

**THE PASTORAL CARE OF DIVORCED COUPLES AND THEIR
CHILDREN, AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA OF THE
DIASPORA, ESPECIALLY IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
NEW YORK.**

*(THE PSYCHO-SOCIO EFFECT AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIVORCE AMONG
THE IGBO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA OF THE DIASPORA, ESPECIALLY IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE
CENTRE).*

BY

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DEDICATION

***THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO MY FAMILY
OMOTU-NWIGWE***

AND

***TO ALL IGBO DIVORCED COUPLES AND THEIR CHILDREN FOR
HEALING.***



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

היברו יוניון קולג' – מכון למדעי היהדות

New York School Graduate Studies Program

Doctor of Ministry Project Final Approval

To: The Members of the Doctor of Ministry Faculty

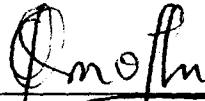

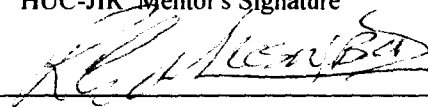
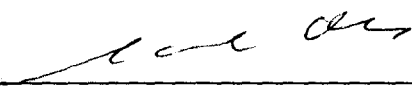
I hereby submit the signatures of approval from my advisors and Dr. Carol Ochs for my completed Doctor of Ministry Project.

The title of the completed Project is: PASTORAL CARE OF DIVORCED COUPLE AND THEIR CHILDREN AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA OF THE DIASPORA (Especially in the diocese of Rockville Centre New York USA)

I have submitted one unbound copy printed on quality paper in a manila folder for the Library.

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INTRODUCTION.

In our contemporary world, both in the traditional, religious and in secular society, it is believed that marriage and family are sacred and a very important organ or cell of the society; they are the microcosm upon which the entire macrocosm is built. Marriage is ideally defined as a permanent relationship in which one man and one woman make a lifelong commitment to each other *“to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health until death do us part” (Catholic marriage rite)*, thus publicly constituting themselves as a married couple. Here, death refers to actual physical death of one or both of the partners, not merely the death of the marital relationship.

Society over the course of history has strongly tended to encourage and preserve the institution and sanctity of marriage, and yet the divorce rate has increased over time especially in our era, due to a variety of reasons which we shall enumerate in this work. Regrettably, divorce takes a deep toll on both the couple and their children, economically, socially and emotionally. My aim in this project is to explore pastoral approaches to helping these divorced couples and their children live a healthy and responsible life in the wake of the trauma of divorce..

Present day experience has shown that the initial courtship, engagement, payment of a dowry where relevant and the wedding itself marks just the beginning of the marital relationship and not the end. As the couples grow in transparency and mutual understanding day by day, seeing the good and negative sides of each other eventually, possibly experiencing the additional challenge of children, problems are bound to emerge, and sometimes if not well managed, may precipitate divorce. Igbo couples in the American Diaspora encounter the additional problems resulting from migration and counter cultural influences, such as the Igbo's patriarchal family system, in which the man is seen as "Dinwe ulo" (the husband and owner of the house). He assumes the role of provider and head of the family, while the woman compliments him as "Obiageri aku" meaning 'one who has come to enjoy the wealth of the husband'. In stark contrast, the American context in which they are inserted is such that women are considered the equal of men, and sometimes exercise more influence in the family than men.

Mercy Oduduoye thus describes African culture as a culture "*where the cooperate personality of the family, clan or nation is always chosen over the personhood of the individual especially when that individual is a woman*" (Daughters of

Anowa p18). In light of this, the potential for problems for Igbo couples as they attempt the transition from a culture of complementarity to a culture of mutuality is obvious. When one compounds this cultural disparity with other situations such as situations where women make more money than the men, since many of them are nurses, becomes a problem. The special need for pastoral responsiveness appears urgent. The whole array of marital difficulties, including lack of communication, infidelity, pride, unforgiveness, lack of trust and worse still domestic violence both physical and sexual also affect Ibo marriages. Often, these problems lead to marital divorce.

My commitment in this work therefore is not to condemn divorce, especially where marriages are irredeemable, but to provide pastoral support and help in assisting these broken couples, to face the emotional, socio-economic and religious effects and challenges of life affected by divorce, and to live a normal healthy and responsible life as a productive member society capable of resisting the temptation to destructive behaviors like drug or alcoholic abuse etc, caused by guilt, loneliness and lack of forgiveness.

The preparation for the writing of this project will include inviting many Igbo divorced couples living within the Rockville Centre diocese, through letters, emails and

advertisement in various parishes to participate in this study. I will organize seminars, lectures, group experience and interviews for these divorced couples. As a counselor and priest I will make myself pastorally available to the couples and will offer them whatever clinical and spiritual skill that I have acquired from this program. In my clinical and pastoral care for these victims, I will ensure that the bulk of my "*instrumentum laboris*" (working materials), comes from them through listening to their personal experiences and of those others who have preceded them through such a journey and are successfully and stably living a happy and normal life today.

I will also draw from the rich clinical investigation of certain psychologists. Finally I will rely on the writings of the Hebrew and Christian Bible for the religious perspective, and I will consult the writings of the Fathers of the Church. I will develop new programs to encourage the divorced couples to live both vertical and horizontal (Godly and human) lives of love and happiness, which the Creator has designed for His children. The project is divided into five respective chapters.

The first chapter will set forth and explain the terms which define the Igbo people and the Mbaise town upon which this work is based. It briefly explains the meaning of marriage and the different kinds of marriages relevant to this culture. It

explains the meaning of divorce and the various factors that lead to divorce and consequently the emotional, social, economic and religious effects of divorce on the couple and their children. In the words of John Trent, *"the effects of divorce on childhood happiness may be more pronounced than the effects of death and may have deeper consequences on quality of life or emotional health"* (Breaking the Cycle of Divorce p16).

The second chapter examines the religious and clinical principles used in this work; it will expound their views on divorce from these differing perspectives, and the means each view might propose to overcome the negative influences of divorce in the life of those it touches. Chapter three lays out the plan of this project. Chapter four and five will be written after the execution of the project. It will discuss how the project was implemented, its fruits and the possibilities of future application.

Finally this work will draw immensely, on knowledge from experience, classroom work, theology, psychology, seminars and interviews. I hope it will be a practical guide and help to divorced couples and their children, and also a help those whose marriages verge on divorce that they may learn from the experience of the past and if possible save their marriage.

The History of the Igbo People

This project is based on the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria in the Diaspora, especially those living within the Diocese of Rockville Centre Long Island New York. It is pertinent, therefore, to offer a historical excurses of the Igbo people in order to understand where they are coming from and their social, economic and religious cultural background. This background will assist the readers to understand the Igbo people living in New York and the problems they encounter in their new environment, especially in the area of marriage and divorce. The conflict of culture is largely responsible for the confusion which many Igbo's in the Diaspora experience and raises many issues both in the private and family life of the individual. One of the devastating consequences of this confusion can be marital divorce if the distress is not properly handled. Igbo children born in Diaspora may even lose their Igbo cultural identity, family values and language, which create a lot of problem when mature and enter into marriages. Let us now have a look at who the Igbo (Ndi Igbo) are.

There are several theories regarding the etymology of the word Igbo, wrongly spelt 'Ibo' by colonialists. It is presumed that the word is of Sudanic origin derived from the verb *gboo*. Theorist have also suggested that the word may have originated from the

neighboring *Igala*, coming from the word *onigbo* a word for slave, but the meaning and origin of the word is still generally considered to be unclear, (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Historically it is believed that the Igbo originated in an area about 100 miles north of their current location at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers. They share linguistic ties with their neighbors, the Bini, Igala, Yoruba, and Idoma peoples, with the split of this linguistically unified population into distinct tribes most likely occurring occurring between five and six thousand years ago. The first Igbo in the region may have moved onto Awka. Igbo people find their home in a rich and fertile crescent created by the lower Niger River. As this early group expanded, so too did the Igbo kingdom. The earliest surviving Igbo art forms are from the 10th century (Igbo Ukwu), and the fine quality of those copper alloy castings suggest that Igbo society had already achieved a level of technology rivaling contemporary Europeans. Their population has presently grown to around thirty million people. Within all of Africa, the Igbo homelands are among the most densely populated regions. It is believed by many that this area and its people were one of the driving forces in the early

development of the Iron Age which has helped mold the world as we now know it.

Their culture has brought much to enrich the world.

The Igbo are politically fragmented group, with numerous divisions rooted in geographic differences. Various subgroups within the Igbo's are delineated according to clan, lineage, and village affiliations. Igbo's have no centralized chieftaincy, hereditary aristocracy, or kingship customs, as can be found among their neighbors. Instead, the responsibility of leadership has traditionally been left to the village councils, which include the heads of lineages, elders, titled men, and men who have established themselves economically within the community and the "age grade".

It is possible for an Igbo man, through personal success, to become the nominal leader of the council. Within this leadership set up is a group called the 'Umunna'. The umunna are the children of the same father or common ancestor. It is considered a taboo for the Umunna to intermarry. The first son of umunna takes up the leadership of the lineage. 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. (family brotherhood is the source of one's strength). That one should be in good relationship with ones patrikin is accentuated by the fact that the ancestors are the*

heads of the lineage who look after the welfare of the living. To be cut off from the patrilineage means losing the protection of the living and the dead (p.5). The Igbo family structure is interwoven; no one lives on his or her own. A sense of community life is encouraged rather than individualistic life style practiced in the western world, especially in the United States where these Igbo's live today. Igbo marriage is a community affair rather than only that of the two individuals involved.

From a religious perspective, a majority of the Igbo's today are Christians, comprising perhaps the largest group of Christians on the entire continent of Africa. Before Christianity was introduced to Africa, their traditional belief system revolved around one particular God, named "Chukwu" the Supreme Being. Although traditional Igbo religion recognizes many other smaller deities compete among themselves, these lesser gods exercise their power within a limited realm of activity. They serve as intermediaries or messengers to Chukwu. Representations, symbols and sanctuaries dedicated to Chukwu, the all powerful and omnipresent God can be found almost anywhere the Igbo dwelt. Homes, compounds, buildings and even village parks and squares would display these depictions of Chukwu. Due to the diversity of the Igbo language, the sanctuaries are referred to by many different names. The Igbos also revere

and venerate their ancestors, as in the cult of the saints in Christianity but do not worship them. Afer (African Ecclesia Review) 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)

Economically, the majority of Igbo engage in trading and also farmers. Their staple crop is yam, and its harvesting is a time for great celebration. They are able to produce yam efficiently enough to export it to their neighbors. With the assistance of migrant labor, they also harvest the fruit of the palm tree, which is processed into palm oil, and exported to Europe in large quantities, making it a fairly profitable cash crop.

The Igbo have a very unique and distinctive language. It is widely considered to be one of the hardest to learn. The difficulty of the language stems from the fact that it is not spoken anywhere else in the world. It is a rich language with many variations. The Igbo seem to be just as diverse as the changing language they speak. The Igbo home life is very structured. Typically the husband is taken to be the head of the household. He also accepts certain responsibilities to his community. It is of equal importance to tend to both the family and the village. Igbo people usually have very extended families; it is

culturally constitutive of them. In recent years, there has even been a drive for family members who have moved away to return to their origin of birth, along with their offspring if any. The Igbo people have stood out in their own way throughout their history. Within Nigeria, they exhibit enthusiastic pride in their accomplishment as a people, their history and culture. With a distinct language and culture, they will continue to grow as a people.

MBAISE TOWN

Mbaise is a region located in Imo State, southeastern Nigeria. Set in the heart of Igbo land, it is gradually developing into towns and cities. The name "Mbaise" was derived from five cities, namely ; Agbaaja, Ahiara ,Ekwereazu , Ezi na Ihite , Oke Uvuru

The area of Mbaise (the three Local Government Areas) is about 404 km²: Aboh Mbaise (185 km²), Ahiazu Mbaise (111 km²), Ezinihitte Mbaise (108 km²). The Mbaise slogan is "seat of sages (the domain of the wise people).

Culturally and demographically, the people of Mbaise are largely Igbo. About 90% Catholics, while Protestants and other religions comprise the remaining number. The Nkwotile dance (rump dance) is common in Mbaise. This is the dance used for

celebrating the annual yam festival and for propitiating the yam god Ajoku (Ahianjoku). This dance has been modified over the years to ekpe (masquerade), Iroko, ekereavu, abigbo to ngba (wrestling). Other music and dances include: Agbacha Ekuru Nwa, Alija, Edere, Egwu Onu Nwa, Ekwirikwe Mgba, Ese, Nkelenke, Nkwa Ike, Nkwa Udu, Ogbongelenge, Uko etc. Today Christians participate in these traditional dances devoid of their pagan origin but as a social activity.

There are also numerous social titles which feature prominently throughout Mbaise. The Ezeji (yam lord). Chieftaincy titles are very common and highly regarded. They include: Eze (king), Okenze, Nze, Ozo, Durunze and more. The Mbaise people have festivals which attract both locals and foreign tourists – the Iwa Akwa, "Oji-mbaise" (kolanut festival) and the wildly politicized "Iri-ji-Mbaise" (the New Yam Festival) which is observed annually on August 15.

Before 1902, when the "Aro expedition" was carried out by the British Colonial powers to subdue the 'Aro' slave trading oligarchy, Mbaise had not yet come under British rule. But by 1906, at the conclusion of the British operation, the present day Mbaise consisting of the three Local Government Areas (Aboh, Ahiazu & Ezinihitte) was

effectively unified together under British control which left in place a semblance of local authority

To keep the Igbo clan of Mbaise under effective supervision, the British established a native court at Obohia in 1907 but pressure from the likes of Chief Nwaturuocha the traditional ruler of Nguru caused the transfer of the court to Nguru in 1909. In 1929, the Nguru court was destroyed as a result of the Igbo Women's War. Sectional courts were subsequently opened in Obohia, Itu, Ife and Enyigogu in response to the increasingly popular "Home Rule" movement of the 1930s.

The coming together of the people under a common political and administrative unit was secured in 1941. By 1945 councils had been formed based loosely on blocs of autonomous communities. The group councils and their respective number of autonomous communities recognized in Mbaise were: Ezinihitte – 16; Agbaja – 7; Oke-Uvuru – 4; Ekwerazu – 6 and Ahiara – 6 (source: Ekechi 1989:179). It was from these councils that the three local Governments were created. Ahiazu LGA was a merger of Ahiara and Ekwerazu councils and Aboh LGA was a merger of the Oke-Uvuru and Agbaja councils. Ezinihitte remained by itself except for the secession

of two small villages – Isu Obiangwu and Umuohiagu which joined Ngor–Okpala from the Agbaja area in Mbaise. Modern Mbaise

The current Mbaise population is in excess of 1 million people. Subsistence farming still accounts for a major part of the occupation. Yams, cassava, palm fruits, vegetables and fruits are the main agricultural products. However since the end of the Biafra/ Nigerian civil war in 1970, the quest for an improved standard of living and academic excellence and the development of business enterprise have resulted an unprecedented boost in the fortunes of Mbaise people. Mbaise boasts of legions of doctors, lawyers, public administrators, educators, artists, engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs. Mbaise people are avid travelers and adventurers. Favorite destinations include the Americas, Europe and Asia where many Mbaise seek new ideas to bring home

THE HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE.

According to the Catholic Church's Code of Canon law, "A diocese is a portion of cooperation of the presbyterate so that, adhering to its pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist; it constitutes a particular Church in which catholic and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and operative (Canon 369) . The Roman Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre comprises the territory of Nassau and Suffolk counties (regionally known as Long Island) in New York state, USA. Founded in 1957, this diocese was created from territory that once belonged to the Diocese of Brooklyn. The diocese currently serves almost 1.5 million Catholics. The Most Reverend William Murphy has served as the diocese's fourth bishop since 2001.

Most of the Catholics living within these geographic boundaries are members of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Others who are parishioners of Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Roman Catholic Church belong to dioceses whose headquarters are elsewhere. Their parishes are listed in this book under the heading, "Eastern Catholic Churches."

In the Rockville Centre Diocese there are 134 parishes, 126 geographical parishes, 7 non-geographical ethnic parishes which were originally established to serve

immigrants from specific nations, and the campus parish through which students at secular colleges and universities in the diocese are encouraged to participate in the life of the Church. These parishes serve a total Catholic population of more than 1.5 million out of a general population of about 3 million.

Closely associated with these parishes is a network of elementary schools serving more than 28,000 children. In addition, in eleven parishes, diocesan or religious community high schools serve more than 11,000 young people. Each parish also has a program of religious instruction for those not in Catholic schools. These programs serve more than 167,000 students. There are over 400 priests in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. (Long Island Catholic Newspaper 2006, modified 11/15/2007)

CHAPTER ONE

THE GENERAL NOTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a social, religious, spiritual, and legal union of individuals. This union may also be called matrimony, while the ceremony that marks its beginning is usually called a wedding and the married status created is sometimes called wedlock. The Catholic church traditional definition of marriage upon which most English common laws are based, sees marriage as a “covenant, by which a man and a woman freely establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (Code of Canon law, Canon 1055 #1)

People marry for various reasons, but usually one or more of the following, for legal, social, and economic stability; the formation of a family unit; procreation and the education and nurturing of children; legitimizing sexual relations; the public declaration of love; to obtain citizenship. Writing on this, Kingsley Davis summed up the anthropological evidence for marriage. *“Although the details of getting married—who chooses the mates, what are the ceremonies and exchanges, how old are the parties—vary from group to group, the principle of marriage is everywhere embodied*

in practice As a practically universal human idea, marriage is about regulating the reproduction of children, families, and society. While marriage systems differ, marriage across societies is a public sexual union that creates kinship obligations and sharing of resources between men, women, and the children their sexual union may produce

(Kingsley Davis, Contemporary Marriage. Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Institution 1985, p5).

Marriage is uniquely beneficial to society because it is the foundation of the family and the basic building block of society. It brings significant stability and meaning to human relationships. Also it remains the ideal context for the raising of children and plays an important role in transferring culture and civilization to future generations.

Marriage is not merely a private contract, but a social institution of great public concern.

