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### A Marriage Preparation Program in the South Central Ghana Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

A MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM IN THE  
SOUTH CENTRAL GHANA CONFERENCE OF  
THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Francis Tuffour

Adviser: Jeffrey O. Brown

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL  
GHANA CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Francis Tuffour

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD

Date completed: May 2017

### Problem

Similar to many other places in the world, the divorce rate in Ghana is on the rise. Certain media reports in Ghana have attributed the spate of marriage breakdown to a lack of marriage preparation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Central Ghana Conference is confronted by a plethora of marital problems. Many couples schedule their wedding dates and then simply inform their pastors, whereas others adopt the traditional or customary marriage without telling the church. The short notice couples give to pastors and the church makes it difficult for adequate marriage preparation to take place. No official denominational guidelines are available for pastors in helping premarital couples.

The lack of proper marriage preparation programs has resulted in best practices not being consistently followed by pastors who counsel premarital couples.

### Method

Eight ordained pastors in the South Central Ghana Conference were selected for interviews in February 2014. The objective was to assess their views on marriage preparation, their competence levels, and the resources they use in carrying out the programs. Based on the findings, marriage preparation was designed for implementation by three pastors in the South Central Ghana Conference. The implemented program was evaluated to determine its impact on pastors and couples, including its weaknesses and overall success.

### Results

The study found that all the pastors interviewed recognized the importance of premarital counseling in the church. However, no documented or written marriage preparation program was used by pastors in the South Central Ghana Conference. The conference does not have a standard or plan regarding the number of times or sessions for premarital counseling. The study also found that most pastors who conduct premarital counseling do not use inventories or assessment tools, neither do they have a comprehensive follow-up plan after their premarital counseling. The post-implementation review showed the need for a marriage-preparation resource guide to equip pastors in the conference. The resources boosted their confidence level and the preparedness to run such programs to help premarital couples in the conference.

## Conclusions

Based on the responses from pastors selected for interviews prior to the designed program and after the implementation of the program, a proactive and intentional marriage preparation program has a positive impact on pastors and premarital couples. Therefore, promoting and running effective marriage-preparation programs has merit and is recommended.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM IN THE  
SOUTH CENTRAL GHANA CONFERENCE OF  
THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Francis Tuffour  
May 2017

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this project document to my mother, Suni Johnson, who saw the need to support my education financially. I always appreciate her love and kindness. She made sure I had all the resources I needed for the successful completion of my doctoral program.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory, for His guidance and leadership throughout this journey. I acknowledge and express my sincere appreciation to special people who have played key role in this project. My first adviser, Dr. Jeffrey O. Brown, has been inspirational to me by providing timely guidance and feedback. Even when I was behind time, he kept in touch with me to find out the progress of the project. My second adviser, Dr. Hyveth B. Williams took a great interest in this work, I am grateful for her dedication, guidance, and patience. The pastors of the South Central Ghana Conference recruited for this study gave their valuable time for interviews and the implementation of the designed program. Dr. Ronald Flowers, Coordinator of the Doctor of Ministry Family Ministry Concentration, offered constant words of encouragement, project timeline reminders, and prayers. My friend, Stella Adwoa living in Amsterdam, who kept encouraging me to finish this work, and South Central Ghana Conference officers and Pastor Josiah Osei Twum kept supporting me. I am highly indebted to my sweet wife, Doris Tuffour, for her great sacrifice and love when I had to leave her and our children in Ghana to pursue education in the US. She motivated me and offered spiritual support for me to finish the project. Finally, my children, Adwoa Pinamang Tuffour, Kwesi Baffour Tuffour, Lisabeth Dolwig Yaa Tuffour, and Kwame Yeboah Tuffour, deserve commendation. My absence sometimes deprived them of their comforts but they understood my situation and the importance of my mission. Their sacrifice, prayers, and support enabled me to get to this point.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Several studies have found the importance of marriage preparation programs. Premarital counseling programs are offered to couples without distress in their relationship and are aimed to help prevent future distress by providing an awareness of potential problems that may occur, and the information, skills, or resources needed to prevent or improve these issues (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Some researchers (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006) have recognized the importance of marriage preparation for premarital couples. Marriage preparation has been linked to improved marital satisfaction, increased commitment to a spouse, and a 31% decrease in the divorce rate (Stanley et al., 2006).

However, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana has not been intentional in running intensive marriage preparation programs with the necessary resources for premarital couples.

The first chapter of this study provides a brief ministry context of marriage preparation in the South Central Ghana Conference (SCGC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This includes theological context and reflections, and a review of literature relevant to this study. It further describes the methodology and design for the study. Finally, some key terms are briefly explained.

## **Description of the Ministry Context**

The setting for this project is the SCGC, located at Ahinsan, on Lake Road in Kumasi, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The Ashanti Region lies in the middle belt of Ghana, located between longitudes 0.15W and 2.25W, and latitudes 5.50N and 7.46N. The region shares boundaries with four of ten political regions, Brong-Ahafo in the north, the eastern region in the east, the central region in the south, and the western region in the Southwest (“Ashanti Region,” n.d.).

The SCGC of Seventh-day Adventists is the headquarters that serves as the administrative body for churches within this territory, with a mission focused on evangelism, nurturing constituents, running hospitals, and operating a system of schools (“South Central Ghana Conference history,” n.d.). The conference was founded on June 5, 1997 and officially organized in 1999. The SCGC has 42 districts, 231 churches, and 279 companies, with an estimated membership of 77,684. The conference headquarters is in Kumasi-Ahinsan. The SCGC territory comprises the political boundaries of part of the Ashanti Region, which forms the larger portion of the conference, and some parts of the Central Region of Ghana.

The Family Ministries Department of the conference is the immediate context for this project, particularly those preparing for marriage. The department recognizes the importance of family in the lives of church members and nonmembers. It is dedicated to strengthening the home as a disciple-making center where family members, through their interpersonal relationships, are encouraged in their relationship with Jesus Christ and the church. The department has adopted the following as its objectives (West-Central Africa Division Working Policy, 2008):

1. To proclaim the reviving and restorative message of the everlasting gospel within the context of family living. In this context, Christ is and must be acknowledged as the head of the family.

2. To enable parents and families to endeavor to transfer Seventh-day Adventist values to the next generation. The department is responsible for providing resources and opportunities to assist parents in making biblical truth appealing to their children.

3. To affirm and strengthen every Seventh-day Adventist family as a primary disciple unit. When this objective is achieved, it revives the family and serves as a conduit for witnessing to a larger society.

4. Each church member comes from his or her own family to join the church, but the department endeavors to create a comforting atmosphere so that the church will be seen as a family of God to every member.

5. The department helps all families to become witnesses for God and assists families in identifying their spiritual gifts to enable them to witness to those in their communities.

The ministry approaches include education, enrichment, and counseling through education on Christian principles that are Bible-based, as well as other inspiring Christian literature for families. Through enrichment programs, specific programs that are beneficial to church members are organized for married couples and singles to enhance their relational skills and to address certain challenges. Counseling is a core activity in family ministries, as most family members facing individual and family problems are assisted by pastors and lay counselors. Pastors often counsel church members on

relationships, although in their absence church elders assist, referring any counseling case beyond their competence to a qualified pastor.

The designed marriage preparation program meets the objectives of the family ministries department, even though it aims at helping those preparing for marriage. Assisting young couples to achieve a healthy marriage enables them to avoid marital problems, and the skills they acquire will help them to manage issues that erode the foundation of marriage, which in turn will help them build a healthy Christian family.

