celebrated. For example, if a woman has mourned the death of her spouse for one year, she is supposed to remove her sack-cloth on the eve of the anniversary. A group of other women, mostly those who have lost their

spouses, will gather around. At midnight, the woman to be "purified, or cleansed", will surrender her sack-cloth and the others will wash her clean. After giving her a thorough bath, she will dress herself with a new beautiful attire. The sack-cloth or mourning garment will be burnt. The significance is that her old life/stage has passed and a new life has begun. If the woman is a christian, her family members, neighbors, relatives, in-laws, and friends will escort her to her church for thanksgiving. It is to thank God for granting the spouse the fortitude to bear her loss, and demonstrates the community support. Normally a sumptuous feast follows the church service. The reality of the loss remains forever, but the ritual shows that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

It is important to emphasize that the same ritual is observed by both men and women who mourn their spouses.

My group experience borrowed a lot from this practice, to mark the finality of their marriages. It was a shared ceremony. The group brought out their wedding garments and rings and put them together. Cyrina remarked that it was proper to burn the wedding dresses which are worn only twice in one's lifetime; one, on the wedding day and another on the day of burial. Many others suggested smashing the old rings with a hammer. However, they cringed at the waste of precious metals. Eventually, the decision was to give their old wedding garments to the Salvation Army, Thrift shops, or Charitable organizations. As for the precious rings, each person was allowed to sell his or her own to dealers who buy used jewelry. They advised themselves not to give the ring as a gift to anyone. They feared that any spouse given the rings might fall into the same fate.

I observed that the group felt relieved. Every participant uttered some esoteric pronouncements as he or she dropped the wedding garments. They called the exercise a "wake" to mark the anniversary of a lost love and a transition to a new beginning.

At the end, I asked them to express their feelings.

They told me they had mixed feelings. Some laughed, joked, and were humorous. They told me that it was a better way of dealing with a serious issue, and it was healing, and helped them to feel good about being single again.

Mr. Providence said that the ritual provided him an opportunity to do something creative with his lingering sadness and anger. However some in the group said that the ritual, no doubt excellent, reminded them when their marriage was the happiest day of their lives, but now was a sorrowful event. They said that their eyes were clouded with tears during the exercise. Yet they felt the ritual was therapeutic and eased their transition into a new life. It helped to ease the tension between a life lived together as spouses and a life to live as a single person, the home known to a new home and quite unpredictable.

I observed that the ritual was born out of necessity, by people who know that divorce is traumatic. It spoke what they felt, not what they ought to say; it acted what they experienced, not what they ought to feel. The divorce ritual was expressive of the weight of this sad time in the history of their lives. My group felt obligated to ritualize their divorce to enable them to revitalize self-esteem and connection to their religious lives.

Rituals are aspects of religion, which my group experience added to the help they got from their group process.

The importance of rituals cannot be over emphasized. "Political life depends upon ritual every bit as much as does religion", (David Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power).

Kertzer is saying that human beings, in all societies, have engaged in the making and performing of rituals. He concludes by saying that rituals belong to us and we to them, as surely as do our language and culture. He says that the human choice is not whether to ritualize but when, how, where, and why.

In the case of my group, the "why?", was to stave off boredom and boost self-esteem in an atmosphere of strategies that gave their lives shape and meaning. The divorce ritual is likely to be my group's strong ally in bouncing back to physical, emotional, spiritual and social growth.

I must admit that the performance of the divorce ritual did not eliminate the trauma, loss, anger, feelings of victimization, but was essential in helping to transform their lives.

Edward Leach emphasizes that rites can alter the state of the world because they invoke power.

Again, Tom F. Driver, in his book: "Liberating Rites", illuminates the role of rituals by examining the varied ways humans use rituals to give order to their lives, to provide a sense of security and control, especially in the face of extreme danger.

In summary, I believe the divorce ritual my group performed, was one of the strongest ladders to their healing.

QUESTIONNAIRE.

What is your assessment of the Group Experience?