Marriage may take many forms. For example, a union between one man and one woman as husband and wife is a monogamous heterosexual marriage. It can be polygamous in which a person takes more than one spouse. This was common among Igbo and other Africans. Recently, some jurisdictions and denominations have begun to recognize same sex marriage. Other forms of marriage include, child marriage, a

practice in which the parents of two small children (even infants) arrange a future marriage. Endogamous marriage is contracted between members of a domestic group while exogamous marriage is that which is contracted, between members of different groups. Inter-marriage or mixed marriage is marriage between people belonging to different religions, tribes, nationalities or ethnic backgrounds, while interreligious marriage is marriage (either religious or civil) between partners professing different religions. {*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_marriages"}

MARRIAGE AMONG THE IGBO OF NIGERIA (IGBO PERSPECTIVE)

The Igbo's have no classical definition of marriage. An old farmer called it a union of a man and a woman leading to that of the two extended families. Another person described it as a lasting union between a man and a woman

Dr Celestine Obi says marriage for the ordinary Igbo *"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 mile-stone in the life of a man and a woman, which will enable them to immortalize their remembrance through their children. Since the Igbo are a patriarchal people, marriage is deemed an indispensable*

factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. Children occupy the central point in Igbo marriage. Parents long for this and the father of the family requests this every morning in his kola nut prayer. The mother begs for it while giving cult to her chi during annual festival. In other words, if you ask the ordinary Igbo man or woman why he desires to marry, the spontaneous answer will be, "I want to marry in order to beget my own children, to get a family like my parents". (Unpublished doctoral Thesis)

This love for having children is manifested in Igbo names like *Nwabu-uwa* meaning "this child is the entire world to me". Other things in life rank second to this desire. A childless woman is regarded as a monstrosity and childless marriage often leads to divorce. The position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes really secure after the birth of a male child. At this stage she is specially welcomed as a responsible housewife in her husband's extended family (*Umunna*). In fact the birth of the child gives her the title of wife, before this time she may be said to be a wife only in anticipation.

Consequently, the fate of a sterile woman is a very hard one indeed. Not uncommonly she is made the object of conversation and ridicule by some of her female neighbors. If an occasion for a quarrel arises, she gets the most painful telling off. Her

women rivals would call her *Mgbaliga, Nwanyi-iga* literally meaning, "the sterile woman, the barren one". She is regarded as the sterile monster that has her maternal organs for mere decoration. If she eventually does bear a child, in her joy and gratitude as a proud mother she may name the child *Chukwuemeka* meaning God has been very generous towards me.

Marriage in Igbo land is an arrangement which enables individuals (man/woman) to live together and cooperate in an orderly social life within an extended family structure where "one is his/her brother's keeper.". The extended family takes the form of three or four generations of nuclear families of lineal descendants. Thus, John Mbiti (1969) says. "For African people marriage is the focus of existence, it is the point where all the members of a given community meet, the departed, the living and all those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history are repeated, renewed and is revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor and not just a spectator. Therefore marriage is a duty, a requirement for the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone participates".(p174)

The Igbo family structure is strict on incest and consanguine relationships. The bridegroom has to take a wife outside his kinship community. A bride prize is paid as a token of appreciation for the loss of a daughter. This token gift is given to the bride's father or relatives before the elders of both the bride's and bridegroom's communities. It is not the purchasing of a wife, but a part of a contract between two families. The bride price plays a very important role in social, legal and economic customs. The bride price seals the marriage covenant between the bride and bride groom as husband and wife. It also shows that the man is capable of providing for the woman, it also regulates the rate of divorce since it must be returned for any meaning divorce to take place....

Cyracus S Mba in Lucerna January-June, 1982; Vol.3, enumerates the four stages of Igbo traditional marriage. *"There are four important stages of the contract cum covenant of marriage, namely, a) The betrothal following on the proposal. This betrothal is 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 obligations.(P22).*

Generally, marriage is regarded as a family and clan affair. When a boy betroths a girl, the matter does not end there. The families of the contracting parties will embark on a series of investigations about the character, home training, lineage, health, clan relationship of the proposed spouses. Where all the requirements are satisfactory to both sides, approval is readily given for the continuation of betrothal and the payment of the bride price. If otherwise, any further relationship between the two purported betrothed will be discouraged+.

Among the Igbo's, the period of courtship comprises the first arranged encounter of the boy and the girl, other meetings of the two people concerned and their family, the mutual inquiries conducted by each extended families and the period of friendship leading into the actual celebration of the marriage. Love is the sum total of the physical, psychological, economical, social and moral attraction which exercises a magnetic influence on the young man and the young woman, on the one hand, and on their extended families on the other. Their attraction is not merely physical. There is in their love mutual trust, confidence and mutual self-giving. Each feels proud of and satisfied with having the other as partner in the difficult but noble task of raising a family. This is what the Igbo's of the past and of today generally understand by "*ifuna-*

anya' (love) .During the time of courtship the man and the woman study themselves and their families. The long mutual scrutiny of both parties and the community involvement together with finances involved in the marriage makes divorce very difficult in Igbo land. This will help us understand the plight of the divorced Igbo woman/man, whom we discuss in this work.

The two most popular forms of marriage in Igbo land are monogamy and polygamy. Monogamy is the form of marriage imported from Christianity into Igbo society and has been prevalent among western nations, whose social structures are based on the Greco-Roman tradition and on the Christian faith based notion of marriage as the permanent union of 'one man and one woman as husband and wife. Traditional Igbo marriage on one hand is polygamous. It permits a man to have more than one wife. Many marriages begin as monogamous but end up as polygamous for reasons ranging from childlessness of the first wife to other awkward reasons like the need to refrain from intercourse with a woman who is pregnant or nursing a child. It is presumed that women age early and lose their attraction for men. Men like change or variety; there is also the need for more hands for farm work. Among the Igbo and some

other African tribes the law against bigamy is not binding in the practical sense. With the impact of Christianity on Igbo education, monogamy has gained momentum.

This purview provides a background of understanding the mentality and attitude of many Igbo's regarding marriage and the increasing rate of divorce among 'Ndi Igbo' in the diaspora, living in the United States.

DIVORCE AND ITS INFLUENCING FACTOR

The Latin word *divortium* or *divortere* "divorce" in the English language is translated as: to dismiss, to let depart, to let go, to loose, to separate, to put away, to release, to send away, and to set at liberty. It can also mean to drive out, to be cast out, to expel, and to thrust out or "to let loose from, to let go free."

Legally divorce can be defined as the civil or canonical termination of marriage. According to the New Comprehensive International dictionary, "divorce is a legal dissolution of a marriage relation, leading to severance, separation of the couple". The Romans had an interesting view towards marriage – '*matrimonia debent esse libera*' or 'marriages ought to be free'. This meant that either spouse could opt out of the marriage if the union becomes undesirable for them. Centuries later, Victorian England had a vastly different view. People got married and stayed together "for better or for worse" as

the couple explicitly and publicly vowed to each other in the wedding ceremony.

Society frowned upon divorce and divorced people were likely to find themselves considered as social pariahs. In the present century, both of these views can be found to prevail depending on the part of the world and which culture is examined. Divorce rates are higher in European or North American countries, where individualism is valued over tradition as opposed to African countries where familial and social opinions have decisive influence. In Igbo land, for instance, divorce is difficult because the entire family and community is involved; it is not a personal decision of the couple to engage in divorce just as in the case of entering into marriage. Divorce is typically a collective agreement and decision of the family members in those rare cases where it is allowed, and for very circumscribed grounds including infidelity, insubordination or poisoning on the part of the woman.

There are many different reasons or factors for divorce, each of them specific to that particular couple's marital relationship, their individual experiences and personal problems. Some of these influencing factors according to my survey in Igbo societies include; the lack of commitment to the marriage, breakdown in communication between spouses, infidelity, abandonment, and alcohol addiction on either or both of the

spouses, substance abuse. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are also indicative as causes of divorce among Igbo couples. Again there is the question of the inability of spouses to manage or resolve inter personal conflict, personality differences or 'irreconcilable differences'. Disparities in the spouses personal and career goals, household difficulties, the relative earning power and financial contribution of the spouses, disparate expectations about household tasks, and about having or rearing children, and even the interference of parents and in-laws all can affect the successes of Igbo marriages. The lack of emotional maturity of either of the spouses, intellectual or sexual incompatibility, the conflict of traditional roles, with personal desires or goal, falling out of love, the religious conversion of a spouse or generally the lack of shared religious belief, a disparity in cultural or life style preferences, inability to deal with each other's idiosyncrasies and finally the mental instability or illness of a spouse can bring marriage to breaking point..

The lack of inter spousal communication is one of the leading causes of divorce among Igbo's in America.. A marriage is on the rocks when the lines of communication fail. You can't have an effective relationship if either one of the spouses refuses to discuss his or her feeling, refuse to talk about mutual or personal issues, harbors

resentments simmering under wraps, expect his or her partner to guess at what the whole problem is all about. Divorces often happen because spouses rarely discuss their expectations in detail prior to marriage, are less willing to work on their marriages afterwards, and seek quick solutions to marital difficulties rather than honest and integral resolution.

The issue of inculturation within the host culture is another important factor on the success or failure of Igbo marriages in the diaspora. In particular authority and equality of marriage and the family is put to in question. Sometimes Igbo men seek to exercise authority over their wives with the claim that they are the head of the family. They quote the Bible to support their position, that God created women from the ribs of the man to be mans helper (Gen 2; 21-23) and St Paul urging women to be submissive to their husband because he is the head, while the men should love their wives (Eph 4;22-26). These quotations are erroneously used today for subjugation of women which in my understanding was unintended by their proponents. Some Igbo men often see in their wives expression of personal opinion, if it is at odds with their own and especially If she insists on clarification or explanation from him insubordination, which sometimes leads to divorce..

Immigration raises the issue of the spouses having to endure long periods of physical separation as when the bread winner must immigrate to another country for employment, leaving the other spouse and their children in the country of origin or as when one of an immigrant leaving the other party alone, with the psychological, social and economic hardship enough to expose the marriage to the possibility of divorce. This reality of this kind of separation assaults the dignity and sanctity of their marriage, impacts the children negatively. It also encourages infidelity which is a very prominent factor for divorce in Igbo society.

It also must be noted that there is a statistical high level of probability that people who come from divorced homes are more likely to get divorced than people who come from happily married households. Divorce seems a more acceptable option for those who have seen their parent go through it. This is why in Igbo society part of the pre marital inquiry is to find out whether the individuals' parents are divorced. Many children of divorced parents find it emotionally difficult to get into marriage or even to be approached by the men for marriage because of fear of divorce.

According, to Sonal Panse, "In many cases, quite a few of the problems that cause divorce have existed in the couple's relationship long before they got married.

The problems were either not acknowledged or were ignored in the fond hope that marriage might offer a miraculous panacea, it doesn't. Nobody can make you feel better about yourself. As someone wise once said, it takes two wholes to make a marriage, not two halves". {<http://www.buzzle.com/>}

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON COUPLES.

The document of the Vatican Council 11 says, "the plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements has an obscuring effect (GS 47). Divorce, therefore affect most couples psychologically, economically, socially and even religiously.

Psychologically and emotionally, the affected individuals experience a feeling of anxiety, anger, sadness, weariness, guilt, isolation, low self-esteem, worry, disappointment / frustration, loneliness and depression.

Within our context here, **anxiety** is described as a set of familiar, unpleasant physiological event which include, rapid heart rate and respiration for example that may or may not be accompanied by a cognitive explanation. Freud thus, defines anxiety "as the response to helplessness in the face of danger. If the danger has struck the anxiety is automatic and immediate. If the danger is still in the offing anxiety is the anticipation of helplessness in the face of danger. The overwhelming preponderance of

anxiety falls into the category of anticipation" (Basic Freud p108). People sometimes for one reason or the other feel apprehensive, nervous, or even fearful. Anxiety sometimes is adaptive, and helps spur us into action. Anxiety affects the divorce victim because he/she does not know the challenges lies ahead.. There are different types of anxiety disorder, these includes; generalized anxiety disorder , obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) , panic disorder , post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social phobia (or Social Anxiety Disorder).

Anger on the other hand is a basic human emotion that is experienced by all people. Typically anger is triggered by an emotional hurt, anger is usually experienced as an unpleasant feeling that occurs when we think we have been injured, mistreated, opposed in our long-held views, or when we are faced with obstacles that keep us from attaining personal goals .The New Comprehensive International Dictionary defines anger "as a violent vindictive passion, sudden and strong displeasure as a result of injury, opposition or mistreatment ".

Also there is the presence of guilt. Guilt "is a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined or remorseful awareness of having done something wrong" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English

Language). Guilt can either be noisy or quiet. The divorced individuals often feel lonely. Loneliness; is defined as being "without companions; lone, solitary, desolate". (American Heritage Dictionary). Loneliness is an emotional state in which a person experiences a powerful feeling of emptiness and isolation.

Loneliness is more than the feeling of wanting company or wanting to do something with another person but more a feeling of being cut off, disconnected and alienated from other people. The lonely person may find it difficult or even impossible to have any form of meaningful human contact. Lonely people often experience a subjective sense of inner emptiness or hollowness, with feelings of separation or isolation from the world. Consequently, depression which these some of these individuals face is a mood disorder described as feeling sad, blue, unhappy, miserable, or down in the dumps. Joan Berzoff defines it "as a state of sadness depletion, deflection, emptiness, hopelessness and boredom. (Inside Out and Outside in p365). There exist several types of depression. reactive depression (following tragic events), major depression (with no apparent cause), and bipolar disorder, a type that includes episodes of euphoria. It is likely that several factors together can cause depression. These include genetic predisposition (proven for bipolar disorder) and environmental factors.

Economically, divorce places a financial burden on both parties. Expenses which were unified in marriage such as rents or utilities bills are doubled in divorce. Some find it necessary to work overtime to make ends meet, or endure the stress of two jobs. The former husband has the heavier financial burden if he is providing maintenance for the children who are in the wife's custody after divorce and at the same time building or supporting a new family, if he has re-married. The party too that has depended on the other for financial survival typically the wife and home maker suffers a great deal from the loss of that support, especially if she is still responsible for home making and child rearing after divorce and has not the job marketability suited to financial independence.

Socially a stigma usually attaches to divorce. For example, it is not unusual for divorcees to be derided by the community of fellow Igbo. Friends and relatives may ask awkward questions. The estranged couple loses the support of each other's relatives and friends. At the same time the help of relatives in looking after the children may be needed more than ever. The sense of loss will be all the greater if the partners have been very much dependent on each other in daily life. The help of welfare and other support organizations may have to be sought.

From the legal perspective, divorce brings about changes in the status of a person. For example, there are restrictions in owning a Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat imposed on a divorced person; a divorcee is required to pay higher personal income taxes; the responsibilities of single parenting are greater; divorcees must bear the legal costs for the divorce proceedings; losses may be incurred when the parties to divorce are forced to sell their jointly owned flat or to surrender it to HDB; further conflict may occur in Court if one party fails to comply with the Order of the Court. This has a very negative connotation of justice.

Couples who are divorced are also saddled with added responsibilities and roles, particularly with regard to the care of children. Each parent has to be both father and mother to the children. Some mothers may have to go out and work to maintain their children which compromise their domestic presence to them.

Religiously, in some religious organizations, divorced persons are barred from holding some religious positions and sometimes even from receiving the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharist. They are seen as 'sinners' sometimes by both the church officials and members which affects them emotionally. Some even absent themselves from churches as a result of this attitude of condemnation.

The above are some examples of what is experienced by negatively by couples who decide to go through divorce proceedings. There are, however, some parties who experience divorce positively as when for example they are made free from an irresponsible spouse. Thus, from the positive perspective, Shlemon B L quoting Joan Kelly says "divorce has the potential of not only freeing men and women from destructive and unsatisfactory relationships but of allowing adults to develop and change in gratifying ways in the aftermath of divorce. (Healing the wounds of divorce p13)

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Though my emphasis in this work is more on the couples, I cannot lose sight of the fact that divorce affects children too. Divorce affects children differently, depending on their gender, age and stage of development. Their world, their security and their stability seems to fall apart when their parents' divorce. Hence for Marta S Y; "divorce terminates the family. It rips apart all that children need and hold sacred" (Healing the hurt, restoring the hope. p104). The following are universal responses that researchers have found among children of divorce.

- They worry that their parents do not love them anymore and they feel abandoned. They feel like the parent who left has divorced them too.
- They feel powerless and helpless because they cannot get their parents back together. They can neither speed up nor slow down the process of divorce. .

Children still struggle emotionally regardless of how the parents feel.
- They feel angry, although they may not express their anger.
- They often feel they are at fault. They may believe that something they did or said caused a parent to leave.
- They grieve. Divorce is a loss in the lives of children and parents. They experience a grieving process very similar to of mourning a death.
- They experience conflicts of loyalty.

Children are more likely not to finish school, to engage in teenage pregnancy, and to engage in drug abuse and delinquent behavior. Thus they are more likely not to have good marriage themselves. They may doubt their own ability to get married or to stay married

According to Wallerstein J, a study of children six years after a parental marriage breakup revealed that even after all that time, these children tended to be

"lonely, unhappy, anxious and insecure". ("The Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Children, 1991).

Having examined the meaning of marriage and divorce and the negative consequences of on both couples and their children, as well as the disposition of Church communities and society in general towards the divorced, we shall in the next chapter explore the relevant literature for the religious and clinical resources and approaches to overcoming the negative impact of divorce.

CHAPTER TWO.

RELIGIOUS AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES..

The religious principles examined and applied in this project are taken from both the Hebrew and Christian Bible and also from the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In the Hebrew Bible, the prophet Malachi reminds us that God hates divorce, "I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel." (Malachi 2:16). The reason for this according to the Bible is that God's plan for his children is that marriage should be a lifetime commitment. This is expressed in Adam's reaction at the creation of the woman and their union, "this now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she is taken out of man. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2 22-24). This union of man and woman (one flesh) in the Hebrew perspective speaks not only to oneness in body, but also to oneness in emotions, reasoning and the spiritual life as well.

Moreover for Malachi marriage is a covenant "God had refused to accept

the offerings of his people. They asked why? Because the Lord had been the witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion and wife by covenant" (Malachi 2; 13-14). God in His infinite wisdom knew that, since marriage involves two human beings, divorce might occur. In the Old Testament, He allowed divorce on certain grounds in which Jewish law allows for a *get* (גט, plural *gittim* or *gittin* גיטין) which is a divorce document, presented by a husband to his wife to effect their divorce.

The essential text of the *get* is quite short. "You are hereby permitted to all men," i.e., the wife is no longer a married woman, and the laws of adultery no longer apply. The *get* also returns to the wife the legal rights which a husband holds in regard to his wife in a Jewish marriage. The biblical term for the divorce document, described in the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 24, is "Sefer Keritut", (Hebrew: כריתות ספר). At the same time God laid down some laws in order to protect the rights of divorcees, especially women (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

In the New Testament Jesus did not support divorce "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). Jesus pointed out that divorce in the Old Testament was allowed

and the laws regulating it given because of the hardness of people's hearts, not because divorce was God's desire (Matthew 19:8). Jesus went further to say, "a man who divorces his wife and marries another wife is guilty of adultery against her and a woman who divorces her husband and marries another is guilty of adultery too." (Mk 10:11-12)

The controversy over whether divorce and remarriage is allowed according to the New Testament revolves primarily around Jesus' words in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The phrase "except for marital unfaithfulness" is the only thing in the New Testament Scripture that possibly suggests God's permission for divorce and remarriage. But many interpreters understand this "exception clause" as referring to "marital unfaithfulness" during the "betrothal" period. In Jewish custom, a man and a woman were considered married even while they were still engaged or "betrothed." Immorality during this "betrothal" period would then be the only valid reason for a divorce.