As the primary researcher and designer of this project, I will briefly share about myself professionally and personally in the context of this study. I was born and raised in Ghana. I am married with four children. I became a pastor in the SCGC on August 1, 1999 and have worked in the conference for 14 years. I have served as Communication and Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries director in the conference from 2010 to 2014. I have a Master's degree in Religion from the University of Ghana, and a Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the SCGC, one of the most frequent issues on the agenda of nearly every Seventh-day Adventist church board meeting is marriage issues, as observed by this researcher. This same problem also ranks first regarding church discipline. Certain media reports in Ghana have attributed the high incidence of marriage breakdown to a lack of marriage preparation (Ghana News Agency, 2007a). Marriages are deteriorating, and those entering into marriages are not adequately prepared. In 2012, *Ghana Statistical Service's 2010 Population & Housing Census* reported that closely 600,000 marriages contracted in Ghana have collapsed and over 300,000 ended in separation (Ghana

Statistical Service, 2012). A leading Ghanaian Family and Marriage Counselor suggests that one of the root causes for breakdown of marriages is lack of effective premarital counseling. He observes: “Lack of pre-marital counseling, absence of training in the home that prepares people for future courtship and marriage, or poor counseling that does not provide the important details of the meaning and purpose of marriage” (Kisseadoo, 2016). In the SCGC, many premarital couples schedule their wedding dates before coming to inform their pastors about their weddings, and some adopt the traditional or customary marriage without telling the church. The short notice couples give to pastors and the church makes it difficult for adequate marriage preparation to take place.

The prevailing marital breakdown and lack of education on marriage call for a model of a marriage preparation program for singles interested in marriage and for premarital couples who will soon be married.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project was to develop and implement a proactive and intentional marriage preparation program that will serve premarital couples, with the aim of enhancing marriage stability and preventing divorce.

The overall goal of this marriage preparation program is to equip pastors with needed resources in order to help premarital couples to build healthy, loving, long-lasting, and Christ-centered marriages. The program includes essential information designed for pastors and counselors to enhance their premarital counseling efforts with couples by facilitating, administering, and providing needed feedback to premarital couples. This marriage preparation guide is designed for nine sessions, allotting 45 minutes to one hour for each session. For the purpose of this study, this program has been

intentionally prepared for use by pastors preparing couples for marriage. However, it can also be used by professional marriage counselors, family life educators, church leaders considering their involvement in family ministries, and any other professionals connected with premarital guidance. The topics include certain Bible texts where necessary because the principles or guidelines for this program are Bible-based.

This program was implemented in the SCGC of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Delimitations of the Project**

While recognizing that marriage preparation for the unmarried is a broad area, this study specifically focuses on a Christian marriage-preparation program in the Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventist setting. The project is not focused on Adventist singles in the conference, but is aimed at couples intending to marry. The participants for the study were limited to ordained pastors, excluding laity and pastors who are not ordained.

### **Justification of the Project**

The high rate of divorce among young couples in Ghana has been attributed to a lack of adequate marriage preparation. A leading chief in the Ashanti Region of Ghana has called for the need to guide youth in premarital relationships through marriage counseling units in churches and other religious organizations (GNA-Ghana News Agency, 2007b). Seven months after the chief's observation, the Ashanti Regional Girls Education Coordinator of the Ghana Education Service also attributed the high rate of divorce in Ghanaian society to a lack of marriage preparation (GNA). A great need exists for a marriage preparation program to help Ghanaian youth before marriage.

This study can be valuable in helping the SCGC to provide marriage preparation programs in the churches.

This study is relevant because of a knowledge gap that it will attempt to fill. Currently, no researcher has conducted any serious study on this topic in the conference.

### **Description of the Project Process**

Because of the biblical basis for marriage, biblical teachings on family life provide instruction for fathers, mothers, and children. These teachings show God's interest in families, and the fact that God instituted marriage as a means of companionship and procreation indicates that marriage and relationships are important to Him. The theological reflection in this study focuses on the biblical view of marriage. Special attention has been given to what the Bible teaches on the origin of marriage, the aim of marriage, divorce, sexuality, and the responsibilities of wife and husband.

The second step reviews both Christian and secular literature, including books and articles regarding the need for marriage-preparation education, a brief history of marriage-preparation programs, perceptions of marriage-preparation programs, premarital assessment tools such as FOCCUS, PREPARE, Couple CARE, RELATE, and Christian marriage-preparation programs. The study also investigates the African traditional marriage process with special references to Ghana, the types of marriages in Africa, marriage-preparation programs through rites of passage, and informal domestic marriage-preparation education by parents.

Eight ordained pastors who conduct premarital counseling in the church were recruited as participants for the study.

Based on the findings, a marriage-preparation program was developed for premarital couples in the SCGC, using the educational resource program of PREPARE/ENRICH as a guide in some areas that are relevant to Ghanaian context and other marriage and relationship programs to meet the needs of the people. The program aims at helping singles and premarital couples develop harmonious relationships prior to marriage and after marriage, and to assist couples in effectively increasing long-term marital satisfaction. Three pastors who implemented the program were interviewed to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The designed marriage program aids pastors in focusing on core areas that may require more extensive counseling from the pastor. The inventories in the program help the pastor as counselor to understand who the couples are, their current relationship, their knowledge on communication, sex, spirituality, parenting, and their view on love and marriage. The pastors were encouraged to engage the couples interactively. The importance of responding to the inventories accurately is emphasized, to enable the pastor as counselor to help the couples establish a solid foundation for their marital life. The questionnaires that are administered to the couples assist the pastors in searching for compatibility and incompatibility factors and any background issues that may have adverse effects on the couples' relationships.

1. A report focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the program was submitted.
2. The program begins with a ten-week course which includes the use of some aspects of premarital assessment (PREPARE/ENRICH) and education on communication, conflict resolution, marital roles, sexuality, commitment, finances, and personality issues. The goal of the course is to educate couples

about themselves and their relationships so that they can improve the long-term health of their relationships. Inventories were administered to the couples who participated in the marriage preparation program to increase their knowledge of their strengths and those areas needing improvement or assistance.

Week 1- The Importance of Relationships/Foundations of Marriage

Week 2- Communication

Week 3- Conflict and Resolution in Relationships

Week 4- Financial Management

Week 5- Leisure Activities

Week 6- Sex and Affection

Week 7- Relationship Roles

Week 8- Devotional Life of a Couple/Family

Week 9- Children and Parenting

Week 10-Wedding Planning

### **Definition of Terms**

Key terms that are central to this study are listed and defined in this section.

*Ghana Union Conference* is national headquarters of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana, which is made up with conferences throughout the country. Ghana Union Conference, serving as a national executive body has administrative control of all the conferences in Ghana.

*Marriage* today is defined according to different viewpoints. Two leading competing definitions of marriage include the conjugal view and the revisionist view.

According to Girgis, George, and Anderson (2010), the conjugal view of marriage is defined as the union between a man and a woman with a resolve of “a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.” The couple seal their relationship or union by conjugal acts, which are part of the reproduction process. By contrast, the revisionist view of marriage defines it as a union of two people, which could be of the opposite sex or of the same-sex, who are committed to “romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life.” This study relies on the biblical definition of marriage as a holy institution from God, a life-long union between a man and a woman, as noted in the theological reflection found in the next chapter.

*Premarital counseling* refers to “a therapeutic couple intervention that occurs with couples who plan to marry” (Murray & Murray, 2004), and also to a “form of counseling which centers around the interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman, helps them evaluate their relationship in view of their approaching marriage” that aids couples to know each other and to explore ways that will enhance the stability of their marital life (Diaz, 1966).

*Marriage Preparation* may refer to “a variety of formal and informal efforts by which persons become ready for the roles and responsibilities of marriage” (Family and Consumer Sciences, n.d.). In this study, marriage preparation refers to formal instruction in which the couple attends a program or counseling session(s) that will assist them in preparing for marriage.

