

**PASTORAL CARE TO SUPPORT MARRIED COUPLES IN
IGBO SOCEITY.**

**A PASTORAL COUNSELING APPROACH IN REFERENCE TO IGBO
COUPLES IN BROOKLYN DIOCESE, VISA VIS OTHER COUPLES IN
NEW YORK AND BEYOND.**

BY

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Doctor of Ministry Project Final Approval

To: The Members of the Doctor of Ministry Faculty

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DEDICATION

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO

HONDUREAN COUPLES

AND

IGBO COUPLES

WHO ARE FACING CRISIS IN THEIR MARITAL LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to give pastoral care and support to the Igbo couples in Brooklyn Diocese. My apostolate among them will be to help couples to discover and live their new vocation, mission as couples, and be ever more a true community of love. It is necessary that all should be helped and empowered in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise in their mutual service, and in active sharing in marital life.

When two people are married in Igbo culture or Church they promise life-long fidelity to one another and to love and care for each other and for their children. Both the Igbo custom and Church teaches that "Cana is Forever." Although the world often asks, "can this marriage be saved?" the Igbo custom and the Church urge couples to preserve their marriage vows and to strengthen them through hard work, sacrifice and love.

Couples need support and care in their marriage relationship, to develop and handle their marital dynamics. After the preparation of engagement, sacramental, and civil celebration of marriage, the couple begin their journey towards the progressive actualization of the values and duties of marriage itself. In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the couples share, in communion with the church and society, the full revelation and manifestation of the kingdom of God seen in marriage life.

It should be emphasized that the pastoral intervention of the church and society in support of couples is a matter of urgency. In view of this, I will make every effort to strengthen and develop pastoral care and support for couples without exception, in particular, couples of Igbo immigrants in Brooklyn Diocese, and including couples of

other backgrounds. These couples are living under the societal pressures coming from inside and outside the new world that affect their family life. Migration to the large and impersonal cities in search of work and wealth brings about the loss of the former cultural supports for marriage and family life. There is a possible tendency to lose the sense of sacredness of marriage and the discipline it imposes on men and women. Economic pressure has put the family in disarray. Most parents are working almost twenty four hours in different places separated from each other. By far the most alarming situation is the neglect of the proper upbringing of the children. The increase of divorce rate in our society is included. The case of who is in charge of finances among the couples calls for attention. It seems that there is a growing lack of unhealthy attitudes towards firm commitment of spouses to each other. With all these problems confronting the couples, I see pastoral care and support a matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic church which is the family.

Some of the couples I have interacted with in my ministry always tell me that their most difficult problems as couples are lack of communication, acceptance of their mistakes and the disposition to ask for forgiveness. For all the couples, I will do my best to offer them words of truth, goodness, objective help so that they can come closer to that model of a couple which the creator intended for them from "the beginning" and which Christ has renewed with His redeeming grace. This holds true especially for young couples, who find themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities. They are more vulnerable, especially in their first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. I feel that young

married couples could learn to accept each other willingly, and make good use of time by trusting themselves.

I will begin my pastoral care and support to couples by writing an invitation letter to couples in several places. I will ask for permission to visit and speak in some churches, asking the couples to attend eight weeks of seminars, lectures and group experiences that will serve as support to their marriage life. My role as a counselor will be to provide the couples with my presence and necessary skills to evaluate their relationship, to assess potential difficulties, to develop communication skills essential for an intimate relationship, and to integrate the Christian vision of marriage into their expectation for marriage. As a priest I will act as spiritual director to all the couples. In addition, my role will be to facilitate, nurture, support, share and encourage couples in their struggles to face their challenges as couples. I will not fabricate something entirely different out of what engaged couples bring to their relationship from the past. Thus within couples, there should be mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from pastoral care to the couples will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means of transmitting from one to another these Christian values that are the goal of all pastoral care. After helping the couples, they will in turn help other couples who are finding problems in their relationship.

In my pastoral care of the couples, I will pay special attention to help them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demand of communion and service. This includes: (1) Preaching by catechetical instruction adapted to couples by the use of the

social communication. (2) By personal preparation for entering marriage, so that the spouses are disposed to the holiness and the obligations of their new state. (3) By sacramental marriage established by Christ and his Church. (4) By preparing programs to encourage couples live out conjugal covenant.

The project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the definition of terms to the central theme of the project, and how general mutual understanding of marriage should help couples to reconcile when things are difficult in the family. The second chapter explores the religious and clinical principles involved in this specific ministry. Chapter three gives a lay out of the planned approach to the project, while chapters four and five are written after the execution of the project, and discusses the outcome and application of the project.

The project will be based on materials from class work, theology, psychology, interviews, and seminars and to a lesser degree sociology.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.1. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE IGBO PEOPLE

When we embark on any project like this type, it is always good to define the terms and the concepts that will enable our readers to know exactly what the project is all about. This is adequate in writing about the historical background of the Igbo since the main focus of this project is based on married couples living outside Igbo cultural environment. Writing this historical background is necessary because the Igbo couples in the Brooklyn Diocese and beyond are confronted with numerous cultural issues. Some are caught up in the confusion of cultural alienation that makes them not able to distinguish what is original to them from what they have inherited from the American culture. Many are having problems with Igbo cultural identity. Some strayed from the Igbo communal life to individualistic type of life, while some have been involved in addictive behavior in drugs, food and alcohol. The reasons for these may be due to the separation from families and Igbo culture background. With the evolution of time, the children born outside this Igbo culture may have the tendency to ask their parents the history of their origin.

The origin and dispersal of the Igbo society is a larger one than can be dealt with in a small project like this. For this reason I will try to provide some forms of group experience where Igbo couples and their families will talk about their stress and conflicts that will enable them to adjust in the USA. These group processes will include: (a) A place to help them develop insights or new understanding of a problem situation based on

consideration of alternative perspectives. (b) A therapy group process that will help them develop increased awareness of the possible meaning of their behaviors, emotions, and experience to themselves and others in a problem situation (c) I will also establish a group process that will help them learn new behaviors, concepts, and skills that will enable them to achieve their goals in a problem situation. There are a lot of things to be done to care and support Igbo couples scattered all over the United States of America. Cyprian Anyanwu quoting Isichei in his doctoral thesis likens the Igbo world to “a big river where one can swim as much as one has the interest, time, and energy (P.24). For this reason, not everything to be to support and care for the Igbos is going to be dealt with in this project. I am going to concentrate on geographical location, socio-political institution and religion of the Igbo people.

Geographically speaking, the Igbo people occupy the southern part of Nigeria. They constitute one of the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria- Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Their population is between fifteen and twenty million. The Igbo people live at the banks of the River Niger between five to seven degrees north latitude and six and eight degrees east longitude. The early history of the Igbo has much in common with the history of many of their Nigerian neighbors, like the Edo, the Yoruba, Tiv, Igala/Idoma, and Ibibio. The Igbos enjoys a tropical climate. Apart from the river Niger, the society is blessed by Imo, Cross, and Uasi rivers. The geographical region of the Igbos fits into what modern scholars call a “culture area.” Anyanwu explains this further by saying,

By culture area is meant “a geographical area occupied by people whose culture exhibits a significant degree of similarity with each other as well as significant degree of dissimilarity with the culture of others... “The Igbo culture Area” enumerated six basic traits for identifying the Igbo as a culture area. These traits are: the linguistic, the social, the political, the economic, the ritual, and cultural. In these traits the Igbo

exhibit much similarity with each other, although local peculiarities as dialectical and varying ritual observances could be noticed. This explains why the danger of a "stereotype" consideration of a people has been warned against. The focus therefore will be on those elements, structures, and values that are common among the Igbo and define them as a people (P.25-26).

These similarities and dissimilarities found Igbo as a whole has effects on them as a unique group when it comes to community life. These differences noted in the people unite them instead of dividing them.

Continuing with the social- political institution and religion of the Igbo people; one can notice that they have clans that make up the Igbo tribes which constitute the ethnic platform with a unifying language and common cultural patterns. The Igbo socio-cultural pattern falls under the tribal system that has no centralized political authority. This means that every clan each obi or clan have their particular place of meeting. Each clan also has their shrine where they worship and perform their sacrifices to the deities. This phenomenon was responsible for the myriads of Igbo Kings in a decentralized socio-cultural system. It is within this context that the popular "Igbo Enwe Eze" proverb which means that Ndi Igbo had no Kings.

In the Igbo Governing set up, there is a clan outside this, there is another setting called Umunna. Literally speaking, Ummunna means children of the same father. It refers to children of the same ancestors. This Umunna cannot intermarry. The first son of the Ummunna is normally the political head. According to Lucerna (1982, Vol.3 No.1)

The Umunna tie is so fundamental to the Igbo that to be cut off from it is tragic. As Igbo say: Umunna bu ike. (The agnates are the source of one's strength) That one should be in good relationship with one's patrikin is accentuated by the fact that the ancestors are the heads of the lineage who look after the welfare of the living and to

be cut off from the parilinage means losing the protection of the living and the dead (p.5).

Everybody should belong to the community made up of Umunna. In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist except corporately. He/she owes his/her existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his/her contemporaries. To put more simply, the individual is part of the whole. This is the more reason one should belong to the umunna. The Igbo social structure embraces a network of relationships. Religion, law, justice and family structures are so interwoven with one another that it is difficult to speak of one without mentioning the others. Igbo traditional religion hinges on the Supreme Being God, called: Chi or Chiukwu or Chukwu or Chineke. Chukwu has unlimited attributes in Igbo religion and His aura permeates every fabric of Igbo cultural life. The intermediary gods in Igbo religion are not to be confused with the Supreme Being who is God. Rather, these Igbo gods serve as mere messengers to the Almighty God. Another important revealing about Igbo worship is that Ndi Igbo do not worship our ancestors. The cult of Igbo ancestors is similar to the veneration of the Saints in Christianity. Ndi Igbo venerate our ancestor and there is no ancestor worship in Igbo Traditional Religion. Afer, Vol.25, No.4, says, "The great value of African ancestor veneration is that the dead are not forgotten. They actually continue to play a role in the whole community. People of Africa live and communicate with their dead" (P.202)

The Igbo world view is a multi-dimensional field of action admitting multiplicity of realities. There is a spiritual, physical and abstract world of existence. According to Lucerna, Physical world nature is not dead but throbbing with life since it could be the temporary or permanent abode of spirits. For an Igbo, all concepts are built from experience but not all experiences can be so well articulated in language as to give a clear

and exact mental picture. For this reason, it is not clear and exact mental pictures of every reality. The Igbo believes that there is a supernatural power that controls the universe.

For an Igbo, witchcraft is understood as an existential phenomenon; a manifestation of supernatural power. Tatah H. Mbuy (1992) indicates that

Witchcraft derives from the Middle English word, WICCHECRAFTE and Anglo-Saxon WICCECRAFT. It is a compound noun from CRAFT and WITCH. Craft originally meant "strength, power, force, and skill" while witch has close links with the Latin VINCERE (to conquer). A witch therefore refers to a woman with supernormal powers to conquer (subdue) others. The term was also applied to men. Hence WITCHCRAFT referred initially to the skill of a woman or man with supernatural and mysteries powers. (P.18)

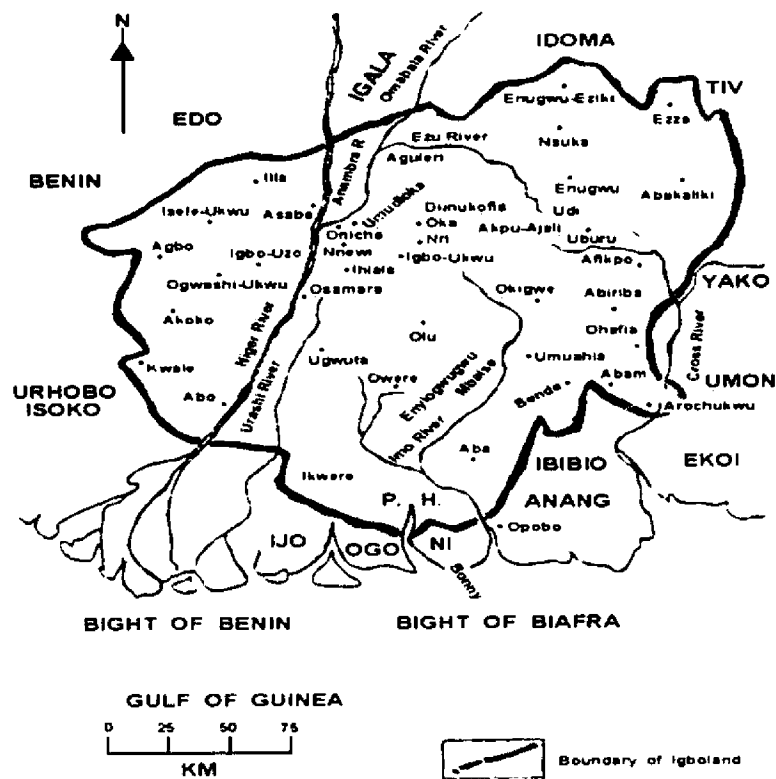
The Igbo's use Witches to search for the casual origin of some illness and death in the family or community. There is a constant interaction between the world of spirits and the world of men in Igbo world view. Lucerna Vol.3 No.1 (1992), says,

In the world of spirits, the Igbos distinguishes four main categories of spiritual beings: the supreme God, a multitude of lesser divinities and spirits, the ancestral spirit and the evil spirits. Some of the spirits inhibit physical realities like forest, streams, and animals. Some wait to reincarnate in those to be born, others make life uncomfortable for the living by causing such calamities as long drought, small-pox epidemic, and premature deaths. Caught up in the midst of physical insecurity and witches, the Igbo man finds religion the key to maintain cosmological balance with the divine Realities (P.7).

In view of this, to the Igbo, the world presents a mixed outlook where what is good can do damage, where reality has to be sought under the surface of things, where the thoughts, words and actions of people can change things for better and for worse. It is this world-view that provides the framework for the goals of Igbo community life and for the hopes and aspirations for the good of individual Igbo person.

Fig 1

IGBO WORLD



1. MAP OF IGBOLAND IN NIGERIA

1.1.1. BRIEF HISTORY OF BROOKLYN DIOCESE

It is important to write something on the brief history of the Brooklyn Diocese where most of the Igbo immigrant couples live, work and worship. I hope that the knowledge of where they are living with their families is going to help the couples in most of the things they are passing through. According to the information I got when I went for Vitus program on the 21 of August 2007, Brooklyn Diocese is considered to be the first diocesan agency in the United States of America created to respond specially to the needs of immigrants. I was told from the immigration office that the services offered are available to all immigrants regardless of race, religion, or belief. It is interesting to note that the government does not help the Diocese economically to run her programs. The immigration program receives support from generous people of the Diocese, special fund raising efforts, and the generosity of the immigrants themselves through the token they pay for services they are receiving. Having seen what the Diocese does, it will be interesting to know the genesis of the Brooklyn diocese, and the names and year of the Bishops who have piloted the affairs of this Diocese.

The information I am to present in this section is from the publication of the "Brooklyn Catholic Experience (2004)." According to this book, the Brooklyn Diocese began in 1853 in response to the flood of German and Irish immigrants coming to Long Island. The first Bishop, John Loughlin, was himself an Irish immigrant. During Loughlin's episcopate (1853-1891), the Diocese expanded in size and service to include a vast network of parishes, schools, hospitals, and orphanages, many run by priests and religious congregations who were also immigrants.

Bishop Charles E McDonnel (1892-1921) established parishes and schools for new immigrant groups entering the Diocese, many from Italy and Eastern Europe, as well as for Hispanics and African-Americans. To coordinate activities, he established the forerunner of the Catholic Schools Office in 1894 and Catholic Charities in 1899. In 1908 he established the official diocesan paper, *The Tablet*.

Under Bishop Thomas E. Molly (1922-1956), the Catholic population exceeded one million and Catholic life flourished with new organizations. In 1930 Bishop Molly established the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception. In 1935, the Catholic War Veterans was founded by Rev. Edward J. Higgings of Immaculate Conception, Astoria. Under the editorship of Patrick F. Scanlan in (1917-1968). *The Tablet* achieved national circulation. In 1951 Bishop Molloy was made a titular Archbishop. In the postwar years, many older immigrants began to move out of Brooklyn and Queens. As the Nassau and Suffolk population grew, the Diocese of Rockville Center was established under Bishop Walter P. Kellenberg in 1957.

Bishop Bryan J. McEntegart (1957-1968) promoted outreach to the growing Hispanic population, sending priests and religious congregations to study Spanish language and culture. A champion of education, McEntegart established high schools, Cathedral College, and Douglaston College. In response to Vatican II, McEntegart established the pastoral Institute in 1967. In 1966 he became a titular Archbishop. As the Diocese's immigrant population grew and diversified, Bishop Francis J. Mugavero (1968-1990) established the Catholic Migration Office, soon a model for other Diocese and perhaps the universal Church. Mugavero also established the Catholic Medical Center. He was a driving force behind the Campaign for Human Development. In 1985,

the Diocese took a leading role in the Nehemiah project, an interfaith program that created housing for low-income families in Brooklyn, attracting national attention. Mugavero was a pioneer in Catholic- Jewish relations at the local and national level. Bishop Thomas V. Daily (1990-2003) missionary background enabled him to meet the needs of Brooklyn's diverse faith community. In 1990 he established the Diocesan Convocation on Racial Harmony. The 1996 Diocesan Synod brought the people of the Diocese together to determine a new approach to the future. The Disciples in Mission program helped prepare the Diocese for Jubilee Year 2000.

On August 1, 2003, Bishop Daily retired. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio was named as Brooklyn's seventh Bishop. Internationally renowned as an expert on immigration, Bishop DiMarzio is well qualified to lead a Diocese known as the "Diocese of Immigrants." In his writings and his leadership, Bishop DiMarzio has committed the Diocese to the work of the New Evangelization as called for by Pope John Paul II. In a Diocese with a proud heritage of prayer and service, Mass is celebrated every Sunday in 26 Languages. Igbo language is included among these languages. At its 150th Anniversary, the Brooklyn Diocese faces the future with faith, hope and joy, the same characteristics that impelled its founders. As we hope with joy for a better future, we can see that our society is faced with widespread spiritual hunger. There is a quest for meaning and for a deeper experience of God and of community. This spiritual hunger and quest for meaning has motivated me to enter into this apostolate in the support and care of the Igbo couples in this diocese and beyond.

Fig. 2

BROOKLYN BOROUGH MAP

1.2. IGBO UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

In Igbo culture, marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects.

These aspects overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from each other. In this

Paper, I will deal mainly with the religious side. According to Cyriacus S. Mba, in

Lucerna January-June, 1982, Vol. 3 No.1: says,

Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, customary or cultural marriage has been proved to be a true form of marriage celebrated according to the traditional laws of the people. There are four important stages in the contract cum covenant of marriage, namely, (a) The betrothal following on the proposal. This betrothal is just a form of having a sort of claim to someone by some fact or event. (b) The setting and payment of the marriage wealth. (c) The formal knotting of the marital tie in the presence of witnesses. (d) The leading of the bride home and the assumption of the marital rights and obligation. (P. 22).