St Paul emphasizes the sacredness of marriage, which he understands as a sacrament, which images in the marital union of husband and wife, symbolizes the relationship of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5: 22-24, 5:32-33). Women as

wives are subject to their husband in a way which images the church as subject to Christ who is the head. In this sense who loves his wife is shown to love himself also. 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 (Eph 5:25-30). Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 "to the married I give this ruling and this is not mine but the Lords, a wife must not be separated from the husband or if she has already left him she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and a husband must not divorce his wife"

It is distressing that the divorce rate among professing Catholics and other Christians is high today, yet the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and that reconciliation and forgiveness should be the marks of a believer's life (Luke 11:4; Ephesians 4:32).

However from the Christian religious principle a divorced believer should not feel any less loved by God. God is Love, who loves the sinner but hates sin and offers forgiveness to the sinner and healing consolation to the injured. The bible emphasis the fact that God is full of love, and is merciful and compassionate to his children. Married couples and divorced individuals should be reminded the love

and mercy of God revealed in the scripture, rather than of the idea that they are sinners. Moreover the Bible encourages the pursuance of happiness for everyone and condemns social, legal, economic injustice and oppression of any kind. (e.g. Exodus 23:1-13, 23 Leviticus 19:11-18, 25, Exodus 22:25-27, or Deut 15:1-4) as against strangers and sojourners (e.g., Exodus 23:9), orphans and widows and the most vulnerable in the society including married women (e.g. Deuteronomy 10:17-19) of Igbo extraction.

Some of the divorcees especially women are unfortunate victim's of injustice who are neither responsible nor culpable for their divorce. Moreover the Bible encourages them to have courage to face the future. Three hundred and fifty five times the bible encourages God's children to "be not afraid I am with you" (Joshua 1:1-10. LK 12:32). Hence divorce victims who think they are alone should realize that they are not alone, God is with them. He is the Good Shepherd "who looks for the lost one, brings back the stray, bandages the wounded and makes the weak strong" (Ez 34:17). They should therefore foster a forgiving spirit towards themselves in imitation of the Father who loves them and towards their partners so that their heavenly father will forgive them as well. God is also merciful to the

culpable one, and invites repentance with a fatherly love. The good news is not only for the victim, but also for the repentant victimizer.

THE TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Among Catholics, one of the most sensitive and often avoided topics is that of the reality of divorce which the church sees as objectively immoral and a grave offence against the teaching of Christ.. The Church teaches that while there must be a pastoral response to assist those parties who seek counseling when their failed marriage ends in divorce, the truth of Christ's teachings must not be compromised for the sake of the pastoral response. The words and teachings of Jesus Christ on divorce are clear, and it is the responsibility of the Church and its pastors to safeguard, proclaim, and defend them. Let us, therefore, turn our attention to the words of Christ Himself in which the Church firmly bases its teachings as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

"And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the

two shall become one” So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery.’(Matt 19,3-9)

The Lord Jesus thus insisted on the original intention of the Creator, who willed that marriage be indissoluble, and abrogated the accommodations that had slipped into the old Law. Thus Archbishop Fulton Sheen, encapsulating the Church’s position on divorce said “divorce, goes against everything man and woman were created to be. They are, indeed, especially wrong for Catholics. They are a violation of the law of God, the Natural Law of God, for *everyone*, whether he be Tibetan or Moslem, or a so-called Christian. Marriage was instituted not by man but by God. He made it a union not a contract. In marriage two persons become one, they become spiritually, mentally and physically united. There are judges who will grant divorces, but how does God look upon them. After the divorce they aren’t

two separate individuals as they were before the marriage; they are fragments of a joint personality, like a babe cut in two" (Your life is worth living, 2001, p252).

He went further to say that even original sin and the deluge did not destroy the divinely established order of man and woman. Conjugal love survived both the deluge and original sin. Therefore the Church teaches that between the baptized, "a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death." (Canon 1441). Moreover "from a valid marriage there arises between the spouses a bond which of its own nature is permanent and exclusive. Moreover, in Christian marriage the spouses are by a special sacrament strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state" (Canon 1134)

Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery.

If a husband, separated from his wife, approaches another woman, he is an adulterer because he makes that woman commit adultery, and the woman who lives with him is an adulteress, because she has drawn another's husband to herself CCC 2384

According to the catholic church, divorce is immoral because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society CCC n 2385.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “the *separation* of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by canon law If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense. CCC n 2383

It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law, in such a case, this faithful spouse has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely

tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his or her own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage. CCC 2385.

The Church also offers some solutions, support and sensitivity for victims of divorce. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n.1651) says, “the Church stresses that the community of the faithful should exercise a sensitivity to the divorced through works of charity”. Hence, the Church teaches that toward Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons.”

Pope John Paul II has stated that divorced persons “should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace”. (*Familiaris Consortio* no 84).

It is also a fact that today in many parishes in Igbo society, the divorced are

still considered inferior to those who are living together in an intact marriage. In some situations they are excluded from receiving holy communion and from holding official church positions such as leaders of pious societies. I propose to establish a Bible study group or organization, where divorced couples could come for Bible study, prayer, and the sharing of the word of God.

The pastoral purpose of this group will be to teach the individuals the need to have courage and an abiding faith in God who loves them in spite of their divorce and can heal them. I will promise to visit them biweekly and to help them to institutionalize and run the group on their own. I will make available copies of the Bible, spiritual books and workshop books. Also this group will serve them as a forum for interaction and sharing of experience, a channel of comfort, welfare and peace. Some have criticized the idea of the formation of such a group as they see such an organization as not being fit to exist in the church.

CLINICAL PRINCIPLES.

The religious principles above set out the Church's position on divorce and how to help the divorcees. The clinical principle will explore deeply some of the clinical observable reasons for divorce and how to overcome them. This will help

affected individuals to recognize their coping strength and limitations and to make some adjustment in their approach to future relations, marital or social. Some of the principle referenced here is the psychodynamic principle of "object relation theory" and "the Igbo family system theory". I will examine some of the opinions of psychologists in overcoming the effects of divorce.

PSYCHODYNAMIC PRINCIPLES.

Psychodynamics is the systematized study and theory of the psychological forces that underlie human behavior, emphasizing the interplay between unconscious and conscious motivation. "It applies to all forces at play in shaping ones personality. It involves any forces internal or external that has an impact on mental and emotional development". (Berzof, 2002 p.4). I will integrate our discussion of psychodynamics with references to object relation theory and Igbo family system theory

OBJECT RELATION THEORY.

According to David C Olsen (1993), "Object relation theorists examine each partner's internalized representations of significant parental figures"

(Integrative Family Therapy.p49). Object relations theory therefore is a theory of relationships between people, in particular within a family and especially between the mother and her child. A basic tenet is that we are driven to form relationships with others and that failure to form successful early relationships leads to later problems. According to Milano Flanagan in his contribution in the book 'Inside out and Outside In'; "Object relations explores the process whereby people come to experience themselves as separate and independent from others while at the same time needing profound attachment to others" Melanie Klein 1952 summarized the core tenet of this theory. There is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal ; in other words, object relations are at the centre of emotional life".(Berzof, 2002 p.127)

Object relations theorists believe that human beings are relationship seeking, rather than pleasure seeking as Freud suggested, though part of the reason for relationship is need gratification.. Thus building relationship is an important and main focus of psychotherapy.

Freud. S, originally used the term "object" to mean anything an infant directs drives toward for satiation. Freud identified two types of drive. libidinal and

aggressive. Since Freud, however, many theorists such as Margret Mahler, Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott, Jacobson, Kernberg and Kohut have moved in varying degrees, toward a relational/structural model of the psyche in which an "object" is defined as the target of relational needs in human development. Within modern object relations theory, objects can be people (mother, father, others) or things, such as transitional objects with which we form attachments. These objects and the developing child's relationship with them are incorporated into a self, and become the building blocks of the self-system.

Many object relations theorists see psychological dysfunction as an expression of being stuck at a stage of development, unable to mature further. From this perspective, dysfunctional and symptomatic behaviors are really an immature attempt to resolve early traumas. However, these attempts typically fail since they utilize immature manipulations to influence others, in order to satisfy needs stemming out of these early traumas. A mature and satisfactory resolution requires the intervention of a trained professional psychotherapist.

One of the greatest contributors in this theory is Fairbairn, who believes that human development is a lifelong breaking away from the dependent bonds of

early childhood to the adult states of mutuality and exchange. In other words, human beings spend much of their lives attempting to break out of the limitations of dependency to reach the autonomy of adulthood. Failure to break away from dependent bonds leads to psychopathology.

The process the human beings use to attain the goal of adult autonomy is called separation-individuation, first developed by Mahler and later adopted by Kernberg and others. In the words of Margaret Mahler in her book, "The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant" (2000), she says "let us for the sake of brevity call this period... the separation individuation phase of personality development. It is our contention that this separation- individuation phase is a crucial one in regard to the ego and development of object relationship. It is also our contention that the characteristics fear of this period is separation anxiety" (Mahler p9). Within this model, the human infant moves from the early stages of autism (withdrawal) and then symbiosis (with the mother) to a process of first separating from and then individuating from the primary caregiver. This separation-individuation process has many developmental tasks and physiological maturations during the first three years of life and ends with the child achieving

"object constancy" (the ability to internalize the primary caregiver and hold that figure in memory), and "identity formation" (a blueprint for an identity or personality). These qualities of object constancy and identity are the basis of healthy functioning.

Here is a summary of Mahler's developmental stage;

1. Normal Autism (birth – 2 mos) – Periods of sleep outweigh periods of arousal.
2. Symbiosis (2mo – 5mos) – Mother-infant is perceived as a single fused entity. Developing perceptual abilities gradually enable infants to distinguish the inner from the outer world
3. Differentiation (5mo-10mos) – Distinctness from mother is appreciated. Progressive neurological development and increased alertness draw infant's attention away from self to the outer world.
4. Practicing (10 to 18 mos) – The ability to move autonomously increases the child's exploration of the outer world.
5. Rapprochement (18-24 mos) – Children move away from their mothers and come back for reassurance. As they slowly realize their helplessness and dependence, the need for independence alternates with the need for closeness.
6. Object Constancy (2-5yrs) – Children gradually comprehend and are reassured by the permanence of mother and other important people, even

when not in their presence.

Trauma along the way (such as abuse) can lead to a pathological delay of the developmental sequence, with the result being the child never matures emotionally. Instead, the child is in a state of "identity diffusion" and lacks the ego strength necessary to form and maintain healthy relationships.

J. Bradshaw writing in the book "The family. A Revolutionary Way of Self Discovery" says "the betrayal and chronic shock set one up in a kind of emotional numbness. The fear of closeness is the fear of betrayal and pain. This comes up over and over again in marriage and relationship. Victims move away from real love, affection and closeness and are attracted to an abusive rejecting person" (Bradshaw p122). This is the basis for personality disorders, such as the schizoid, the borderline and the narcissist.

Eventually, the adult with this weakened sense of self repeats the traumatic pattern through relationships with others with the hope of reaching a resolution. However, these attempts are futile because the immature self never develops sufficient "ego strength" to overcome the traumatic pattern. In addition, the people selected to relate to are themselves immature and subject to their own destructive relational patterns.

From this perspective, psychopathology is the inability to overcome these developmental impasses and remain in a state of immaturity and the resulting destructive relationships. Psychotherapy, in turn, attempts to move the person through the necessary, but inhibited, developmental stages and to free the patient to go forward with his or her development to full psychological maturity. The role of

the therapist is to provide an enabling environment within which the patient is able to resolve these destructive developmental impasses and move away from his or her dependency toward autonomy and full functioning adulthood. Igbo divorcees need this treatment and therapy since some of them as children were physically and psychologically abused by their parents in the name of discipline through flogging, beatings, child labor and even intentional starvation as a means of punishment and inculcating discipline.

Psychotherapists are concerned with resolving human conflict, whether the conflict exists within an individual, between individuals, or among members of a group. Most orientations to psychotherapy employ various techniques to resolve these conflicts. Object relations based psychotherapy offers a deeper level of resolution by identifying and resolving the underlying causes of human conflict. This is because object relations therapy assumes that conflicts experienced from early childhood help create a blueprint upon which the self-system will develop and pattern relationships later in life.

The task of the therapist is to provide a safe environment that will allow the dysfunctional pattern to emerge and then to find ways of confronting it. The therapist helps the patient to find new way of relating by recognizing and expressing his or her needs for acceptance and validation openly and honestly in order to encourage honest, and autonomous ways of relating. This may have affected ones marriage in the past but a resolution will help the individual in subsequent human relationship and especially if he/she wants to enter into another marriage. The individual can be brought to understand that he/she is unique and

that the destructive developmental process he/she experienced in issues of dependency and growth towards autonomy and full functioning as persons can be overcome. The pastoral approach which we develop here. Will encourage, openness and transparency in human relationship among the divorced both in the group and outside the group process, and will offer an environment of trust and openness. If a group dynamics exposes a dysfunctional pattern of relationship, the individual will be recommended for referral. Let us now consider another psychodynamic factor that exerts influence on divorce, the Igbo family system theory.

IGBO FAMILY SYSTEM.

In discussing the Igbo family system, I am stating the fact that Igbo families function as a unit and have a lot of influences on marriage. Here we examine the role the family system plays during marriage and after divorce in supporting the victim.

According to Peter M Senge (1994); the family as a system is a concept 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" (p7). In the book Family Evaluation, Michael Kerr describes the family as a system in this way; "the

family is an emotional system, or an emotional unit. This means that family members are emotionally interdependent and function in reciprocal relationships with one another. Therefore, the functioning of one member cannot be completely understood if taken . . . out of the context of the functioning of the people closely involved with him" (Kerr, 1988, p. 37). A family system functions because it is a unit, and every family member plays a critical, if not unique, role in the system. As such, it is not possible that one member of the system can change without causing a ripple effect of change throughout the family system.

Thus a family is an organism, unique and acting as a unit with its particular sets of rules, language, celebration and symbols. Members of such family can communicate and understand each other symbolically as a unit. The nurturing children receive from their family according to the norms and culture of that family influences their moral, spiritual and psychological life. Many families practice an open type of system while others practice a very restricted system.

Among Igbo people (Ndi Igbo) the family is made up of the nuclear and extended family structure. The nuclear family comprises the husband, wife and children while the extended family system consists of people of common descent

originating from one ancestor "Umunna". Both form a great bond of unity and solidarity. People of common descent regard themselves as brothers and sisters umunna/umunne. There is a wide range of mutual consultation among nuclear and extended family members on important issues like divorce before it occurs. One cannot just take a unilateral decision in such matters. Umunna must know about it. The family system is such that umunna living in Diaspora must associate and help one another, show collective responsibility, solidarity and cooperation even for the development of their community afar home in Nigeria as in the welfare of their members here in the United States. The Igbo family system is such that if an active member of the family dies in any part of the world, his/her corpse must be transported back home to Nigeria for burial. If the deceased person had no savings for this purpose the 'umunna' must contribute and ensure that the corpse is transported and given descent burial Nigeria.

The Igbo family system includes both monogamy and polygamy.

Monogamy is a system where a man marries only one wife, while polygamy is the system that permits the man to marry more than one wife, provided he can take care of them. Polygamy is a mark of honor and a sign of wealth. According to

Aniworld Shorter (1978), "In Africa there is traditionally no place for single woman or even the single man" and it must be added no place for the divorced, especially the divorced women. Divorce is not encouraged partly because of the complicated extended family bonds that marriage creates and because of the fact that marriage is very expensive and takes a very rigorous process. An example of some materials and expenses which must be accumulated before a marriage can take place is shown in the list below. It represents thousands of dollars and products and is just an example of a typical average traditional marriage list in Igbo society; the list though may vary from village to village. All these must be provided by the bridegroom. for the parents and family of the bride.

MARRIAGE LIST IN SOCIETY.

SECTION ONE ,

IKUAKA N'UZO.(Bridegroom Knocking at the door)

1. 8 Kola nuts or cost price
2. 8 Gallons of palm wine or cash equivalent
3. 8 Heads of tobacco with potash
4. 1 Goat for umunna
5. 2 crates of minerals

6. 1 carton of maltina
7. 2 cartons of star beer
8. 1 carton of Guinness small stout
9. 8 packets of Benson and Hedges
10. 2 bottles of Ground snuff
11. Lump sum (ogwe ego) -----N2,000
12. 2 bottles of seaman's schnapps (Millennium Brand)

SECTION TWO.

IHE NGWA EFERE (GIFTS FOR THE MOTHER)

- A) 1. YAMS-----40 PIECES
2. Okporoko (stockfish) -----2
3. Ukwu anu ewu (goat leg) -----2
4. Morning rose powder-----24
5. Pomade-----20
6. Su,gar----- 10packets
7. Ovaltine-----2big size
8. Bar soap----- 1 carton
9. Tablet soap----- 1 carton
10. Tin milk ----- 1 carton

11. Bread-----24 loaves
12. Salt-----2 bags
13. Rice-----1bag
14. Tomatoes Tin-----1 carton
15. Red (palm) oil-----1 tin
16. Groundnut oil-----1 rubber
17. Kerosene-----1 tin
18. Maltina Drink-----2 cartons
19. Soft drink-----6 crates
20. Onions-----40 bulbs
21. Big basin-----2
22. Big umbrella-----2
23. Piece George-----2
24. Hollandis-----2
25. Blouse-----2
26. Head ties-----2
27. Wrist watch-----1
28. Shoes-----2pairs
29. Big Box-----1
30. Lamp-----1

31. Hand bag-----1

32. Nigerian wax-----1 piece

33. Gold necklace and ear-ring-----1 piece

B) 1. Ego maternity-----Maternity money.

2. Body cream; lux soap; big towel-----1 each

3. Ego ogo cherem, (Money for in-law) ---\$500

4. Yams-20; Eju (snails) -20; Okporoko (stockfish) -1; big tray-1

SECTION THREE.

MARRIAGE LIST FOR UMUADA (ALL KINDRED DAUGHTERS)

NMANYA UKWU NA NMAYA NTA (THE SMALL AND BIG WINE FOR BRIDES FAMILY)

1.16 Kola nuts or Cash equivalent

2.20 Gallons of palm wine or cash equivalent

3. 2 Crates of minerals

4. 2 Cartons of maltina

5. 2 cartons of Guinness small stout

6.10 cartons of star Beer

7. One roll of Benson and Hedges

8.12 Heads of Tobacco with potash

9. 4 Bottles of seaman's schnapps (millennium brand)

10. 4 Bottles of Ground Snuff

11. "Ego Ala Ezi" Money for mother land that protects her children.