### **Expectations of the Project**

This study seeks to prevent or minimize the development of marital distress and to enhance marital stability. Also, this project will provide a biblically-based marriage preparation program for the SCGC. In addition, it will assist the Ghana Union Conference Family Ministries department and other conferences to provide proactive and intentional marriage preparation programs.

This study will serve as a basis for others to conduct further research. It will help me and other pastors to fully understand the needs of premarital couples, and to provide the necessary leadership skills for marriage-preparation programs.

Furthermore, this study will serve as a source of knowledge for those contemplating marriage. Also, because certain leaders in the Ghanaian public have raised concerns about the lack of effective marriage-preparation programs, this marriage preparation program is necessary and will serve as a tool for policymakers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines what the Bible says on the origin of marriage, the gift of singleness, biblical characters who are single, sexuality, and marriage and divorce. The aim of this section is to establish a theological foundation for a Christian program to reach and prepare premarital couples for marriage. The chapter explores key themes by tracing the biblical origin of marriage, surveys key Bible texts on relationships, and examines what the Bible prescribes and condemns in marriage. The chapter also addresses the issue of singleness in the Bible and some identifiable biblical characters who were single. It further focuses on sexuality, sex outside of the boundary of marriage, and divorce. Scripture declares, “My people perish from lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). This knowledge includes premarital education for people who will choose to marry in the future, for those who have chosen not to marry, and for those who cannot marry due to circumstances beyond their control. Leaders, whether in the family, the church, the school, or the community are expected to provide this education for those who need it.

In biblical times, God worked through His prophets, priests, kings, evangelists, apostles, and others; scripture declares that this guidance is still available today to assist people who need God's direction in every aspect of life. The Bible offers abundant information to help the unmarried. Although the principles are not centered in one place,

they can be gathered from various passages in the Bible, providing necessary information for contemporary people who are unmarried. Therefore, this section investigates various passages that address issues that impact the unmarried.

Because premarital couples are transitioning to marriage, the specific sub-topics of this program are related to marriage. Those who choose not to marry are sometimes confronted with similar problems that married people encounter. Whereas certain issues are unique, this reflection will take a broad approach in addressing them.

### **Origin of Marriage**

Bacchiocchi (2001) posits that the Bible presents marriage as a divine institution. He further points out that marriage was established by God at the beginning of human history when He "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Bacchiocchi argues that because God is the Creator of marriage, he has the right to declare which principles should govern marital relationships. He argues that the One who originated the marital relationship knows about factors that can promote its stability and factors that can militate against it.

According to Smith (2012), timely principles emerge from an ancient institution:

The institution of marriage dates from the time of man's original creation (Gen. 2:18-25). From Gen. 2:24 we may evolve the following principles: (1) The unity of man and wife, as implied in her being formed out of man. (2) The indissolubleness of the marriage bond, except on the strongest grounds (Comp. Matt. 19:9). (3) Monogamy, as the original law of marriage. (4) The social equality of man and wife. (5) The subordination of the wife to the husband (1Cor. 11:8,9; 1Tim. 2:13). (6) The respective duties of man and wife. In the patriarchal age, polygamy prevailed (Gen. 16:4; 25:1,8; 28:9; 29:23,26; 1Chron. 7:14), but to a great extent divested of the degradation which in modern times attaches to that practice.

Regarding point 5 above, the purpose of the gospel is to reverse the negative consequences of the fall. Instead of the subjection of a wife to her husband, the New

Testament promotes mutual submission between husband and wife (Eph. 5:21). Indeed, White (2002:494) states, “The wife is to stand by the side of the husband as his equal, sharing all the responsibilities of life.” She further states, “Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her as her husband’s equal” (1980:231). Brown (2015:589) insists that creation did not rank Adam and Eve in significance. He admits that while Adam was created before Eve, that cannot establish rank, because the creation story shows a pattern of ascending order of importance.

In tying marriage with family, Köstenberger (2011) reveals the clear biblical position that, at its root, marriage and the family are not man-made conventions based merely on a temporary consensus and time-honored tradition. Instead, the Holy Scripture teaches that family was God's idea and that marriage is a divine, not merely human institution. The implication of this truth is significant indeed, meaning that humans are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage and the family according to their own choices or terms. Instead, they are obligated to preserve and respect what has been divinely instituted. This position parallels Jesus' response when asked about the permissibility of divorce: "What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). Based on this, Köstenberger is of the view that marriage is far more than a human social contract; it is a divinely instituted covenant. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2010) supports the view that "Marriage is a divine institution established by God Himself before the fall" of the first family. It further states that it was God's original plan that the marriage of the first couple, Adam and Eve, serve as a pattern or a model for all future marriages. Jesus' comments buttress this fact when he quoted from the Old Testament:

Have you not read that He who made them at 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 flesh?” So then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate (Matt. 19:4-6).

A knowledge of where marriage originated, with whom it originated, and what its requirements were when instituted, will assist the discovery of the true meaning of marriage. It can then be approached with seriousness and commitment, in order to maintain its sanctity.

### **The Gift of Singleness**

Society and the media portray singleness as one of the most boring and uncomfortable states in adulthood. The common assumption is that most people transitioning from childhood into adulthood will marry in their lifetime. Some people are surprised that some can live without choosing to marry. Brown (2001) counters this negative judgment and attempts to help counselors and family life educators place singleness in proper perspective.

Köstenberger (2011) notes that in Old Testament times, singleness was rare among individuals old enough to marry. Certain factors caused some people to be single in the Old Testament era. Some became single because of the death of a partner, such as Ruth and Naomi, even though there was the possibility of remarriage on the part of Ruth. Other singles included eunuchs, who were single and excluded from congregational worship and the priesthood (Lev 21:20; Deut 23:1), the divorced (Deut 24:1-5), those who could not marry due to diseases such as leprosy, and singles just prior to marriage.

The New Testament reveals more about singleness than the Old Testament does. Some adult singles are identified and the New Testament indicates that singleness is one

of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this lack of ample information on singleness may be due to the predominant Jewish culture that promoted marriage over singleness.

According to Hoffeditz (2005), the reference to singleness as a gift originates in one of Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth. In that particular reference, Paul, who was a single adult, indicates that it was his wish that all men and women could be like him:

<sup>7</sup>For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. <sup>8</sup>But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; <sup>9</sup>but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. (1 Cor 7:7-9)

Paul considered singleness as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and he undoubtedly possessed that gift. He went even further by enumerating the advantages associated with being unmarried:

<sup>32</sup> But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; <sup>33</sup> but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. <sup>35</sup> This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor 7:32-35)

Commenting on the above passage, Hoffeditz (2005) observes two characteristics or benefits that mark the gift of singleness. First, he asserts that single adults are free from particular concerns that married individuals face. To him, marriage entails submitting to one another and sacrificing time, energy, and resources; these bring anxiety to married couples, from which singles are free. The marital roles that Paul reveals in Ephesian 5:22-33 do not apply to singles. Second, he believes that singleness allows for unhindered devotion. He argues that being anxiety-free from familial responsibilities provides many opportunities for singles to serve the Lord in ways that married Christians,

especially those with children, cannot do. However, he admits that freedom from particular activities does not always guarantee increased devotion to the Lord. Some singles abuse their independence by being irresponsible and poor stewards of their God-given talents.

Jesus indicates that a call to singleness allows those who are unmarried to give maximum devotion to the work of God:

For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it. (Matt 19:12)

This statement clearly shows that there are persons who choose to remain single for the sake of the kingdom, or to give their undivided time and energy for the cause of God. Jesus, who had no wife, was one of them, as well as John the Baptist and the apostle Paul. Denny (2011) points out some disagreement over whether Paul had been married at an earlier point in his life, but it is generally agreed that the apostle was an unmarried man for the duration of his ministry. Although no biblical texts indicate whether he married in his lifetime, it is easy to believe that Paul was not married during his ministry because he advised others to be like him in his single state. No reference exists in the book of Acts, Paul's own epistles, or those of other writers who wrote after he became a Christian, indicating that he was married.