The four stages of marriage Mba mentioned prove why at times divorce is very difficult among the Igbo couples. Temporal separation between husband and wife are more common than divorce. This may be caused by a quarrel between the husband and wife, or between the wife and the relatives of the husband. It may result by the failure of the husband to give the stipulated amount of marriage gift as agreed upon between the two families, by the unfaithfulness of one party; or by other tensions in the family. In each case, the wife goes back to her own people, for any period ranging from a few days to even a few years, until there is reconciliation or the cause of the separation is remedied. Separation may be prolonged with the result that the partners concerned find new partners and the first marriage is broken up and ends in a divorce. (However couples reconcile as soon as possible out of their love for family.)

Indeed, what John S. Mbiti said about African people is clearly seen among the Igbo people. According to John S. Mbiti (1969):

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone participates. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but "under human." Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return. (P.174)

Marriage is not an individual act or affair in Igbo society. Marriage concerns families, ancestors and the whole community. If by chance, any marriage has a problem, the two families involved, the community and the ancestor will be consulted to look into the problem of the couples. This is where Igbo sense of community life comes into play. The marriage is built on the sense of extended family. The extended family depicts a spirit of togetherness and oneness that sees every one as a brother and sister. There is an outstanding slogan "otu onye anaghi alu awanyi" (A person does not marry a wife alone). This means that in the Igbo traditional marriage system, marriage is not only an alliance, a bond, or covenant between two individuals, a man and a woman, but also an alliance between two family groups or kindred communities. This element contributes immensely in holding the nuclear or primary families together and inspiring the stability of marriage even when and where the partners are ill-situated or ill-disposed for stable, enduring and lasting union. This is a value which every normal bride and bridegroom would pray and hope for ardently on their wedding day.

The Igbo believes that "together we stand but divided we fall." This is manifested in marriage life. If one couple has a problem it is believed all the members of the family and

community are in trouble. It is an offense punishable by the law of the community if any person is caught working against the separation of any family. The Igbo are aware that there are situations in the family that warrant separation of the couples like unfaithfulness of any of the couples, irresponsibility in playing their part as couples. The family members and the community are always there to make sure these situations do not occur. If in any such thing happens, something positive must be done to restore the situation. (Divorce is generally believed to possess greater danger to the children involved as well as the society.)

We must note that marriage and procreation in Igbo communities are unity and, without procreation marriage is incomplete. This is a unity which attempts to recapture, at least in part, the lost gift of immortality. It is a religious obligation by means of which the individual contributes the seeds of life towards human being's struggle against loss of original immortality. A person who, therefore, has no descendants, in effect quenches the fire of life, and becomes forever dead since the line of physical continuation is broken if he/she does not get married and bear children. This is a sacred understanding and obligation which must neither be neither cast nor dispensed. This may be one of the reasons the Igbos are not in total agreement with the Catholic celibacy where the priests and religious refused to marry for the kingdom of God. Some of the Igbo are against celibacy from their concept of personal immortality. Unless a person has close relatives to remember him when he has physically died, then he is nobody and simply vanishes out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished. Before the coming of the missionaries to the Igbo land, those who died without marrying are not mourned by any

one. They were buried in the evil forest because they did not contribute to the growth of the family and community through marriage.

According to Mbiti, "Their names may still be mentioned by human beings, especially in genealogies, but they are empty names which are more or less without a personality or best with only a mythological personality built around fact and fiction" (P.34). This is why childlessness couple is lamented in Igbo society. It is an obligation and mission of the couples to transmit life through their marriage and to educate their children. Mbiti makes the situation of barren women clear by saying that, "For a barren woman, or one who has passed the childbearing age, finding a husband is more difficult, since, on the whole, African girls marry before the age twenty- five, the process of their marriage is complete by the time they pass childbearing period and it is rare for divorce to take place after that age" (P.190). This explains why Igbo marriage has teleology, not only for convince, life style or sex alone.

1.2.1. CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES ON MARRIAGE

The family:

When I talk about contemporary influences on marriage in this paper, I also talk about the things that affect family. Talking about marriage without mentioning family is like leaving the head and destroying the neck. Whatever affects the marriage affects the family and vice versa. No one denies that in a relatively short time, since the 1960s, there have been vast contemporary issues influencing marriage. The old communal order, along with the system of Judeo-Christian morals and values, has broken down. It has been replaced by unbridled individualism for which any barrier, any check, any moral

teaching is considered an assault, a constriction, and a violation of human freedom.

William J. Bausch (1989) says,

A scholastic, medieval religion based on a static, chain of life hierarchy is no longer viable. Marriage between a man and a woman for the purpose of children is merely one choice among many, as unions between anyone are deemed acceptable and designer children can be bought from the eggs and sperm in your latest catalogue. In a word, the past is no longer a guide and ancient wisdom is no longer in demand. The older generation, befuddled by the world around it, is asking the younger generation for guidance (P.1)

From the idea of Bausch, marriage is commonly defined as a partnership between two members of the opposite sex known as husband and wife. In our contemporary world, there is a problem whether marriage can be universally defined. The usual roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife include living together, having sexual relations only with one another, sharing economic resources, and being recognized as the parents of their children. However, unconventional forms of marriage that do not include these elements do exist. For example, there are Igbo couples I have seen who are not living together as wife and husband. Instead, each spouse remains in his or her apartment, and the husband/wife is a "visitor" with seals of rights. This is posing a big problem to some Igbo couples because they cannot live together and plan their lives as couples.

Committed relationships between homosexuals (individuals with a sexual orientation toward people of the same sex), also challenges the conventional definition of marriage. This has not only influenced the concept of marriage and family, it has also influenced the church and the world. Because of the controversy involved in this type of marriage many churches have divided apart between those who are for or against gay/lesbian marriage.

Gloria Durka in one of her articles on family system: A new Perspective says,

Today, religious socialization and education are made difficult because of many myths surrounding the family" (P.78). She mentions some of these myths that influence the family. (1) (a) Parents alone are responsible for what become of their children. Families are free standing, independent, and autonomous units. (b) Relatively free from social pressures. These two assumptions form the core of the American myth of personal self-sufficiency. (2) The second myth is the belief that most children live in nuclear families that have only one wage-earner parents. (3) The third myth is that professional are infringing upon the rights and authorities of the family, thereby contributing to its decline.

From the three myths mentioned by Durka, I think that for the progress of nuclear family/marriage, and adequate education, we need partnership between parents, children, church, professionals, and secondary educators in the promotion of the common good. I would suggest that couples should adopt partnership in their marriage instead of democracy. Partnership will help them work for the common good of the family.

Contemporary notion of fatherhood and Motherhood:

Another serious issue that is affecting marriage is the concept of who needs father and mother in our contemporary family? I will say that children do. I am not condemning global single motherhood/fatherhood since we know that many men and women are forced into single motherhood or fatherhood by circumstances beyond their control. Following the teaching of Jesus, we should remind ourselves today that the ideal Christian family remains that of father, mother, and child. If children need father and mother, from my own personal opinion, I may suggest a universal declaration of children's rights to have a mother and father. At times we seem not to understand this when we discuss divorce. In most cases, we seem to look only at the interest of the man and woman. I think that the party that is most hurt by divorce is often not the man and the woman but the children. Children need their father just as they need their mother. They

need their fathers as a role model as much. It is quite clear that a father's love is different from mother's love, and the child needs both in the same way our bodies need both proteins and carbohydrates in order to achieve a balanced growth.

The crisis of fatherhood and motherhood in our family contributes to the crisis of faith in our society today. Even though God is pure spirit and cannot be made male or female; the Bible usually presents God to us in the image of father. Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer to call God "Our Father." Since we go from the known to unknown, it stands to reason to say that the experience we have of our earthly father affects how we visualize our heavenly father. This also applies to the image we have of our earthly mothers. The crisis of faith we have in the family, church and society in many young people today could be related to early life experience in which the experience of a good and loving figure was missing.

To show how divorce can affect children, let us look at this pastoral case study. J is a 17 year old girl in the high school. She has a 9 year old brother called P. According to J, she has suffered much due to the separation of her parents. J wished her parents lived together. She is looking for a priest to relate her problems and sufferings.

j. 1: Hi father. I want to speak with you.

P. 1: Ok, with all pleasure. When would you have time to come?

J. 2: Could it be possible today?

P. 2: I would have loved to talk with you today, but today is Sunday. I am busy with masses and visiting the sick people.

J. 3: What about Wednesday at 10 am? I am sure I have no class that day.

P. 3: That is wonderful. I am always in the office on Tuesdays through Friday, except on Mondays I go to the university.

J. 4: Thank you. See you on Wednesday.

P. 4: Bye for now.

After this first encounter, one week j came back again to speak with me. The following verbatim was the outcome of this second encounter.

P. 1: Welcome. Have a seat. How can I help you today?

J. 1: Really, it has been a long time I have been looking for the opportunity to speak with a priest about the situation I am facing in my family. This is affecting me and my brother. Crying...

P. 2: Take courage, I am here for you. I am listening to you, talk to me.

J. 2: My parents are separated. The problem started when I was 14 years old and my brother was 6. I can remember well one night my mother poured water on my father. My father kicked her with his legs at her back. After this incident, things started changing in my family. Each time my parents were talking to each other, they end up shouting at one another. My mother used to spend most of her time crying. I tried to ask her what the problem was, she never told me anything. My father who used to come early from work to stay with us at supper, and after, help us to do our home work started coming back from work very late. Finally, we never knew when my father packed his things and left the house. After one week of total absence from the house, I called him to ask why he left us; he told me he was sorry. He tried to explain to me that fault was not from him. I wept and refused to go to school for almost two weeks. I was sick during this period and had

no interest to do anything. We need our father. It is only my mother helping us in many things at home. It is not the same as when my father was in the house.

P. 3: I can imagine all you have gone through because of the separation of your parents. I congratulate you for your courage and efforts during this early period of your parent's separation to move on with your life. You have really come a long way.

J. 3: Actually it is hard. I love both my father and mother.

P. 4: I am happy for you. Tell me who is paying your school fees and your personal needs?

J. 4: My father pays my school fees and that of my brother. He gives us whatever we need. To tell you the truth, this does not keep me happy. It is not the same when my father is in the house. Before, both my father and mother used to attend the parents' teachers association meeting together, but now only my mother attends. I feel so bad when I see both parents of some of my classmates together every month for this meeting.

P. 4: I feel for you. I know it is not easy for you not having your parents living together. It is not your fault. The presence of your mother should make you happy. She has always been there for you.

J. 5: I know that my mother has always been there for me and loves me, my father supplies everything we need, I will be happier if they are living with me and my brother. I had a very bad experience last month that will be very hard to forget. Silence...

P. 5: Why silence? Tell me more about this experience

J. 6: My brother had a surgical operation last month. We stayed in the hospital for one week. My father was coming every day to visit us. In each of the visits, he never stayed

less than two hours. It was a shock that both my parents never talked to each other. This affected me emotionally.

P. 6: Oh yeah, that was not good. It is a pity you suffered as much. I really imagine your feelings. Well, you should be happy that the surgical operation of your brother was successful. The presence of your father shows that he cares for you and your brother. Continue to love your parents. It is very important to note that in their differences they still have love for you. This should make you happy. Do not allow the differences between your parents to affect the things you are doing, especially your studies.

J. 7: Thank you very much for listening to my problems. When are we going to see each other again? Please do not forget to pray for my family.

P. 7: Sure, I will be praying for your family. Whenever you feel like talking to me, give me a call. I will be happy to receive you.

The case of J is a very good example why I should work hard to help Igbo couples in their marriage problems. In this project I will develop a pastoral action that is progressive that will strengthen Igbo marriage structures. I will follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development. This means that my pastoral care will include the newly married Igbo couples, their children, and young people who will be the marriage partners of the future. Finally, this project will pay special pastoral attention to those with marital difficulties and victims of marital breakdown. In this project I have learned from the case J that children's needs are insatiable in the sense that they need their parents continuously throughout their childhood. In abandonment, the order of nature is reversed. The preciousness and

uniqueness which every human child possesses is destroyed through abandonment. The child is alone and alienated in the world.

The immigration issues:

One of the contemporary issues that affect Igbo couples in Brooklyn Diocese and the entire United States of America is the immigration problems. Through the deportation of some couples, their dignity and marriage are tampered. This affects their children and entire society. Each person has dignity, this dignity comes from God. The Preferential Option for the Poor (1995), referring to the pastoral letter "Economic Justice For all" claims,

Every human is created as an image of God, and the denial of dignity to a person is a blot on the image. Creation is a gift to all men and women, not to be appropriate for the benefit of a few; its beauty is an object of reference (40). Therefore, no one is to be used as a means to an end or exploited for the gain of someone else. Christians are called to ensure that human dignity is not violated by people or the social structure which have created (P.5).

This dignity does not come from what one accomplishes in life, from gender or race, age or economic attainment, physical health etc. It is a free gift from God. If we claim that God crowned us with glory and honor by sharing his image, we must oppose any action which deny to others God-given human dignity. The present debates on the immigrants in the United States of America are some of the highest forms of dehumanizing couples. Socially, politically and religious wise, it is an immoral act, a social injustice to deport, or judge undocumented immigrants who have worked here for many years, accepting low-earning jobs that U. S. citizens don't want to do. Not only do they perform menial jobs, they are poorly paid. Sending these couples back to their countries after many years of

working here is another form of exploitation and slavery. (These situations affect couples/families being primary school of human development). The members of these families go back to their countries to engage in activities that possibly endanger their lives and the lives of their families, and the society due to economically motivated factors. Some of these couples go home leaving their sons and daughters who are American citizens from birth. Some of these kids grow up to be drop outs and drug addicts due to absence of parental care. These couples under their critical conditions could be affected spiritually in their relationship with to God regarding prayer and worship. It is said that a hungry person is an angry person. If Jesus were here today, he would have done something concrete for these couples and their families as he did with two thousand people. "In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, he summoned the disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a great distance. Mark 8: 1-3). As we are aware, some of these couples came from Africa, Honduras, San Salvador, Columbia, Haiti, and Jamaica.

In The Tablet of April 1, 2006, vol.99, No.1, Bishop DiMarzio says, "Any legislature which creates additional hostility around the issue, which serves further to separate family members should address the underlying moral issues involve in this immigration reform" (P.15). Bishop DiMarzio is correct in his reflection. Deporting these couples to their countries is the same as putting salt to a fresh wound. Some of these couples and families have already abandoned their natural families, friends, states and countries looking for a means to survive and help the families they left behind and those here with

them. In some countries like Mexico, Honduras, and El-Salvador, the rate of violence and crimes are increasing daily. Most of the young couples, young boys and girls deported as illegal immigrants eventually turn out to be a nuisance to the family and society. We are aware of some gang groups called Mara 18 (Diez ocho) and Mara 13 (Trece). These gangs fight and kill themselves, steal, do violence, drugs and all other sorts of crimes. These gangs are no longer under the influence of the family.

Equality in the family:

Another serious contemporary influence on marriage is family breakdown due to the notion of equality between men and women. This can be noted by high number of female heads of households. In some cases, I have seen some Igbo women in Brooklyn who choose to have children and cannot live with their children's fathers. Some are well educated with good jobs and successful businesses. They want to have children, but their prospect for a husband is small. Most often, however, women are pushed to face the responsibility of raising children alone because husbands cannot play the role of breadwinner anymore because they prefer going to movies, parties and other good things contemporary life brings to the society.

In our contemporary world, thanks to television and a few other modern adducts of "togetherness," conversation has become a lost art. Many couples are so busy doing things together- in tandem- that they are in danger of forgetting how to talk to each other. Like the couples in a one-legged race at a picnic, they do just about everything together- except sit down once in a while and discuss who they are, why they are and where they are going. Some couples prefer to watch television instead of watching the signs that go with marriage.

Pornography:

I cannot finish writing on the contemporary influence on marriage without saying something on the influence of pornography to the family. According to Gerald and Stephen (1998), Americans spend over \$4 billion annually on pornography. That is more than we spend on professional baseball. So this is not just ghetto pornography. This cesspool material is being consumed by MAINSTREAM America. Only a fool could fail to see how pornography rips “family” apart. America leads the world in producing pornography-and divorce” (P.15) The family environment is being polluted with this pornography. This does not only tear family apart, but also our children. For good and healthy development, children need a good healthy environment where they can live and develop toward adulthood. A hostile environment that is being posed by excessive pornography strips persons of resources that would enable adaptation to life. We should note that children are just like the “tendrils” of a yam that grows according to the direction given to them.

1.2.2. RENEWAL OF COUPLES THROUGH MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Understanding is one of the most difficult things in life especially among couples, families, and different organizations. We fail to understand due to our human limitations. Couples are unique individuals that are full of shortcomings. Those working with couples should understand this truth. These limitations are what make couples and individuals most often commit fallacies and wrong judgments in their daily interactions. Jesus understood these human limitations. This is one of the reasons he decided to use parables in form of stories to teach his disciples so that they could understand him. In an effort to

make people understand us, we tell stories to provide meaning and understanding for life existence. If we are asked who we are, we tell our own life stories. For any marriage to survive bad times there should be mutual understanding among couples by telling and listening to their own stories. Bernard Lonergan (1971) understands how difficult it is to understand. He says,

Understanding the object accounts for the plain meaning of the text, the meaning is obvious because both author and interpreter understand the same thing in the same way. However, as in conversation, so too in reading, the author may be speaking of P and the reader may be thinking of Q. In that case, sooner or later, there will arise a difficulty. Not everything true of P will also be true of Q and so the author will appear to the interpreter to be saying what is false and absurd. (P.158)

This problem in understanding takes us to communication. The ability to understand depends a lot on the effectiveness of our communication. At times we have good intentions in our communications, but our understanding and disposition at moments of interactions makes the difference. Communication can be used for a variety of purposes- for good or for evil, for love or for hate, to encourage or to terrify. Communication is a tool, an instrument, a means to express what we have in the mind. In most cases, it is the communicator who knows what he/she wanted to communicate that was misunderstood. This is one of the reasons it is said that if we cannot forgive an act we should consider the intention. With these complexities in understanding, the question may be how could engaged couples learn to use communication to cement the bond and deepen union in their marriage? I may say that one of the most important things to learn in communication is to discover the feelings of the other person. Psychologists use the word empathy for this skill. In the Dictionary of Counseling (1994) Rogers defines Empathy as,

Entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meaning which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his or her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meaning of which he or she scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feeling of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensing of his or her world as you look with fresh and un-frightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. (P.91)

There is an Eastern proverb which puts it another way, "You never understand a person until you crawl inside his skin and see life through his eyes." In a certain sense this is what we try to do in marriage.

Communication in marriage might be defined as the mutually practiced art of expressing and receiving ideas, attitudes, insights, feelings and information in such a way that understanding and acceptance result. With good communication, couples could minimize their disagreement; understand their differences and be able to work for a common course. Communication is a bi-lateral act not restricted solely to experiencing your views, opinions and feelings but LISTENING to what the other is saying and appraising it, adding it up in the mind and heart and forming conclusions and judgments.

Marriage is fundamentally an adventure of discovery that must continue until death if each of you is to know and thereby sanctify the other. For some this discovery comes easily, naturally, and quickly. Couples need to work at learning about the infinite possibilities and character that is in each of them. Couples who fail to understand this may live for 10 or 20 years only to discover that you have married a stranger. Two people in love should try to understand each other so that their love will grow. Couples should also decide to marry because they want to be with each other; to embrace each other and enjoy each other's bodies; to know each other deeply and avoid

misunderstanding; to feel each other's needs; to steal each other's fears; to encourage and support the other with loyalty, kindness and dedication; to lean on the other when you are confused, fatigued or anxious-in fact to live so closely and intimately that the other disappears, that you live the other as yourself. The other in a way becomes the self. You become two in one flesh, two in one spirit-that you achieve unity or communion. These things are impossible unless the couples are ready to study and understand one another. This is not a thing so easy, but a process.