12. Officers money

SECTION FOUR

OPENING OF GATE

1. 32 Kola nuts or cost price (CP)

2. 30 Gallons of palm wine or CP

3. 2 Crates of minerals

4. 2 cartons of maltina

5. 2 cartons of Guinness small stout

6. 10 crates of star beer

7. 2 rolls of Benson and Hedges

8. 32 Heads of tobacco with potash

9. 4 bottles of seaman's schnapps (millennium brand)

10. "Umunna Ahuna Ego" Money presented to Umunna

11. Toasting of wine (Ncha kishi udu)

12. 1 bottle of seaman's schnapps + \$50 for Onye Eze (village chief)

13. "Ego Umuama" Money for extended family/grand children

14. "Ogwe Ego" (Lump sum of money for the family)

15. "Ego mpatu Anya"(Jealousy money)

16. "Ikpo Onu Aku Nwanyi" (BRIDE PRICE) -----? (negotiable)

Bride price plays a very important role in Igbo social, legal and economic customs and marriage contracts. The bride wealth seals the two couples and also regulates the rate of divorce cases, if any. The bride price or dowry is paid also as a token of love to the family of the woman and to show that the man is capable of taking care of his wife. This bride price varies in some communities, sometimes a higher bride price is paid for women with higher education.

According to Uche Nworah; writing on the high cost of marriage in Igbo society, he says; "Many suitors and potential sons-in-law may end up marrying people's daughters with fake or stolen credit cards, a situation that may lead to the in-laws sending 'repo' men after them to repossess their daughters, as they would normally cars, houses and other items purchased on credit with default payments "

(Marriage in Igbo land p5)

This high cost of marriage currently affects many young eligible Igbo men in America and other parts of the world from marrying. The women are also

not spared because they will not leave their parents' homes until they are well into their late 20s and 30s. It may be pastorally appropriate for Igbo elders to re-evaluate some of Igbo customs and traditions considering, ways to encourage healthy and free decisions concerning entering into marriage. With the family sense of community spirit and decision making, the high bride price and the intolerance for divorce, Igbo divorce is rare. This will now explain the psychological and emotional struggle victims of divorce suffer in this community, whether in Nigeria or abroad. It is important to point out that after a serious scrutiny of a troubled marriage especially during the time of preparation for divorce, if the family members discover that their daughter is an innocent victim of abuse but is being victimized by the husband especially on the area of violent abuse, the umunna will support their daughter to separate from the man and support her reintegration into her parental home.

In order to overcome the post effect of divorce, priests should encourage the divorced couple to try and draw strength and support from umunna because it is difficult to be cut off from your root, while they encourage those rejected by their families to find solidarity and comfort in friends, organizations and associations to

get the support denied by their families.

I will encourage the group to study the family genogram which is a pictorial display of a person's relationship and medical history at least to the third generation, so as to know their history in areas of alcoholism, divorce, anxiety and abandonment etc. It will show hereditary patterns and psychological factors that punctuate relationship in their family line, which will help to forestall repetition compulsion and improve one's relationship with neighbors and objects around his or her environment

Some psychologists using clinical principles have expressed great opinion on how to help parents and children overcome the trauma and effects of divorce, Going through a divorce is perhaps one of the most stressful occurrences in a person's life next to death. A divorce is stressful for nearly everyone involved, from the spouses to the children, even if it is an "amicable" divorce, certain clinical practices can minimize the stress that comes with a divorce. A divorce can bring up many negative emotions and hard feelings among all parties involved. Some of these emotions cause us enough stress to interfere in our everyday lives and our

ability to function properly. Rather than engaging in destructive tendencies like alcoholism, drugs, regrets, guilt or other addictions, the individual should strive to be good to him/herself, while recognizing that dealing with stress is an important aspect in everyone's life. Here are a few suggested ways of handling the negative effects associated with divorce. The individual must learn to

Listen to his/her emotional needs and communicate –The individual needs to talk to somebody and express his or her feelings. Doctors and psychologists recommend talking to someone whenever you are starting to feel overwhelmed. It can go a long way to relieve emotional distress. An open discussion with family or friends or perhaps a support group or therapist is a step towards healing. Opening up channel of communication is very important. Learn not to repress or bottle up personal feeling.. According to Robert M Krauss “the ability to communicate is vital to a species survival...communication transmits messages from a source to destination” (The Psychology of Verbal Communicationp2}. Repression which “is an exclusion of impulse or feeling from consciousness” (Freud 2002p125) sometimes can be negative. I have seen some Igbo men and women who withdrew from public interaction because of divorce, some because of shame and the stigma the Igbo

society places on them, they therefore avoid any one from asking those questions concerning their divorce. Some withdraw because of the betrayal of trust from their ex spouse. Withdrawal is counterproductive to emotional healing, Therefore helping the person to maintain an open communication keep communication line with family and friends should be a pastoral priority..

Stay physically fit –An emotionally stressed or depressed person should stay as active as possible. There is nothing worse than sitting around moping. Keeping to a regular exercise routine has proven beneficial effects on the human person's emotional recovery. Physical activities relieve stress, anger and anxiety. The individual should strive to enhance to enhance his or her physical, emotional and mental health. Engaging in sporting exercises that relax the muscles is recommended. In fact physical exercise has been shown to be effective anti depressant.

Acknowledge the need to feel emotion-- It's ok to feel emotions. It's it is natural and healthy to feel emotion both negative and positive. Quality of life is largely determined by how a person handles such emotions. At the same time

activities which include anything to do with drinking or drugs when trying to deal with deeply injured feelings should be avoided according to prudence or taken minimally. The negative emotional state must be transcended and not permitted overwhelm or to lead to desires for revenge, the false comfort of play the victim, or becoming abusive.

Make time for fun things -- It is not healthy to be sad and depressed all the time. One needs to laugh and to play. Make plans to do things that make one happy and then regularly participating in them counter a depressed emotional state. The person healing from a divorce should develop a circle of friends and should socialize often. Never isolate yourself from others.

This will help you avoid loneliness and depression. At moments of depression according to Fr George Morelli, one should seek clinical intervention," effective clinical intervention must be used, first involving helping the patient recognize and label the cognitive distortions and themes, followed by helping the patient restructure the distortions. Three questions are helpful in challenging the patient's thinking so that restructuring can occur. Where is the evidence? Is there

any other way of looking at the situation? Is the situation as bad as it seems?"

(Overcoming Depression p5)

Take care of oneself both emotionally and physically -- Do things that are for you only. Take time out of your life to try activities that give you a feeling of good self-worth. Try reading a book, sleep in once in awhile, start taking long, hot baths, eat healthy and nutritious foods, and surround yourself with positive people.

Change ones' expectations – One is not going to be able to control someone else's actions or emotions. While you may have thought that during your marriage you had a little bit of control but now that there is a divorce in process you have even less control than before. You need to let go of trying to control what your spouse may feel. You need to learn to accept whatever might happen.

Let go and move on – One should take some time for oneself and use it to heal from one's divorce and all those feelings of loss. Most importantly, you need forgiveness. Forgive yourself and your spouse.

According to Barbara Leahy, "there is the need for *acceptance* of the divorce that had happened rather than living in *denial* as if the divorce never happened or

down playing its importance “by saying it could have been worse” (Healing wounds of divorce 2001 p19). I will discuss this in detail in our didactic in chapter three.

On the part of children psychologists offer opinions on how they can overcome the divorce of their parents. The loss that divorce poses for children will elicit strong emotions. How a child is helped to cope with these emotions can be an opportunity as well as a challenge. The child can learn emotional coping skills that will serve him or her well in future challenges. Rage, resentment and anger in all its subtle forms can be particularly hard to deal with when it's coming from your children. At some point, children are likely to express their anger with their divorced parents for destroying their sense of normalcy.

This is an appropriate response to their loss. Although it may seem difficult, one can help children through this by giving them opportunities to express their anger openly and without judgment. Divorced parents have the obligation to listen to their listen children, and not to react to their children's anger with displays of their own anger or by taking it personally. The child is grieving. According to John W James “grief is the conflicting feeling caused by a change or

an end in a familiar pattern of behavior” (When children grieve p7). There are other steps which psychological research has shown to help minimize the harmful effects of divorce on children, especially when parents make a concerted effort to keep the best interests of their children as their first priority. The following can help parents enhance their children’s ability to adjust to divorce according to *Kristi Tanner*;

Maintain a stable routine. Children feel more secure when there is consistency and predictability in their lives. Continue routines such as bedtime rituals, reading books together, and celebrating birthdays and holidays. Keep children in the same school and neighborhood where possible. And if possible also, keep the children in the same house or apartment, some studies have shown that the most upsetting thing for children is the loss of their family home.

Help children share and deal with their feelings. Children of divorcing parents experience a wide range of emotions, including fear, sadness, anger, guilt, rejection, and loneliness. Children will need time to mourn their lost family and adjust to new circumstances. Outbursts of anger, such as tantrums and shouting, are normal. Children can be encouraged to talk about their feelings by

acknowledging their feelings and empathizing with them. Offering solutions is not always necessary. Listening itself can be extremely effective. For very young children, talking about feelings is difficult. They might communicate more easily by drawing a picture. Children may prefer to talk to a third party such as a teacher, family friend, or another family member (aunt, grandmother, grandfather etc)

Reassure children that the divorce is not their fault. Many children believe they are the cause of their parents' divorce. Often they think that if they had behaved better or done better in school, Mom and Dad would still be together. A child of divorced parent need to be reassured that the divorce is not his or her fault. The decision to divorce is made by adults, not by children. Parents should never blame a child for a divorce. They should also be careful that family matters are not discussed within hearing of children. If a child overhears conversations, he or she can easily misinterpret what is said. When telling a child about divorce, and in all conversations thereafter, parents should choose words with sensitivity and care

Practice positive discipline. Positive and consistent discipline is essential for raising healthy children. The guilt that some divorced parents feel sometimes causes them to indulge their children, which can compound the harmful effects of divorce.

Children thrive under loving, positive discipline, so proper limits and guidance are necessary for them. Children need clarity regarding what behavior is acceptable, what is not acceptable, and what the consequences are for non-compliance.

Consistent imposition of consequences promotes emotional security as does recognizing good behavior and praising your children. Listen to your children and work together as you set limits and make compromises when you disagree.

Keep both parents involved. Shared parenting usually serves children best, as long as parents can negotiate and get along. Parents who are constantly in conflict, however, make shared parenting miserable for children. Whatever the living arrangement, each parent should encourage involvement of the other, working as a team to ensure that the need of each child is met. It is the obligation of divorcing parents to make sure that the effects of that decision cause the least hurt possible to their children. Each parent should keep the other informed about each child, and instruct schools to send information to both homes. Research indicates that non-residential fathers are more likely to continue both contact and child support when they feel they have their share of control over decision making.

Help children maintain positive relationships with both parents.--

Children want both their parents. When a child wants to spend time with the one parent, it is not a rejection of the other parent but a healthy desire to stay connected to both Mom and Dad. The child be encouraged to enjoy time with the other parent, and to talk freely about what they did, and their happiness when they had a good time. The child should be encouraged to acknowledge birthdays and special occasions for the other parent. If divorced parents mutually support the parenting of the other partner, it will be easier for both parents to have a good relationship with their children, which is most healthy for both the parents and their children.

Do not put the child in the middle—allow him to love both parents. The child wants to love both Mom and Dad. Do not put him/her in a situation where the child has to choose between you or your ex-spouse. Asking your child “Do you want to live with me or your daddy?” puts the child in a no-win situation, because by choosing one parent he is forced to reject the other.

Don't use your child as a go-between. Do not send messages to your ex-spouse through the child or ask your child for information about your ex-spouse. Keep adult communications direct between adults. Control your emotions and restrain yourself from saying negative things about the other parent in front of your child. If your child complains about his other parent, encourage him to talk directly with that parent.

Allow the child to be a child. Children need their parents to be the grownups. While some responsibility is great for children, they should not be expected to counsel, comfort, and make meals for the family, or be sounding board about important decisions. Take stock of the responsibilities that you have given your child, and make sure the tasks are appropriate. Parents are supposed to support their children, not the other way around. Do not burden the child with information that he or she is too young to handle, and do not depend on him/her as a peer. Rely on friends and family of your own age and maturity.

Spend time with your child. Spend one-on-one time with each child regularly. While time demands are tremendous for single parents, spending focused time with each child is invaluable to their growth and development. Be an "askable"

and approachable parent. Let the child know that he can always come to you with any concerns he/she may have. Tell the child often that he/she will continue to be loved and taken care of.

“If parents are committed to the well being of their child and minimize negative experience, children can lead happy, well adjusted lives”. (Helping children adjust to divorce; p1-2)

All these ideas priest and counselors should endeavor to practice, which I also inculcated into the Marian group so that parents can implement them in their families. This chapter has helped us to understand and use the religious and clinical principles examine the causes of divorces and how to overcome its effect on the part of parents and their children.

CHAPTER 3

THE METHOD OF CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT.

This chapter spells out the approach and procedure I am taking in executing my project that is the actual activities I am engaging in carrying out this project.

3.1. PREPARATION FOR DIVORCE FORUM (OR MARIAN FELLOWSHIP)

It is important to understand that I can use the word ‘divorce forum’ or ‘Marian fellowship’ interchangeably, both are indicative the same group. But I use the later in order not to stigmatize members because of our context and the sensibility of members and the entire church organization.

I started these sessions by first engaging in a special dialogue with my pastor whom I related my intention and sought his cooperation to use the facilities of the church for which he consented. I announced the encounter in the parish bulletin and visited other parishes, informing the pastors to encourage Igbo members of their churches to attend I also informed any person who is interested and can understand the background of the Igbo culture which is our focus and context. Some of the pastors’ cooperated, while some did not. I spoke at some of the Sunday masses in different parishes. I made some phone calls, sent out invitational letters, flyers and emails to pastors and would be participants. This encounter

lasted for six weeks.

Some of the themes we discussed in this encounter include, interpersonal relationship and communication, authority in family and daily life, personality difference/conflict resolution, co-parenting and a didactic on healing the wounds of divorce which includes; loneliness, depression, anger, forgiveness. We discussed a particular topic each week and the divorced couples were asked to share their experience as related to the topic. I made it clear to them that those who were finding it difficult and were resistant to share their experience in public could speak to me in private. We also watched film on divorce and reconciliation, after which people related their experiences. We had confessions in which people confessed their sins and weaknesses. We celebrated the Holy Mass or Eucharist in which people prayed for God's forgiveness, mercy, and blessing. Participants received the Holy Eucharist or communion at the mass which is a mark of love and unity. After the mass we held a big reception in which members cooked and brought our traditional food from their homes and everybody ate and drank.

Finally we exchanged addresses and emails of members in which we encouraged personal and collective visits to each other's homes. In fact some people suggested that the meetings should be held periodically and rotated in willing members homes, so as to know

and appreciate each other better.

3.1.2. GROUP PROCESS.

While definitions vary considerably, group process generally refers to “what happens in the group, particularly in terms of the development and evolution of patterns of relationships between and amongst group participants” (Beck & Lewis, 2000; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These processes occur at both observable and inferred levels. Observable processes consist of verbal (e.g. speech content; expressed affects) and nonverbal behaviors that have been conceptualized, operationalized and assessed from fine-grained to very abstract levels of analysis. Inferred or covert group processes refer to conscious and unconscious intentions, motivations, wishes, and needs enacted by individual participants, dyads, subgroups or the group-as-a-whole. Group process can improve interpersonal interaction and can enhance the individual learning about self in relation to others.

Group process is important to this project because it is the interaction of people learning to appreciate each other in guided conversation with a facilitator. The use of group process here helped the victims to re-evaluate what happened to them, the reasons why it happened and to appreciate the fact that even if they contributed in any way towards the breakup of their marriage, there is still a brighter future to look to look forward to. In this

process the victims were given the opportunity to work on some of the unfinished issues of their childhood experience as we explored in the psychodynamic principles and make the necessary adjustment. It offered them the opportunity to seek for new ways of living a healthy normal human life rather than living in regrets, alcoholism, quilt and drug addiction.

My goal in this group process was to help improve the victims self image through self discovery, ability to identify and express feelings, improve communication and decision making skill and to own up to responsibilities. They should step out and take active participation in the churches activities and life in general.

What I realized was that from the feedback I got, the group experimented with different ways of coping with their situation, with their improved self esteem; they decided to make a difference in their future relations.

3.1.3. SESSION ONE. Saturday (October 18th 2008)

Introduction of the forum

I used this first session for welcoming and explaining the reason for organizing this forum and sessions. There were fifteen members at the first session. This session started with

an opening prayer, and bible reading, followed by introduction of members and welcome address. In the bible reading, I chose a very important portion of the bible that portrays the love and mercy of God. I read from the Prophet Isaiah, *“The spirit of the Lord is on upon me, to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord”* (Isaiah 61;1-2). I reminded them that the lord wants to free them from the burden and grief of divorce to live life in abundance, because “He came that we may have life and have it in abundance (Jn 10;10)

I now gave each of them opportunity to introduce himself/herself, their backgrounds, family and work experience, where they live and their parish. I asked them to state their reasons for coming and what they expect to gain from this encounter and forum. Some narrated the ugly experience of their marriage and how it broke down. Some narrated their pain and woundedness in their broken relationship. Some narrated their post divorce experience of loneliness, unforgiveness, anxiety, depression and deep anger and hatred. Some also continued blaming themselves with some sense of guilt. Some wanted peace in their soul and spirit of forgiveness and healthy interaction. I reminded them that my purpose is to create the avenue for them to share their feelings, thoughts, concerns in an atmosphere

of mutual trust and confidence. This will help free them from their past to live a healthy normal life.

I pointed out that confidentiality will make the group successful. Everything discussed within the group should remain within the group and should not be discussed outside. I emphasized the fact that we needed mutual respect, trust and the ability to listen to each other without interruption. We must not be afraid to explore new ideas. Moreover we should not hesitate to open up and express our feelings. I appealed on the need to be regular and punctual as a mark of respect for the group.

After this, members asked questions and sort clarifications on how long each session would take, if they had some financial commitment to make and if they could come with their children. I responded by telling them that we shall have six sessions of three hours and one Sunday for closing activities, no financial obligation is expected except if they want to organize any event outside the Church or take any initiative on their own that involves some spending. They are free to come with their children, since we have a crying room where they can take their children when they cry. I mentioned that if there is any day that we might discuss some issues that they wouldn't want their children present they should let me know, and if I notice any situation I too will communicate to them.

We then ended the session with prayer asking God to guide our deliberation and make it a source of renewal in our life.

3.1.4. SECOND SESSION- Saturday, (October 25th 2008)

Importance of communication.

The second session started with singing of a hymn and little meditation in the form of yoga. I had an assessment of previous session. They expressed satisfaction on its organization, especially the respect for time. I realized from the sign on sheet that we had additional twenty people. This addition was recorded due to additional announcement of the forum and the effort of those who attended the first session, enjoyed it and disseminated information about it. I noticed from my research and interactions that part of the reasons for the breaking up of the marriages, was lack of communication. I therefore thought it wise to deliberate on this topic, so that the divorced couples can engage in healthy communication in future relationship. I allowed them to narrate their experiences and express their views on communication in marriage.