One striking feature in 1 Corinthians 7 is Paul's ample and comprehensive instruction for the married and unmarried. He is not biased in outlining what is expected from both groups. Each state is important and is given by God. The instruction to believers in Corinth concerning the lifestyle expected of them is relevant to Christians today. Paul does not stigmatize or ridicule singles in this chapter as society does. He

presents the advantages that Christian singles can enjoy. He even refers to their status as a gift, but not just any gift. Its originator is God Himself, as “every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jas 1:17). Though a single himself, Paul does not command all Christians to be like him. He maintains that it is a gift and each person has his or her gift, including marriage and singleness. His instruction should serve as a theological basis for the church to emulate and continue comprehensive instruction for marrieds and singles in the church.

Singleness should not be seen as a curse or a state of stagnation; it is a gift that comes with a blessing. In maximizing the merits of marriage, Catholicism scrutinizes the solitude of singleness:

Among the worst miseries of life is that of unrelieved loneliness. To go to one's dwelling at evening, only to find it empty of any person interested in your struggle, rejoicing in your achievements, softening the sting of defeat with the balm of sympathy and understanding, is to live in a darkened chamber whither the sunshine of human comradeship and love scarcely penetrates. (O'Brien, 1974, p. 19)

Jesus' statement that in the heavenly kingdom people will no longer marry, but will be like the angels (Matt 22:30) demonstrates that singleness is not a curse. So the saved will spend eternity as singles. If singleness were a curse or a state of stagnation, God would not give it as a reward to His people.

### **Biblical Characters Who Were Single**

Whereas the Bible devotes considerable space to marriage and married couples, there were people who, through their personal choices or circumstances, were known to be single adults. Although the marital status of certain characters is debatable, biblical evidence is sufficient to affirm that they were single. According to the Christian Family Law Association, singleness in the Old Testament was uncommon among individuals

who were old enough to marry. Jewish culture promoted God's command in Genesis 1:28 to "to be fruitful and increase in number." Most of the time this is quoted with Genesis 2:18, a text appearing to support marriage: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" Most people in the Old Testament viewed singleness as contrary to God's intention in creation. Most Old Testament singles were widows and eunuchs.

Horst (2001) asserts that a number of singles existed in the Bible who had a significant impact on the lives of God's people. This is true in that there were many singles in the Bible, but whether those people were singles throughout their lives is debatable. There were single adults who later married; there were those who likely never married, as well as those who became single again after marriage due to the death of their partners, or because of other factors.

Daniel and his three friends, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abedenego are believed to be single. No biblical references indicate that they were married, from the time they were taken captives and throughout their stay in Babylon. This position is not absolute, rather it is assumed. What is significant is that in their status in a foreign land, they remained committed to God. This serves to inspire singles of today that they too can serve God, even as Daniel did.

Bible scholars are divided on the marital status of Miriam, the sister of Moses. Some believe that she was single because she was never referred to as a wife or a mother. No biblical record supports her having a husband or children, so she was, in all probability, unmarried. However, Tribble (n.d.) challenges this position, arguing that the Jewish tradition at that time would not tolerate her single status. Interestingly, the

historian Josephus deems Hur to be her husband, but rabbinic sources object to that notion and assign Caleb as her husband and Hur as her son. These extra-biblical sources may offer nothing more than conjecture. The argument that Jewish tradition would not tolerate Miriam being single is not a convincing one. Duin (2013) comments on societal pressure:

According to Rabbi Zoe Klein of Temple Isaiah, a reformed congregation in Los Angeles, “A lot of commandments are only fulfilled through having a family,” he continues, “There’s a lot of pressure in the Jewish community to marry. So much of our cultural Judaism revolves around the family experience that singles are left out. I know a lot of single Jews. But I don’t know many Jews who are happy being single.” (Para. 8, 9)

So while in the days of Miriam singleness was not glorified, it was not a prohibited lifestyle. Similar to Miriam, no biblical passages indicate that Jeremiah was married. Jeremiah 16 is often used in support of an unmarried position:

The LORD gave me another message. He said, <sup>2</sup>“Do not get married or have children in this place. <sup>3</sup>For this is what the LORD says about the children born here in this city and about their mothers and fathers: <sup>4</sup>They will die from terrible diseases. No one will mourn for them or bury them, and they will lie scattered on the ground like manure. They will die from war and famine, and their bodies will be food for the vultures and wild animals.” (Jer 16:1-4)

It is easy to contend that Jeremiah was single, at least for some stage of his adulthood, when he was serving as a mouthpiece for God. However, one cannot use the previous quotation alone to demonstrate that Jeremiah never married, because God did not say he should never marry. To put the text in proper perspective, God was talking about a particular city that Jeremiah should not marry in. He might have married in another place, or never married at all. Because there are no traces of his wife, children, or his being called a father, it is assumed he was unmarried. He was active in his prophetic ministry. He was obedient to God’s commandment that he should not marry in a particular city. Contemporary singles can still serve the Lord without getting married.

Other biblical characters are believed to have been unmarried, although their marital status is debatable. Among these are Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, the apostle John, Lydia, Timothy, Barnabas, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, Barnabas, Mary, and her sister Martha.

It is universally acknowledged that Jesus Christ never married when He came to the earth in the flesh. He devoted His life to preaching, teaching, and healing. Indeed, the church is referred to as His bride (Rev 21:9). He did not oppose those who raised families, He was placed in the human family as an infant, and He was raised by Mary and Joseph. He helped other family members in His ministry, indeed His first act of ministry was at a wedding (John 2:1-11). Thus, He understands the needs and desires for some to marry and others to remain unmarried. White (1940, p. 144) comments, “His power was put forth to add to the joy of a wedding feast. Thus He showed His sympathy with men, and His desire to minister to their happiness.”

Paul was an unmarried adult during his ministry. The debate about Paul’s marital status centers on whether he was previously married. Some believe he was a widower before becoming a Christian, after which he chose to remain unmarried and even appealed to other Christians to imitate him. No biblical support can be found for gaining divine favor through singleness. The apostle Paul warned that in the last days people would practice that false teaching by refraining from marriage:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The fact that there were singles in the Bible who did their work well does not mean that to become the best Christian one has to be single. In the Bible, neither marriage nor singleness are prescribed for all people.

### **Sexuality**

According to Eckman (2011), humans are gendered and are sexual beings. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God's creation of gendered people is declared to be the divine purpose, with both sexes made in the image of God and humanity as a whole, both the man and the woman, declared to be very good. In the Bible, the physical pleasures of sexual union noted in Proverbs 5 and in the Song of Songs are presented positively, connecting eroticism directly with romantic love and intimacy.

Sexuality is a major theme in the Bible. Grant and Hudlin (2007) argue that more verses, chapters, and even books are devoted to issues related to sexuality than to the church, repentance, baptism, and angels. They further state that the entire books of Hosea and the Song of Solomon broadly covers the issues of sex, in addition to Genesis 29 and 34, Leviticus 18 and 20, 2 Samuel 13, and 1 Corinthians 7.

Deem (2012) points out that the very first command God gave to humans was to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." This command to procreate can only take place through sexual activity. However, if one is to reason by this position alone, one can be tempted to believe that sex was given only for procreation. Challies (2009), however, explains that God has created sex because the sexual union between husband and wife has a unique power to bond them together and to make them one.