Do you still have emotional ties to your ex-spouse?

If you were to reunite with your ex-spouse, what would you do differently?

Does the fact that your marriage did not last a lifetime make it a failure?

How can you assess the facilitator in the whole group process?

Any suggestions/comments on the future of divorced spouses of Ibo origins in America?

QUESTIONNAIRE.

What is your assessment of the Group Experience?

Perhaps I benefited best because the experience helped me resolve some of the issues I was struggling with before the process. The thought came late but it eventually came nonetheless.

Do you still have emotional ties to your ex-spouse?

Yes, but not one of love. Our children are the ties, especially those who resemble me but over there.

If you were to reunite with your ex-spouse, what would you do differently?

Much would be expected from my ex-spouse. She came to US and jumped out of her skin. She failed to realize that men and women are not the same.

Does the fact that your marriage did not last a lifetime make it a failure?

No! I fulfilled my cultural and societal expectation that a man should marry and raise children. I proved my worth. I am glad I have my peace now.

How can you assess the facilitator in the whole group process?

Pretty excellent minister. If he continues to put group discussion in Churches, I should be free to take second wife; the minister should tell the Church.

Any suggestions/comments on the future of divorced spouses of Ibo origins in America?

They should not contest broken marriages in Courts, especially the men. They can not so win. Just pay child support. The future of divorced couples here in America is that who suffered to bring a wife from Nigeria, may die without wife and family because nobody cares again the cultural tie that binds families together.

QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your assessment of the Group Experience?

It should have started years ago to help us. Anyway, I was very happy with the whole process. It is my yard-stick, something to refer to, and hold in a staff to move ahead.

Do you still have emotional ties to your ex-spouse?

Whether it is positive or negative, the emotion doesn't go away. The way that I was abused for years doesn't go away. My feeling is that his evil life should hunt him.

If you were given the opportunity to reunite with your ex-spouse, what would you do differently?

I will not accept that opportunity period. He stole my life and should pay restitution.

Does the fact that your marriage did not last a lifetime make it a failure?

The Igbo people and their culture would think that way. But I don't think ^{that my} marriage was a failure. I did nothing wrong, I played a successful role.

How can you assess the facilitator in the whole group process?

To have thought of us and initiated the group process, is a plus for him. I will always remember him as a person who knows that other people could have problems.

Any suggestions/comments on the future of divorced spouses of Ibo origins in America?

To keep this group process alive as a seminar, the pastor should organize during the time of lent, because it can remind us of Christ's suffering. It may not happen soon because I heard that the pastor may be going back to Nigeria. I hope to join the group proposed during the process.

QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your assessment of the Group Experience?

The group experience made me more confident. Before then I was shy and avoided some gatherings Nigerians organized. But now I realize every person has his/her own problems.

Do you still have emotional ties to your ex-spouse?

To say "No" is a ~~pretence~~ pretence. My ex-spouse got uncontested divorce. If I knew then what I know now, he wouldn't get away with it.

If you were given the opportunity to reunite with your ex-spouse, what would you do differently?

It is a mere probability, it will not happen. Assuming it does, I will still be myself, even develop tough skin.

Does the fact that your marriage did not last a lifetime make it a failure?

No! Life itself doesn't last for eternity, what less marriage. I was customarily and legally married and wedded in church. I have my life and children — Thank God!!.

How can you assess the facilitator in the whole group process?

Throughout the group experience, I observed the pastor was unflustered. He remained calm and articulate, yet very conscious of his role to steer the course we were going.

Any suggestions/comments on the future of divorced spouses of Ibo origins in America?

It will be good news if the pastor can introduce the group experience at home — Nigeria, especially in Ibo tribe. Please pastor, if you do, tell other ministers of different churches to join you in the fight.

EPILOGUE.

As I emerged from the group experience and preparing to go back to Nigeria to assume a new responsibility, I'm hearing a voice. The voice is persistent and real. It is the voice of God ringing in my ears and burning in my spirit. It is the same voice Dan Schutte put into song; based on the prophet Isaiah 6:8ff: "I, the Lord of sea and sky,.....I, the Lord of wind and flame. I have heard my people cry. I have borne my people's pain. I will save them".

"Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send? Whom shall I send? Whom shall I send?"

My response is Dan Schutte's refrain: Here I am , Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

Yes, I want to carry out the crusade to liberate the divorced from the shackles of cultural taboos, stigma, rejection and abandonment.

I intend to use the pulpit, organize seminars, TV. talks, and writings to create awareness to the plight of the divorced; both at home and abroad. I hope to take advantage of my age and experience to try to convince my local church (Catholic Church) that more evangelization is needed to address the plight of the divorced and other less privileged members of God's people.

As Dr. Banschick reminded me, I am not going to change the Ibo culture or the Catholic Church.

Rather I want to urge both the Church and Ibo culture to strike a balance between authoritarian stance and humanistic approach. Erich Fromm, in his book, "Psychoanalysis and Religion", says that in authoritarian religion, God is a symbol of power and force. Then the individual is full of sorrow and guilt. Fromm holds that in a humane religious experience, God is symbol of joy, connectedness and strength. The all loving God is calling the weak, the sinner, and the hurting, to "come to Me all you that are burdened, and I will give you rest".

That is the image of God I am asking both the Ibo culture and the Church, to reveal/present to

our people. I will continue to urge both institutions to hear and listen to "the cry from the depth !"

According to Dr. Martin Luther Jr., the cry from the depth is higher than the one from high.

I am very much aware that my task is not going to be easy, that's why I call the mission a "crusade". My participation in the group experience is a revelation, for which I am hopeful that change will come from my continued efforts to work on the side of the divorced.

On the other hand, I'm surprised that the cultural taboo, stigma, rejection, conceived years ago, are basically the same today and even more critical. During the group experience, I observed that the participants have internalized our culture's dogma against divorce.

It played out in what Carol Bloom once wrote: "The internalization of the culture's rejection of a person becomes physically structured in and joins up with his or her internal Object-World, causing profound self-hatred, shame, and rage. What the culture does to you, you do to yourself tenfold" (*Psycholoanalysis and Psychotherapy. Journal of the Psychoanalytic Institute of the PCMH*, vol. 19, No.1 2002).

Carol BLooms' assertion is very true of my group's perception. Besides the group, other educated people from Ibo land have not changed their minds about the way our culture and church regard divorce. Recently, I had a conversation with an accredited scholar about the topic of my group process. He wondered why I chose such a "sensitive issue" to be discussed in public. I guess he wanted to save me from confrontations with some people who may not share my views.

My response was that no other person could discuss our "cultural sensitivity" except us, born and raised in the same culture. I quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "The sin of a nation is on those who know what to say and do, but fail to say or do it". Ours will be sin of ommission if we fail to say or do something because we want to soothe ethnicity. I am convinced many of my educated brothers and sisters know the problem exists, but the question is: "Who will bell the cat?"

Another revelation I observed among the members of my group experience was how Religion involves the people's most fundamental beliefs and can arouse some of their deepest feelings. I mean how little congregants know about the compassion, help, and love the Church can offer. For example, time and again, divorced catholics ask: "Is divorce the unforgivable sin?" It is sometimes hard to convince them that it is not a sin in the first place. Maybe the legalistic process of obtaining an annulment seems to justify their fears and assumptions. The burden of proof lies on the church! The church has to convince some divorced members who are still skeptical, that they have "pews" in the church, as Rosemary rightly put it. I heard my group members complain how their fellow christians treated them with disdain and condescension.

The issue of divorce for me, will continue to be a matter of concern. I intend to make an input that will enable the divorced know enough of the world, that different options and choices exist for them. This demonstration project is only the beginning of a new awakening spirit in me. "A new spirit create in me O Lord!".

Finally, I hope this project will provide some inspirations to those who may be interested to look into other aspects of our culture and church directives that may need some sort of softening or reforms.

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