One of the women told the group how her husband never engaged in conversation with her even when she initiated one. She says the husband does things without consulting

or even informing her. When I even tried to inquire as a mark of concern and love, he asked me “what will I do if he tells me?” He was a workaholic, but I don’t even see or know what he did with his money. In the house he would read novels or watch films alone. He had no time for me and I had no body to share my story with. I was treated worse than an uninvited visitor in that house. I wanted to go back to Nigeria but my parents and relations refused. She summed up her story by saying “we lived in the same house but not the same home” This woman really suffered psychological breakdown caused by loneliness and lack of communication. She decided to withdraw and live a private life according to her story.

Another man narrated a story about his wife, who never liked him and doesn’t like talking to him. Some time when I try to open up discussion she will tell me that I talk too much. She had no sense of humor and was repulsed when I would show some signs of love and affection. But what I did not understand was why she always felt happy talking to people on phone. I observed that there was a particular person she speaks to most of the time but their words were always coded. Listening to their discussion, I could not tell whether the person is a man or woman. I would only be hearing yes, is that so? ok, waw, good, when did it happen? She will be happy and smiling. All efforts I made to understand whom the person was proved abortive. Yet she cannot talk to me in such a happy mood. I loved her but I think

she did not love me, I wish her well and hope she will be happier where she is.

Another woman told a story of how her own friend told her husband and herself bad stories about each other which eventually led to their separation. She ended up marrying my husband. Latter friends revealed to me that she was at the centre of our divorce. I regretted not telling my husband all she said about him. But I have a conviction that anything built on falsehood will never last, that marriage will never last. Today I cannot trust anyone and cannot open up to anybody because of my experience. She will need to go for therapy to overcome this.

Later a little play was staged to dramatize her story in which a woman gossiped between a non communicating couple which eventually destroyed their marriage, making the woman a beneficiary of the broken relationship since she eventually got married to the man. Almost every one there agreed that they once had such experience in different ways and the need for communication.

Having listened to all these stories and the drama, I thought it wise therefore to discuss skills and importance of communication, not just in marriage but life in general, because communicating clearly and concisely both internally and externally is very vital as we saw

in the stories above.

I reminded them that the function of communication is to ensure that every member of the household or organization knows what is expected. Good communication is critical in ensuring transparency, coordination and control of individuals, groups and departments and encourages cohesiveness thereby reducing stress. Many problems such as bias, misunderstanding and distortion are often the result of poor communication.

Communication barriers have to be identified and eliminated. I therefore taught them some tips for effective communication and asked them to apply it to themselves and see if they have been using it in the past or not. Some of the tips are,

Stay focused on the present issues being discussed, understand one another and find solution.

Listen carefully. People often *think* they're listening, but are really thinking about what they're going to say next when the other person stops talking. Listen and don't interrupt.

Try to see your partner's point of view. We want to feel heard and understood while neglecting the other person's point of view. Try to really see the other side, and then you can

better explain yours.

Respond to criticism with openness and look for what's true in what your critic is saying; that can be valuable information for you.

Admit when you're wrong. It diffuses tension, sets good example, and shows maturity. It also inspires the other person to respond kindly, leading to mutual understanding and a solution.

Look for compromise and solution instead of only trying to 'win' the argument, look for solutions. Healthy communication involves finding a resolution that both sides can be happy with.

Take a time-out. Sometimes tempers get heated and it's just too difficult to continue a discussion without it becoming an argument or a fight, take a break from the discussion until you both cool off. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.

Don't give up. While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea,

always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a constructive attitude, and mutual respect, you can make progress toward the goal of a resolution to the conflict. Unless it's time to give up on the relationship, don't give up on communication.

Ask for help if you need it. If you've tried resolving conflict with your partner on your own and the situation just doesn't seem to be improving, you might benefit from few sessions with a therapist. Couples counseling or family therapy can provide help with altercations and teach skills to resolve future conflict. If your partner doesn't want to go, you can still benefit from going alone.

I later asked them to reflect in their past and see if the above ingredients were present in their relationship with their spouses. I went further to inquire about the goals and focus of their discussion with their former spouses. Was the goal to connected to each other, have their feelings and thoughts heard and respected, learn new things, discuss problems and explore solutions, reach an understanding of one another? Or did their goal lacked direction. Some members smiled in admiration, while some wore heavy faces as admittance of their weakness which may have caused the break up. One woman interjected and said we did not do all these, we kept on quarreling. I responded that it never too late, start now in

your new relationship. The session ended with one of the couples leading in prayers.

3.1.5. THIRD SESSION, Saturday (November 1st 2008)

Communication workshop and self assessment exercise.

In the course of the week, I got emails from members and telephone calls demanding that we should continue discussion on communication because of its importance. I thought I discussed it in detail, but I realized that there are still other areas to be harnessed. I therefore thought it wise at this third session to organize a little workshop on “Interpersonal Communication Skills. Self-Assessment Exercise”. After welcoming members, I started by saying that in today's team-oriented workshop, the development of good interpersonal communication skills is an important key to success. The following self-assessment exercise is designed to help you evaluate your own interpersonal communication skills and style, and provide you with helpful tips for becoming a good communicator – and team player!

Communication Skills Self-Assessment Exercise

In each of the following, read items A, B, and C, then mark the one that best describes your communication style. (23 total). (*Note; The copy printed here is the one with answers but members were given the copies without answers*)

1. ___ A. When conversing with others, I usually do most of the talking.

- ___ B. When conversing with others, I usually let the other person do most of the talking.
- ___ C. When conversing with others, I try to equalize my participation in the conversation.

Best answer: c. Conversations should be a balanced two-way flow of dialogue.

2. ___ A. When I first meet someone, I wait for the other person to make the introduction first.
- ___ B. When I first meet someone, I introduce myself with a smile and offer a handshake.
- ___ C. When I first meet someone, I hug the person.

Best answer: b.. If shaking hands is difficult, a quick head nod is a good substitute. It helps build rapport.

3. ___ A. I usually "warm-up" new conversations with small talk.
- ___ B. I usually avoid small talk and jump into more important matters.
- ___ C. I usually avoid starting conversations.

Best answer: a. It's good to initiate conversations with small talk. Topics like the weather, news of interest, or impressions about the current activity (if you're at a meeting staff party, or other gathering, for example). Examples of conversation starters might be "its sure warm today, isn't it?" "Did you hear about the big accident on the freeway? Traffic's backed-up for miles." "What did you think about the Blazers game last night?" "This is a nice party, isn't it?" "Could I get you something to drink?"

4. ___ A. I make an effort to remember and use peoples' names.
- ___ B. I don't pay attention to names as I tend to forget them.
- ___ C. I only learn the names of important people.

Best answer: a. It's good to call people by name whenever possible. It makes a good, lasting impression, and it makes the other person feel important and special.

5. ___ A. I frequently use courtesy words and phrases - "Please," "Thank you,"

"You're welcome," "I'm sorry."

- ☐ B. I occasionally use these courtesy words and phrases.
- ☐ C. I never use these courtesy words and phrases.

Best answer: a. Regular use of these courtesy words and phrases is important to show politeness and build rapport.

6. ☐ A. I tend to be serious and don't smile often while conversing.
- ☐ B. I smile all the time while conversing.
- ☐ C. I smile at appropriate times while conversing.

Best answer: c. Smiling when greeting people and at appropriate times greatly helps build rapport.

7. ☐ A. I make eye contact while conversing.
- ☐ B. I sometimes make eye contact while conversing.
- ☐ C. I never make eye contact while conversing.

Best answer: a. Making eye contact is important for building rapport. It gives the impression you're interested and engaged in the conversation, and you have good self-confidence. .

8. ☐ A. While conversing, I hold my head still at all times.
- ☐ B. While conversing, I nod my head at appropriate times.
- ☐ C. While conversing, I nod my head constantly.

Best answer: b. Occasionally nodding your head to indicate you agree or understand helps build rapport. Again, it shows you are interested and engaged in the conversation.

9. ☐ A. While conversing, I stand one-foot away from the person.
- ☐ B. While conversing, I stand two- to three-feet away from the person.
- ☐ C. While conversing, I stand five- to six-feet away from the person.

Best answer: b. Your arm's length is the appropriate distance (between two- to three-feet). Standing closer than arm-length makes the other person

feel uncomfortable (or feel threatened). Standing a further distance away breaks rapport.

10. ____ A. I often stand while talking to a person who is sitting.
____ B. I often sit while talking to a person who is sitting.
____ C. I often lean down while talking to a person who is sitting.

Best answer: b. Communicating at eye level helps build rapport. .

11. ____ A. To end a conversation, I often just leave.
____ B. To end a conversation, I begin to look impatient hoping the person will get the hint.
____ C. To end a conversation, I wrap up with a closing statement.

Best answer: c. It's best to bring the conversation to an end by making a polite closing comment or gesture. Good closing (wrap-up) comments might be:

"I've enjoyed talking with you."

"Let me give you my business card."

"Well, I need to go speak with...."

"Do you know a person I can contact?"

12. ____ A. If a co-worker has put on weight, I say nothing about it.
____ B. If a co-worker has put on weight, I tell the person that he or she has changed in appearance.
____ C. If a co-worker has put on weight, I honestly tell the person that he or she looks fat.

Best answer: a. It's best to say nothing. Never say anything that might hurt or offend the person. It's called being tactful. It's always best to give compliments only, and only say things that will make the person feel good.

"I like your dress."

"That's a nice shirt."

13. ____ A. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often cross my arms over my chest.
____ B. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often lean back and turn my body away from the speaker.
____ C. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often lean slightly forward and face my body toward the speaker.

Best answer: c. Leaning slightly forward and facing the speaker shows you're interested, and it helps build rapport. Sitting with your arms crossed over your chest gives the message you are defensive. Leaning back with your body or turning your body away from the speaker gives the message that you are bored, disinterested, or feel in charge. Such body language breaks down rapport.

14. ____ A. When I cross my leg, I cross my leg facing the speaker.
____ B. When I cross my leg, I cross my leg away from the speaker.
____ C. When I cross my leg, I bob my foot.

Best answer: a. Crossing your leg toward the speaker shows you're interested, and it builds rapport. Crossing your leg away from the speaker gives the message that you are defensive, disinterested, or feel in charge. In essence, you are putting up a subtle barrier. And if you bob or swing your foot, you're sending the message that you're anxious or nervous!

15. ____ A. While listening, I tend to be distracted by things going on around me.
____ B. While listening, I listen for meaning and ask questions.
____ C. While listening, I watch the person speak, but I don't "hear" a word.

Best answer: b. If you're a good listener, you keep mentally busy searching for for meaning in the message, and you ask questions. This mental "search for meaning" helps keep you focused, attentive, and engaged.

16. ____ A. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I don't comment about it.
____ B. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I try to change the subject.
____ C. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I try to

relate to the person's feelings and show sensitivity to his or her misfortune.

Best answer: c. Showing empathy (sensitivity) to another person's feelings helps build rapport. It's called "reaching out to people." Empathy can be shown by making comments, such as "I can imagine how you feel.", "I would feel that way too in your situation."

17. ____ A. When I discuss a topic, I tend to talk about and focus on positive (good) aspects.
____ B. When I discuss a topic, I tend to talk about and focus on the negative (bad) aspects.
____ C. When I discuss a topic, I tend to complain.

Best answer: a. Focusing on the positive (good) aspects draws people's attention in a favorable way, and people enjoy the conversation more.

18. ____ A. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I just say it.
____ B. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I lead in with a positive comment first.
____ C. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I say nothing.

Best answer: b. It's best to say something positive first, and then express a negative opinion or comment in a tactful way.

19. ____ A. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I note where I need to improve.
____ B. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I get angry and defensive.
____ C. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I deny the problem, make excuses, or plead ignorance.

Best answer: a. When you receive feedback, it's important to know what you do well, but it's equally important to know where improvements can be made to increase your chances for success. Few people do everything well, and you've undoubtedly heard the saying – "No one is perfect." Simply make note of "weak" areas (we all have them!) and make changes needed. Receiving honest feedback is truly "a gift." It usually means someone cares and wishes

to see you succeed.

20. ___ A. When I give a person negative feedback, I focus on the person's observable work or behavior and offer suggestions.
- ___ B. When I give a person negative feedback, I focus on what I don't like about the person.
- ___ C. When I give a person negative feedback, I simply tell the person what to do right.

Best answer: a. When you give negative feedback, you should focus on and communicate your observations of the person's work or behavior, not focus on nor judge the person. Focus on performance, not personality (or personal traits).

21. ___ A. When I give a person negative feedback, I do it around others so everyone can hear.
- ___ B. When I give a person negative feedback, I do it in front of the supervisor.
- ___ C. When I give a person negative feedback, I talk with the person alone in a private place.

Best answer: c. It's always best to meet the person privately and away from other people so others can't hear.

22. ___ A. When I disagree with a person, I listen first; ask questions for clarification, then disagree non-judgmentally.
- ___ B. When I disagree with a person, I quickly point out the person is wrong and why.
- ___ C. When I disagree with a person, I say little or nothing.

Best answer: a. It's fine to disagree, but it's important to **disagree agreeably**. This means you should.

- 1) show respect for the other person's ideas,
- 2) listen attentively until the person is done,
- 3) ask questions if needed,
- 4) disagree non-judgmentally, and, if possible,

5) offer an alternative solution.

23. ____ A. When I'm in a group, I tend to frown a lot.
____ B. When I'm in a group, I tend to smile and use humor at appropriate times.
____ C. When I'm in a group I tend to be serious.

Best answer: b. At appropriate times, it's always good to smile. And when used at appropriate times and in appropriate ways, humor is beneficial for group dynamics. Humor helps "break the ice" when people first meet. Humor helps relieve stress and tension. A humorous observation and comment helps lower the heat when a heated discussion gets too "hot." And most importantly, humor helps build team cohesiveness.

After filling out the questions I brought out the copy with the answers which is the one printed here. We discussed the questions and everybody made contribution. I will discuss its analysis in assessment of outcome; We ended with a song "What a friend we have in Jesus".

Sixty people were in attendance.

3.1.6. FOURTH SESSION; Saturday, (November 8th 2008).

Authority in the family and daily life.

The fourth session was a bit delayed because of rain that particular day. Not so many people attended. Instead of the fifty two people expected only thirty attended. The theme that day is on authority. What is authority like in the family or in your place of work?

If I may ask who is the head of the family if any? Immediately I introduced this topic, most of the men in the group started smiling. I enquired about the laughter and one man responded, "Father please speak; don't mind us". I probed further to explore the meaning of that laughter, then one of the men made some sound as if he coughed, just to clear his throat. He asked me, "are you asking about authority in the family here in America or in Nigeria? I responded by saying that "your family is your family everywhere, whether in Nigeria or in America, you are the same people and the same couple" but the man disagreed and said emphatically NO!. Another man said "if it is the same, many of us will not be in this situation now".

One woman in the group sighed and said is there no divorce in Nigeria? The same attitude our men have that is causing divorce in Nigeria is the same reason for it here. Another member responded by saying, if you say there is divorce in Nigeria what is the percentage? In fact divorce is not up to five percent compared to what I am seeing here in the US. When our women come here they open their eyes as if they were in darkness before and they loose respect for everybody including their own parents, father in-laws and mother in-laws. They no longer listen to advise from their parents or our elders but do what they

like in the name of being in America, civilization and "seeing the light". This is most common especially among the so called nurses in their midst. I immediately interjected and cautioned them to be careful in their use of language. I did not like the word "so called" attributed to the nurses. The man immediately apologized and said he was just letting out what was in his mind. I allowed some minutes of silence for us to recollect ourselves and calm frayed nerves. One man with great sense of humor brought in what I called a comic relief. He said "what we are saying here is that the white man's society and culture has put a knife in the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. Things fall apart the centre cannot hold" (Achebe p162). I am saying that things are no longer at ease. He was referring to the words of the great Igbo scholar and author Chinua Achebe in his books "Things Fall Apart" and "No Longer At Ease".

I tried to help them understand that where there is love authority does not count so much, but another man who used to be a lawyer in Nigeria but presently teaching in college here asked, what is love? Does love mean that a man should look stupid before his wife? Does love mean that a man should give up his right as the head of the family? Does love mean that a man should not know what is coming in and going out of the pocket of the

family (referring to the woman's income)? I ask, does love mean that a woman should neither respect the husband nor members of his family. (I immediately remembered the Igbo concept of 'Ifunanya' (love) in which love is not a private affair but a communal one. You cannot claim to love a man without loving members of his family. Finally the man with sense of humor asked "must a man be a moron for a woman to know that he loves her?"

I reminded them that genuine love does not recognize head or tail in the family but understands and believes in mutual respect. I cited the reading of St Paul in 1Corinthians chapter 13 on the qualities of love; love is kind, love is patient, love does not count wrong. I helped them to understand that though the bible places the man over the woman, the emphasis is not on lordship but on service, mutuality and respect because of our common dignity as human persons, created in the image and likeness of God. After all leadership in Christianity is for service. Christ himself gave us an example to follow when he said "the Son of man (Himself) came not to be served but to serve and give his life as ransom for many". The leader must therefore be your servant. Hence in the family and in Christian set up even in the civil society, we should not emphasize authority and leadership but service. Anyone can cook in the family and any one can wash dishes or even take care of the children. Some

of the women were nodding their head in agreement while some of the men were uncomfortable. I went further to say that I am saying this for the future; we may not know where we may find ourselves. Let there be mutual respect for everyone both in our families, environment and working places.

As I was still speaking a man angrily asked "How can a woman not respect the husband because we are in America? I wouldn't blame women because American laws have given them power to chase away the man of the house and take possession. Look at me, a house that I saved for a long time to buy, a woman who never knew how I made the money is taking possession with her children and I am thrown out. Any way I made the initial mistake of bringing her to America. His temper was rising and we had to calm him down with some members saying is okay, is okay.

Another man spoke explicitly on family finances. He said he is happy that I am an Igbo man, so I should understand better. He went further to say that in Igbo culture the man controls the finance of the house. When a woman receives her salary she gives it to the husband to keep and if she needs anything she will discuss with the husband and the money will be made available. But what are we seeing here in America, is that a woman living

with you in the same house cannot tell you how much she is earning; talk less of giving the money to you. All the years I lived with my ex-wife I never knew how much she earned as a registered nurse and what she did with her money. In fact America is a different place. I now advised him and the group not to blame America. "The fault is not in our stars but in us". It depends on individuals and what they want to make out of their marriage; some couples have successful marriages here while others have failed marriages.