Challies further reveals that the essence of sex is to provide unique ways through which a husband and wife can intimately know one another, mutually serve one another,

and reciprocally express their vulnerability to one another. No other area in marriage offers so much to gain and so much to lose, or so closely grafts the couple together than does sex. Longhenry (2012) shares a similar position, maintaining that human sexuality was made to be good, part of the means by which married couples can make that deep, intimate connection between themselves and their respective spouses. He further stresses that if Christians maintain a healthy sexuality, they will embody the limitations and proper exercise of sexuality, understanding that any expression of sexuality outside of its proper sphere is not only a perversion, but a counterfeit of God's plan for oneness.

Longhenry is correct because the Bible encourages sexual activity only within the confines of a marital relationship. Any sexual activity that occurs outside of marriage is considered as sin against the commandments of God. In the heart of the Ten Commandments, God indicated His hatred of sex outside of marital boundaries. “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14). In Jesus' description, adultery included sexual relations between a married man and a woman other than his wife (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Other New Testament teachings also understand it that way (cf. 1 Cor 7:2, *Christian Bible Reference*). In short, adultery is any sexual activity between persons not married to each other.

In speaking on adultery, Jesus broadly described it to cover other areas that people may overlook or may not consider to be adultery or fornication: “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5: 27-28). Jesus asked His listeners about what Moses had told the people in the Old Testament concerning adultery, but to Jesus, adultery means more than the physical

presence of the persons involved; it includes the mental lust a person will have for another who is not married to him or her. Sex is not limited to bodily contact alone.

One may inquire, how can adultery be committed in the heart? Jesus declares that the sin process begins in the heart before the actual action takes place: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Elliot (n.d.) advises couples on their need to understand their own freedoms in making each other happy, and their need to know how Satan is using other means, including pornography, to break down marriages. Three questions are recommended as a test of appropriate behavior: Does the Bible prohibit it? Is the behavior beneficial? Does the behavior involve anybody else?

Paul advised Christians, “Run from sexual sin. No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Cor 6:18). Here Paul means that one should not even come close to this sin. One who commits this sin does it to his or her own disadvantage, and it affects the body negatively. Commenting on this text, Richison (2002, para. 2) states:

When it comes to temptation regarding a sex sin – flee it. The Greek indicates immediate and decisive disassociation from sexual sin. The Greek word is the word from which we get the English word “fugitive.” “Become a fugitive from sexual sins.” There is internal injury with sexual sins, so it is not something we debate or discourse about.

Paul reiterates this in Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” So when one engages in sex outside of marriage, it is a dishonor to marriage. Sex is a gift given to married couples by God to be enjoyed in marriage only. The text broadly covers two groups of people who dishonor marriage. First, “fornicators” (single people who

have sex) dishonor the institution of marriage. Second, “adulterers” (married people who have sex with someone other than their spouse) defile the marriage bed.

Cole (2013) hints that the best way for the married to maintain sexual purity is to keep a close daily walk with Christ and a close relationship with their married partners. If they backslide from the Lord and are not spending constant time in prayer and Bible study, they become vulnerable to temptation. Again, if they grow distant from their partners they are more prone to temptation. God gave sex as a gift for married persons to enjoy.

Paul warned about the danger of depriving each other of that gift. He wrote: “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1Cor 7:5). Krell (2007) indicates that the word translated “stop depriving” literally means “do not rob one another,” or “do not do fraud to one another.” The word means to cheat someone out of what properly belongs to them. If a person deprives his or her body when the other partner seeks sex, it is biblical fraud.

Krell recognizes four legitimate conditions in which one may deprive a partner of sex. First, sex can be withheld with the agreement of both husband and wife. This mutual agreement occurs when there is no rejection from one partner. Second, sex can be deprived when both partners agree to delay for a time. The Greek word used to denote time means specific time. Third, sex can be set aside by married partners for prayer. This is when the couple devotes themselves to specific prayer. Finally, sex can be deprived until the husband and wife agree to come together again. The text also indicates that

when one deprives their partner of sex, their self-control is threatened and they open themselves up to attack.

### **Marriage and Divorce in the Bible**

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve and joined them together as husband and wife for life: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Perz (2008) states that through these words God established the marriage relationship and ordained the family unit in the Garden of Eden. According to Bacchiocchi (2001), the first step in establishing a marriage covenant is *leaving* all other relationships, including close relations such as father and mother. He clarifies that such leaving does not mean abandoning one’s parent, because caring for and supporting parents are a biblical responsibility. His position is that a married couple should sacrifice relationships so that they can cement their new relationship as husband and wife. He admits that leaving is not easy, but it is necessary for marriage to succeed.

Another word used by God during the first marriage was “cleaving.” Warnes (2007) argues “cleave” refers to a bond of affection, which can mean glue or cement, and which is enduring. This is the type of permanent relationship of love that should exist between a husband and a wife. The first couple were not the ones who requested marriage, it was God who knew that marriage was ideal for them, as evidenced by the words, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Gen 12:18). It was God who determined what was ideal for the first couple.

Equality between husband and wife is illustrated by how God provided a wife for Adam. According to Matthew Henry, “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of

Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (“Matthew Henry Quotes,” n.d.). Bacchiocchi (2001) supports the position that Eve was created to be Adam’s equal partner, approximating him in every point, and making their marital union a complete whole. She was not given to be Adam’s slave, but rather his helper. Brown (1999, p 15) emphasizes that the biblical meaning of ‘helper’ “is not an assistant, a supporter, someone occupying merely a secondary position.” To him the Hebrew word for ‘helper’ is mostly employed in the Old Testament to describe God Himself. Which means women do not play second fiddle to men in marital relationships.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued a statement on singleness and marriage:

The estate of marriage is not God's only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010a, pp. 74-75)

For those who remain single throughout their lives, God has a plan for meeting their human relational needs. Marriage is not the only avenue in which human companionship needs can be met. God has provided for the unmarried through friendships. Singles can enjoy friendships with other persons, but they need to be informed regarding their social and sexual boundaries.

## **Divorce**

Ross (2010) asserts that Jesus Christ was the first in the New Testament to refine the Jewish practice, instituted by Moses, which permitted conditional divorce. Twice Christ qualified and greatly restricted the practices of rabbinical Judaism in His day. The rabbis had developed a convoluted way in which a man could divorce his wife. They succumbed to cultural and pagan pressures to compromise even further Moses' earlier instructions in the law (Torah). Moses set forth this perpetual statute:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut. 24:1-4)

Commenting on this statute, Ross indicates that 14 centuries after Moses had given this instruction, his words, "if she then finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her," had been misinterpreted or interpreted in its broadest sense, outside of the intended context. It now included anything that a husband might dislike (such as a wife being a poor cook, hard to get along with, barren and unable to bear children, overweight, old, etc.). This Rabbinic interpretation caused unloving husbands to take unjust advantage of faithful wives.

Instone-Brewer (2007) believes that Jesus appears to have given adultery as the only condition for divorce when he said, "Whoever divorces a wife, except for sexual indecency, and remarries, commits adultery" (Matt 19:9). However, he is quick to admit

that Bible scholars are divided on their interpretation on what Jesus said. Most say that Jesus allows divorce only for adultery. But some argue that Jesus originally did not allow even that. Only in Matthew does he offer an out from marriage, “except for sexual indecency.” Instone-Brewer suggests that, in addition to what Jesus says, Paul also wrote that divorce is possible on the grounds of abandonment by a nonbeliever (1 Cor 7:12-15). According to Instone-Brewer, most people have found this teaching difficult to accept and see it as impractical because there is no explicit biblical support for divorce on the grounds of physical or emotional abuse.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church also supports the biblical position that adultery and fornication, as found in Matthew 5:32, and abandonment by an unbelieving partner, as found in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, are grounds for divorce (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010b). Vernick (2013) notes that among conservative Christians, there seems to be some allowance for separation if a husband physically abuses his wife or she fears that her life is in danger, but such support is limited if her husband is crushing her spirit through emotional abuse. Arguing that emotional abuse is far more dangerous than physical abuse, Vernick references research in a 2011 study jointly funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Drug Abuse that found that the human brain processes physical pain and intense social rejection in exactly the same way. The primary difference is that physical injuries usually heal. Wounds to one’s soul and spirit are longer lasting and often more damaging. This revelation resonates well with the popular Pythagoras's quotation, “A wound from a tongue is worse than a wound from the sword; for the latter affects only the body, the former the spirit, the soul.”