This doesn't mean that love requires you to sit moonstruck and eye-glazed staring at each other for the next forty years. It means that you face the challenge of life side by side, knowing that you have a committed lover who understands, who will always be with you, who will never fail you. The sorriest and saddest marriage may be those in which two acquaintances become roommates and bedmates and meal mates, but still remain strangers. These people have children, grandchildren, dogs, cats, cars, and houses, but they also have frustrations, neuroses, affairs, divorces, or they live on the edge of quiet desperation, or in the barren wasteland of boredom, and dullness. Why is this so? The answer may be that they have not learned the secret of communion in their marriage. They have never been willing to take the risk of loving.

Acceptance: One of the things couples should learn is the spirit of acceptance. When couples accept themselves the way they are, there will be no room for passing judgment on one another. Acceptance means realizing that your husband or wife has faults and weaknesses and that you do, too. Acceptance is one of the chief reasons that people marry. Here is somebody who will understand-even if the rest of the world doesn't. Here is somebody who is loyal. Here is somebody who will not judge me too harshly.

No one is perfect. And even as the unruly child won't be changed by being beaten every day, so a husband or a wife with a difficulty won't be helped by constant nagging, bearing or criticism. When you marry you frequently marry an image, not a person. An image made up partially of your father, your brother, movie stars. When you live in the intimacy of marriage, the façade is stripped away. He does leave his socks around the room. She does wear a great deal of makeup. He can be unpleasant when he's tired. She is terribly shy when you'd like her to impress business guests. As the façade is stripped away there must be a rebirth of love for the real person. A real attitude of tenderness, loyalty, and acceptance that will lead him/her to reveal him/herself is very essential for couples. This is the very basis of communication. How well you understand this way will determine the success or failure of your marriage.

1. 2.3. RENEWAL AMONG COUPLES THROUGH RECONCILIATION

We cannot talk of reconciliation without talking of sin and guilt. Sin is a rejection of God and his divine plan. It is introduction by man's willing and knowing refusal to acknowledge God, and also man's failure to choose the good which God wills for them. Generally speaking, reconciliation is the establishment of friendship after a situation of conflict or alienation has been overcome. In most cases, reconciliation has been expressed and understood in different forms: like verbal actions, formal gestures, confession, apology, repentance, acknowledgement of the past, and a willingness to suffer consequences as part of reconciliation. According to the Holy Scripture, reconciliation is primarily an act of God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to

Himself." St. Paul in emphasizing a similar point concludes that, God has sent Jesus Christ, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Hence,

If anyone is in Christ, he is new creation; the old has passed away; behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespass against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to (2 Cor. 5: 17-20).

This call to reconciliation is urgent and needed among couples of today. There is evidence of raptures, lack of forgiveness and reconciliation among couples of today. This is affecting the children, the family, society and the church. Absence of reconciliation, most often has led to divorce and separations of couples.

To reconcile is to reunite, to bring back to harmony. Reconciliation implies, therefore, that division has taken place, separation, rupture. Two realities, two peoples are at odds, they do not relate as they should. According to Vincent Nnabufie,

The term reconciliation suggests divisions and hostilities found among nations and peoples, within societies and families, between individuals in their very environments and even within individual lies. Ordinarily, Reconciliation is used to describe the process of settling quarrels between estranged patterns. It is, therefore, a process of medium of restoring an original harmony which was disrupted Nacaths Journal of African Theology Vol. 6 March 1996 (p.38).

The reconciliation that works for the couples and our society is not by words, but by deeds. Attitudes and words are not enough in terms of reconciliation. The epistle of James is strong here: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jas 1:22). And the first Epistle of John: "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1Jn 3: 18). It is not enough for a wife or husband to say, "Darling I am sorry." There should truly be change of heart and mind that is being truly sorry for the harm already

done. When this is done, the couples should try to forget and forgive each other for the sake, harmony, joy, and love of the family and society.

There are many features in the Igbo traditional rites of reconciliation that challenges the Igbo couples living in Brooklyn Diocese. In Igbo, when a quarrel between two couples is reported to the head of the obi or family by one of the two parties, he summons the two parties and each tells his/her story. As the chief judge, the head of the Obi or family pronounces judgment and declares the guilt. The two are reconciled before him and all the members of the family. If the Obi cannot resolve the problems alone, he appeals to the Umunna who would come together again to look into the matter. The two families of the couples will be involved in all the processes of reconciliation. This form of reconciliation is difficult here due to the diversified culture and individualistic nature of this place. The couples here prefer to appeal to civil authority in their problems. Many a time, the family members are not involved; hence some see their marriage as personal. This is a challenge to the ministers working with the Igbo couples in Brooklyn Diocese and beyond. More effort is needed to help them to seek the help of their parents and the community. I will encourage Igbo couples in Brooklyn to join Igbo community where they will have the opportunity to live and practice Igbo community life.

The Igbo traditional rite of reconciliation produces in some measures an instant change of heart and attitude. Therein is a re-establishment of love, confidence, trust, forgiveness and the forgetting of the past failure. The climax of it all in some cases is "igba ndu and igba oriko." (Covenant act) This igba undu or Oriko is a traditional ritual that involves sharing of food or Kola nut. The gods are seen as the chief witnesses in these covenantal acts. We have equivalent practices in some tribes like the Yoruba, Tiv

and Anang Tribes of Nigeria. These practices challenge the nowadays fossilized rite of penance by their effective results. Without any prejudice to the seal of confession, it could be worthwhile in certain cases to reconcile together two quarreling people-engaged or married couples, two factions in the church or two enemies- in the sacrament of penance in order to achieve the desired result. Human beings by nature get a lot of impression through the tangible. We go from the known to the unknown. The effect of the matter in the sacrament of penance is good for the Igbo couples in Brooklyn Diocese.

The Igbo couples are in anger and great pains due to the mass deportation of couples and their families. They need healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. Due to this pain and anger, it seems the love and reconciliation Jesus Christ brought to the world is still a myth and illusion to most of them. Religious and political leaders need to reproduce in their own life and in the life of these couples a way of teaching love and reconciliation these poor couples are thirsting for. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Couples, political leaders, nations and the entire world need love and reconciliation. If reconciliation is not forthcoming, the families and the world will look more and more like a battle field, where only selfish interest are valued, and the law of force prevail which, will totally prevent couples from the hope of a better future. We must note that there is no reconciliation and healing without love.

In this paper, I am not denying the absence of quarrels and misunderstanding among couples, individuals, societies, and nations. We should know that conflict in any family relationship is normal. Disagreement can flare up about how warm or cool to keep the home or whether to punish a son/daughter who has misbehaved. When a couple

marries, there are now two voices, two opinions, and two votes to be heard on any decision making. Dealing with and resolving our inevitable conflicts can become defining moments in the family. This is why I suggest that couples apply Partnership in their decisions instead of democracy. Partnership will help work and decide for the common good of the family. The system of democracy will always lead the couples to divide and rule, who speaks better with more point rules. Maureen Rogers Law and Lanny (2002), quoting David Mace says, "In itself, quarreling can be helpful if it reveals the deeper feeling of husband and wife to each other... As long as couples know just why they quarreled, they can and should make the necessary adjustment so that they needn't repeat quarrels" (P. 127). I think the best adjustment necessary in any conflict is the capacity to reconcile. We have a better family when we practice the act of reconciliation and forgiveness among each other member. The best ingredients for this reconciliation is, meeting, dialogue/communication, understanding, feeling, loving, prioritizing, touching, balancing, helping and sharing both joys and sufferings together.

In chapter one, having written the history and description of the Igbo culture and the challenges faced by Igbo families in their new culture, in chapter two I am going to write on the layout of the project based on religious and clinical principles. These principles are going to be guides to know more about marriage that will help me to care and support the couples in their struggles of life.

CHAPTER 2: RELIGIOUS AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

2.1. RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES

In this project, the religious principles I used are: Catholic teachings, Trinitarian doctrine and Scriptural teachings on marriage. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994)

The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they come from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics (No 1603, p. 400)

Leo XIII in the Encyclical "Satis Cognitum" (1896) said, "What did Christ the Lord achieve by the foundation of the church; what did he wish? This: he wished to delegate to the church the same office and the same mandate which He had Himself received from the father in order to continue them (274). To accomplish this mandate from Christ, the catholic Canon law No 1141 says, "A marriage which is ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any power or by any cause other than death.

The Trinitarian doctrine on marriage is based on the anthropological symbolism that lays special stress on intra-subjective relationships (Human life expression of the Trinity); with emphasis on the unity of the triune God. Family symbolism has the advantage of underlying tri-personal nature of God. The old Testament saw marriage as symbol of the relationship of love between the chosen people and their God; the new testament uses the love of husband and wife as a symbol of the love Christ has for his church (Ephesians 5:25)

The Scriptural teaching on marriage is based on the truth that Christ raised marriage to the level of a sacrament, as a vehicle of special graces for married life and for the upbringing of the children. Thus, the natural and supernatural bonds of marriage are for the sake of the children, to give them a united home in which they can be reared and educated to play their part in this life and attain destiny in the next world to come. 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 beings must separate (Matthew 19:4-6).”

The understanding of these religious principles has helped more to understand what marriage is all about. This understanding has helped me to care and support couples during my encounter with them. During the group process, some of the couples expressed some of their problems such as affection, affirmation, anger, emotional problems, power struggles etc. I was able to affirm their feelings by saying that; every human being naturally is in need of affection and affirmation. I encouraged the couples to look at their feelings and emotions as one of the primary ends of their relationship and accept them and pray to god to help them resolve their differences.

2.1.1. CHURCH’S TEACHINGS ON MARRIAGE

When I examine marriage and family very closely, I discovered they are not invented by man. God is the creator of marriage. For marriage to function well, it will be good for us to follow the creator’s instructions on family and marriage. In this way we will be on the right path, because God knows what is good for us. The church’s pastoral ministry exists

to sustain the work of the Gospel. One of the ways of doing this is by nourishing and strengthening marriage/family through her teaching authority. The church teaching and doctrine is nothing more than explaining the Ten Commandments, explaining human nature created by God, elevated to the state of grace by Christ the redeemer. This teaching is very urgent and important in our time when there are many things like divorce, relativism, and modernism that are trying to destroy the family and marriage. Carl F. Henry writing in a monthly journal of religion First Things (January 1995 No 49) says, "Natural law theory in modern times come under spirited attack, but the Catholic Church remains a most vigorous champion. It has been said quite properly that without an appeal to natural law, virtually the entire spectrum of catholic moral theory would lose its force (P.54).

Angelo Codeville, quoting John Adam, in defense of family and marriage and support of Henry regarding natural law said,

Foundation of national morality was laid in private families. That means the family must strongly teach its children not to lie and commit adultery, if the families are not moral, how can the nation be moral? Our forefathers laid the foundation of a great nation. They built America with God's blessings. Today, we are destroying America and bringing God's curse upon ourselves (P.221).

The statement of Adam could be correct considering the rate of divorce and different ways marriage is being interpreted by different groups of people and groups. As a pastor, counselor and spiritual director, I will be open to couples in teaching them the implications of the six commandments that talks of the wrongness of infidelity in marriage. This teaching is not going to be based on judgment but on what the church teaches based on revelation. Pope Benedict XVI, in "The Tablet" (October 15, 2005) observed,

We are moving towards a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires. Relativism is an attitude or world view that understands the human person as the definer of all meaning and truth. It affirms that all objective truth and reality can no longer be discovered by an individual directly. This means that all truth is created by each individual according to his/her needs. In short, relativism believes that God is not the creator and revealer of truth, we are.

There are lots of reasons why we should not base our opinions of on relativism. Marriage is one of those things that should be respected and nurtured to grow. In this case, it should not be a matter of convenience for couples and society. The basic reason will be that marriage has a divine origin. From the Church's teachings, marriage is not based on relativism, rather it is seen as "a covenanted communion for life between one man and one woman through which they become husband and wife, mutually share their complete selves, promote each other's fullest welfare, and in love beget and raise Children" (Gaudium et Spes 47-52)."

In this paper, it will be interesting to look at another meaning of marriage that seems opposing to that of the Church. According to APA Dictionary of Psychology (2007), marriage is defined as "The social institution in which two (or, less frequently, more) people, usually but not always a man and a woman, commit themselves to a socially sanctioned relationship in which sexual intercourse is legitimated and there is legally recognized responsibility for any offspring as well as for each other ... (P.555).

This form of marriage that is social and between man and man or woman and woman is not easily discussed in Igbo Society. The Catholic Church in her teachings has never accepted the marriage of homosexuals and lesbians, but respects them as persons and is very reluctant to promote this form of marriage. According to Haas and Haas (1987), the term homosexual has been used for most of this century, and its meaning is

clear. The word itself comes from the Greek homo, meaning same. A person who is homosexual is interested in others of the same sex... Homosexual women often elect to use the term Lesbos, Greek island where in ancient times young women were supposedly schooled in feminine and erotic arts (P.406) As the issue of homosexual/lesbian marriage becomes more prominent, and hotter the debate and opinions on it becomes hotter. Some states in America have already favored this form of marriage, while some churches are ordaining some pastors who manifest to be homosexuals. This has brought a lot of confusion and disunity in some Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily at the mass for his election as the Roman pontiff, April 16th 2005, buttresses this thus, for several reasons a same-sex union contradicts the nature of marriage: It is not based on the natural complementarity of male and female; it cannot cooperate with God to create new life; and the natural purpose of sexual union cannot be achieved by a same sex union. Benedict continues to say that persons in a same union cannot enter into a true conjugal union. Therefore, it is wrong to equate their relationships to a marriage.

The Catholic Church continues to teach that the authentic Christian marriage is a permanent bond of a man and a woman because matrimony corresponds to God, human nature and to God's divine plan. "When a man and a woman enter into a catholic marriage, their commitment to each other surpasses their feelings at the moment and becomes a commitment to maintain the bond God has created between them." Pope Benedict XIV on January, 27 2005, in his annual meeting with the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, a Vatican Court dealing mainly on marriage, says, "Despite a society that often considers marriage simply as a social formalization of affective ties and a contract that

should end if the affection weakens” Pope Benedict said, “The church continues to insist that matrimony is more than a public pronouncement that two people love each other at that moment.”

In the meeting with tribunal, Benedict said, “When a man and a woman decide to marry, the union occurs by virtue of the plan of God himself who created them male and female and gave them the ability to unite forever.” The Holy father concludes his teaching on marriage by saying that, “The court provides a pastoral service to the Church when it defends the Church’s traditional teaching on marriage, despite the fact that many people in the church seem to think that a lifelong marriage is an ideal most couples cannot live up to or that annulment is simply a bureaucratic procedure needed to enable access to the Eucharist for couples who have or want to contract a second marriage.

My understanding of the church’s teachings on marriage will continue to help me to care and support couples by helping them understand some of the components of marriage which includes: (a) Romance (b) Disillusionment, and (c) mature love. Marriage is supposed to be in transition. The romance stage involves dating and honey moon. Some couples who are not careful with this stage of marriage find their future relationship hard. Disillusionment often comes soon after the honey moon. The couple becomes disillusioned when their visions and plans for their marriage begin to change. During this period, the couples should be helped not to repress their feelings and resentments. Any anger or feelings always manifest later in more dangerous form. I took time to explain to the couples the need to share their feelings whenever something goes wrong or bad in the family. The couples should be helped to live an enriched and filled life through their difficulties. If this is not done, the couples may divorce. After the stage

of romance and disillusionment, the mature stage of marriage occurs. This means that the couples have survived the trial moments of their marriage through patience and sufferings. In this stage of maturity in marriage, love, forgiveness becomes the main object of the couples. This maturity does not mean that couples are free from trials in their relationship. This stage of maturity could be comparable to darkness of the night. The couples in their conflicts are desperately seeking and longing, moving toward something profound but terrified to give up what they should give up in order to move more deeply into a relationship with one another. In this stage of the marriage, the couples doubt their safety, the rightness of their actions and directions. The couples have doubts about their ability to maintain dedication, to commit to a direction, but yet in a deep state of fear and confusion. This is ambivalence in marriage. This ambivalence comes because the world is not a perfect place. My support will be to help them maintain stability in all their difficulties. To maintain this stability in times of difficulty in their marriage, I used prayer as one theme in the encounter. The couples were able express what they feel about prayer in relation to God and their marriage. I encouraged them make prayer the master key to all their difficulties. I also taught them the need to attend to church and make use of the sacraments provided by the church. Finally, I supported them by telling the couples the urgent need to send their children to faith formation classes in their various parishes to enable their children attune to the teachings of the church. This is very important for their moral and spiritual growth. I admonished the couples to develop a plan for some programs based on the church's teachings for children, especially for those preparing for the sacrament of initiation, first Holy Communion, confirmation and marriage. I explained to the couples that their children

need a lot of help because of the diversity of cultures in America. These catechetical teachings to children and youth will help them discover meaning in their spiritual and psychological development which will give them energy to progress in life.

2.1.2. TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

When I talk of Trinitarian principles in this project, I refer to the union, love and communion that are supposed to exist between couples. The Christian teachings on the trinity portrays that the Father and the Son are united in undying love by the Holy Spirit. According to Anne Hunt (2005), "In their triune exchange of life and love, we see that to be a person in the Trinity is to be in pure relation, of being for one-another. God's glory is revealed in the paschal mystery as eternally and limitlessly gratuitous, self-sacrificing love (P.51). For the couples to be in Trinity there should be this self given which entails a lot of work and sacrifice among the couples. In the Trinity, we may talk of unity in diversity. Though the Trinity is three, they are at the same time one person. It is evident that couples are born and raised in different cultural backgrounds and parents. When they come together as wife and husband they should not allow this diversity to destroy their union.

The three persons in God are so united in love and submission to one another that they act as one, always in perfect harmony. When writing on the Scriptural teaching on marriage, we are going to see clearly what it means for couples to submit to one another. The boundless love of God spills over into His creations, so that God's love for us, too, is unlimited. God loves each one of us totally. The couples should participate in God's love actively so that there will be harmony in marriage life. The mystery of the holy Trinity

tells us a lot about that tremendous thing we call 'love' real love, lasting love, not any of its cheap substitutes. The dictionary of theology defines this type of love as "That free, self transcendence, life-giving, and unifying approve that has its source and standard within the life of the blessed trinity and that justifies saying "God is love" (1John 4:8) In his encyclical letter *Deus caritas Est* (2005), Pope Benedict XVI tries to explain some meaning of love. According to Pope Benedict XVI, the Greek language has three words for love, but the English has one word-love. (1) Eros meaning erotic love. This is the between husband and wife. It means sexual love, carnal love. (2) Philia love meaning the love existing between brothers, sisters, relations or friends. It also refers to love for sports, artists and movie stars. (3) Agape is universal or unconditional love. It is that love which Jesus Christ showed to the entire humanity by dying on the cross for sins. St John epitomized this by saying greater love than this that a man should die for his friends. This type of love Jesus demonstrated to humanity is supposed to exist between couples. This real love is unselfish and without any condition or personal interest.