Some of the women narrated their own experiences and how they suffered to the point of being treated as slaves by their so called husband. One of the women told the group that as soon as she qualified as a registered nurse, the husband resigned from his work and started depending on her money. He demanded for a new car and she bought the car for him, but when he heard that she sent five hundred dollars to her mother in Nigeria, he became indignant. He was terribly annoyed to the point that he decided not to eat in the house for three days. When she enquired the reason for his annoyance, he said the wife sent money to her mother without informing him, since he is the man of the house and her husband. The woman explained that she did not see anything wrong in that, since she was solely trained by her mother. She however apologized for not informing him but not on the

ground of not taking permission from him. The man refused to accept the apology, but after sometimes said he will accept the apology only on condition that she should be paying all her money into a common account in which both of them will be signatories, though as the head of the family he can sign out money alone. This quarrel continued until we divorced. Meanwhile since after our divorce he has never cared to see his children, but I will take care of my children, Her assurance of taking care of her children is predicated on the fact that the African woman believes "that the joy of a mother is the joy of giving all to her children" (The Joys of Motherhood p224).

I reminded all present that abuse in any form whether in Nigeria or in American should not be condoned, either on the part of the man or woman. What I saw in some of these cases were clear cases of abuse, hence everything still boils down to mutual respect, love and understanding. In their future relationship and even in their place of work, there is need to deemphasize authority and emphasis love and service. Above all humility can help us discuss and overcome our differences. Moreover I pointed out the need to acculturate the rich positive American values with positive African values. While the positive values are to be integrated the negative values must be discarded.

3.1.7.SESSION FIVE; Saturday, (November 15th 2008)

Personality differences and conflict resolution.

The fifth week recorded seventy people in attendance. We discussed personality difference and conflict resolution. We also dealt briefly on the importance of healthy co-parenting.

A) Personality Differences.

I reminded them that though we all are human, each person is unique with different, biological, family and cultural background. What bound them together in marriage was love and not even blood or gene. Hence the coming together of two different people needs love, patience understanding, tolerance and respect. I mentioned that some people are introverts and some are extrovert. What happens in a situation where the man is an extrovert and the woman an introvert or vice versa? Even in our places of work, we have different people with different genetic makeup and character traits, the question then is, how we relate to them without expecting them to behave exactly like ourselves. Thus with ideas I derived from the APA Dictionary Psychology and the views of other

psychologist, I summarized the idea that some people have different personality disorders like;

Paranoid – People who are always suspicious of others, and who often become irritable and hostile.

Schizoid – People who are not usually interested in social relationships and behave oddly or in ways that keep them isolated and separated from others

Schizotypal – People who have strange, unusual, or inappropriate behaviors or beliefs that lead to having conflicts with other people including caregivers.

Antisocial behavior– People who shows little regard or respect for standard rules and laws of society, often do not seem to have a conscience or care about others

Borderline behavior– People with unstable emotions that lead to unstable relationships

Histrionic behavior? People who are over emotional and want to be the center of attention, often disorganized and lack inhibitions

Narcissistic behavior– People who think they should have and are entitled to whatever they

want, often act superior, self-important and arrogant, seem to not care about others.

Avoidant behavior– Shy, inhibited and very sensitive to rejection and how others look at them

Dependent behavior– People who rely completely or almost completely on others to make decisions

Obsessive–compulsive behavior—People who are constantly worried about cleanliness and keeping everything in order, perfectionists that do not want to compromise especially when under stress

Passive–aggressive behavior-- People who tend to resist authority or any demands placed on them by not taking any action or procrastinating. They often criticize and resent others.

Depressive behavior. People, who view life as always gloomy and miserable with no hope of change in the future, often have low self-esteem and feel guilty.

I informed them that I am pointing out these different kinds of personality so that they can see where they and their ex partner falls. An awareness of this will help in conflict

resolution and future relationship. They were so excited knowing about this, one of the women said "I think my ex was mad". He had a combination of all you said which made the entire group laugh. I laughed also but added, that the most important thing now is not our exes but looking inwardly within ourselves. At this juncture somebody reminded me that time is up and we ended with a short prayer.

B) CO-PARENTING.

What is co-parenting? According to Jeanne Segal (2009), Co-parenting means "sharing parenting responsibilities with someone living in a separate household, which might include ones ex spouse". (Co-parenting after divorce).

The benefits of an amicable co-parenting relationship for your children is that it helps children to adapt better to the divorce, and are less likely to have long term negative effects of the divorce . They feel sense of security and that they are more important than the conflict that ended the marriage.

Recipes for success at co-parenting

- Be respectful toward the other parent. don't express critical or hostile feelings about the

other parent to the children

- Resolve conflicts with the other parent privately, not with the children present

- Discuss major issues as adults and arrive at some agreement or mutual understanding before discussing with the children

- Don't make a child your confidant – you need family, friends or a therapist for that role

- Don't make a child a messenger between you and the other parent

- Assure your child that you will always listen to their feelings and meet their needs in this situation just as you would in other difficult family situations. Assure the children that you both will continue to love them and be a part of their lives

- Tell them that the divorce or separation is not their fault

- Tell them they will not have to take sides and are not expected to choose one parent over the other

- Acknowledge that their feelings of hurt, anger, guilt or fear are part of the process, and

that it's OK to talk about these feelings.

- Let them know the extent that you expect to provide continuity in their lives (for example, if they are going to stay in the same school, or the same neighborhood, or continue to visit grandma on Saturdays).

- Assure them that they will be provided for, though there may be some financial hardships having two households to support instead of one.

In this circumstance Pope John Paul 11 said, "the rights of the child may be summarized in its right to be loved and the community cannot pretend to defend, protect and support the child's development, if its initiatives are not based on a renewed awareness of the duty to love the child".(His Essential, Address in Rome 1993 p29)

Major areas for co-parents to plan for.

Custody or visitation schedule

Education

Finances

Children's medical needs or concerns

Discipline and household rules

Holidays and special events

Tips for discipline and household rules

Strong differences in child rearing styles often contribute to marital problems, and after a separation or divorce these unsolved problems will need to be addressed on some level. Co-parents should discuss these issues to find areas of agreement and to come to terms with areas where they agree to disagree. Some basics.

Aim for some consistency in schedule such as meal times, when homework is done, and bedtimes .If a child has been disciplined in one household (as in no TV for a week), attempt to understand the other parent's decision and honor it if possible . Where the rules are different from one home to the other, acknowledge those differences and make sure the rules in each household are clear to the kids.

(Most of my resource came from Jeanne Segal, article; 'Co-parenting after separation or divorce', and Diana Shulman's book 'Co-Parenting After Divorce. How to Raise Happy, Healthy Children in Two-Home Families')

3.1.8. SESSION SIX—Saturday, (Nov 22nd 2008).

Didactic on Healing the wounds of divorce.

In this particular encounter over 75 attendances were recorded. We started with a short song and a brief quiet moment.

SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD FALL AFRESH ON ME

SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD FALL AFRESH ON ME.

MAKE ME; MOLD ME, USE ME---

SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD FALL AFRESH ON ME.

This song is line with our theme “healing the wounds of divorce”. In this song we prayed that God should pour His spirit afresh in us and renew us to have a new life. Some times as a result of human weakness, we may have the will and resolution to do well but lack in the ability, so we need God’s grace to guide us as believers in God. After the song, we had a role call. The members expressed their satisfactions with the manner in which past sessions were conducted. I asked if there were other thing they would like to see added or any other recommendation for the group and they responded that we should continue with the status quo. As I announced that our topic for our didactic today is “healing the wounds of divorce”. One of the women said she was happy when she saw in the curriculum the topic for today. She said that she needed the ‘healing’

more than everybody because she was highly devastated from her experience in the hands of her ex husband especially for physically abusing her. I empathized with her while pointing out that all we have been doing in the group process was aimed at healing the wounds of divorce and living a healthy life style in the society. I started by telling them that;

Generally some authors and psychologists have expressed great opinion on how to help couples overcome the trauma and effects of divorce, in the areas of denial, loneliness, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, forgiveness and general grieving. One of such writers is BARBARA LEAHY (2001) in her book "Healing the wounds of divorce". I intend giving this didactic in a form of a summary of her work, because I find it very useful in helping couples overcome the effect of divorce.. Among the issues she raised here include;

Denial. In the opinion of Harville Hendrix, "to some degree we all use denial as a coping tool. Whenever life presents us a difficult or painful situation, we have a tendency to want to ignore reality and create a more palatable fantasy. (Getting the Love You Want. P56). Barbara L, defines it as "pretending the divorce never happened or downplaying its importance. While "denial" sounds bad, it's much like physical shock after an accident. The body shuts down until it can better deal with the pain. At this stage, the person is incapable

of perceiving reality and reality is distorted"(p1-2), one may need individual counseling with a minister or a professional counselor. Counseling can help you come to terms with the pain step-by-step as the initial shock of the divorce wears off.

Anger. Involves perceived or real injustice about the divorce; it can either be controlled, burn or out-of-control rage. Once you pass the initial pain, being angry about your situation or at others involved is normal. It may even be justified (was the ex-spouse abusive or did he or she cheat?). One needs to control his/her anger and channel it toward healing.

Rejection in which friends and relations abandon the individual, associated with broken relationship is a devastating component of divorce trauma. An assessment of not being wanted, a belief that one is no longer desirable, a blow to self esteem, all contribute to the rejection response. This is because the human heart was created for connectedness as is so beautifully demonstrated by the verses of the song of songs Come then my love, my lovely one, come. For see winter is past the rains are over and gone....Show me your face, let me hear your voice for your voice is sweet and your face beautiful (Songs 2; 10-11, 14)* p23-24. She says a system of self affirmation, finding a divorce recovery group or making a healing retreat like ours can provide a milieu for facing the pain of rejection. You can also

ask people for their opinion about you and you may experience a pleasant surprise at how highly you are regarded, that helps to build one's self esteem. One should also not feel emotionally or spiritually rejected by God because of divorce. We should remember the Lords promise that even if a mother forgets her baby I the Lord your God will never forget you (Is 49;15) (p26).

Fear is "an intense emotion aroused by the detection of an imminent threat. It is different from anxiety because it has an object". (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Barbara L. recounts her experience of fear in her divorce. "Feeling of fear crept over me like a suffocating blanket. I could be walking in the mall, driving down the high way or talking with a friend and suddenly become gripped with terrifying anxiety. The palms of my hands will begin to sweat, my heart would race, and my chest felt tight and became light headed" (p29). In the light of the above she suggests we should dialogue with our feelings and ask "what are you afraid of, verbalize the fear, make a distinction between valid and invalid fears and address them one at a time choosing the most important area of concern. Learn to turn off your panic attacks by doing something constructive to prove that you are not totally powerless over everything in your life"(p32-33). The greatest threat is the fear of fear. Try and see a counselor and call upon the Lord in prayer, sometimes take a quiet moment.

Bargaining simply means a desperate attempt on the part of one of the couple to gain back the other spouse at all cost through, a makeover, promises to never offend the other again, or by organizing a vacation, etc.). At this stage, you might benefit from a support group. Check out local churches to find one near you. People who have been there, can remind you in a supportive way, that it's probably too late for quick fixes at this point. They'll help you realize that bargaining will likely set you up for a fall when reconciliation doesn't work out.

Depression which is “a subjective state of disintegration and a tendency to develop panic when left alone”, (Yalom. I, p41) commonly display itself in physical ways (sleep disturbances, changed eating patterns, irritability, exhaustion, etc.). It is a normal part of divorce to grieve the loss of one’s marriage. At this stage, you might want to find an accountability partner — of the same gender — who will listen. You're looking for someone who won't say, “Snap out of it!” but who'll encourage, “Just get through this day or this week, and I'll be here for you.” This might be an established friend or it might be someone new you meet through your support group.

Acceptance involves recognizing that the past is past; and that it is time to live in the present, and perhaps get ready to step forward into the future. This step occurs like a “light

bulb" moment. It's an internal realization not easily brought about by outside influences. Yet a support group might help if you feel stuck in a previous stage and can't accept what's happened.

Loneliness. Sometimes the loneliness of divorce is so oppressive. It feels like it has a life of its own. We feel disconnected with everyone and everything—society, coworkers, and friends. If the emotional attachment to our spouse is gone we need social integration being part of a net work, such as friends or community, whose members have common interest though it cannot compensate for the other. Loneliness is not cured by going about it strenuously, however great the loss that gave rise to it. Loneliness can have healing qualities when viewed as a time for introspection, reflection and inner growth. Most of us complain that our lives are too busy. Time alone with ourselves and our God can reap great benefits. "We seek to transform our desert of loneliness into a garden of solitude where rest and healing can be accomplished".(p87).

Forgiveness involves the relaxing of animosity toward the ex-spouse and establishing new relationships with healthy patterns and effective boundaries. For this final stage, a support group can be invaluable because of their experience. Your group can help you make sure that the new relationship with your ex-spouse is a healthy one, grounded in the present

(not trying to put the relationship back together) and aiming toward the future. This is the deep-cleaning stage, and a group can lift you up if you have feelings of emptiness (a resignation that the divorce is final) or renewed anger (if your ex-spouse doesn't accept your apologies).

I concluded by saying, my brothers and sisters what I discovered from the writings of Barbara Leahy, is that you can decide to make yourself happy. No one can make you happy except yourself; you are your own paradise. Cheer up; Keep hope alive, you are more than your situation today. The future seems very bright; rise up and take up the challenges since our loving Father has you in the hollow of his hands. Be not afraid and be courageous. Immediately they all burst into a big applause and standing ovation. When the ovation stopped, I could hear some of them saying, thank God I came for this encounter, while one woman said I regret he is not here, referring to the ex husband..

3.2. ACTIVITIES.

In order to make the forum concrete and practical we had some activities like video a film show, the sacrament of the reconciliation and a celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

3.2.1. Video film show; A video film known as ‘Dim Oma’ (my good husband) was played. In this video the couple when they fell in love at the beginning of their marriage promised to love each other till the end of their live whether they are eating, drinking or sleeping, but later the husband started maltreating the wife claiming he has fallen out of love. The wife cried because the husband neither talked, nor ate her food. She thought of going back to her father’s house but blamed culture for keeping her in the home of a man who no longer loves her, since she may not be received well back home. She said in spite of all odds she will go back to her father’s house. The husband asked her to leave and never to forget anything in his house. He even threw her wife’s property outside. She left back for her paternal home but after a long time there was reconciliation again with the husband. The man longed for his wife and apologized. Both forgave each other, reconciled and lived in peace.

The video tried to depict what is happening in the society and what had happened in their lives reminding us that sometimes there is room for forgiveness and reconciliation even if the couples are no longer married, but at least for the sake of the children there can be some level of reconciliation.

3.2.2. Sacrament of reconciliation; Here I gave the members the opportunity to avail

themselves the use of this sacrament from which many have absented themselves due to ignorance of the Church's teaching, as many felt rejected by the church. This sacrament is the method given by Christ to the Church by which individual men and women may be freed from sins committed after receiving baptism. This sacrament is known by many names, including penance, reconciliation, and confession (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Sections 1423–1442). Official Church publications of the Latin-rite always refer to the sacrament as "Penance," or "Reconciliation" or "Penance and Reconciliation." However, many lay Catholics use the term "confession" in reference to the sacrament. Through this sacrament many of them reconciled with God and forgave their ex partners. They also returned to the sacrament of the reception of the Holy Eucharist, promising to live a chaste and holy life style, since the church teaches that "Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace" CCC1415.

3.2.3. Eucharist or sacrifice of the mass. Finally I celebrated mass with the member on Sunday (Nov 23rd 2008). The mass or the Eucharist is the highest form of prayer for a catholic; The four aims of the Mass or the Eucharist are to adore God, thank Him, ask for forgiveness and ask for our needs. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church CCC#

1323 "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us'. It was instituted by Christ as we read in (Mk 14; 23, Mtt 26; 27, Lk22; 17.1Cor 11; 24). Through the Eucharist celebrated the members worshipped together as a community as many have absented themselves from the church for a long time. They also received spiritual nourishment from listening to the reading of the Old testament and that of the New Testament. They experienced sense of fraternity and love.

3.3 METHODS USED IN ACCESSING OUTCOME.

In assessing the outcome of this project, I looked at the attendance and participation of the members, whether they were active or passive. I also looked at their personal contribution in terms of ideas, questions, reactions, and presence. Their attendance record, profile and interviews helped me to determine this.

3.3.1 ATTENDANCE RECORD.

The attendance record was impressive as we can see in this summary. Over 65% percent of those who indicated their willingness to attend each session, via email and telephone were in attendance, except on the fourth week where 52 people indicated interest but because of the rain twenty two people could not make it.

SESSION; WEEKS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number Present	15	30	60	30	70	75
Number Excused.	-	-	2	2	-	-
Number Absent	-	1	-	20	-	-

3.3.2 PROFILE OF MEMBERS.

Sex	Male	35 %	Female	65%
Age	•	40-65 years	•	30-65years
Socio-economic	•	Civil Servants 60%	•	85%
	•	Self Employed 40%	•	15%
Educational background	•	Elementary School 2%	•	0%
	•	High School 38%	•	30%

- College/University 60%
- 70%

3.3.4. INTERVIEWS

A) I interviewed some individuals during and after the encounter to understand their feelings and assess the encounter. One of them was Mr Jide, who was only married for 5years and had only one female child. He expressed happiness for attending the forum. Here is brief verbatim of our discussion.

P PRIEST C CLIENT

P 1, How are you Mr Jide?

C 1, I am good

P 2, Could you share some of your experience on this encounter?

C2, I am happy to be here. In fact I will always thank my friend Ike who informed me about this program. I would have missed a lot if I had not attended.

P3, I am happy to hear this, but which aspect of the program interests you more?

C3, Every aspect has something positive to contribute but I learnt a lot on the area of communication and personality differences. If I had known some of these things earlier than now, may be my marriage would have lasted. I was married only for 5years and we were quite young. I hope in my further marriage I will not make some of these mistakes again.

P4, Are there some areas you want us to talk about more before the end of the program?

C4, I am satisfied with what I am experiencing here. God will surely bless you for all your efforts. Amen.

P 5, Thanks.

B) I interviewed another woman Ms Joy after the encounter. She is a registered nurse and was married for 15years. She has three children.

P1. Hi Joy, is wonderful to have had you here, how are you?

C1, I feel very happy for this wonderful opportunity given to us. As you were talking and in the course of our group discussion, I had my former marriage staring before me. I

remembered times of joy and sorrow in that marriage. In fact during the video where the couple divorced and after a long time they came back. I wished such a thing could happen with my ex. I loved him but he misbehaved especially when he became physically abusive. Is unfortunate that he now has another wife. Well I have to move on in life. How I wish you organize this forum once a year for us and those who have not yet benefited. Let me tell you Fr Charles you are a good priest and God will surely bless you.

P2, Thanks for your kind words. I am really happy that you benefited so much.

C2, Not just me alone but the whole group.

P3, Thanks.

3.3.5. ANALYSIS OF SELF ASSESMENT ON COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP.

I discovered that out of 65 members present for the self assessment on interpersonal relationship and communication, five scored A, five, A-, four B+, eighteen B, twenty one B- and six got C+. From the assessment I found out that the group was just on the average in their ability to communicate and that must have affected their marriage, an awareness of

this will help improve their future relationship

3.3.6 .RANDOM QUESTION IN GROUP PROCESS.