Roberts (2008) disagrees with those who misquote the Malachi 2:16 passage, “For I hate divorce”. Roberts believes that God did not condemn all divorce and she admonishes Christians to refrain from using the slogan, 'God hates divorce.' To her, it is treacherous divorce that God hates, not disciplinary divorce. It is true that sometimes divorce could be legal in Biblical sense. Even when divorce is permitted, God is not pleased. This is evidenced in Biblical metaphorical images such as those found in Ezekiel 16 and Jeremiah 3:8 where God is portrayed as a husband and His people as a wife. A careful examination of these texts conveys the idea that God Himself experienced the pain of divorce. Brown (2015: 598) comments, “Divorce is a destruction of the oneness of humankind and distortion of the image of God, often with devastating consequences for parents and children.” God desires relationship stability, not relationship breakdown.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to establish a theological foundation for marital relationships. Marriage was directly instituted by God and is a holy union between a man and a woman. It is a life-long union that includes social equality of both the wife and the husband.

This foundation provides a framework for couples contemplating marriage, emphasizing that marriage is not a man-made institution, and thus must be entered into seriously, and that biblical instruction provides guidance for couples. This chapter highlights forces that pose as threats to the stability of marriage such as adultery, fornication, divorce, and lack of love and respect. Our examination clarifies the line between factors that mitigate against healthy relationships and those that facilitate their growth.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This chapter conducts a review of relevant research in the following areas: The need for marriage preparation education, a brief history of marriage-preparation programs, perceptions of marriage preparation programs, premarital assessment tools such as FOCCUS, PREPARE, Couple CARE, and RELATE, Christian marriage programs, African traditional marriage processes, and types of marriage programs in Ghana and Africa through the rite of passage. The first section addresses the scholarly argument on the importance of marriage preparation, offering significant advantages associated with marriage-preparation programs. The known benefits of such programs have led governments to encourage people to participate in the program, and in some cases, making it public policy or offering incentives to people to participate. The chapter also traces the historical origins of marriage-preparation programs, in which religious organizations played key roles in running such programs during their initial stage.

#### **The Need for Premarital Education**

Premarital education programs are primarily designed for couples without distress in their relationship and aimed to help prevent future distress by providing an awareness of potential problems that may occur. They provide the information, skills, or resources needed to prevent or improve these issues (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Some authors

(Carrol & Doherty, 2003; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006) have recognized the importance of marriage preparation for premarital couples who participate in such programs before marriage. This position has been reaffirmed by researchers (Doss, Atkins & Christensen, 2003; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Lamanna & Riedmann, 2005). According to Stanley (2001), marriage-preparation programs offer the following benefits to couples: (a) help to avoid hasty decisions and foster deliberation; (b) send a message that marriage is important (c) help couples to know their options in seeking professional advice during marriage; and (d) lower subsequent marital distress or termination. In their view, (McGeorge & Carlson, 2006) premarital education has become a focus of public policy.

Many states have proposed and enacted legislation that requires or offers incentives for participating in some form of premarital education. People who participate in premarital education programs will benefit from them, as well as all of society. Halford and Simons (2005) indicate that the Australian government promotes couple relationship education as an important element of strengthening marriage and reducing the personal and social cost of separation and divorce. The fact that the Australian government has taken a proactive approach to address the problem of divorce and its associated problems gives credence to the importance of premarital education. This means that premarital education or marriage-preparation programs promote marital stability, and a stable marriage creates a safer society and prevents divorce and the financial burdens associated with it. Participation in marriage-preparation programs offers several benefits to couples. In addition to the Australian government's involvement in promoting and supporting marriage-education programs, Halford, Markman, and Stanley (2008), indicate that the

governments of the United Kingdom and the United States have also made financial allocations to boost relationship-education programs in respective countries. In 2006, the U.S. government gave \$150 million in grants to fund demonstration projects that had couple relationship-education program as a major focus.

Duncan and Wood (2003) assert that marriage-preparation programs offer recipients enhanced conflict management skills, help couples to be dedicated to each other, provide couples greater positivity in their marriage, and reduce the potential chances of divorce. Parker (2007) found evidence demonstrating that participating in marriage and relationship-education programs, particularly those that address conflict management, can benefit couples through improved communication and conflict management, and improved relationship quality. Gardner and Howlett (2000) (cited in Gardner & Boellaard, 2007) indicate that there are benefits to putting more efforts in teaching early marriage and relationship skills to young people as part of their school curricula. Relationship attitudes and behavior patterns are often developed, molded, and strengthened by family interactions early in life leading to romances in the teen years. However, Carol and Doherty (2003) are of the view that because there is no extended follow-up research, conclusions on the long-term effectiveness of high school relationship education remain elusive.

Despite the position of Carol and Doherty, the researcher of this study believes that the suggestion of recommending marriage-preparation programs to high school students is prudent, because it is important for young people to be exposed to marriage education early in their lives to learn more and to ask relevant questions before they enter into marital relationships than to be informed shortly before their marriages. Silliman

(2003) shares a similar position, that community-based marriage-preparation programs for engaged couples are effective for solving the problems of distress and divorce that are characteristic of the early years of marriage. In his view, commitment and training skills that are extended to the teen years, connecting youth to positive youth-development programs, might increase benefits, especially for high-risk couples.

Prevention is generally believed to be better than a cure. Findings show that mental health professionals find it difficult to reach the many couples who need marital therapy. Most couples with marriage problems never seek therapy. Some of these couples are of the view that therapy may do more harm than good, and do not believe its efficacy. This is why marriage-education programs should be in place before couples become distressed because it is easier for couples with no or mild distress to improve their marriage than it is for couples experiencing severe relationship problems to change entrenched negative patterns and feelings (Larson, 2009).

Research has also shown that many engaged couples are blinded by romance. Consequently, they fail to see potential dangers and become more preoccupied with the wedding than with the marriage. To help solve this problem, religious organizations have turned the wedding planning into marriage preparation (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004).

A household survey conducted by Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman (2006) found that premarital education in the past few decades has become more common and that increased availability of educational programs is linked with more frequent public use. They reported that premarital education is significantly correlated with higher levels of marital quality, lower levels of marital conflict, and lower divorce rates. By contrast,

Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, and Johnson (2009) found that couples with higher risk profiles for divorce were less likely to participate in premarital education. The implication for this report is that most people who participate in premarital education are couples with lower risk profiles.

Research has shown (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010) that in some places, extensive marriage preparation is conducted. However, it is not meant only for couples who are preparing for marriage. In such cases, marriage and relationship-education (MRE) programs provide information and teach attitudes, skills, and behaviors meant to help individuals and couples achieve long-lasting, happy, and successful marriages and intimate partner relationships. This includes helping participants to make wise partner choices and avoiding or leaving abusive relationships. Since the late 1990s, several states have begun to fund healthy marriage and relationship programs (e.g., Oklahoma, Utah, Michigan, Florida, Louisiana, Arizona, Texas, and Alabama). In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, launched a federal Healthy Marriage Initiative and began funding MRE demonstration programs. Policymakers believe that investing public funds in these programs will help strengthen public and private efforts to improve couple relationships, strengthen marriages, engage fathers, reduce divorce and non-marital childbearing rates, reduce child poverty, and improve child-wellbeing (Hawkins & Ooms, 2010). The main motivations behind these initiatives is to act upon the research findings that suggest that children most often perform best on measures of adjustment and achievement when nurtured in stable, well-functioning, two-parent families, including fathers (Brown, 2010).