God created man and woman not to be alone, and selfish, but to be persons in community, just as he is in the family of his Trinity. God made the union of man and woman in such a way that they should be in family with their children, giving their best to one another as He gives himself to them. Just as each person in the Holy Trinity is different yet living in perfect harmony, so the couples are different from one another, but created to live in loving harmony. Just as there is a fully open communication of thought and love in the Trinity, so should it be among the couples who are created in the image, but are called to live together as wife and husband. Pope John XXIII in (October 2005) talking to a large crowd of people in St. Peter's square in one his audiences said,

When you return home, give each of your children or your parents a great big hug and tell them, this is a little of the love which the pope sends to you” So let me say, “Whenever you show how much you love someone in our family, those you love most in all the world, remember: this is just a little of the love which the Most Holy Trinity has for you.

From this message of John Paul, as a pastor and counselor I will have responsibility to repeat to the couples that they should not be tired of telling themselves how much they love one another. It is my obligation to teach the couples about the unity in diversity that exists between the father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The father is the creator; the Son is the redeemer and the Holy Spirit the sanctifier. They are to work and function as one.

To help the couples understand this doctrine better, I used father, mother and children as an example of family unity. Together they form a single reality I call family. Father and mother love each other, know each other and accept each other. The child is the witness of this love in the ways of the parents and the outside world. I further told the couples that father, mother and child form a family of God, within which everything is bound up in the circle of life just as in a human family of God, within which everything is bound up. I applied this example by telling the couples to invite their children and friends the last day we had the Eucharist and reception. In time of problems and conflicts, I encouraged the couples to reflect on the love and unity existing in the trinity as a goal to help them to solve their problems.

2.1.3. SCRIPTURAL TEACHINGS ON MARRIAGE

In this scriptural teaching on marriage, I plan to base my project on the teachings from the Old Testament and the New Testament because both of them help me to understand better the meaning of marriage. In the creation account of Genesis account, I

read a truth that “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). In the next verse of Genesis (1:28), I read that “God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” From this authority from God, marriage is God’s designed institution. The best way I think to realize the image is through procreation in marriage. In this sacred union of man and woman, made in God’s image and likeness, with their similarity and their uniqueness, come together as one.

The second account on creation, the book of Genesis reinforced the union of man and woman. I read that God took the rib from the man to create a suitable partner whom the man recognizes as “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called ‘woman’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken. That is why man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (2:23-24). John Paul II reflecting on this Genesis account said, “Man” in moment of communion truly becomes the image of God, “an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.

Our Lord Jesus in the New Testament affirms the teaching of the book of Genesis on marriage. We see this when the Pharisees, out of curiosity, asked about divorce, and Jesus replied, “Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and declared, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one, thus, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined” (Mathew 19: 3-7). This teaching of Jesus is enough support to work hard to care and support couples in their marriage. This care and support is very urgent and necessary because from the account of Genesis and

Jesus' teaching, I learned that marriage is the foundation of the family and the whole human race. Cut off marriage and procreation, the world will come to an end. This is why whatever affects the family/ marriage affects the whole world. Therefore, I speak of marriage not as a contract but as a covenant. Just as God made a covenant of life and love with his people of the Old Testament through Abraham and Moses, Christ made the perfect, everlasting, and life-long covenant through the blood of His cross, so marriage is a covenant, a permanent bonding of life and love.

St. Paul in his writing to the Ephesians explains the responsibility of couples in marriage. St. Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife with that of Christ and the Church. In Eph. 5:22-24 and 5:33), In the first place, "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the Church, he himself the savior of the body. As the Church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything." In the same way, "Husband love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her, to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but she should be holy and without blemish. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his flesh, but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5: 25-30). Thus, it is the wife's duty to respect and obey her husband, and she should consider her obedience to her husband as part of her duty to the Lord. It is unfortunate that this teaching of St. Paul has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by many people. This teaching is in no way degrading to women, or

defines women in lesser or greater in authority. All of mankind is called to do everything for the sake of Christ and neighbor, in a spirit of obedience and service. In this same way, wives are called to submit to their husbands as equals. St. Paul did not limit this teaching only to women.

In Ephesians 5: 25-30, St. Paul addressed the responsibilities of the husband saying, in this teaching, Paul wants the husband to treat his wife with loving care and responsibility for the same providential care of her as Christ is for the Church. The husband should love his wife as his body; he must be patient with her, and must honor and respect her above all others. The love and responsibility St. Paul teaches should be reciprocal. It should not be one sided. The husband and wife are like the two hands that wash one another.

To apply the Old and the New Testament teachings of scripture in this project to support couples, I used St. Paul's statement to Timothy a model in support of couples. "Take as your norm the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us." (2 Timothy 1:13-14). I taught the Igbo couples the need to understand that there are good and bad moments in marriage as well as life. In each situation, I told them they require courage and faith. I encouraged them not to be ashamed to express their feelings and worries. I taught them that when they are depressed, or things do not go their way, they should keep faith in God alive with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within them. In order to amend splits existing in the family or that will exist in future, I instructed these couples to establish Bible study groups in every Igbo Christian community, where the couples and their families will go for the reading of the Bible and

sharing the word of God. I promised to visit these study groups on a weekly basis and appoint elderly couples as group leaders. To empower the growth of these group leaders, I will be sending some of them for free Bible course courses and monthly Bible seminars. I hope to organize activities or appeal funds to buy Bibles for the couples and their children.

2.2. CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

As religious principles explain the origin of marriage and what the Catholic Church teaches on it, the clinical principles explore the route of the problems the couples encounter in their marital lives. Identifying these problems and their symptoms will enable me to find ways to encourage the couple to make some adjustment in their daily lives. I see the need on my part to help the Igbo couples deal with a variety of transitional, situational, and developmental problems in their marriages. I did these in the group process I had with them by showing them tools necessary to handle conflicts in their families.

During the group interactions with the couples, I applied the following principles: Igbo family system and Object relations theory. These clinical principles helped me to explore the problems of the couples, and the possible causes of these problems. These principles also helped to look for solutions, like how to maintain balance (manage) in their family issues. My understanding from these principles reveals that the problems the couples always have are unresolved issues from their early child development and family norms. I tried to find ways to encourage couples to make adjustment in their daily lives. I realized in the group sharing that it is a duty and challenge to counselors to help couples

deal with their varieties of transitional and developmental events. These principles also provided me with the necessary skills for conflict management that I used throughout the encounter. One of the couples told me that she is always quarreling with her husband at the end of every year for who is going to control the income tax money. It was a wonderful experience for me to discover that children born in the soil where their parent's alienated and split themselves, there is no way for the children to get what they absolutely need for healthy growth.

2.2.1. IGBO FAMILY SYSTEM THEORY

Everybody is born into a family and belongs to a family. The nurturing one receives from the family consequently influences the moral, spiritual, and psychological upbringing of the person. For the purpose of this paper, a family could be defined as a system of interdependent relationships between man and woman involved in the process of growth and support of each other. According to Peter M. Senge (1994), family as a system is a term originating from the Greek word "Sunistani" "to cause to stand together." Thus a system is seen as a whole element- 'stand together' because they continually affect each other over time and operate towards a common purpose (P.7). From what Senge is saying, a change in one part of a system affects the other. The reason for this holistic change is because system thinking deals with interactions, relationships and interdependence in a system. He goes further to say, 'System thinking is a conceptual framework, body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifteen years, to make the full pattern clear, and to help us see how to change them effectively (P.7). System thinking seeks to classify systems by the manner in which they

are organized and by the independence of their parts. System thinking takes into account the communication and relationship as well as forces involved in living interactions.

Every family has its own peculiar way of acting, with its parental rules, leadership, language, celebrations, social, emotional, sickness/health. This peculiar way of living and acting may not be understood easily by outsiders at first look. This explains the uniqueness of one family in reference to another family. The members of a particular family communicate and understand one another symbolically. A family therefore is an organism, an open system, which is constituted by subsystems surrounded by a boundary, which is a set of rules that governs those who are involved in their interactions with one another and the outside world. The family operates therefore according to transactional patterns unique to it. This establishes and defines the roles and function in the family in relation to how and when one relates. Many families practice an open type of system while others adhere to a very restricted system. This has much effect on the functioning of the Igbo community.

In Igbo society, a family begins when a man and woman join together to form a spouse subsystem. They agree to love, share their lives, and future expectations. They need to go through a period of difficulty and adjustment before they can complete the transaction from courtship to a functional spouse subsystem. Not minding many years of courtship before they come together, the difference in their idiosyncrasies is always there. This difference also could be from their ways of upbringing, from their different families and cultures. These differences in most cases lead to healthy a functional family or to a dysfunctional family. John Bradshaw (1988) says,

The family is a system. It has components and principles that govern the system. The chief component is the marital partnership. If their relationship is healthy and

functional, the children have the opportunity to grow. A healthy functional couple commit to each other through the power of will. They decide and choose to stand by each other no matter what (for riches or poorness, in sickness and health, until death parts them). A good relationship is based on unconditional love. It's not some maudling feeling- it's a decision (P.47).

The crisis and dysfunction in the family may result in intersubjective relationships on both the side of parents and children. Minuchin makes it clear in this form, "families who come for treatment are seen as stuck for lack of alternatives; therapy is designed to unfreeze them from rigid habits, creating the opportunity for new structures to emerge" (P.210).

In Igbo culture, the family occupies a special place in the society. The family is structured in terms of blood relationship and relationships through marriage. There is strong solidarity among family members which extends to the entire community. The vocabulary to explain this relation could be "Bond."

The Igbo family structure could be seen in two forms: The nuclear family and the extended family. The nuclear family is the origin of the family. This is a three generation family system, which is composed of the husband and wife, children, and grandparents. The extended family is made up of sub-family or units that have one origin. It is a large number of people or system related by descent as coming from a common ancestor.(Umunna/Umunne) These Umunna/Umunne are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. These may have different life styles and habits as they continue to remain in balance through the forces existing in their relationships.

The extended family is very common and it is practiced by every family in Igbo land of Eastern Nigeria. In Igbo culture, everybody is called Nwanne/Nwanna, Nwanna meaning brother and Nwanne meaning sister of the same descent. The family unit here

consists of a large number of people related by descent in one common ancestor. It is generally said in Igbo, "Onye aghala Nwanne/Nwanna." This literally means, let no body leave his brother or her sister. This makes the Igbo people look for one another wherever they are. Those living outside the country like here in the United States of America are regarded as "Umunne/Umanna bi'na mba." which means brothers and sisters who are living abroad. In any decision to be taken in the family or society, these people are always considered as people belonging to the family or society, no matter what the distance is. If there is levy for burial or reconstruction of the community hall etc, their immediate families always pay for them. In Igbo family system, there is a sense of community life. This moves the life of the entire community. This community life is motivated by spirit of responsibility, solidarity, and cooperative action among all residents in the family or outside. It is very interesting to note that Igbo family system does not need too much individual or family therapy because before any problem of family or individual could arise, the family and community are always there for the family or individual who has a problem.

In Igbo family system, it will be proper to mention the forms of marriage in Igbo society. There are two forms of marriage in Igbo family system, namely monogamy and polygamy. The monogamous is a system of one man one wife. In the past before the advent of Christianity, this system of marriage was for the poor people. In this form of marriage, a woman is allowed to have as many children as she wants in so far as they are from the same father.

Polygamous marriage means that a man could have as many wives as he can; hence siblings are seen as a blessing from God and a sign of affluence. The more the

family, the richer is the family, and the more the family will extend their farmland because there is an increased man power in terms of labor. In the past there was need to have as many wives and children; hence the livelihood depends on how many acres of land a family has. Anlward Shorter (1978) said, "In Africa there is traditionally no place for the single woman or even the single man. The woman cannot ultimately refuse marriage, and there is no tendency for men to flee from women and create their bachelor society." In Igbo society in the past titles are given depending on how many wives a man has. It is very interesting that they are not given in marriage free of charge. There is always a high bride price paid for any new wife. By bride price I mean the dowry the suitor pays to the family of the bride and Umunna. This bride depends on the education or profession of the bride. There is no traditional or church wedding unless the family of the bride and Umunna are settled.

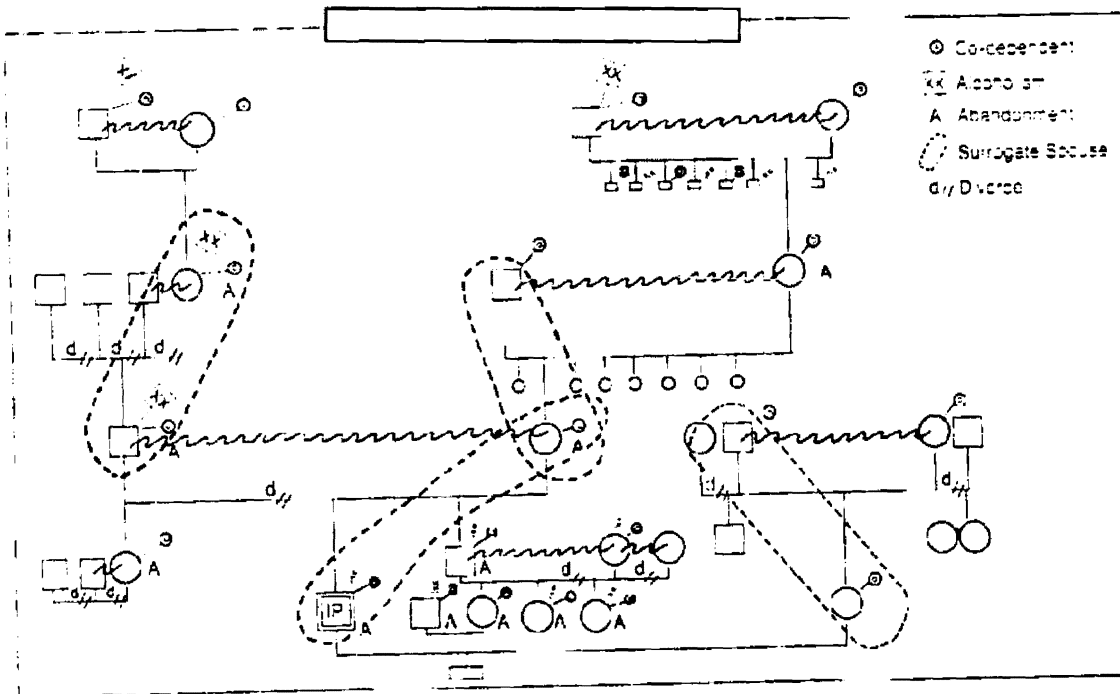
Like any other family system, the Igbo family system experiences some level of family conflicts. Disagreements are a normal part of any relationship. They happen when people have different needs, wants or beliefs. However, if these conflicts go unresolved, they can begin to harm relationships in couples which can lead to divorce. In his project I will teach and empower the couples to use their conflicts to build a solid union. I will teach the couples to see some of their conflicts as opportunity for resolution and deeper intimacy. As the Igbo culture believes in the power of Umunna/Umunne (Brothers/Sisters), extended family, and communal life, as a counselor, any problems of the couples I cannot handle, I will involve the Umunna/Umunne and family members. This point is very important because the Igbo people believe much on family solidarity. What affects one family affects the whole Umunna/Umunne. Onye nuru ube

nwanne/nwnna agbala uso? (Who hears the cry of a brother or sister does not run away). Since the Igbo couples in the United States are living outside their culture, I will develop a plan of action that will involve elderly couples in different communities to form a solid Umanna/Umunne solidarity. Some works of this group are: (1) to look into recurring marriage conflicts of Igbo couples. (2) To visit couples and their families from time to time. Whenever they encounter problems among the couples and their families that are serious, like becoming too violent, or emotionally destructive, I will encourage them always make a referral to some organizations such as family service, agencies and the mental health associations that refer psychotherapists to handle such complex violent and emotional problems that our Umunna/Umunne solidarity cannot handle.

In an effort to care and support couples in my group, I used the genogram to know the family of origin of the couples. I also asked to make their family genogram. I told them to keep their genograms so that other couples will know about it. The genogram of some of the couples were from first, second and third generations. This is important because individuals or generations get caught up in a repetition compulsion, a vicious cycle of repeating over and over again the quest for the lost paradise, only to find that each substitute is an illusion. The genogram is a pectoral display of a patient's relationship and medical history. It goes beyond a traditional family tree by allowing the couples to visualize hereditary patterns and psychological factors that punctuate relationship. With the help of the genogram, I looked into certain family issues like: cut off in the family, alcoholism, abandonment surrogate spouse, divorce, medical history, anxiety etc. For the sake of clarity, I used a sample of the genogram of John Bradshaw The family (1988)

Figure 3

Genogram with some symbols representing the gender with various lines to illustrate family relationships. The ability of counselors to use and read genogram is a big asset in helping couples discovers the route of their conflicts.



2.2.2. OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY

Object relations theory is one of the psychodynamic principles that explain the idea that the ego-self exists only in relationship to other objects, which may be external or internal. APA Dictionary of psychology defines object relation as “An individual’s relationship to his or her entire world, in psychoanalysis, an individual’s relationship to his or her objects (real and imagined), the person’s activities, or things that function as sources of libidinal or aggressive gratification (P.637). According to Melano Flanagan in his contribution in the book *Inside Out and Outside In* (2004),

Object relation theory focuses on the interactions individuals have with other people, on the process through which individuals internalize those interactions, and on the enormous roles those internalized object relations play in psychological development. The term relations thus refer not only to “real” relationships with others, but also to the internal mental representations of others and to internal images as well (P.128).

Clarifying the ideas of Flanagan, Otto Kernberg (1975) inspired by Melanie Klein, whose model was drawn mainly on the paranoid-schizoid position and on the depressive position, came up with his developmental model of object relation theory. For Kernberg, the infant in the first months of life is in a struggle with the environment. The infant moves back and front between two different affective states. One state is characterized as pleasurable and gratified, while the other state is un-pleasurable, painful and frustrating. No matter what is present to the child he/she cannot distinguish between self and the other. In this situation, the child has the task to make a distinction between what is self and what is other. Kernberg says that when this task would not be accomplished, the child cannot develop a dependable sense of the self as separate and distinct because he/she cannot make a distinction between personal experience and the experience of the

other. This means that there is a lack of being able to separate between the internal and external world, own experience and experience of others, own mind and the mind of another.

The second development of the child is the task of overcoming splits. When the first developmental task is accomplished, which is able to differentiate between self images and object images; however, these images remain segregated affectively. Loving self images and images of good objects are held together by positive affects, or libidinal affects. Kernberg says that hateful images of the self and bad, frustrating object images are held together by negative or aggressive affects. The good is separated from the bad. The developmental task is accomplished, as the child is able to see objects as 'whole' objects, the child is required to the self as being loving and hating, as being good and bad at the same time. Kernberg sees the third stage as the varieties of higher level personality development. When the first and second developmental tasks are accomplished, thus self-object boundaries are established and object boundaries are established and object images are integrated. As we have seen in the description of the developmental task, Kernberg has established developmental stages that, if not accomplished, result in psychopathology. It is good to note that Kernberg traced the negative effects of children not being able to internalize good objects relations to their marital life. He shows how the excitation of unconscious, internalized object relations from the past triggers the most troubling conflicts and is also responsible for the most exciting aspects of couple's love life. The early childhood object relations do not only affects the couples in their marriage but also is the cause of normal and pathological relationships, including the role of narcissism, masochism, and aggression in human beings.