The group process helps to show the importance of working together and living together.

The human person is a social animal created for interconnectedness. The group helped to foster relationship, reduce tension and explore and express their feelings, hence to test their understanding of the outcome of the group process I asked some random questions, like

“having participated in this six week group process could you answer these questions?

Question. If you have a problem in your interpersonal relationship or married life what steps will you take?

Answers. C 1, I will open up communication with my partner and if the person is my spouse I will go further to seek for a therapist. or marriage counselor.

C 2 If it is a marital problem, I will involve my extended family because we are Igbo's. My relations and my partners' relation will be involved and if there is no remedy I will involve my towns meeting. I did not take these steps in my former marriage, may be because I was young and naïve. But if it is in my working place or the person is a neighbor, I

will report the person to my boss or a higher authority if communication breaks down.

C 3 Since I am a strong member of the church. I will get my pastor involved. My prayer is that I get a God fearing wife. My ex wife pretended that she was God fearing until I married her and realized that she was Godless. She refused to see our pastor or any other pastor till we got divorced.

C4 I will try to listen more to my partner to understand her position before taking action.

C 5 I need to be patient and understand the individual's personality before taking actions. I did not know about all these personality differences and disorder.

I thanked them and .from their feedback, the couples expressed happiness for the organization of the forum. They are better equipped for the further challenges of human relationship and family life. Their sense of self esteem was boosted, they recognized that they are still relevant in the church and can live a happy life as divorced couple.

CHAPTER 4

4; 1. DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOME.

In my proposal at the beginning of this project, I stated my intention for embarking on this task. I was motivated to work on this project because of the increasing rate of divorce among Igbo couples now residing in the United States. The family is a very essential organ of the society; I see it as the microcosm upon which the entire societal macrocosm is built. Therefore whatever affects the family indirectly affects the society in general. I noticed from my research that, as a result of the influence of the new American marital culture of mutuality instead of Igbo complementarity, freedom and economic empowerment of women, lack of communication together with African culture of pride on the part of the men, many marriages have collapsed. This has directly affected both the couple and their children emotionally, psychologically and even spiritually.

In this work therefore my apostolate is not to condemn divorce, especially when the marriage is irredeemable, but to explore the situation of these couples and provide pastoral support and help in assisting them and their children to live healthy and responsible productive lives capable of resisting the temptations to engage in

destructive life styles like drugs, alcoholism and even suicide. I intend to help and improve their human relationships and communication. The result of this plan will be noticed in what is manifested in the lives of these individuals and their interactions with others especially as seen from the perspective of Irving Yalom's factors of group process.

FACTORS OF GROUP PROCESS AS APPLIED TO IGBO DIVORCED COUPLE (MARIAN GROUP)

The purpose of group process is to help individuals grow socially, emotionally, spiritually and to be able to solve their problems through the interaction of the group. The level of participation and interaction among members determines to a large extent the outcome of every group negatively or positively. Most often the positive outcomes are greater than the negative outcomes. In the light of the above, I will examine the outcome of this project using the 11 "curative factors" identified in Irving D Yalom's book "The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy" (1995. P1). I will show how these 11 curative factors of group process manifested in the lives of these individuals.

According to Yalom I, these eleven therapeutic factors are;

Instillation 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.

Part of the purpose of gathering for this forum, is for the couples to listen to each other, share and learn from the experience of one another, in order to reduce tension arising from their situation. I noticed that many of the couples drew hope after listening to the experience of others as they told their stories. Some of them, hearing the stories of others expressed hope and joy that at the end of the dark tunnel there is a shining light

to lead the way. One woman narrated the story of how she nearly died after her divorce, crying all day long because she had no job and could not maintain herself and her children. She said she mustered courage and went back to do a one year program as a medical attendant. She was able to secure a job after her training and is now taking care of her family. She encouraged other members not to give up hope but to pick up the broken pieces of their lives and move on in life.

A woman in the group heaved a sigh of relief and said "I think your story is a lesson for me. My husband was the major bread winner in our family and I have really suffered since the divorce, but I am encouraged by your words. I will look for something to do, maybe a course to study in a community college which might be cheaper". There were some expressions of joy in her face. She concluded by saying to the woman who narrated her story "God willing, I will have smiles on my face like you soon". The testimony in this and other similar stories became a source of motivation and hope for this woman and other members of the group. Moreover, positive things sometimes come out of negative experience. Hence Barbara Shlemon (2001) says; "divorce has the potential not only of freeing men and women from destructive and unsatisfactory relationships, but of allowing adults to develop and change in gratifying ways in the after mat of the divorce"(p13).

UNIVERSALITY.

In the course of the discussion members noticed that their experiences including their fears, anxiety and isolation, insecurity, hopes and aspiration were common. This confirms Carol Ochs assertion, that in the quest for meaning in life, “we all have many experiences, positive and negative, that could motivate us; discovering love, suffering loss, feeling a sense of wonder, feeling empty. Or we may achieve a level of mastery over our lives that frees us to wonder if life concerns more than we have imagined.(Our lives as Torah p17).

A member narrated how he lobbied members of his family in order to convince them of the need for him to divorce his wife and how all his efforts failed. In fact he feels isolated and abandoned from his family for his unilateral actions. Members of the forum discovered that only ten percent of the group enjoyed the support of their families over their decision to divorce their spouse. The rest were opposed by their families. Also they noticed that the fear of the future, anxiety, insecurity and isolation was a common or universal experience among them. Having realized that they are not alone in their journey, they expressed common optimism in confronting and solving their problems. One man after listening to the different stories and experiences which

they all shared in common quoted St Paul's, "your brothers all over the world are suffering the same way".

ALTRUISM

Altruism or selflessness involves "helping others and being important in their lives" (Yalom P82). It is an important aspect of Igbo culture based on the principle of extended family and "onye aghala nwanne ya" which literally means "no one should leave his or her sibling behind", but technically it means "one should be his or her brother/sister's keeper". Africans also call it the principle of 'Ujamaa' (that is a sense of communalism 'not communism' or welfarism). Within the group, members identified with each other's feelings. Sometimes when they notice a member crying while narrating his/her story, they empathized and consoled the individual saying, "it is ok" and some will offer the member Kleenex to clean his/her tears while others will say "it will be good, don't lose hope."

Some members provided food and drink at different sessions of the forum and some volunteered to drive others home who came via public transport. Some also volunteered to look for a job for some members who are jobless but have the basic qualification.

RESOLVING FAMILY OF ORIGIN ISSUES.

After looking at the genogram of members' families, I noticed that some of the victims came from dysfunctional family setting in Nigeria, not necessarily from the point of view of divorce but other areas like violence and abuse. The lifestyle of an individual's family of origin affects the individual's interpersonal life style, authority, intimacy, hostility, emotional expression and competitive feeling. Just like in individual families, these factors emerged in the group. I saw some of the individuals trying to outdo others in expressing their opinion even when they are asked to allow another to speak. I noticed elements of a desire to exercise authority to dominate each other just like in sibling's rivalry.

Also as a result of the patriarchal nature of Igbo culture some of the men in the group felt they had more right of expression than the women. Some men kept on saying "Is it because we are in America" believing that if they were in Nigeria, the women would not exhibit the kind of freedom and authority they exercise in this country. I reminded them that many of us are carrying baggage from our family and cultural background and therefore, there is need for us to help resolve most of the unresolved issues in our lives in order to make progress. One member told me that he thought that I

studied only the bible in the seminary, but he could observe that I talked like a psychologist which made members of the group to laugh.

SOCIAL SKILLS

The development of social skill is a therapeutic factor in all therapy groups. The individuals were given opportunity to express their opinion on the appropriateness of each other's behaviors. Some expressed the opinion that they were happy with each other's social skill, while others said they felt bad and humiliated because of interruption by members. One man said he was not allowed to express his opinion and accused another man of dominating the whole discussion.

Another woman claimed that women were marginalized in the group and were not allowed by the men to express themselves. In fact one woman accused the men of carrying the Nigerian mentality of women subjugation into the group, which led many of them to be where they are today. I reminded them of the need to respect the dignity of each person and the importance of listening sometimes in a group rather than talking all the time. We talked more about conflict resolution and the ability not to be judgmental of one another, but rather to emphasize the need for compassion and support of each other.

IMITATIVE BEHAVIOR.

In group, people sometimes try to imitate the behavior they experience from others. Just as children learn from imitation, some of the couples learned from the behavior of other group members. For Yalom I, "clients during individual psychotherapy may in time sit, walk, talk and even think like their therapist" (p17).

From the feedback I got, a woman told me that she admired the behavior of a particular man in the group who looked so quiet and intelligent. She said "I wish I could have his temperament and maturity". She commended the man for comporting himself when he was interrupted by one woman while asserting that she could not have tolerated that woman's behavior. "This man is a mature and well cultured man she said; I have really learned something from him. I wonder what might have led to their divorce. I wish my ex-husband had his temperament or that such a man can be my husband".

I asked her if she was thinking about something in future towards the direction of marriage and she laughed and said 'not yet for now', but who knows tomorrow? This woman learned maturity and how to handle one's temper in the face of provocation from this group member. Some people by observing others learned the importance of self esteem from members who are not as learned or rich as themselves, but possessed good carriage and self esteem.

INTERPERSONAL LEARNING.

The human person is a social animal. We are meant for each other. In other words, we are inter-related beings. Through our inter-dependency and inter-relationship we learn from one another and develop our potentialities. Sometimes we misconstrue, misinform and misunderstand each other because of lack of communication. The forum opened the eyes of members to realize that sometimes their perception of people may not be what they really are. We thus emphasized the need to engage one's partner in conversation and to open up on one's feelings about the individual. Some who practiced it said it worked for them. One member narrated his experience with one of his co-workers in the office, whom he felt disliked him. He opened up his feeling to the man and discovered that the man had no ill feelings towards him. He realized he might be suffering from paranoid.

Other members expressed how the interpersonal and communication skills they learned from the group helped them. They expressed feelings of regret that if they had known about this long ago maybe their marriage may have succeeded. Many learned how to work on interpersonal problems. Their goal was to correct their emotional feelings and experiences in the presence of other people. They learned to interact with each other deeply and personally.

GROUP COHESSIVENESS

The ability to connect in a group is very important for the existence of the group. I did my best to connect with the group as the facilitator and encouraged members to do the same. Many of the members felt that the group gave them a sense of acceptance, as they have been feeling social and emotional isolation from friends and even members of their family. They see in this forum a new social and spiritual family

The members made effort to understand each other. Sometimes there were misunderstandings as some members felt angry over others who wanted to dominate the discussion. In fact at the fourth week of the session, many of the members understood each other and expressed deep appreciation for the gift of one another, others and the group. Indeed a cohesive group allows for free and greater expression of emotions and opinion. Unexpressed hostility and opinion leads to resentments. It was because many couples did not express themselves that led to their divorce. Group cohesiveness helped the couple to have a sense of self esteem, to overcome their anger, to have courage to face difficult times, and to respect the other's opinion and personality.

CARTHARIS

Catharsis is a learning that deemphasizes intellectual articulation for feelings or emotional experience. It is emotional ventilation. It affords members the opportunity to talk about their feelings, express their emotion, cry and let it out. Some members remembered the good days they had with their spouses and cried while some remembered the abuses they suffered and wept. Some others remembered their failures and contribution towards the collapse of their marriage and also cried. This crying brought emotional relief to members and unburdened their heavy heart.

EXISTENTIAL FACTORS.

Existential factors relate to issues of life, sufferings, injustice, sickness and death in the world. Members discussed these issues and realized that wherever human beings exist, these issues must come up. Hence according to them, we must be properly armed and be ready to confront them whenever they arise. We should not live in denial but try to overcome our problems through a sense of responsibility, support for one another and perseverance in prayer. Members expressed happiness for the wonderful opportunity they had in this encounter.

4.2 DEVELOPMENT NOT ANTICIPATED IN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL THAT FIGURED IN THE FINAL OUTCOME.

There were some developments that I did not anticipate at the beginning of this project that emerged at final outcome.

I did not anticipate **the attendance record**. The attendance was higher than I expected. I thought that with the busy schedule of our people here in America, in which some of them do more than one job, many would attend the forum. I was surprised to see that the attendance was very impressive. The first week recorded fifteen people, second week, thirty people, third week, sixty members and the fourth week had thirty people in attendance because it rained heavily that day. The last two weeks recorded the highest attendance, as seventy showed up at the fifth week while seventy-five were present at the last session. Those who could not attend excused themselves. The mass for the closing ceremony on Sunday was attended by over two hundred people including friends and relations of participants. They brought food and we all ate and danced, after which a certificate was awarded to members.

I noticed there were some **issues of resistance** at the beginning of the session. Some members did not want to share their experience with others in spite of the fact that I gave them assurance of confidentiality. Some members still doubted the fact that

their privacy and confidentiality would not be violated. One of the members told me that she could trust me as a priest since I hear their confessions, and she knew I could not share her feelings with other people outside our group, but she questioned whether she could trust other members of the group? Some expressed the fact that if they come to realize that their privacy had been violated, they will die in shame. And they did not want to open old wounds in their lives.

After I was able to gradually and patiently enter into their world, reassuring them of their confidentiality, some members showed some sense of sincerity and openness to share their deep feelings and emotion which initially they did not initially want to share.. They unburdened their feeling to the group.

Some of the participants lived in denial. One of the men believed that his ex-wife who left him since six years ago and now with two children from her present marriage would eventually come back to him. He said to the hearing of some of his friends in the group that when his wife comes back, he hopes to implement most of the things he learned from the group. Another woman said that her husband left her not out of his wish but because of the influence of witch craft. She says that she will continue to pray until her husband is released from the hands of the devil. Some also deny their emotional and psychological feelings, pretending as if nothing happened in

their life experience. Some even denied the need to grieve over the loss of their spouse through divorce. I pointed out the need for us to face and confront reality, rather than live in denial. This will help us proffer solutions to our problem rather than sweeping them under the carpet.

Again I did not anticipate some accusations against me and some questions I was asked. Some of the men accused me of favoring the women in the course of the forum. In fact one of the men in the course of our discussion accused me of talking now from American mentality. He hoped that as an Igbo man I should see things from Igbo perspective, but from listening to me he indicated that it seems I am now supporting the women and the American culture rather than African culture. I responded that I am not in favor or against any culture. Rather, that which is positive in each culture should be assimilated while negative values should be discarded. Another man expressed surprise about how a celibate priest who is unmarried could talk effectively about marital relationship. At the end of his contribution, he advised me to marry so that I can experience these women more deeply. Some members were not happy with him and asked him to apologize. I remembered while the man was talking that many Africans possess disapproval for celibacy. Most Africans believe that any one born into this world must also beget another person, especially a man, for the continuance of the family

linage. But in my response I tried not to be angry, intolerant or arrogant but employed patience, empathy and respect for each member.

Finally from the telephone conversation I had with one of the participants, he has indicated his interest to **marry a member of the forum**. He told me that watching the woman throughout the encounter, he believes that they were meant for each other as husband and wife. I informed him to take his time, pray over it and have a closer relationship to develop an understanding each other, since both have been divorced for five years. Indeed most of these developments were unanticipated, but since the human person is a bundle of possibility, we must make room for any eventuality.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS BOTH ANTICIPATED AND NOT

ANTICIPATED AS REPORTED IN CHAPTER FOUR

a) THE IMPLICATION ANTICIPATED.

The goals and result anticipated in this project is to present the Igbo understanding of marriage and examine why present day generation of Igbo couples are not living up to expectation due to frequent divorce. My commitment and anticipated goal is not to condemn divorce, especially where marriages are irredeemable, but to provide pastoral support and help in assisting these broken couples to face the emotional, socio-economic and religious effects and challenges of life affected by divorce and to live a normal healthy and responsible life as productive members of society, capable of resisting the temptation to destructive, addictive behaviors like drug or alcoholic abuse, etc. caused by guilt, loneliness and a lack of forgiveness. I accomplished this by enumerating some important religious and psychological principles that could be of great help for these individuals.

The Igbo regards marriage as sacred and as the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of procreation. They strongly believe that “he who is begotten must beget another” for the continuation of the lineage.

According to kofi Antuban (1963) “the ability to produce a child is a necessary factor for the continuance of marriage” (Ghana’s Heritage of Culture (Leipzig; Koehler and Amelag, P23). Most Igbo’s today as Christians also understand marriage and Christian family as a communion of love through which God reveals and communicates his divine love to the world. Hence the experience of love we encounter in our human family through union of husband and wife in marriage, love among parents and children and even to extended family is a pointer to the love between humanity and divinity. Therefore the human household should mirror on earth the unity and divine love for which humanity yearns.

The Igbo society, the Catholic Church and the scripture teaches that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1; 27). Hence the marriage of a man and woman should be based on mutuality, respect and love. The church teaches that “man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other in their respective beings as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. Being man or woman is a reality which is good and willed by God;

man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity in the image of God'. (CCC 369).

The stability of marriage and family not only enriches our culture but also ensures stability in society and the nation in general since the family is the microcosm upon which the macrocosm is built.

Unfortunately this wonderful idea of God, the church and the Igbo society is not being realized today as many marriages are broken, through divorce due to many reasons enumerated in this work, which includes: lack of commitment to the marriage, breakdown in communication between spouses, infidelity, abandonment, addictions of various kinds, substance, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Again there is the issue of inability to manage or resolve conflict, financial problems; different expectations about household tasks and child care, interference from family members, including also the lack of maturity, insistence of sticking to traditional roles and not allowing room for personal growth, religious, cultural or life style differences, and the inability to deal with each other's petty idiosyncrasies and mental instability or illness.

It is also a fact that some of the individuals involved in divorce cases never intended it but are mere victims. These individuals experience many negative effects of social, legal, psychological and religious nature. Many today are traumatized, with feelings of sadness, regrets, loneliness, anger, hatred and unforgiveness, while others have a deep sense of guilt and depression. I have to point out that some have committed suicide because of lack of care and rejection from family members and society in general, including the church. The children too, feel negative about the divorce. They worry that their parents don't love them anymore and they feel abandoned, powerless and helpless because they can't get their parents back together. They struggle emotionally and feel angry, although they may not express their anger. These children grieve, and experience conflict of loyalty. They also feel lonely, unhappy, anxious and insecure. Many of them become school dropouts; engage in teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and delinquent behavior.

In view of these negative consequences, I feel that pastors and counselors have a sacred duty to protect the institution of marriage and married love in order to protect family stability. They are called in a special way to provide support and care for the families and individuals whose marriages could not succeed due to some of the reasons

cited above and in certain situations due to no fault of one of the parties, who becomes a victim. Hence in line with the position of the Catholic Church teaching “the Church stresses that the community of the faithful should exercise a sensitivity to the divorced through works of charity. Hence, the church teaches that toward Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons” *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n.1651).