Reports from 2004 indicate that more than 40 states in America have launched programs to support marriage and couple relationships (Dion, 2005). This indicates growing support for marriage-preparation programs. Government also recognizes the importance of such programs. Marriage and relationship education has moved beyond the traditional realms of private professional or lay practitioners and is being used as a tool in public policy (Hawkins, Markham, & Stanley, 2008). For the past decade, according to Hawkins, Amato, and Kinghorn (2013), the federal government has supported educational programs aimed at assisting individuals and couples to develop and maintain healthy relationships and marriages, popularly known as Healthy Marriage Initiatives (HMIs).

Not all people are happy about government involvement in marriage education, and some critics have expressed their concerns. The first concern is that pressure might be put on people to marry in general, and to marry (or stay married to) unsuitable (e.g., abusive) partners in particular. The second concern is that money meant for other programs will be diverted to fund marriage programs (Markman & Halford, 2005). Markman and Halford posit that policy makers and curriculum developers must work together to clarify that the goals of government initiatives are to offer research-based marriage-education services to couples who “choose marriage for themselves,” and that no programs are offered with the objectives to pressure people to marry or to stay married to an abusive partner. Such an objective would be a clear indication that the program contradicts its own principles because the initiatives promote healthy marriages, and any aggression, coercion, or victimization is not part of a healthy marriage. Third, the money for other programs such as housing, medical care, jobs, child care, education, and

schooling will not be diverted as claimed by critics. Based on the explanation by Markman and Halford, the critics' concerns or argument, though legitimate, will not produce their expressed negative consequences.

### **A Brief History of Marriage-Preparation Programs**

Marriage preparation as part of the school curriculum began before World War II. One such program was offered by Boston University in 1924 by Ernest R. Groves, titled "Preparation for Marriage and Family Living." A similar course was also provided at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1929. The marriage preparation content during the pre-World War II era centered on health and heredity issues, the wedding, finances, religious understanding, legal qualifications for marriage, and the need for preparation (Wilmoth, 2005). A marriage education course was taught by Alfred Kinsey beginning in 1938 at Indiana University (Miller, 2011). The need for formal marriage preparation aimed to prevent marital distress and divorce started in the 1930s. The first program was developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932 (Mac, 2008). In 1941, the Philadelphia Marriage Council established a standardized program; the aim was to help young married and premarital couples to better understand companionship in marriage and how to help them avoid certain causes of marriage problems. Before the 1930s, the clergy were still meeting couples for guidance prior to marriage (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

In 1962, David and Vera Mace initiated their first marital education class for married couples in order to provide intervention services (Kirby, 2005). Because interactional theories were in their infancy in the 1950s and 1960s, professional counselors generally believed that marital problems were the problem of one individual

in the relationship. Therefore, premarital education was not a regular part of professional clinical practice at that time (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Historically, religious institutions have played leading roles in marriage-preparation programs. The Roman Catholic Marriage Encounter program, which started in Spain in 1962, was through the initiative of Father Gabriel Calvo, marriage enrichment was led by David and Vera Mace, who led retreats for Quakers in 1972, and the United Methodist Church's leadership training programs for couples was begun by Leon and Antoinette Smith in the 1960s (Nadir, n.d.; Wilmoth, 2005). According to Wilmoth, Mace challenged marriage counselors to spend more time on marriage preparation instead of focusing on remedial orientation. Mace's advice makes sense because most marriage counselors are more reactive in helping couples deal with existing marriage problems than preemptive in helping couples avoid potential marital problems. In the 1980s, premarital programs were conducted, such as PREPARE and Catholic Pre Cana. Diane Sollee founded the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education in 1995 in an effort to promote marriage-education programs (Staier, 2007).

### **Perceptions on Marriage-Preparation Programs**

A study by Martin, Specter, Martin, & Martin (2003) found that 70.9% of adolescents showed interest or neutrality toward premarital counseling, with 47.3% expressing a need for more education on marital expectations. Silliman and Schumm (2004) reported that previous studies with college students revealed a preference to learn by experience. However, there was substantial interest in a short-term, affordable formal marriage-preparation program, if led by a competent person in a nonthreatening manner to dating or engaged couples. Blair and Cordova (2009) reported that participants in a

premarital education program believed that an overall attendance of the program would be beneficial to their relationship. Despite these benefits, some couples still do not attend these programs due to money and time that outweigh the benefits the couples perceive they will receive. Blair and Cordova (2009) suggested that removing such barriers is one of the most effective ways of increasing participation.

The most attractive marriage-preparation programs preferred by young adults are those that are private (not in a group), led by well-known providers, who are skillful, respectful, offered at educational and religious settings, not mandatory, that target those in committed relationships, and offer a variety of methods to address relational issues and topics (Duncan & Wood, 2003). Previous studies evaluating the satisfaction of couples who participated in marriage-preparation programs have found high levels of satisfaction. Participants in such programs have perceived them to be a valuable experience in the first years of their marriages (Mac, 2008). Bruhn and Hill (2004), however, argue that couples who are in the developmental stage prior to marriage are still emotionally attached to their partner and find it impossible to think that there could be potential problems in their premarital relationship that may challenge their marital relationship. Therefore, couples in this state find it difficult to seek a counselor's assistance, because they perceive nothing wrong with their relationship.

Fogarty, Mayberry, Smith, and Echevarria-Doan (2010) observe that perceived social norms or views that others hold on marriage-preparation programs may also affect a couple's decision. If a behavior practiced by others is seen as normative, and a couple is known to receive benefits from such a program, then a couple is likely to follow suit. Couples whose peers regard marriage preparation programs positively may be more

likely to participate. Such likelihood may be strengthened when respected individuals in the couple's community recommend such a program.

### **Premarital Assessment Programs**

In a study by Busby, Ivey, Harries, and Ates (2007), the effectiveness of three models of premarital education was investigated. They compared the outcomes among a workbook-only self-directed program, a therapist-directed program (which is not structured), and an assessment-based (RELATE) relationship-enhancement program. They found substantial differences in effectiveness among the three approaches after a six-month follow-up. The assessment-based program was found to have more significant influence than were the therapist directed and self-directed programs on problem areas, and was more effective than the therapist-directed program in the areas of communication improvement and relationship satisfaction. The two main approaches used by practitioners in relationship-education programs for couples are: (a) structured, inventory-based assessment and feedback, and (b) curriculum-based teaching that centers on specific relationship skills and knowledge (Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008). The inventories are instruments that are used to assess couples, and feedback is given following the assessment. Assessment tools that are effectively used in combination with skills training provide a promising approach to premarital education because they give the opportunity to customize interventions to meet the unique needs of each couple (Busby et al., 2007).

Whereas Halford, Markman, and Stanley (2008) admit that the inventories are widely used and are empirically developed, they argue that there is a lack of published studies evaluating their effects on couples' relationships. Inventories and skills training

are two general approaches in relationship education that are evidence based and reasonably widely adopted (Halford, 2004). According to Halford, the most widely used inventories are PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE), the Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study (FOCCUS), and RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE). PREPARE was created to help counselors and clergy help premarital couples for marriage. In the first stage of the program, each couple must complete a PREPARE couple inventory, which is comprised of 30 background questions, as well as 165 items.