The basic teaching on this object relations theory was summarized by Fairbairn's belief that human development is a lifelong breaking away from dependent bonds of early childhood to the adult states of mutuality and exchange. This can be better explained that we spend most of our lives trying to break out of the limitations of dependency to reach the autonomy of adulthood. Whenever we did not break through this bond of dependency, we land ourselves into psychopathology.

Margret S. Mahler (1975) is another expert in the object relations theory. Her ideas and that of Kernberg's are similar. Mahler says that the way we attain the goal of autonomy in our early development is called separation or individuation. From our early child development, the infant moves from the early state of autism or withdrawal and then to symbiosis with the mother. In our normal phase of autism, we are lost, oriented only toward the inside. Our survival begins here. This is the place of being unrelated to the world around us, but not connected. In this moment, we are completely dependent in fact on those around us for our survival. The paradox in this state of autism is that we are unaware of the other, but the other is there, and deeply aware of us in attending to all our needs. The stage of symbiosis is what Mahler may call 'Merger'. In symbiosis, we are merged with the other. We feel enveloped, held, taken care of. Ideally there is a seamless flow between our needs and the caregiver's ability to meet those needs. Here, we notice the joy of being fused with another. Here we see that the primary love object can be the basis for future relationship and representation of self and other. Here the infant develops the capacity for spiritual life, constant presence, empathy, patience, non-relational and forgiveness. Lack of these qualities in the couples brings problems in marriage. They were not developed in early childhood.

When we attend the stage of differentiation, we begin to recognize there is something else besides us, in the moment, satisfying our needs. We begin to sense our presence and the presence of another to whom we may be deeply connected, and on whom we depend for everything. But we are no longer merged, as Mahler would say. There has been a separation/individuation, and so with a new and still largely unformed identity, we now have the possibility of forming a relationship with the other, and object relationships with someone, with ourselves, and ultimately with God. This is a presence with whom one may develop deep connections, on whom one may depend, but no longer in a merged state. In the world, we should be in love with another. This is a thrilling moment of discovery; there is a world out there. There are others, big and small, nature, animals, things to touch and smell. This may be one of the reasons God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things in the earth. God saw how good it was, Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground. (Genesis 1: 25-27)

The theory of object relations could be properly applied to the process whereby couples come to experience themselves as separate and independent from others, while at the same time needing attachment to each other. This theory explains further that the basic orientation toward relationship in early infancy continues throughout development and specific relations with caretakers are essential for a person to function fully and freely in the world. As a child, if one is not treated well, abused in any form, this affects further relationship with others. From the interactions I have had with some couples most

of the problems they are having in their marriage could be traced to their early object relations.

Whenever any of the stages of development is wounded, the self is imprisoned and subsequently hidden from the world which appears unsafe for authentic and spontaneous living. This leads to splitting of individual self and creates a lost or denied self as well as patterned behavior to protect that self. Bradshaw says,

Once violated, a person withdraws into self. The withdrawal into self and self-indulging habits and painkillers is the opposite of having friendships and mutuality. Once a person is used, he becomes an object. Since there is no nurturing parent there for the child, the child objectifies himself. Thumb-sucking, early masturbation are self-indulging and objectifying habits. Once a person objectifies himself, he tends to project that outwards onto others. Sexual objectification is an outcome of sexual abuse ... (P.122).

The application of object relations theory is a challenge to pastoral counselors as we are going to work with couples. The couples need to know the differences that make them different. The interpretations of these physical and internal objects, both conscious and unconscious, become the basis for our later relations with our environment, individuals, friendship, marriage, and raising of a family.

Object relations theory can provide an empathic holding environment among the couples to see some of the destructive developmental impasses that make it hard for the couples in their issues of dependency and growth towards autonomy and full functioning as persons. With my understanding of object relations, I encourage openness and honesty among the couples during the group sharing. I empowered the couples on the need to share information freely and without suspicion. One of the couples told me that she never spoke in the public. With the understanding of object relations theory it seemed to me that this woman was suffering from low self-esteem. To help some of the couples begin

to overcome this problem, I created an environment of trust and confidence and non judgmental environment among the couples. I taught the couples the following communication skills:

- Listen carefully when the other is speaking
- State viewpoints clearly and honestly without ambivalence
- Treat each other with respect
- Acknowledge each other's feelings.

The application of religious and clinical principles for mending marriage splits and helping couples with problems in this chapter reveal the following: (1) That family is the nucleus in which a person first learns human love and cultivates the virtue of responsibility, generosity and fraternal concern to be carried on to marriage life. (2) Married couples with problems should be helped because strong families are built on the foundations of strong marriage. And strong societies are built on the foundation of strong families formed by men and women. There, respect and support of marriage in which a man and a woman join together in a lifelong commitment are essential for the family, society and government.

CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHOD OF EXECUTION

3:1. PREPARATION OF THE MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER

I started these sessions by obtaining permission from my pastor to use the facilities in the parish. I sent out invitation letters to the couples involved with the date of meeting them. I visited some parishes within and outside the Brooklyn Diocese asking the various pastors for permission to speak in the Sunday Masses on this marriage encounter, and the sharing of the invitational letters. Some of the pastors, whom I could not meet in person, were contacted by phone calls.

This encounter lasted eight weeks. They were scheduled on Sundays for two hours each Sunday. Some of the themes discussed during the encounter were: on prayer, listening and communication skills, authority and daily lives of couples. Each week had a special theme to be explored and couples were allowed to share their marriage experiences with one another at the end of each section. There were also activities like: film on Igbo traditional wedding. At the end people were asked to share what they experienced in the video. There was a typical Igbo act of reconciliation which was performed with "Oji" (kola nut), a symbol of unity and reconciliation in Igbo culture. There was Eucharistic celebration as the symbol of Christian unity and love, in which the couples were asked to invite their friends and their children. After the mass, there was a reception and award of certificates to the participating couples.

3:1.2. GROUP PROCESS

Group process is relevant to this project because it is the interaction of people appreciating each other in guided conversation with a facilitator. The use of group

process in this project was to allow couples to be aware and re-evaluate the decisions they made about themselves in the course of their marital lives. Even though their early decisions were once made for the purpose of physical and psychological survival, many of these decisions may no longer function or serve the couples. In this group process, the couples worked on some of their unfinished issues of their childhood experiences that influence their relationships. This group process helped the couples to re-examine the degree to which their core decisions in their marriages are working for them today and how to begin a process of re-decision and adjustment in their lives. The group experience offered the participant couples an opportunity to consider a set of beliefs, as well as room to experiment with new ways of behaving in their family and marriage.

In this group process, my goal and role as facilitator was: to improve the couple's self image through self discovery, ability to identify and express feelings, improved communication and listening skills, value clarification, decision making skills, coupling with couple pressure that comes from their marriage and group members, learning to accept responsibility for their behaviors and how it affects others. I also encouraged the couples to act as positive role models to their fellow couples and take leadership roles in their various Christian communities. With feedbacks in the group, the couples learned some tools for experimenting with different ways of behaving in their everyday marital lives. Furthermore, with increased self-acceptance and self affirmation in the group, the participant couples have a basis for going beyond taking care of their marriage and family life. The couples were able to genuinely be interested in others and typically demonstrated a will to make a difference in their future relationships as couples.

3.1.3. SESSION ONE (SUNDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER 2007)

The session was used to present the information and rationale for organizing the marriage encounter among the couples in the Brooklyn the Diocese. There were seven couples on the first day of the marriage encounter. A total of eighty couples attended the marriage encounter. There was one absent, and the couple was asked to be excused. The first meeting started with an opening prayer, followed by a welcoming address to the couples present. In the address, I cited a passage from the Old Testament scripture to motivate all the couples. "All you who are thirsty, come to the water; you who have no money, come and eat; come without paying and without cost, drink, drink wine and milk, why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in the rich fare. Come to me heedfully; listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant." (Isaiah. 55:1-3)

After the welcoming address, the couples were given opportunities to introduce themselves to one another, and to mention the name of their parish and the type of job they do. Some of the couples mentioned their reasons for coming to this marriage encounter. Some said they are searching for peace in marriage life. Some said they cannot communicate with one another in a lot of things especially those themes concerning each other which most often lead to quarrels. Some said they want to improve their relationship. After all these, I told them the purpose the marriage encounter was: to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns with each other in an atmosphere of mutual trust, caring and understanding. To make this group successful and meaningful, we agreed to have the following rules/ guidelines: Anything shared in the group stays in the

group, respect what other group members say, we respect everyone's need to be heard, we listen to each other when one is speaking, we are willing to take risks, to explore new ideas, and to explain our feelings as well as we can. We are willing to let others know us. We agreed to be honest and to do our best to speak from the heart. We do not talk about group members who are not present. We will try to be, non judgmental and to be punctual to sessions.

The establishment of group rules, questions and explanations brought the first session to an end with a prayer like this, 'Heavenly Father, we know that you love us and want us to love one another. Hear the prayers of your people gathered today in this marriage encounter, looking for support in their relationship. Help them so to love one another that they will always experience your loving presence in their lives and family, we make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen. Our Father... Hail Mary....

3.1.4. SECOND SESSION (SUNDAY 7TH OCTOBER)

The second session started with check in. Check in involved being present with a little meditation before the session. I asked them to share their experiences on the preparatory session if there was any. One of the couples reported that they were satisfied on how the first session was organized. Another member of a couple said she felt well relaxed on the first meeting on how things were made very clear, especially on the confidentiality that should exist among the group. After knowing their feelings and reactions to the first session, there was a roll call to know whether those who attended the first encounter were present. This roll call led to the introduction of new members. There was no one absent from the first session. There were 18 more couples in attendance in

this second session. The essence of this roll call is to create trust and confidence among the couples.

The topic for this session was covenanted communion between one man and one woman through which they become husband and wife, mutually share their complete selves, promote each other's fullest welfare, and in love beget and raise children (Gaudium et Spes). During one of our sharing, one of the couples said her husband does not give her space either at home or when they go outside. She said that he hardly allows her to be alone or with another man. She said, "I am tired in this marriage, I need to liberate myself" Some women the group were murmuring in reaction to this sharing. One of them made a small verbal gesture "I see, uh huh, I thought I am the only woman suffering this situation." The husband of the woman who shared her experience was nodding his head with his legs crossed. When I noticed how tension was increasing in the group because of this sharing, I kept some silence. After a while, I spoke directly to the couples on their roles in their family and need for improved communication to make balance in their lives. However, I told the couples that for a real communion to take place; their coming together must be not only of bodies but also one of minds and hearts. Gandhi once said, "Physical relationship divorced from spiritual is body without soul." But this coming together doesn't mean that the two become completely one. They don't fuse in such a way that the two become a third person. They two are not streams, once separate, which converge and coalesce. The partners keep their unity as couples, at the time try to maintain their individual identities. The couples should be able to know the things that make them different. This is the uniqueness of each person. The more individuated the couples, the more they grow and mature in their love relationship.

A better example than that of the streams is that of two travelers, travelling on different paths, which meet and decide to travel together from one point on. I am not talking about two strangers who by chance meet when out for an afternoon stroll, and who decide to finish their stroll together. I am talking about a man and a woman, on the great and irretraceable path of life, which meet and make the momentous decision that from that point on they will become fellow travelers. They decide to share, not just a few moments or hours of their time, but the rest of their lives. This sharing should not remove or violate the freedom and privacy of as couples. I mean that couples should have their privacy even though they try to share their lives.

My dear couples, I want to teach you something very important on the implication of agreeing to come together as couples the whole of your life. When you decided to walk together as couples for the rest of your life, it supposes that you accepted to share everything that comes your way. I remember on the day of your wedding, the pastor representing the Church and God asked you, are you prepared to make a total gift of yourself--body, heart, and spirit? To give an unqualified "yes" It is good you reflect on these questions and your response to these questions in this marriage encounter. It was a huge undertaking you made to one another in your marriage. To commit one's hopes and dreams and one's entire life and destiny to another human being is an enormous thing to do. Believe me, it is not easy. I assure you that you are not alone in this journey. God is always at your side in all your difficulties.

When the Bible says, "the two become one," there is a certain loss. There is for instance, a loss of independence, but independence with your uniqueness. Each can no longer "do it alone." But there is a far greater gain when couples unite all the resources

they have as individuals. For some of you who are starters in this journey, it is easy. How swiftly and sweetly the milestones go by when you have pleasant company. If you have mutual support and encouragement with one another you will be able to take the difficulties in your journey as couples. Above all, if you do not have a thing called 'love,' without which you are forlorn travelers on this earth, the journey is difficult.

It is very interesting to reconsider in this encounter how your paths crossed prior to becoming a couple. Sometimes the meeting seems completely accidental. But is anything accidental? Other times it seems as if an invisible and friendly hand steered you gently towards one another. Sometimes the decision to travel henceforth together is taken quickly. He believes in you, and you believe in him. In other cases, the decision comes only after your paths have crossed and reconnected and/or closed many times. During this time, trust has been growing, and finally the decision is made.

In this section, I used this theme as a facilitator to encourage the couples to be helped by Christian faith to accept the circumstances they meet in their marriage. I told them that a couple with faith is able to say: here is a companion; God has given to me with whom I can share the rest of my life journey. I can share with this person the rest of my journey. I explained to them that this journey is not just any type of journey. It is that unique and wonderful journey, the journey of life, a journey which, according to faith, is a homeward one to God's eternal kingdom. My dear couples, you have met, and have decided to travel the rest of the way together. I gave them the hope that this marriage encounter is a way of support for more commitments in their family life. I prayed that in this encounter that God will bless and guide the couples and give the necessary skills, peace, and love to care for their marriage and family.

After this long reflection, I gave the couples a twenty minute break. After the break, I gave them self test questions on love and respect. These questions/statements were copied from John Gottman (1994). Is there enough love and respect in your marriage? Answer "yes" or "no" to each of the following statements, depending on whether you mostly agree or disagree. As before, take the test on behalf of your partner also if necessary.

1. My spouse seeks out my opinions.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

2. My spouse cares about my feelings.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

3. I don't feel ignored very often.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

4. We touch each other a lot.

You: Yes No

Your spouse: Yes No

5. We listen to each other.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

6. We respect each other's ideas.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

7. We are affectionate toward one another.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

8. I feel that my partner takes good care of me.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

9. What I say counts.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

10. I am important in our decisions.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

11. There's lots of love in our marriage.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

12. We are genuinely interested in one another.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

13. I like spending time with my partner.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

14. We are very good friends.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

15. Even during rough times we can be empathetic.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

16. My spouse is considerate of my view point.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

17. My spouse finds me physically attractive.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

18. My partner expresses warmth towards me.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

19. I feel included in my partner's life.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

20. My spouse admires me.

You: Yes No

Your partner: Yes No

Scoring: If you checked "yes" to fewer than seven items, then it likely you are not feeling adequately loved and respected in your marriage. You need to be far more active in adding affections in your relationship.

Some of the group process I used in this project includes, Interpersonal process group, Expressive group process and Communal and cultural specific group process. The interpersonal group focuses on healing by changing psychological dynamics within couples or among the group. I used this process to help the couples to focus on here and now dynamics in the group, and to emphasize process over content. For instance,

- Facilitate discussion among the couples.
- Foster open and honest communication; supply sharing and participation.
- Help couples share and overcome difficult challenges in their marriage.
- Model appropriate group behavior and provide positive reinforcement in the life of the couples.
- Maintain appropriate individual and group boundaries.
- Perceive and resolve interpersonal struggles among group members and couples.
- Observe and monitor interpersonal group dynamics, stages of group development, emerging roles, couples strength, impact of couple's behavior on group and family functioning.

Expressive group process allows the couples to express feelings and thoughts that might be difficult to share in normal sharing. My aims of using this process are the following: To help the couples explore their personal history, resolve trauma that came from marital abuses, discover new coping skills and foster social interactions and creativity. To achieve these objectives, I used a highly interactive style that focused on the group's attention on creative activities while remaining mindful of group process issues. This modality I used helped me to know the signs of reactions to trauma on the couples and be

able to work with or contain couple's emotional responses when indicated. I was sensitive to couple's ability and willingness to participate in the group process. I helped couples work through their powerful emotions. I provided boundaries for couple's behaviors and protecting them from vulnerable emotional states.

The last group process I used was communal and culturally group process. This was to help the Igbo couples adjust to Igbo cultural values and incorporate the new American cultures. The application of this was seen in the Igbo ritual of reconciliation demonstrated with kola nut. The understanding of the American culture and how it affects Igbo couples and their families has given me a great insight. And I acknowledged the inherent Igbo cultural and current American values, with a goal of helping to empower couples in this marriage encounter. I was able to have insight into what couples in the group held in common, while being sensitive to differences.

3.1.5. THIRD SESSION (SUNDAY 14TH OCTOBER)

The session started thirty minutes late because one of the couples called that they had a flat tire on the road. Two couples left to help them out. The topic for this Sunday was on prayer. I used prayer to know the relationship the couples have with God and themselves. It is said that family that pray together lives together. If couples say their prayers and perform their religious duties regularly without fail, so will the children even when their parents are dead and gone. I encouraged them to share among themselves what they understand by prayer.

- Pastor (P): Before we enter into our topic on prayer, it will be good if we share with one another what we understand by prayer.

- Couple A: Wife- Prayer is talking to God.
- Couple B: Husband-Prayer is lifting up our heart and mind to God.
- Couple C: Husband-I see prayer as helping other people in need.
- Couple D: Wife- For me, I pray with my husband when we make time to stay before the Blessed Sacrament in silence.
- Couple E: Wife- Prayer for me is when we make all our plans and intentions to God.
- Couple F: Husband- I have not had the experience of prayer because I was not taught by my parents. But I believe that God exists.
- Couple G: Husband- My prayer is always to ask God to forgive my sins.

After sharing with each what they understand by prayer, I started to explain the deeper meaning of prayer. I proceeded, with validating their sense of prayer. 'I am happy you know what prayer is and how to pray'. As couples, prayer is important in all the things you do. St. John Chrysostom said that "prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness." Catholic Book of Quotations (p.290). As couples aiming to be happy in your marriages, you need to be closer to God in prayer.

Prayer is a two way communication. We speak to God, and God speaks to us. We speak to God in the quiet of our hearts as one of you said. We may also speak to God aloud in vocal prayer. We do vocal prayer mostly when we pray in our community or groups. In a vocal form of prayer we pray aloud to God. Another form of prayer is meditation and contemplation. "The word contemplation is defined in the American

heritage dictionary of English language (1982) as “to consider carefully and length; meditate on or ponder” (P. 406). According to J.P. Miller (1994), “contemplation includes meditation as well as spontaneous and unstructured moments when we experience a connection with the unity of things... Meditation is a form of contemplation that involves concentrated practice” (pp.2-3) Meditation was defined by J.C. Smith (1975) as “family of mental experiences that generally involve sitting still and counting breaths, attending to a repeated thought, or focusing on virtually any simple external or internal stimulus” (p.558) I told the couples clearly that for their relationship to grow in marriage and God, they should be faithful to prayer and be regular in it. I told the couples that as they speak with each other every day, hopefully in a significant and mutual way, so they should set aside a time every day to speak to God. I taught them that; God is the one they are called to know, love and serve with the whole of their heart, mind, soul and strength in their marriage. I told that if they want to grow closer to God they need to spend at least a few minutes every day speaking to God in prayer and listening to Him when He speak to them.