Whenever we did not help these victims through prayer, counseling, moral, social and sometimes economic support we fail in our sacred duty as pastors and counselors and even in Christ’s universal call for love of humanity “You must love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22, 38). The richness of God’s love will be made manifest in the love we extend to those individuals and to their children who are the hope and leaders of tomorrow, both in the church and in the society.

The group sessions and counseling these individuals had will help them not only to overcome their difficulties and repair the damage done in their broken relationship

but it will at the same time help to improve their future human relationship with people they meet and their neighbors. Also for those who may engage in future marital life, their exposure in the group will help them handle marital issues by understanding that in every relationship "things are meant to be." They are to read the signs of the time, listen to the inner voices of their heart and find ways out of the problem as solutions. If they are helped to make the right choices God's love will be made manifest in their lives and they become authentic witnesses of the gospel.

Indeed despite the strict position of the church on divorce, I anticipate that the church should have a pastoral plan of action in which couples who intend to divorce can come and seek help from the church and if in all sincerity it is discovered that all effort to save the marriage cannot succeed, then the couple should be counseled in such a way that they can divorce within the context of Christian fraternal charity, in which the welfare and happiness of the individuals and especially the children should be the center of focus. It will reduce post divorce stress disorder experienced by these individuals. This pre-divorce counseling should encourage the couples not to bear hatred and animosity against each other and in cases where children are involved, emphasis should be placed also on the love, care and security of the children, so as to

become healthy members of the society, contributing for the progress of the society instead of becoming social miscreants.

Indeed without compromising her ideals and position as *Mater et Majestra, that is mother and teacher of the faith* and defender of the divine institution of marriage, the church cannot live in isolation or denial that some marriages cannot work, especially marriages that involve alcoholics and drug abusers who refuse to seek help and engage in domestic violence against their spouse and even children. Instead of rejection by the church, such couples should be helped if they insist on divorce or separation to receive counseling and care. Help should not just be given after divorce but should be a slow progressive encounter, within and after the marriage mostly in cases where the couple made their intention known to the church or pastor.

Also this pastoral plan should be comprehensive and broad to include the young and young adult who will engage in future marriage, those who are already engaged and are coming for their pre-marital counseling, those who are already having healthy marriage, those couples who are having marital problems and those who are divorced. It is anticipated that this pastoral plan and care should involve all Igbo catholic couples

and other people of Igbo extraction living in the Rockville Centre Diocese and even beyond.

It is anticipated that Igbo marriages should be stable, since marriage among Igbo's is a communal affair involving the entire community with a long rigorous process involved, in which both the social, economic and religious aspects are interwoven and in which there is long scrutiny of the individuals involved, together with their families, followed by exchange of gifts and consent, payment of dowry, traditional wedding and finally church wedding.

It is anticipated that since marriage involves all these rigorous processes and rituals, Igbo marriage should be a covenant, sacred and indissoluble once contracted especially in the light of the Christian gospel which many Igbo's have embraced. Hence Mbiti S John (1969) opines, "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 presence has 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 therefore anticipated that the marriage of Igbo couples living here in Long Island within Rockville Centre Diocese should be helped to be protected from negative cultural influences that affect them. But in those cases where marriages were irredeemable and unfortunately led to divorce, the individuals should not be abandoned either by their families, church or society in general. They should be helped to readjust their lives, reintegrate into society both social and religious and live a healthy loving and happy life since whatever affects them and their children also affects the society in general. This is my mission, my goal and my anticipation in this project and through the words, actions and positive reactions of the group members, this mission was accomplished to a large extent and my anticipation realized to a great deal.

B) IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS NOT ANTICIPATED.

I did not anticipate the huge success recorded in the whole encounter and what I set out to do which includes improving the self image of the individuals through self discovery, ability to identify and express feelings, improve

communication and decision making skill and to own up to responsibilities, including the ability to step out and take active participation in the churches activities and life in general.

In fact I was surprised with the attendance recorded because many people usually do not attend matters relating to the church or their spiritual life. The attendance moved progressively from fifteen people in week one, to thirty in week two and sixty in week three. The fourth week recorded thirty people because of the rain while seventy people were present at the fifth week. Finally seventy five people came at the last session while almost two hundred people including family members and friends came for the closing mass and party including the award of certificate.

I was wondering at the beginning of the session how the couples would respond to my questions and invitations for discussions. I was surprised at the openness and transparency with which some of the couples expressed their feelings. I did not anticipate that they would be so open and to trust and confide in me. I realized the importance and value congregants place on their priest which must not be betrayed. It opened my eyes to why many people felt angry with the church and even lost their faith during the days of pedophilia and priest sex scandal abuse.

I did not anticipate the level of resistance I encountered among some of the members who refused to open up to their problems in spite of all effort we made to encourage them. Some members seemed to be introverts and some seem to still nurse feelings of injury and anger on their ex-spouse. It is only when one lets out his or her problem that the individual can be helped. Writing on this Schwartz Richard (2001), quoting Francisco Varela says; "when we are in touch with our open nature our emptiness we exert an enormous attraction to other human beings....And if others are in the same space of entering it, they resonate with us and immediately doors are opened to us. This state- where we connect deeply with others and doors open-is there waiting for us. It is like an optical illusion. All we have to do is squint and see that it has been there all along, waiting for us. All we have to do is to see the oneness that we are" (Internal family systems model P57). This was partly my reason for devoting more time in discussing the importance of communication and interpersonal relationship in detail.

I did not anticipate the level of denial that still exists among some of the members who still hope that their marriage will work out after their ex-husband/wife have gotten married to other people. Some still hope that the new relationship will break up and the ex-husband or wife will come back to them. This implies that many of

them are not ready to accept their present situation and move forward in life. They still remain stuck to the past.

I was also surprised at people's insistence on confidentiality. The Igbo's in particular because of their philosophy of "biri mam biri", (live and let live) claim to live in an open society but the people's strict insistence on confidentiality surprised me. A member asked me, "Fr please this thing I am going to tell you, I hope you will not tell anyone. Please I do not want anybody here to know about it. Let me be honest with you father, no one tell each other what he/she does in America. So many people are envious of each other and some will laugh at your woes instead of helping you. Please keep all I will tell you in mind". It made me understand that things have really fallen apart in this new culture and that the Igbo's in diasporas have been greatly influenced by the individualistic and relativist culture of their new environment here in the United States, contrasted with the brotherhood of the Igbo race in which parents, family, age and grade have a voice in the marital, social, economic and spiritual life of a member.

I did not anticipate the fact that some members did not welcome my person, statues and ideas simply because I am a celibate priest. One of them asked me how an unmarried person can discuss effectively marital issues. He advised me to marry so as to

have a feel of women and understand men's predicament. He told me that I will never understand women until I live with them. I was surprised at his level of over generalization when he said "umunwanyị bu ekwensu" which means "women are devil". Though, I was able to absorb his insults with philosophical calmness and cautioned him on his statement against women. I went ahead to empathize with him because I understood that he was still deeply angry with his ex-wife.

I actually did not anticipate the fact that in spite of their learning and exposure to civilization, many of our Igbo people are still stuck to the negative traditions of our illiterate ancestors. Many still believe in the enslavement, dehumanization, abuse and domination of women. Some men kept saying that their wives are behaving the way they are doing in asserting their right, because of the fact that they are in America. They did not see it from the perspective of the promotion of human dignity or as a natural right which God has endowed on all human beings, since they were all created in the image and likeness of God. I realized that many of our people have heard the message of the gospel, baptized but not yet converted. The message is still far from bearing fruit in their lives. Hence pastors and missionary workers need to do a lot of catechesis to

deepen the gospel message in the practical life of the people, since it “by their fruit that we shall we shall know them.”

I did not anticipate the success recorded at the mass of closure and final party in which over two hundred people attended. One important lesson I learned with the group, is that everyone was willing to share the little food available. Among Igbos one does not need an invitation to eat in an Igbo person’s house or party. The individual involved will always try to provide or share the little he/she has, like the woman of Zaraphath (I Kings 17; 8-16) or the widow who gave her last penny in the bible (Mk 12:41-44). Hence the positive Igbo cultural values of hospitality, empathy, marriage and family life need to be preserved.

Finally I did not anticipate the fact that they wanted the encounter to continue or to be an annual event. This goes to show that when programs are well planned and executed, people will be excited and seek for more. Hence pastors and counselors should make adequate preparation before engaging their clients or congregants.

5.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT TO CLARIFYING AND EXPANDING; RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO.

In expatiating the meaning of marriage and divorce in chapter two, I made use of the Hebrew and the Christian scripture, I also used the teachings of the Catholic Church. Both the scripture and the church see marriage as a very important and sacred institution that should be preserved as a lifelong commitment “for the well being of spouses, their children and the society in general”(Canon 1055§1, GS 48§1).

In the creation account the bible explicitly states that God is the author of marriage, since the Lord created woman from the ribs of the man Adam and Adam exclaimed “this now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she is taken out of man. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2 22–24). God willed that they shall become one and what he has joined together no one should separate. God disapproves divorce and stated through the prophet Malachi “I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel.”(Malachi 2:16)

Jesus also insisted on the sacredness of marriage “they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19.6). He enumerated the fact that divorce in the Old Testament was permitted by Moses because of the hardness of people’s hearts, not because they were God’s desire (Matthew 19.8). In other to show his disapproval for divorce he says “a man who divorces his wife and marries another wife is guilty of adultery against her and a woman who divorces her husband and marries another is guilty of adultery too.”(Mk 10:11-12)

St Paul re-echoes the sacredness of marriage which he sees as a sacrament. This is because marriage between husband and wife symbolizes the relationship of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5: 22-24, 5.32-33). He disapproved of divorce in his teaching saying “to the married I give this ruling and this is not mine but the Lords, a wife must not be separated from the husband or if she has already left him she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Corinthians 7.10-11)

The Catholic Church sees divorce as a grave offence and immoral act against God and natural law “divorce is immoral because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children

traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society" (CCC n 2385)

Since the church comprises saints and sinners, the weak and strong, it is therefore important to emphasize the point that part of the mission of the church in her ministry of evangelization is to seek and save like her divine master Jesus, that which is lost. (Lk 19;10)

Indeed from my discussion in the group session, I discovered that many of the victims did not intend divorce but were mere victims and some are even willing to go back to their marriage if their partner is interested; therefore the church cannot abandon them but rather encourage them to persevere in the faith as members of the family of God. Pope John Paul II says; "They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace". (Familiaris Consortio no 84).

In many parishes these individuals are treated like lepers of old, and excluded from communion and services in the church. Not just in America but in different parts of the world, the pastors and members of the community should heed to the voice of the

church that calls for support and sensitivity for these victims “the Church stresses that the community of the faithful should exercise a sensitivity to the divorced through works of charity...priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons.” (CCC n.1651) .

When love and compassion is shown to these victims, they will experience in practical terms the Christian teaching of love. Moreover when Israel became adulterous God did not abandon them, sometimes he punished them and but brought them back to himself (Hosea 3;1–10). The church should show solidarity to these individual in assuring them that they are not alone, God and his church is with them in their loneliness, anxiety and fear through prayer, support and integration.

5.3 CLINICAL PRINCIPLES DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO

In the course of my discussion during the marriage encounter I learned that different factors affect marital relationship including divorce, some of them includes childhood experiences and family influences. I discussed these issues under object relation theory and family system theory.

The object relation theory in psychodynamic principle states that we are “relation seeking rather than pleasure seeking”, the ego-self exist only in relation to

other objects which may be external or internal. A good family environment provides a child a conducive atmosphere to exercise the power to know, love, feel, decide and imagine things. For Margret Mahler (2000), the way to attain the goal of autonomy in our early development is called 'separation and individuation. "Separation and individuation are conceived of as two complementary developments; separation consists of the child's emergence from a symbiotic fusion with the mother and individuation consists of those achievements marking the child's assumption of his own individual characteristics" (p4). The first three years are so important for such development. Without achieving a good sense of separation and autonomy the child remains in a state of "identity diffusion" and will lack the ego strength necessary to form and maintain healthy relationships in later life.

I discovered that many of the victims of divorce in my group did not achieve authentic separation, individuation and autonomy. Some of the couples were totally dependent on the other; some feel the absence of the other because of the services derived from him/her. Others lacked communication ability. They found it difficult to relate and communicate with their spouse and that was why they appreciated most the aspect of my discussion on communication. I encouraged and referred some of them to visit therapist in order to help improve their relationship. The therapist will help

provide them with a safe environment that will allow the dysfunctional pattern of the individual to emerge and then find empathic ways of confronting it. Moreover I reminded the victims the need to help their own children achieve healthy object relationship because when process of separation and individuation is not well accomplished, the individual faces crises in later life both in the individual's marriage and social life.

I also looked at the family system theory in which the family is seen as a unit in which family members are interdependent and function in reciprocal relationships with one another. Therefore a member cannot just function outside the context. A family system functions as a unit, where every family member plays unique role in the system. As such, it is not possible that one member of the system can change without causing a ripple effect of change, throughout the family system.

Whatever affects one family member affects the others because of the great bond of unity and solidarity that exist among Igbo families, since they all regard themselves as 'umunna/umunne' (brothers and sisters). Hence family member are expected to consult each other in matters ranging from marriage, divorce, social, economic and spiritual matters. They are also expected to show collective responsibility, solidarity and cooperation in helping each other.

I also noticed from the experience I gathered from the group, that sometimes there is too much interference in the privacy of family members, such that they decide whom a family member must marry or divorce. Some Igbo family members in America today are trying to cut themselves off from their family unit. I reminded them the importance of maintaining their root, even if they do not agree with all that their family may propose, yet they need the family for security, intimacy, economic, spiritual and emotional support and satisfaction.

From my encounter with them I really saw their need and encouraged them to maintain Igbo family values of solidarity in which extreme individualism and relativism is frowned at by Igbo society and every one acts as his or her brother/sister's keeper. I pointed out that the parents should teach their children the need to love and relate with their brothers and sisters, uncles, nieces and nephews and to have a sense of respect, responsibility and hospitality which Igbo families encourage their members to inculcate.

The Igbo family system also respects old age as mark of wisdom. The Igbos say "okwuru anaghi aka onye nwe ya" (an okro cannot be taller than the owner, because its owner will always bend it down to pluck it). Hence, a child does not know if he/she is eighteen or forty years before his parents or elders. He/she must continue to

draw from the wisdom of the parents and elders, while they too must respect the individual's freedom. That is why a child must have the blessing of his parent before he embarks upon marriage or divorce. Thus positive values of the Igbo family system should be retained while the negative aspects should be abolished. But on no grounds should Igbo's in the diasporas reject their culture and family system because of their new environment, since many other races in America still hold on to their family values.

5.4 CONTRIBUTION TO MINISTRY IN A WIDER CONTEXT.

Being conscious of my role, as a pastor and counselor in which "I witnessed steadily, undistracted, relentlessly – the life experience of the counselee, the harried pilgrimage of a soul that has too often scurried in shadow (Dittes James p56.). I will say that my experience has been enriched within the context of my ministry here in America and in the course of my project. My experience shows that Igbo couples are really having hard times because of their exposure to multi cultural environment. Most Igbo's in the diasporas now question Igbo traditional values, which they were taught from childhood. Many do not believe in objective truth but in moral relativism. Many engage in alcoholism, materialism and consumerism, together with individualism contrary to Igbo brotherhood. The sanctity of life is questioned, as contraception and

abortion is being practiced among some of them. In Igbo culture abortion is a taboo and those who engage in it are sanctioned with heavy penalty of paying a fine or are exiled. Some men and women no longer consider fornication and adultery as sin.

A woman told me in course of our discussion that she has a boy friend, since her husband was deported four years ago "because body no bi wood" meaning (that she needs a boy friend since her body is not ordinary wood). This also shows the difficulty Igbo couples are facing as regards immigration issues separating couples today. Some members who live with their wives also engage in extra marital affairs without any qualm of conscience. Indeed many have lost their social, spiritual and African moral values.

I therefore propose that adult faith formation should be intensified within Igbo apostolate in teaching Igbo couples here in Long Island, the need to go back to their family root and gospel values. They should be catechized to understand that some values are natural and eternal truth that stands at all times and places. The document of Vatican II says, "The natural law is immutable and permanent throughout the variations of history" (GS 10).

Therefore there should be ongoing faith formation both for infants, adolescents, youth and young adult, married couples, the divorced and the elderly that emphasizes

these values. It should involve the whole life cycle. Both the family which is a domestic church, the church and religious schools should take this responsibility seriously as a sacred duty. Moreover since women suffer most in this issue of divorce among Igbos, I suggest with Kathleen Fischer (1988) that pastors and counselors should try and “focus on women’s experience as an authoritative point for their spirituality, the importance of recognizing the social as well as personal roots of women’s spiritual issues, the need to demystify the power relationship inherent in any helping process” (Women at the well. P6). According to her we must take into cognizance that, “women are angry, that their husbands control all the money and make all the decisions in their marriages and they feel they are being treated like children. (P134). Indeed in this apostolate, women’s experience should be taken into consideration and respected

5.5 IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

The implication of this project for my future ministry involves finding a way of ensuring marital stability among Igbo couples and especially providing support and encouraging those individuals who unfortunately became victims of divorce as a result of the influence of their new environment and other factors.

My concern and anxiety in realizing this objective is a result of lack of stability in my posting as a priest. I have been a priest for fourteen years and have worked in over ten parishes. I do not know how long I will stay in my present place of assignment nor of my returning to my country Nigeria. During these years of moving from one parish to another I realized that I made commitments to some prayer groups, societies and organization that I helped spiritually that I will continue to help and support them, but it became difficult because of many commitments in my new place of assignment.

I am worried about the continuity and follow up in this ministry to divorced couples, but I am consoled by the fact that the church is a continuum. The church belongs to Christ and I am only an instrument relying on his help and promises, that "he will be with his church and his people till the end of the world" (Matt 28, 16-20). Mine is to sow the seed and God will make it grow. Like the apostles in the bible I will be writing them letters to remind them of all that I thought them, since I have all their emails and through my prayer and contacts I will support them in their journey of life. I will remind them like St Paul "to always behave in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to you and see for myself or whether I only hear all about you from a distance, I shall find that you are standing firm and united in spirit, battling

as a team with a single aim, for the faith of the gospel, undismayed by any of your opponent". (Phil 1; 27-28).

I have a strong conviction and hope that these victims of divorce will overcome their problems following their reaction and response during and after the encounter and that they will continue to implement the basic principles I taught them. I have strengthened them just like Jesus asked St Peter to "strengthen his brethren" (LK 22; 31)

I will also encourage priests and church members now and in the future to be receptive of these our brothers and sisters and encourage them by their words and actions, since "by their fruit we shall know them" (Matt 7; 16). However these individuals should help themselves by putting into practice all I have taught them, together with their own creativity so that they may live a healthy functional life in their families, church and society. However for the future execution of this project I rely totally on the help of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit whose instrument I am, together with the cooperation of the individuals and groups in ensuring that this ministry which I set out in this project to achieve succeeds. I am done and to God be the glory.

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