As couples, you should learn in this marriage encounter that the catechism of the church reminds us that prayer is a battle. First, it is a battle against our own flesh, the laziness, or distractions that keeps us from praying. It is also a battle against the likes of some people in the world, who view prayer as an unproductive waste of time. In reality, prayer is one of the most important investments we can make in our married life. Yet, it can also be a difficult discipline to acquire because we must battle against numerous distractions, some from within ourselves and outside ourselves like the problems of children, and family. I guess many people may wonder why couples pray at all if God

already knows your problems and needs. These people fail to understand that God awaits our petition because the dignity of the children of God lies in their freedom (CCC 2736).

After this topic on prayer, I suggested to the couples to share twenty five minutes meditation, and sharing their deeper ideas and understanding on prayer. When they came back, they were served coffee, tea and some drinks. After this little entertainment, the couples shared their experiences and discussions in their groups. Some said they are distracted whenever they are praying. One of the couple recounted how many times her husband fell asleep when they were praying the Holy Rosary. Two couples shared the same opinion that nobody taught them how to pray. A couple said that her prayer is basically reading the Bible. A couple said they thank God because they came from good Christian families who taught them early in life on how to pray. A woman very close to me pulled me by my sleeve and whispered to me that the testimony of the couples who said they were taught early on how to pray is a lie. "After all they do not go to church on Sundays" I said in low tone is that so? The session ended with one of the couples leading in the closing prayer.

3.1.6. FOURTH SESSION (Sunday 21ST OCTOBER 2007)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS PRACTICE: ATTENDING AND REFLECTIVE LISTENING

During my conversations some of the couples told me the difficulties they were having in interacting with one another. A wife of B told me that her husband does not like to take her in his car. He likes to move on his own without her. She said "In our first five years of marriage I suffered a great loneliness. I wanted to ask B to send me back to

Nigeria. The worst problem came when I could not get to any neighbor to express my experiences. Everybody was enclosed in their apartments. I remembered one morning after quarreling with B at night, I was going to take train to go to the hospital. On the way I said good morning to a woman I thought was my neighbor, but she did not respond. These experiences still remain with me.” Another couple told me that they are living in the house like visitors. Everyone does his/her things. My husband spends his whole time watching movies and at times pornography. C told me about her marriage with D for twenty three years with four children. They never had a formal discussion as wife and husband. Any attempt to share ideas ends up in quarrels and shouts. He told me that he has been carrying D as a cross God has given him. He further told me she is with him till today for the sake of their four children. These experiences through group and personal sharing with the couple revealed some seemingly lack of communication, attention, sharing and listening among the Igbo couples. For these reason I spoke about communication skill development among the couples.

These are based on:

- Discussion on basic marital issues
- Build on strength and focus on weak areas
- Practice communication and problem-solving skills
- Learn more about self and future relationship
- Recognize patterns in their relationship
- Deepen their relationship
- Progress in the transition from I to we
- Evaluate readiness for living together

The majority of the women in the group were smiling as I was speaking about the development of skills. Two men left the group and came back when I was almost concluding the speech. Their wives confronted them privately, but one of the men could not manage his anger. He pushed his wife away from him. I heard her say in a low voice, “Ekwensu” Devil; you want to show them how you live at home, ‘ihere eme’ without shame.” As these problems were going on some of the couples showed some signs of disappointment. I was keeping silence. One of the men said; “Here we are.” I smiled. The couples left the day’s session with some confusions and tensions.

3.1.7. FIFTH SESSION (SUNDAY 28TH OCTOBER, 2007)

AUTHORITY/DAILY LIFE OF COUPLES

From my sharing with the couples, I learned that many are having problems of power struggles in their families of who is going to be in charge of money and the control of the family activities. One of the couples told me that her husband is too hard on her whenever it comes to decision making in the family. He imposes his will and decision on everybody. He is not open for dialogue. This is one of my crosses in my marriage.” Her husband laughed loudly and said, “Oto olu kwue o na ato” (when one voice is heard, it sounds very pleasant).

To help the couples understand and handle the issue of power and money, I started the fourth session, with a passage from the Bible that says, “Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore; whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves”

(Romans 13:1-2). I explained to the couples that when God called them as couples by His special grace to live as wife and husband, He gave them the highest authority to love, respect, and share your lives with one another. In view of this, conjugal love should be practiced within the framework of the family. I made it clear to the couples that Man is the head; woman is the heart. The family is a society and someone must have the final word, not in a manner dictatorial or arbitrary, but after discussion and consultation. The whole family suffers when headship is determined by a contest of personalities. I help them to understand that, the question of men being superior to women or vice versa should not be a major problem among couples. I told them that, the greatest among them should be serving the other. Husband/wife feeling being in power/ authority and money does not imply superiority.

In the daily lives of the couples, I gave them instances of something I may call facts of life in their dealings with one another. This fact of life is that they should learn to accept life as it is. I told them that there are many things beyond their control as couples. For instance, the hurricane Mitch or bad weather is beyond control of human beings at times. I explained to them that hurricane Mitch is a phenomenon that results from the nature of things and must be accepted accordingly. It is only a child that can refuse to take a realistic view of them.

I helped them to understand that there are always some degrees of monotony in everyday life. Marriage is no exception. For instance, routine tasks of making a living, keeping house and maintaining your children, handling money, sex issues and power could prove monotonous. I tried to tell them that in marriage these monotones could be overcome by companionship, love and, patience. To apply these teachings in the lives of

the couples, I gave them an assignment to take home and read as couples before the next session.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophesy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patience, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrong doings, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

3.2 ACTIVITIES

To make the marriage encounter more concrete and practical for the couples, I organized some activities for the couples. The first activity was a video film on Igbo typical traditional wedding. This video was to remind each couple of their own traditional marriage hence the Igbo culture requires every couple to pass through this process before the church wedding. The next activity was a ritual celebration of reconciliation that was done with kola nut (oji) as a symbol of love and unity in Igbo culture. The Igbo people generally believe that Oji is symbol of peace, unity, love, and reconciliation. In Igbo land Oji reconciles clans who are intending to go for war, individuals, families and couples. Reconciliation is archived by ritual blessing and sharing of oji among the warring parties. In Igbo land, before anything should be done in marriage Oji is the first thing to be presented to the in-laws as a sign of welcome and a symbol of peace, love and unity among the communities and families involved in marriage. After the video film, the next activity was the celebration of the Eucharist. Eucharist is a symbol of Christian unity. The

couples agreed among themselves to invite their children, friends and well wishers to participate in the Eucharist. The Catholics have always seen Eucharist as a symbol of love and Christian unity. After the holy Eucharist, there was a reception in the parish hall. In the Eucharist and sharing of food, the couples manifest the solidarity that exists among the Igbo extended family.

3.2.1 VIDEO FILM

The scene in the video was from the traditional weddings of the couples from Mbaise, Imo State. The bride is the first daughter of her parents. She is an accountant. Her husband was a mortgage banker in Nigeria before he migrated to the United States of America. This ceremony brought the representative families and communities together in love and harmony. The invitees acted as witnesses to the traditional marriage and they will work together to ensure the stability and longevity of the marriage. In the cultural wedding scenes, the guests are welcomed as they arrived and are seated amidst traditional music. As indicated on film, guests-invited or uninvited are free to come. No one is ever driven away and does not need an invitation to come. There was enough food for everyone. The ceremony took place in an open space. There were dancing groups and musicians playing to keep the mood happy. It was all very festive in this tropical, warm, sun-kissed region of Africa.

In the video, the mother of the bride made her entrance on a typical traditional wear with her entourage, fellow women and her peers, sisters and friends and danced round the ceremonial ground, being greeted and feted by the guests. Money was spread at all the occasions-Naira (Nigerian currency), dollar, pound sterling, Deutsch mark, and

other currencies because many people came home for the ceremony from the different countries. Also, in Igbo culture, during the time of December a lot of people visit home. For this reason many couples normally fix their traditional wedding during the time of December to attract more people to their ceremony. The money collected in this ceremony is part of the gifts to the couples on the occasion. Other gifts were given too. The Igbo know that it is expensive to stage such a wedding and the money goes to help offset the costs somewhat. It is very important to note that the money collected in the ceremony never nears the actual costs of the wedding. However, it is all a happy occasion and worthy of the expenditure. The couple who brought this video said it took them one year to plan their traditional marriage.

In the video, after the appearance of the mother of the bride, comes in the bride with her maidens, peers, classmates, relatives and friends, and she does the Atilogwu dance of the bride. She went to her parents and knelt showing obedience and respect. The father gave her a cup of palm wine, a symbolic gesture, and told her to go and look for her husband who is hidden somewhere in the crowd among his friends. She carries the cup of palm wine dancing with her maidens and friends searching for the groom in the midst of the crowd. When she finally found him, she offered him the cup of palm wine and claimed him as her groom. The groom will drink the wine and offer gifts to the bride. Then the bride will bring the bridegroom to her parents kneeling before them to receive their blessings. With this blessing, the parents have married them traditionally before the assembly of friends, relatives, and the greater community.

Figure 4:

A dancing group of Atilogwu performing in a typical traditional wedding: A traditional wedding is an occasion for festivities, music, dancing, and merriment. It marks a union of many families and communities.



Figure 5:

Accompanied by her maidens, the bride goes in search of her groom, who is hidden somewhere in the crowd by his male friends. It is a playful event. Many young men will plead to be offered the wine. There is a lot of laughter and merriment as she refuses each in turn.



Figure 6:

The bride and the bridegroom kneel for blessings from the father of the bride. This blessing is the core of the Igbo traditional marriage.



3.2.2. IGBO RITUAL ACT OF RECONCILIATION WITH KOLA NUT (OJI)

By nature man is a homo symbolicus, a symbolizing, conceptualizing and meaning seeking animal. For this reason the Igbo uses symbolic rituals to express a lot of things they do and believe. The Igbo believe in the existence of evil and good, wrong act and good act. They maintain the principle that it is never right to do wrong. Whenever wrong is done to the individual, family members, and society, there is always a way out of it. One of the ways out is to look for solution and reconciliation in a ritual with kola

nut (oji). This is used to re-establish peace, unity and love. According to Ofoegbu Jon (1991), oji is the first thing served in every function or ceremony, personal or communal agreement, welcoming of a visitor to an Igbo home and settlement of family disputes (P.43)

There is no Igbo cultural symbol that has received an equal attention as the kola nut. The Igbo believe that the kola nut is symbol of life. (Onye wetere oji wetere ndu he/she who brings kola brings life). Many profound and mysterious interpretations and formalities are accorded it. Ofoegbu quoting Eze Ugo III of Okporo says that "...the kola nut is the 'bread' of Igbo sacramental communion and must therefore be specially presented, broken, shared and partaken by all the parties and families in every marriage ceremony as the final consummation of the blessings." (43) During this encounter, the social and religious aspect of presentation and breaking of kola nut was carried among the couples. The oji was carried from one person to another according to a trace of seniority, kingship relationship starting from the Igbo living in my parish to the host. The kola continued to spread out in the direction of left to right movement and came back to the oldest Igbo couple in the parish. After the presentation of the kola nut, came the blessing of it by the oldest couples in the group. It is believed that oji Igbo identifies itself with Igbo language. For this reason the kola was blessed in Igbo language.

Obasi bi n'elu bia taa oji

God in heaven come and eat kola.

Ndi oki na ndi opku bia taa nu oji

Our ancestors come and eat kola.

Ala America bia taa oji

Land of America come and eat kola.

Ndu mmri ndu azu, mmri atala ma azu anwula

Live and let live.

Ochu okuko enwe ada, nwa okuko enwe ndanda oso

Evil person will meet evil.

Ndu nwoko, ndu awnanyi, ndu onye ukwu ndu onye nta

The life of every man and woman, big and small.

Ojemba enwe iro, ala America chekwanyi

A traveler has no enemy, protect us land of America.

Iseeee....

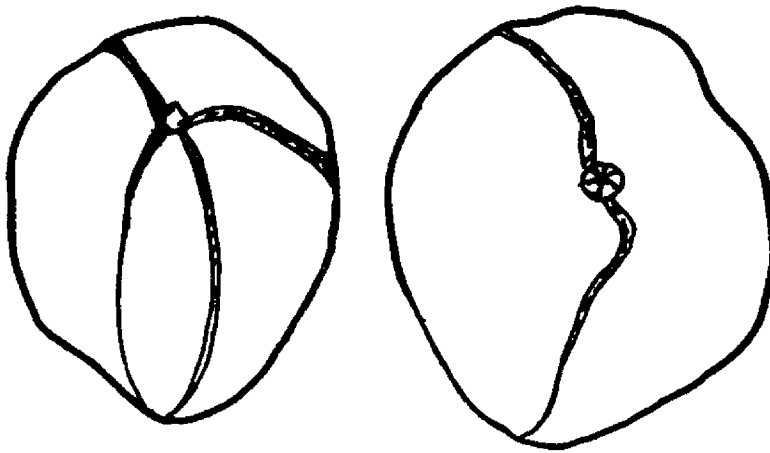
Amen....

The blessings of the kola nuts establish the seal of reconciliation among the couples and members of their families. The prayers over the kola nut show that all beings, spiritual, ancestors and human are invited to partake of the kola nut and therefore accompany the whole family participating in the marriage encounter. Here kola nut symbolism unites all men the ancestor, cosmic forces, the deities and God. As a symbol of life unity and peace, the libation makes clear this truth whenever celebrated in any marriage or family encounter. After this blessing of the kola, the next thing was the sharing of it. The plate was placed in the center of the hall. Each couple was coming with their hands joined together. Some were offering promises that they are going to be better wife and husband. Some confessed that they regret their indifferences towards their marriage. Some couples indicate that their drinking has caused a lot of harm to them and their families. Some say they will seek assistance to resolve their problems. Some who

have been unfaithful in their marriage gave promises that they will never do that again. This symbolic ritual was very significant for the Igbo couples. People who are not of Igbo origin may not know the value and power of this ritual with the kola nut. According to Chima Anyawnu "No ritual can be properly understood independent of the community that invented or adopted it (P.172). The traditional ritual with kola nut has improved the understanding, peace, unity, kindness, fraternity and reconciliation for the Igbo couples in the Brooklyn Diocese and beyond who participated in these eight weeks of encounter.

Figure 7:

OJI (The Kola Nut): A symbol of unity, peace and love in Igbo land



3.2.3. SHARING EUCHARIST

The Eucharist means "Thanksgiving." To celebrate the Eucharist is to be grateful to God for life and for all He has done for humanity. The Eucharist is a spiritually shared food. Those who are invited to eat it eat the bread and drink the same wine. To participate

in the Eucharist is to live the life of Christ in fidelity to God and humanity. For Christians to participate in the table of the Lord is to ask the Lord for forgiveness, strength confidence, fraternity and peace. This is the reason at the beginning of each Eucharistic celebration, The Roman missal says, "My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins." Because of what the Eucharist signifies for Christians, the couples in this marriage encounter decided to include it as one of their activities to be carried out.

For the celebration of the Eucharist, the couples were asked to invite their families and friends for this celebration. Some of the Igbo priests living in Brooklyn were asked to come and concelebrate in the Mass. A liturgical committee was set among the couples to plan for the Mass. The celebration took place in the parish church. Two couples were chosen for the readings. During each of the readings, the couple went together as a sign of love and unity. The first reading was taken from the book of Genesis 1: 26-28-31. The theme of the reading was, God made man and woman for one another. The bond of marriage means that in a sense they are no longer two but one. The responsorial was taken from Psalm (102(103):8, 10-14, 17-18). The theme was the Lord is compassion and love. The second reading was from 1 John 4:7-12. The theme was, those who love, know God because God is love. The gospel from John 13: 34-35 was proclaimed by an Igbo deacon. The theme of the Gospel was Christ urging his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. The prayer of the faithful was shared among the children of the couples.

Three other couples were chosen to bring the bread and wine. Many other couples followed them with different types of offerings and gifts to the altar. There was a long procession for this offertory gift. Four couples were in charge of the offertory collection.

It was announced before the mass that the collection in the mass will be given to the parish to help cover some the expenses throughout the encounter. There were more than five couples who volunteered to serve as ushers for the celebration. The ushers were available to answer whatever questions the invitees for the Mass may have regarding the event of the day. The ushers will also guide during the mass, especially during the distribution of the Holy Eucharist. In order to ensure that the spirit of reverence is maintained throughout the day, the master of ceremonies made an announcement to give full co-operation to the ushers and follow whatever direction they may give.

The celebration was very interesting because the couples formed a beautiful choir for the Eucharist celebration. Some of the instruments in the Mass were Igbo local drums, gong (Ogene). After the Mass, there was a reception in the parish hall. The traditional Igbo food was shared with the invitees together with drinks. As the sharing was going on, some were dancing, enjoying themselves with the Igbo traditional music.

Figure 8:

The Children of the Igbo couples participating in the responsorial psalms during the Holy Eucharist of their parent's marriage encounter.



Figure 9:

The couples singing at the mass of their marriage encounter while others proceed to the altar for their offertory gifts.



Figure 10:

Some of the Igbo priests at the con-celebration mass of the Igbo couples living in Brooklyn Diocese and beyond.



Figure 11:

Mr. Tobias Nna and his wife Uloma and their children at the reception hall for sharing after the Eucharistic celebration



3.4. METHODS USED IN ASSESSING OUTCOME

In assessing the outcome of this demonstrative project, I am going to look into the behaviors of the couples in the various ways they participated and contributed in their group process. The dynamics of involvement in carrying out the works they assigned to themselves, attendance to sessions, and the interpersonal relationship among the couples during the whole encounter, and personal reactions to their individual experiences. The tools I applied to determine results are: Attendance record and Verbatim.

3.4.1. ATTENDANCE RECORD

SUMMARY

Four Sundays of October, Four Sundays November

Couples	Ses.1	Wk.2	Wk.3	Wk.4	Wk.5	Wk.6	Wk.7	Wk.8	Wk.9
No Present	7	25	25	24	25	25	25	25	80
No Absent	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
No Excuses	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-

3.4.2. VERBATIM/INTERVIEW

Couple B was the oldest couple in the marriage encounter. They have lived in United States of America for more than thirty years. They are devoted Catholics and are active in church matters. They are blessed with six children, three boys and three girls. They told me that their children are all professionals. They told me that they like to work in the church because God has blessed them a lot. Couple B donated their minivan for

running errands throughout the marriage encounter. They donated generously for the success of the encounter. They told me that they desire and pray always that couples know how to appreciate one another so the joy of marriage will last the whole of their life.

P= Facilitator

B= Couple

P.1: It is wonderful to have you in this marriage encounter.

Wife.1: Thanks you for inviting us. It has been a wonderful experience.

Husband.1. Really I do not know where to begin to thank for this wonderful opportunity given to our Igbo couples to come together to share their experience of married life.

P.2: Could share with me more about your experiences in this marriage encounter?

Wife.2: Frankly speaking, in our forty five years of living as couples, we have been attending seminars and encounters on marriage; this is one of the best. It is well organized. The topics were relevant to the situations we are passing through in our families as couples. The publicity was widely made.

P.3: I am happy you have enjoyed the encounter. I will remain grateful to your family for availability and contributions you made towards the success of this encounter.

Wife.3: During the watching of the video film, I was full of mixed feelings. I remembered my own traditional wedding. As the only daughter of my parents, they gave me a wonderful blessing and provided enough food and drinks for all the invitees. My father died seven years ago and my mum died last year. (Tears...)

P.4. Really it seems you had a wonderful, kind and loving parents. May they rest in peace?

Couple B. Amen

Husband.2. Father, I think we need this type of encounter once in a while. I would not mind to sponsor the expenditures whenever it is going to be organized. We need to be reminded of our responsibilities as couples once in a while. Some couples have already expressed their satisfaction on the encounter.

P.5. Thanks a lot for offering to sponsor the encounter whenever we want to have it. I am noting your wonderful suggestion and the pledge you have made. Maybe we are going to form a committee for this encounter.

Husband.3: Perfect, I will like to be a member.

P.6. Thanks for everything. May you remain blessed?

3.4.3. GROUP PROCESS FOLLOWED THE ROLE PLAY

We have acted in this role play what the D. Min program is about. With the permission of couple B, I will like to share our experiences of what we heard in Wife 3. She said, during the watching of the video films I was full of mixed feelings. I remembered my own traditional wedding, as the only daughter of my parents; they gave me wonderful blessings and provided enough food and drinks for all the invitees. My father died seven years ago and my mum died last year. Tears... the video also provoked the same mixed feelings to some other couples whose parents have died. My presence and encouragement was very helpful to wife B, if not, it would have been hard to manage her feelings.

Question1: How do we feel when we are full of mixed feelings?

Answer: Couples B (husband) has promised to sponsor the next encounter out of strong feelings.

Question: What has feeling to do in our life?

Answer: It affects our psyche and body and makes us feel good or bad

Question: How do we control our feelings?

Answer: Some couples said it makes them happy and motivated like B, out of great feelings promised to sponsor the marriage encounter whenever it is to be organized again.

Question: How did couple B wife handle her situation?

Answer: Somebody was there to encourage, support and counsel her. This helped her to control her feeling and emotions over the death of her dear parents who hosted a wonderful traditional wedding for her. She did not give up with her feelings or repress them.

CONFIRMATION

This shows the importance of working in the group. In this group we encourage, become friends, and are warm and responsible to one another. Also working as a group, we harmonize, reduce tension and help people explore their feelings. In this project, the group process and activities I carried out with the couples have made them aware of decisions they made about their marriages. To test this understanding on how to handle their marriage issues I asked them some open-closed questions regarding some marriage problems.

Verbatim:

A.1: When you have some marriage problems what will you do having participated in this eight marriage encounter?

Couple.1: We shall look for marriage counselor for therapy because it is like going to the doctor when one is sick.

Couple.2: There is no need for us to go for family therapy; we shall look for help from our extended family for advice. No matter how long we might live in the United States, we shall not overlook the support that comes from family members. Whenever there is any misunderstanding between us, I always call my family members. My wife does the same.

Couple.3: I strongly believe and support what couple 3 has just said. It is in our extended family that the political, social, and religious marriage problems are solved. Going to therapy is like putting fire on fuel or violating the Igbo communal solidarity when it comes to the problems of marriage.

A.2: when you go to your homes, when you communicate with one another what are going to be your postures?

Couple.4: wife, I will talk loud and clear so that L may understand me.

Couple.5: Husband, I will try to look E on the face whenever I am going to speak with her. In the past it was difficult for me to make eye contact when I was speaking. This easy contact will help me sense her feelings.

Couple.6: wife. In this encounter I have learned how to listen whenever T is annoyed or talking to me. In past, we have had problems because I used to challenge him when he was angry with me. Husband, I will equally do the same when U is talking to me.

The couples did get a good picture of how they present themselves to others, and of how others experience and react to them. With this feedback, the couples have got some tools for experimenting with different ways of behaving in their everyday married life. Furthermore, with increased self-acceptance and self-affirmation, the couples have learned the basis for going beyond taking care of themselves and families. Most of the

couples told me that participating in this marriage encounter has given them new spirit to genuinely devote more time and interest to their family and marriage. Others said that they are going to make a difference in their local Christian communities.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOME

As I explained in my proposal, the Igbo couples living in United States of America, especially, in Brooklyn are living under the societal pressures coming inside and outside the new world that affect their family life. Migration to large and impersonal cities in search of work and wealth brings about the loss of the former cultural supports for marriage and family life. There is a possible tendency to lose the essence of family life and sacredness of marriage due to external forces coming from the new culture and society. Some Igbo children I interviewed told me that their parents are working almost twenty four hours in different places separated from each other. The consequences of the situations Igbo families are facing are the alarming neglect of the proper upbringing of the children, and the increased divorce rate among the Igbo couples. Some Igbo children are acting out in schools and some are involved in drugs and alcohol addictions.

My intention in this project is to explore the experiences of these Igbo couples living in Brooklyn. My apostolate among them will be to help them discover new ways to live their vocation, and mission as a couple, and be ever more a true community of love. I will empower them in their responsibilities as they face the problems that arise in their service, and in active sharing in marital life. The result of this plan will be noticed in what manifested in the lives of these couples with others. This result is going to come clearly from the lenses of Irving Yalom's factors of group process.

FACTORS OF GROUP PROCESS: APPLIED TO IGBO COUPLE GROUP

Group process exists to help individuals grow emotionally and solve personal problems. The couples utilized the power of the group to help one another. The outcome of every group, negative or positive, could be measured according to the level of participation and interactions among the members. Most often the positive aspect of the group is greater than the negative aspects. Irving D. Yalom in his book The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy (1995) identified 11 “curative factors” that are the ‘primary agents of change’ in group therapy (P.1) For more clarity in this project, I am going to explain briefly the 11 curative factors in group process. In my interaction with the Igbo couples, these 11 curative factors of group process were manifested.

YALOM'S THERAPEUTIC FACTORS:

- Installation of Hope
- Universality
- Imparting information
- Altruism
- The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group
- Development of socializing Techniques
- Imitative Behavior
- Interpersonal Learning
- Group Cohesiveness
- Catharsis
- Existential Factors
- Installation of Hope

Some of the Igbo couples came to the marriage encounter hoping to decrease the tensions and sufferings in their marital lives. My role as a counselor was to see that each couple in the group at different points were watching and listening attentively as others expressed how they overcame similar problems. The expressions of other couples instilled hope and inspiration in others. Some couples expressed that they never believed they had many things in common with other couples. One of the couples expressed that, "I thought I was the only women whose husband does not allow going out alone or talking to another man." Testimonies from the other couples on how they have been living in their families were a source of motivation and hope to others. For instance, one of the women said that her husband stopped taking drugs after 15 years of their marriage, when they had their third son G. Another woman she said "I hope God will help my husband to stop smoking. My house smells like cigarettes every time, looking at her husband." He husband smiling on her as she was talking. These testimonies promoted commitment and hope to the group sharing.

UNIVERSALITY

By universality, my experience in running the group showed that the problems affecting the couples are universal. The conditions some of the couples are having in their marriage also exist in other marriages. At the beginning of the group encounter, I noticed some fears, isolation and insecurity among the couples. A man said to his wife, "Honey, who knows whether I will continue till the end. I am not feeling okay. Some couples were feeling that they were unique and alone with their problems and carry many secrets.

They were socially and emotionally isolated from one another. Some of them have little or no acceptance by others. After the second session, things started changing in the group. There was enormous relief that comes from the recognition that they have come together to share with one another their problems. Some of the couples discovered that many problems related to marriage like deep conviction of inadequacy, feeling alienated, and sexual secrets are common.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

Based on the premise that factual knowledge changes attitudes, relieves uncertainty and confusion, I provided information, suggestions that will help the couples deal with their day to day family problems. The capacity of some of the couples to welcome my information and advice on how to handle some of their problems increased the interest and caring to one another in the group. I discovered that the level of taking advice and information among the couples varies. A woman said her experience with her husband for more than 13 years of marriage showed that her husband is worst when he is given advice. She decided not to advise him in anything. "What advice that will change D? I have taken him the way he is." For couples to provide information on the problem they were having in their families, the first thing I did was to remind them of confidentiality as of one of the important group rules. This gave the couples the confidence and security to share freely among themselves.

ALTRUISM

Altruism is selfless concern for the welfare of others. This altruism is embedded in the Igbo extended family where everyone is his brother/sister's keeper. I discovered in this encounter that caring about others decreases unhealthy self absorption. My ability to validate couple's feelings increased their self-worth. I told one of the women that she looks very pretty in her Igbo traditional attire, She said, father is that so? Thank you. She shared this compliment to her husband and two other couples in the group. I observed that the couples offering each other support, reassurance, suggestions, and insight were received more easily than the ones I offered them. A told me, "Father how is that priests who are not married are giving advice to married couples. You have spoken too well on marriage and how we should cope with our problems; it is not easy to be with a woman for a long time. My wife L. is like a book, every moment she opens a different chapter." From this statement, I learned that this man prefers to receive advice on his marriage from couples instead of myself who is not married. They were very empathic to one another in their various problems. I noticed this from the way they were so supportive to one another.

RESOLVING FAMILY OF ORIGIN ISSUES

I did this by asking the couples to draw a genogram of their families. This provided the couples with new information about themselves, their families and others in the group. I learned that most of the couples came from a dysfunctional family environment in Nigeria. The family of origin experiences influenced the couple's interpersonal distortions, role play in the group and attitudes toward each other and me. It

was clear to me that group resembles a family structure. I discovered authority/parental figures, peer siblings, deep personal revelation and emotions, intimacy, hostility, and competitive feelings among the couples. I tried to work out the old unresolved family issues among the couples. I told them that marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious dimensions. I told them to draw the picture of their family. I discovered that there are members of their family excluded in their drawings. Some of them gave me information about their past life tracing their problems from their family of origin. I empathized with them. I asked one of the women to count the members of her family; she started by counting herself first. I asked her why she began with herself, she said, "My mum taught me that I must be first in anything." Other couples laughed. Here I discover the issue of authority and self-centeredness that are traceable to the family of origin.

SOCIAL SKILLS

According to Yalom, social learning, or the development of basic social skills, is a therapeutic factor that occurs in all therapy groups. The couples offered feedback to one another about the appropriateness of the others' behaviors. I discovered that this feedback was painful to some couples. The painfulness was on the directedness and honesty with which they were offered. The most interesting thing of it all was that it provided much-needed behavioral correction and thus improves relationships both within and outside the group. Mr. Q the husband of L was almost dominating the group, Mr. A, husband of T told him Q, "Enough is enough, you are not the only person in this group, allow other people to say their own opinion. You are showing us how you dominate L in your

family." Q did not take this feedback lightly. There was noise in the group. To calm the situation a bit, I went back to the ground rules of the group for exploring relationship and testing new behavior. This feedback by Mr. A helped Q to listen more instead of talking always in the group. Through the development of social skills, the couples learned much about conflict resolution skills and how to respond in a helpful way. Also they learned to be less judgmental and more empathetic.

IMITATIVE BEHAVIOR

Yalom believes that groups allow one to try behaviors they have witnessed in others with the thought. For instance, children learn by imitation. The couples in the group model some their behavior from aspects of other couples. Through nonjudgmental feedback, and support, with time, the couples picked up these behaviors and incorporated them into their own life. I discovered from the couples an increasingly positive feedback from other couples, enhancing their self-esteem and emotional growth. The couples were using some slang like 'etie-okwe erie okwe' (when you play a card you win a card) when they were speaking to one another. I did not understand this language, and I did not ask them for explanations because I did not want give them the impression of being too intrusive. I also noticed that there was competing on dressing among the couples. One of the women said that her husband bought her the traditional attire she was putting purposely for the marriage encounter.

INTERPERSONAL LEARNING

Human beings are interrelated. Our lives are characterized by intense and persistent relationships, and much of our self-esteem is developed via feedback and reflection from significant others. The interpersonal learning leads to transformation of unwanted patterns and behaviors. This interpersonal learning explains why it is generally said that nobody is an island. We need one another, to learn and develop our potentialities. However, at times we develop distortions in the way we see others, and those distortions can damage even our most important relationships. This family marriage encounter has helped Igbo couples learn how to have healthier relationships (healthy support system). Some of the couples said in the group that when they go back to their homes they will apply the communication skills they learned in the group. Some said that they have learned to keep quiet when their spouse is speaking instead of attacking. The interpersonal tensions among the couples were resolved through consensual validation. In the group couples compared their own perception with that of other couples in the group. After the eight weeks marriage encounter, most of the couples learned on how to work on interpersonal problems and goals. This marriage group encounter also helped the couples as a corrective emotional experience. There were emotional situations that the couples could not handle in their families in the past. For instance, one of the women expressed how her husband was unable to take her in his car. After this emotional expression, it was discovered that many of the women have undergone this same problem with their husbands. The supportive environment created during the encounter encouraged the couples to share more their feelings. This consensual validation after sharing more openly motivated other couples to offer their own perspective and honest feedback. Finally, the

outcome of the group was that the couples learned to interact with others more deeply and honestly.

GROUP COHESIVENESS

Belonging, acceptance, and approval are among the most important and universal human needs. The first thing I did as the facilitator of the group encounter was to connect myself with the couples. I knew that fitting in with any group or fraternity as couples or adolescents is a basic human need. Many people with emotional problems, however, have not experienced success as group members. For them, group makes them feel truly accepted and valued for the first time. A woman said that, she was always shy in speaking in public even in her family meetings. "The first day I spoke in this marriage encounter, the response I received from father and couples motivated me a lot. I thank God for bringing me to this encounter." Group encounter can be a powerful healing factor as individuals or couples replace their feelings of isolation and separateness with a sense of belonging.

Cohesive groups allow greater expression of all emotions, including hostility, toward fellow group members as well toward the facilitator or counselor. I learned in the group that unexpressed hostility leads to resentments and decreases cohesiveness, reduces chances for conflict resolution and personal growth. There was time when a man was dominating the whole discussions in the group. When his attention was called to this behavior he stopped talking at random. I did my best to contain the conflicts in the group by keeping open the communication within the group rules expressing feelings. I

encouraged the couples to work together and take responsibility for their own feelings, and behaviors. There were good results that came from couple's embracing of conflict:

- Couples became less afraid of their anger and of the others.
- Couples learn they can withstand an "attack" (feedback).
- Self-disclosure deepens as couples share feelings and reactions.
- Couples realize that everyone's perspective is valid, their own and others.

CARTHARSIS

Catharsis is a type of learning as opposed to intellectual understanding that can lead to immediate opportunity for members of a group to have powerful experience. Catharsis is emotional ventilation. It helped the couples to let out pent-up feelings by talking, crying, shouting etc. After watching the video film, one of the couples wept bitterly in remembering the death of her parents who organized a wonderful traditional marriage for her. She said, "My parents provided enough drink and food for all the invitees." The crying brought about emotional relief and sense of being burdened. She learned that in spite of the temporary outburst, she was still accepted by the group and her husband. Catharsis brings members of the group more closely. I learned that catharsis cannot be forced on members of the group. The group environment provided ample opportunity for members to have these powerful experiences.

EXISTENTIAL FACTORS

Existential factors are certain realities of life including death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness. Becoming aware of these realities can lead to anxiety. The trust and

openness that develops among the couples permits exploration of these fundamental issues, and helped the couples develop an acceptance of difficult realities. This was one of the reasons after the teaching on prayers the couples were given time to meditate and reflect on some of the realities that confront their lives and family. The couples came up with some of these themes:

- How should they deal with unfairness and injustice? How are we with justice as couples and with the members of our families?
- How do we handle the issue of death, terminal sickness, conflict, pain, loss and morality in our daily life?
- How should we live more honestly with oneself and with other (How honest are with oneself and others?)
- How do we learn to take more responsibility for oneself and for the choices we make?

The couples said they value taking ultimate responsibility for the way they live, no matter how much guidance and support they get from others. My presence to the couples was a key factor in creating the quality of the encounter. During the whole exercise I discovered that my emotional presence was valued more than my skills and knowledge. A couple told me, "Father, this encounter has touched my life and marriage. I think my life is not going to be same. This encounter is an eye opener for me. My husband said the same last night."

4.2. DEVELOPMENT NOT ANTICIPATED IN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL THAT FIGURED IN THE FINAL OUTCOME DEALING WITH OPENESS, DENIAL AND RESISTANCE IN THE COUPLES

I was greatly surprised by the readiness of the couples to discuss with me what has been a very painful chapter in their marriage. Couple Q and Z told me how the first three children of their marriage died. For this reason their fourth son was called Onwubiko (death have mercy) their fifth son was called Chibuzo (God is the way) and their sixth and last daughter was called Chimuanya (God is awake). The Igbo give their children names according to the circumstance of the child's birth or the things that go on the family. My involvement with the couples was welcome because it afforded them a structured forum to address their conflicted feelings and be supported in doing so. I did not know how the couples would respond to me asking them to participate in the marriage encounter and in this project. The couples I had interviewed about doing this project were very receptive to my proposal. The first seven couples to participate surprised me. These couples told me, father, do not worry; you are going to be more surprised. There were twenty five couples at the second session. This number increased in each session. The only one absent in the eight encounters was excused. However, in my research I discovered that couples, because of their intimate detail of their marriage situation for the sake of privacy prefer to open up to someone they trust. It is not uncommon for couples to have a different position regarding who they should confide in their marriage problems.

I did not anticipate a high level of denial on the part of some the couples regarding the situations they were living in their families. According to APA Dictionary

of psychology, denial is a defense mechanism in which unpleasant thoughts, feelings, wishes, or events are ignored or excluded from conscious awareness. It may take such form as refusal to acknowledge the reality of terminal illness, a financial problem, an addiction, or a partner's infidelity. Denial is an unconscious process that functions to resolve emotional conflicts or reduce anxiety (P.268). As I discovered from my interviews and study of family dynamics, in some families the children were viewed as the 'identified patients.' This position freed the couples from seeing themselves as having any part in the present predicaments in their marriage. My task was to break through this defensive posture by sharing with them insights I gained from my research. I began this process of educating them in the second session. I had to tell them to accept the responsibility of facing the crisis coming from their marriage as facts of family life instead of projecting them on to their children. I learned that the couple's refusal to accept the reality of their marital problems and daily life is considered one of the most primitive of the defense mechanisms that stems from their early childhood development.

Outside the openness and denial as one of the results not expected in this project, there was also an element of resistance among some couples. Families are notoriously resistant to change. In addition to the recalcitrance of individual family members, the system resists change. Resistance in psychotherapy, whether individual or group, refers to the fears that clients or group members feel when they reveal personal information. When I say that a client is resistant, I see him/her as maybe fearful and anxious, angry, embarrassed, shameful, and helpless. This person may fear that the counselor and or the group as a whole will treat them in a hurtful manner. Two men left the group when their wives were sharing how they were being treated in their relationship. This incident

opened my insight on what it means to resist. Because of this, I asked some of the couples why they were afraid to share their feelings or resisting to at the beginning of the marriage encounter. They told me:

- We are afraid that you were going to dismiss or treat lightly the feelings they were going to express.
- They fear they will be cut down for feeling a certain way after sharing their feelings.
- They fear violation of confidentiality of their family norms and rules.
- They fear they will be shamed.
- They fear that I will not really listen and take feelings seriously.

Michael p. Nichols (2004) says:

Minuchin's solution to the problem of resistance is straightforward: he wins families over by joining and accommodating to them. This gives him the leverage to utilize powerful confrontations designed to restructure family interactions.

Resistance is seen as a product of the interaction between therapist and family; change is accomplished by alternatively challenging the family and then rejoining them to repair breaches in the therapeutic relationship. (.384)

I practiced Minuchin's solution by being empathetic to the couples in their resistance. I achieved this by non reactions, coercion, getting angry, or feeling intolerant to the couples' resistance. These skills helped to interpret the couples' resistance by identifying and discussing unspoken issues or feelings of the couples. I learned that it is more helpful to be tentative rather than dogmatic.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. THE IMPLICATION OF RESULTS BOTH ANTICIPATED AND NOT ANTICIPATED AS REPORTED IN CHAPTER 4.

(a) THE IMPLICATION ANTICIPATED:

My goals in the results anticipated was to enumerate some important elements of marriage that will help couples to live a good family life. I also tried to bring some of the teaching of the Catholic Church and scripture on marriage.

For the ordinary Igbo, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of begetting children after some rites have been performed. It is regarded as a milestone in the life of a man and woman, which will enable them to immortalize their remembrance through their children. The Igbo regard consent as the most important element in marriage.

Ilu nwanyi (Marriage) has a foremost place in political, religious and social economy of Igbo people. Marriage is deemed an indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line of the couples. Parents long for this and the father of the family request this every morning in his prayer (libations). The mother begs for it while giving cult to her Chi (God) during annual festival.

The Christian family is a privileged communion of love through which God has revealed His divine love in the world. Many of our deepest human relationship are joined in our families. The union of husband and wife, the relationship between parents and children, the bond that exists between extended family members are all experiences of love that point us to the God of divine love who is always self-giving and the source of

all unity. This is the primary value in the Trinitarian life that should animate the life activities of the individual human household. The human family, whose being is rooted in and dependent on its creator is expected to reflect the image of the Divine household by living as a community of persons.

The Igbo society, Catholic Church and the scripture teaches that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God. This teaching leads to the “vision of the wedding feast of the Lamb.” Catechism of the church, (No 1602). Scripture speaks of marriage and its “mystery,” its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin, its end, and its various realizations throughout the history of salvation. The church teaches that Christian marriage is a sacrament. Jesus Christ ordained that the marital agreement was to signify and effect the sanctification of the couples by the Divine grace that it conferred. Cana Conference of Chicago (1960), stressing the stand of the Christian and scripture on marriage in the Pauline language says,

Paul sums up this point by stating that Christian marriage is the symbol of Christ’s union with His church. When two Christians are joined in marriage, their union renders visible that more profound, supernatural union of Christ and His mystical body. Just as union with Christ confers grace upon His members, so that union of husband and wife becomes the effective instrument through which Christ confers grace upon them. (P.21-22)

Whenever we strengthen Christian marriage and family, we also greatly enrich our culture and assure the stability of the society and the nation as a whole. The family is the first community where people build life and love. In view of this, pastors and counselors have a primary duty to care and support couples in their struggle to build a communion of love that exists between the Holy Trinity. Whenever we did not help couples in their marital life, it is not only the sacredness of marriage that is at stake; the advancement in holiness of Christian spouses and their children are also exposed to danger. The richness

of God's love will be made manifest in the lives of the couples if they are helped to make right choice of what God expects from them. This rightful choice will help them to bear successful witness to the Gospel as reflected in their own life history. It is anticipated that the Church's pastoral action and ministry be progressive in empowering couples to handle their marriage difficulties. This pastoral action must follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development. It is anticipated that care to couples must include the newly married, those frustrated in their own marriage, the young people who will be the marriage partners of the future. There should be an important ministry to promote the well being of the couples in their family life. It is anticipated that this important pastoral care should involve all Igbo couples living within and outside the Brooklyn Diocese. This was the reason the topic for this project used an inclusive phrase (Beyond Brooklyn Diocese).

From all I have said so far on marriage, it is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another. Marriage is not an individual affair but rather a communal involvement. The two families of bride and bridegroom have to meet and agree that their children are going to marry. After this agreement, the community will be informed about the engagement. This will be followed by the exchange of gifts and the paying of a dowry. The last step will be the traditional wedding (Ibga Nkwu Nwanyi). After this process, the next thing will be the church wedding. This rigorous process with different rituals involved in Igbo marriage is what makes it sacred, covenantal, and difficult to dissolve once contracted. Mbiti S John (1969) writes,

Divorce is a delicate "accident" in marital relationships. In the African situation what constitutes a divorce must be viewed against the fact that marriage is a

“process.” In many societies that “process” is complete only when the first child is born, or when all the marriage presents have been paid, or even when one’s first children are married. Marriage involves many people, and not just the husband and wife, and the transfer of gifts in form of livestock, money or labor. Once the full contract of marriage has been executed, it is extremely hard to dissolve it if dissolution does come about, then it creates a great scar in the community concerned (P.190).

It is anticipated that the Igbo couples living outside of the cultural background need to be helped to protect their marriage. Whatever affects them in their marriage definitely affects their children and extended family in Nigeria.

(b) IMPLICATION OF RESULTS NOT ANTICIPATED

I was surprised to see how actively the couples responded to the invitations, questions and many things that went through the process of the marriage encounter. It was a surprise to see that seven couples were present in the first session of the encounter. The number continued to increase as the encounter proceeded. I was greatly surprised by the willingness of the couples to discuss with me what has been a very painful chapter in their marriage. My involvement with them was welcomed. I never imagined that my presence alone would afford them a structured forum to address their conflicted feelings and be supported in doing so. I really did not know how the couples would respond to me asking those questions about their private lives. This uncertainty kept me worried as I was preparing the encounter for this project.

Some of the couples were very receptive, while some were resistant to my proposals. However, in my research I discovered that many of the couples, because of the difficulties and complications that arise in their relationship were not ready to talk about certain issues. I discovered that for the sake of privacy they cannot open up to anybody

easily. The couples prefer to talk to somebody they are sure will not reveal what they have shared with them. One of the couples said, "Father I have been looking for this opportunity to speak to somebody I can confide with the difficulties I have in my marriage. My fear has been to whom shall I confide? Again my job gives no time for church activities or visits to the parish during day to talk with my pastor. For about three years, I have not gone for confession. I thank God for the opportunity to participate in this encounter." This sharing made me understand that it is not uncommon for couples to have a difficulty regarding to whom they should confide in their marriage problems and private life.

I discovered from the study of family system theory and principles that family dynamics often 'mirror' the dynamics in family life where the children were viewed as the "identified patients." This position freed the couples from seeing themselves as having any part in the present predicament in their marriage. My task was to break through this defensive posture by sharing with them insights I gained from research about family dynamics. This insight began by educating the couples in the second session I had with them. One of the couples made passing word; "I do not know what do with Okechukwu. Every day I am receiving reports about his behavior in the school. Look, Dan (her husband), they have called me that Okey is fighting in the catechesis class. Chineke ekwala ihe ojoo." (God forbid bad thing).

The last thing I never anticipated was the impression the marriage encounter made on the Igbo couples. They organized themselves in committees to organize the party and the celebration of the Eucharist to mark the end of the encounter. When two couples suggested that it will be good to invite their members and friends to be with them on that

last day of the encounter, they all agreed to this. The singing at the Mass and the sharing in the hall really made a big impression on me. One of the couples offered to sponsor this encounter so it is going to be organized every year. I never expected that the couples should act so quickly to have set a committee to look into the possibility of organizing this encounter every year.

5.2. CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT TO CLARIFYING AND EXPANDING:

RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO.

In chapter two of this project, I used Catholic Church teachings, Scriptural and Trinitarian teaching as religious principles to expatiate the meaning of marriage. Etafo B; and Okeke H. (1993) quoting Pope John II In the Apostolic Exportation, Famiaris Consortio states; "That since God's plan for marriage and the family touches man and woman in the concreteness of their daily existence in specific social and cultural situation, the church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and family are lived today in order to fulfill her task of serving (P.102). The understanding of this important statement of John Paul II is an inescapable requirement of the work of evangelization to the Igbo couples living outside their cultural area. Today in America and some other continents where the Igbo couples are living to make life, the family life seems to be shrinking. We tend to put the whole blame for all our ills and misconduct on the influence of scientific development. This could be partly true, but the fact remains that the family and society need to come closer to God. "And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn.17:3)

The Church has the responsibility to teach the family the right road that leads to the knowledge of God. The church in her call and mission has been trying to be true to this vocation. The Church teaches that the family is the domestic church. When couples are trying to live according to the teachings of the church as God mandates her, couples build a better home. When the children sense that their parents are surrounding them with tenderness, protecting them, and feel the happiness of loving them, this basic experience prefigures the approach of God. If couples perform their parental tasks as well as they can, and if they are united with one another at the same time, they are giving their children the only religion lesson they can assimilate at their development. This religious teaching and exemplary lives of the couples will help their children to live a good adult life.

From the teaching of Vatican II, marriage may be described as the intimate partnership of life and love between a man and a woman, total and perpetual, which is established by the irrevocable personal consent by which the spouses mutually bestow and accept each other and which by its very nature is ordained for the procreation and education of children. In the book of Genesis, I read that God created man and woman in the image of himself. The man gave names to all cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man and the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman; for out of 'her man' this one has been taken (Genesis 3:20-23). All these differences are carefully not the result of chance. Carol

Gilligan (1993) talking on the difference between men and women says, "I saw that by maintaining these ways of seeing and speaking about human lives, men were leaving out women, but women were leaving out themselves. In terms of psychological processes, what for men was a process of separation, for women was a process of disassociation that required the creation of an inner division or psychic split" (P.xiii). Man and woman complement each other. Marriage is the completion of both the man and the woman. In marriage, the personalities of man woman are merged together.

Religiously speaking, the man is enriched by the woman's purity of conduct, her patience, her devotion, her goodness, generosity, attention, love and her understanding. The woman on her part is enriched by her man's sense of objectivity, strength, courage, protection, and the security which he gives. These qualities can be seen in both man and woman. C told me that when they visited Nigeria last year, one night she was going to visit her mother with her husband T. They saw a big snake. T shouted and ran away. C told me that she used the stick close to her to kill the snake. From this experience, it is evident that some women can be braver than some men.

5.3. CLINICAL PRINCIPLES DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO.

As I discovered with the couples during the marriage encounter, I learned that there are many factors that contribute to the difficulties the couples experience in their marriage. Some of these problems have their root from the early childhood experiences or development. Some of the major things I discovered were the problems of object relation theory I learned in the psychodynamic principles. The second was the complex nature of the Igbo family system.

Object relation theory is psychodynamic principles that explain the idea that the ego-self exist only in relationship to other objects, which may be external or internal. A good family matrix provides a solid ground upon which each one can exercise the power to know, love, feel, decide and imagine things. In chapter two of this project, Margaret Mahler says that, the way to attain the goal of autonomy in our early development is called separation or individuation. When the couples were unable to attain individuation and separation in their early childhood development, there are the possibilities to have some problems in their communication and the way they relate to each other as couples.

The foundation for our self-image is grounded in the first three years of life. Our sense of self needs to be mirrored by significant others who love and care for us. The more our caretakers love themselves and accept all their own feelings, needs and wants, the more they can be there to accept all the parts of their children, their drives, feelings and needs. Couples who have good self-worth and self acceptance are getting their own needs met. They do not have to use their children to have a sense of power, adequacy and security. Each couple is in the process of finishing their business with their own family of origin. Separation from mother and father is being accomplished. Each is complete in the sense of having finished the past. When the process of separation and individuation is not well accomplished, the crisis repeats itself in the later life of the couples.

In chapter two I said that Igbo the family system is a complex one in the sense that a change in one part affects the other part. The chief component of Igbo family system is the marital partnership. The Igbo couples in America need to maintain the origin of their family system. They need a sense of worth, a sense of physical security or productivity, a sense of intimacy, readiness to help one another, a sense of responsibility,

a need for challenge and stimulation, and a sense of joy, affirmation and spiritual grounding. Also the Igbo family system needs a mother and a father who are committed in a basically healthy relationship and who are secure enough to parent their children without contamination. The couples in the Igbo family system need to play the role of nourishing teachers, giving their children time, attention and direction. Some of the couples explain to me that they work such long hours to keep their family going. This affects the attention and direction they are supposed to give to their children.

The children of the Igbo couples need direction as their role is to be learning. Two couples told me that their children once told them to leave them alone to manage their life since they are eighteen years old. In the Igbo family system, it is very rare for a child to say this to their parents in Africa no matter their age and education. In the Igbo family system, the child continues to learn from their parents irrespective of their age and advancement in education. The parent's care and teaching does not remove the children's initiative and powers, to love, feel, choose and imagine things themselves. The basic truth is that the parents should provide the base for the freedom to choose and act as their children need. Once this foundation is laid, the children continue to learn throughout life. The wisdom and blessing of the parents in the Igbo culture is comparable to the Wisdom of Solomon we read in the scripture. This is the reason nobody marries without the blessings of the parents and elders in the community. It is important to note that irrespective of the complex nature of Igbo family system, the family roles and rules are flexible and rotating. Thus *aka nri kwoo aka ikpa, aka ikpa akwoo aka nri*. (Respect is reciprocal).

5.4. CONTRIBUTION TO MINISTRY IN A WIDER CONTEXT

The experience I had in writing this project on Igbo couples has been a great treasure for me. My experiences showed that Igbo couples are facing complex difficulties in trying to adjust to new American culture. Some of these problems are: secularism, excessive materialism, ethical relativism, drug/alcohol, and tensions rooted in religious or cultural pluralism prevalent in American society. Many Igbo families question the validity of objective moral norms and deny the connection of freedom and truth. The dignity and sanctity of marital life are threatened through acceptance of contraception, abortion, racism, violence, and immigration laws that have affected many families emotionally because some of their family member or friends have been victims of deportation. This project has revealed a lot of things to me about the difficulties the Igbo couples are confronting in America. The church in America seems to know some of these problems too. In Our Hearts Were Burning within Us (2002), the American Catholic Bishops of says,

Families experience great stress, over-whelmed by the influence of mass economic pressure that keeps some parents to work in order to pay the bills. Parents look to the Church for guidance and help to grow closer as couples, stronger as family, and better able to prepare their children morally and spiritually for life in this complex and challenging society (P.12).

These problems Igbo families are facing have a wider context to this project. These problems create a vast pastoral agenda that should be shared by the church and the Igbo apostolate in the Brooklyn Diocese. Adult faith formation should serve as the focal point of reference for catechesis for every couple and their families. Thus, all catechesis should be geared to lifelong dependence of faith in Christ.

In this project of catechesis, I commend and praise the Igbo apostolate in Brooklyn Diocese for the efforts they have made in the past to provide faith formation to Igbo couples and their families. This work of formation is a sacred trust and serious responsibility that we must always be fulfilled with utmost care and dedication. I wish we do not weaken our commitments to this essential ministry in any way, but to teach as Jesus did. John I. Elias (2002) says "What Jesus taught was not fully understood until the learners saw him involved in an action, the breaking of the bread. Thus the effectiveness of the teaching of Jesus cannot be disconnected from the deeds of his life. The simplicity and beauty of his life drew many persons to him" (P.15). To teach as Jesus did means calling and equipping all couples and their children to the state of life in which they can fulfill their baptismal call to holiness in the family and society. It is a mission and responsibility to evangelize and transform the family into a more caring and loving environment where peace is should reign every day.

Ongoing faith formation is essential to accomplish this mission. It does not end at first Holy Communion, confirmation, and graduation, but continues until death. This implies strong commitment to children. The catholic schools and religious education programs will play active role in this plan through quality of faith formation they provide to the couples and their families of the children they teach.

5.5. IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

The implication of this project for my future ministry is to look for a way to care and support couples in their daily life and to make their marriage and family happy in the multi American culture they found themselves. As I write this project, I am full of mixed feelings with the knowledge that as a missionary priest I do not stay in place for long periods of time. Fear and uncertainty are occupying my mind knowing that I will soon leave America for another place. These are some questions that come into my mind: Is this pastoral care and support of the Igbo couples going to continue after I leave? How long am I going to be with them in this apostolate? Will the support Igbo couples gave to me in working with them, be given to the next priests who will be in charge of them as I leave. These questions have many implications to my future ministry to the Igbo couples and my future ministry. My seven years missionary experience in Honduras comes into my mind as I write this project. Some of the groups I established like: the Morning Prayer, home visitation, and sending food to the sick and poor stopped functioning one year after I left Honduras. This thought brings lots of uncertainties to the future of this pastoral care and support I started with Igbo Couples in Brooklyn Diocese.

However, I see myself as a missionary like Paul and Barnabas. At the end of their first missionary journey they returned to "Lystra and Iconium and to Antioch." "They strengthened the Spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to preserve in the faith..." (Acts 14:21-22). The implication of this to my future ministry is I do not know where I am going to be posted after my apostolate with the Igbo couples. However, like Paul and Barnabas have strengthened the faith of the apostles, I have also strengthened Igbo couples in the faith to persevere in their marital covenant and difficulties. I hope they are

going to make the good use of the materials and foundation I have laid for them on how to handle their family conflicts and problems.

There is hope for the future for the Igbo couples that they are going to transcend their present difficulties in America like: relativism, lack of care to the family unity, immigration problems, violence, drug and alcohol which their children are becoming involved. The Igbo couples are like the three disciples on their way to Emmaus, before they met the risen Lord, and they were discouraged by all that had happened to Jesus. At times too, I am discouraged to see the difficulties the Igbo families are passing through in America to sustain their marriage and family. But just like the disciples, my heart burns within me as I care and support them on their daily journey of life. These fears increase more when I remember that soon I will leave for another place of evangelization. However, I am still committed to this plan of support and care to Igbo couples until the times comes for me to move.

For the future ministry, I should move ahead full of hope knowing that the vision of the couple's faith can grow and become reality. Jesus the Risen one still is with Igbo couples, meeting them on their pathways of their lives, sharing, strengthened, and nourishing them and their families. In the providence of God the Father, the action of the Holy Spirit will rekindle the fire of love in the hearts and families of the Igbo couples.

In the future, I encourage the Brooklyn Diocese, the Igbo ministers and all men of good will to awaken and be energized by the spirit to strengthen their commitment and intensity in their efforts to help the Igbo couples be transformed by the life-giving message of Jesus. The couples should be helped to explore more meanings and experience the power of Jesus working in their marriage. The couples on their own part

should put their own creativity and vigor to embrace and put into practice whatever help they have received from me during the marriage encounter and the help that comes from the church and society. However, for the future execution of what is in this project, I rely on the Spirit that the couples will not fail in their will and sincere efforts to bear lasting fruit for their life, family and the society.

APPENDIX A:

QUESTIONNAIRE:

Please, kindly answer these questions. Answer from your hearts. Your answers are going to be our guide lines to prepare for the next marriage encounter. We want to improve on what we did this year.

Dates of the encounter _____

Names of couple (optional) _____

Please rate each aspect of the encounter according to the degree to which it served your needs as a couple (Very Poor, Poor, Satisfactory, Good, Very Good, and Excellent).

Specific comments about content, format, and quality of the presentations of themes will be very helpful.

(1)What is your overall impression?

(2)What is your impression of the information and explanation on each of the themes to you as couples?

(3) Please comment on the exercises. Were they helpful? Too much work? Less challenging to you?

(4) What was the most valuable aspect of the encounter for you?

(5) Please comment on any aspect of the encounter that was disappointing to you.

(6) Please comment on the location, time, and preparations.

(7) Any additional recommendations or comment on the encounter?

(8) Your name or signature is optional.....

Thank you!

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