After completing the inventory, the answer sheets from the couple are sent for scoring. The counselor or facilitator of the program then receives the computer-based report of the couple's results, from which the counseling sessions are based (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Knutson and Olson further state that in using the PREPARE program, counselors are instructed to focus their counseling sessions on six goals with related exercises: (a) explore couple strengths and growth areas, (b) strengthen couple communication skills, (c) learn how to resolve couple conflict, (d) explore family-of-origin issues, (e) develop a financial plan and budget, and (f) develop personal, couple, and family goals. According to Barton, Futris, and Bradley (2014), as part of its evaluation or assessment the PREPARE inventory classifies couples into one of four couple typologies:

(1) Vitalized couples—those with the highest relationship quality and high scores across all inventory areas;

(2) Harmonious couples—those with moderate relationship quality and above-average scores on relationship interaction dimensions (e.g., communication, conflict

resolution) and lower scores on dimensions more typically associated with the institutional quality of marriage (e.g., children and parenting; religiosity);

(3) Traditional couples—those with moderately low relationship quality, particularly concerning scores that focus on relationship-interaction dimensions, but higher scores on institutional dimensions of marriage; and

(4) Conflicted couples—those with the lowest relationship quality and the least degree of consensus and positive responses across all inventory dimensions.

The RELATE model adopts the numerous constructs into various relationship contexts or subsystems that effect the couple's relationship. The predominant contexts that are linked with premarital and marital relationships are the individual, couple, familial, and cultural contexts. These contexts are not static, but go through a changing process in the course of time (Childs, 2009)

According to Thompson (2006), in the RELATE program, couples are not required to use a facilitator. They have the option of either completing a web-questionnaire or completing a pencil and paper questionnaire. After they have completed the questionnaire, they obtain the results of potential problem areas that may lead to major conflict (Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010). The RELATE program produces a detailed printout for couples to review to learn about relationship strengths and challenges, or to seek the additional help of a professional counselor or therapist. The advantages of using RELATE include its ease of interpretation, its use for large groups of people, its cost-effectiveness of computer scoring, its comprehensiveness, and its availability on the internet. However, the drawbacks of using RELATE include the inability to measure the similarity of absolute status in a couple's age, education, income,

and social economic status of one's parents, since these are thought to be factors that predict marital quality (Mac, 2008).

The FOCCUS pre-marriage inventory is a comprehensive, easy-to-use tool for professionals, couples, as well as lay individuals who have trained as FOCCUS facilitators, to help couples who are preparing for marriage. The objective of the FOCCUS inventory is to assist couples to understand their uniqueness, their relationship, and to recognize significant topics that will have impact on their lifelong marriage (FOCCUS Incorporated). The Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) is comprised of 156 items in 19 scales with an optional 33 items for interfaith couples, cohabiting couples, and couples in which one or both partners are remarrying. FOCCUS is widely used by Catholics and Protestant churches, as well as nondenominational counseling services. The inventory was designed to reflect the values and ideals of marriage as a sacred institution, including issues of permanency, fidelity, openness to children, forgiveness, shared faith in God, and unconditional love. The strengths of FOCCUS are its multi-lingual versions, including a version for those who have reading problems. The inventory result can be scored in three ways-- through computer, manually, or PC program. The problem areas in the relationship are listed on a single scale. Its drawbacks are its failure to measure the three factors that predict marital satisfaction, and the validity for the ideal response is unknown (Hudson, 2008).

The FOCCUS inventory is comprised of five sections (Thompson, 2006). The first section focuses on background and touches on the following areas: lifestyle expectancies, friends and interests, personality match, and personal issues. In the second section, the inventory addresses daily life such as religion and values, finances, extended

family, sexuality, and parenting. The third section addresses individual communication patterns, such as an individual's communication skills and conflict-resolution practices. The fourth section centers on marriage, and includes marriage readiness and marriage covenant. The last section of the program addresses key problem areas such as dysfunctional family of origin and dual career households.

Skills-based relationship education indicates great promise in improving couples' relationship skills and reducing their risk of future relationship problems (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). The skills programs are approaches that focus on active training of skills, however they typically also include a significant emphasis on building awareness and cognitive change (Stanley, 2001). Halford et al. list the following as examples of skills training programs: The Relationship Enhancement (RE) program, the Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), the Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement program (Couple CARE), the Couples Communication Program (CCP), and Couples Coping Enhancement Training (CCET).

Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement (Couple CARE) is a skills-based flexible delivery relationship-education program (Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer, 2004). Couple CARE is a flexible delivery program because it incorporates ease of access (even at home) and promotes self-directed learning, as opposed to group formats in which program leaders direct the sessions (Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). The program incorporates a minimal amount of professional initiative to assist couples in maintaining their focus and improving their skill development (Wilson & Halford, 2008). Wilson and Halford (2008) believe that Couple CARE has substantial overlap content with other couple relationship education

programs, but it is unique in its learning processes. The content of Couple CARE is not substantially different from other skilled-based relationship-education programs because it shares certain characteristics with other programs in areas such as positive communication, conflict management, positive expression of affection, and development of realistic expectations.

Self-directed marriage-preparation programs that are carried out through books, websites, and online assessments are believed to be the most frequent method adopted by individuals and couples who participate in such programs (Duncan et al., 2009). However, the effectiveness of such programs is not well documented (Duncan et al., 2010).

### **African Traditional Marriage Process**

In Africa, marriage is more than a union between a husband and wife. Hendrix's work (as cited in Kyalo, 2012) points out that in the African context marital relationship is described as affiance, an agreement or a contract that exists between two families or groups of kin. Marriage is believed to be sacred in Africa, because it solidifies the relationship that enhances communities and nations, and in turn brings new life and hope ("African Marriage," (n.d.). Nukunya (2003), who also holds similar view that African marriage is a union between two groups, has elaborated that marriage is a group affair, because apart from the couple and their immediate relations, distant kinsfolk, neighbors, and friends are all involved in the marriage ceremony. Nukunya's position is correct because in Africa, people are more interconnected with each other than in other cultures. In most societies of sub-Saharan Africa, the idea of family is not limited to its conjugal members. Lineage or extended family is a far larger web of relationships in which all

members are believed to have a common ancestor, either male or female. A person's relationship with members of one's extended family may be as important as the nuclear family and in some cases, more important than one's relationship with one's spouses and children (Kutsoati & Morc, 2012).

One key feature of African marriage is the payment of bride-wealth. In other cultures outside of sub-Saharan Africa, dowry is paid by the parents of the prospective wife to the family of the prospective husband, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa it is vice-versa. It is the parents of the boy who pay the bride-wealth to the parents of the girl (Amevor, 2010).

### **Types of Marriages in Ghana**

Three types of marriages are recognized by the law of Ghana: (a) customary marriage, (b) marriage under the Marriage Ordinance, and (c) Islamic marriage under the Marriage of Mohammedans Ordinance (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, herein referred to as KMA). Slight variations of customary rites are practiced from group to group, although in virtually all cases, customary marriage involves a general pattern of a gathering at which the bridegroom's family makes payment of a bride-price to the bride's family, followed by the bride being asked if she will accept the bridegroom as her husband. If the bride agrees and the families are satisfied with the necessary customary rites, the couple goes to the metropolitan or any district office where they will be accompanied with one witness each from their respective families and pay a required amount of money for the marriage registration process. According to KMA, the customary marriage process throughout Ghana generally includes the following steps: consent by the man and woman to be married. Consent by the family of the man and the

family of the woman that the two should be married. The man, or a member of his family, presents the woman's family with gifts and asks for her hand in marriage. The woman's family accepts the prospective bridegroom's gifts. A marriage celebration is held. The man and woman live as husband and wife, although not necessarily under the same roof. They are recognized by their community and families as husband and wife.

Historically, customary marriages are the oldest form of marriage known to Ghanaians. In Ghana today, they are still the most commonplace form of marriage and surpass the Christian ordinance and Islamic marriages in number. Again, the evidence is that Christian ordinance marriages are almost always preceded by a customary marriage referred to as an “engagement,” but in essence they are a customary marriage (Atuguba, 2003).

Persons involved in ordinance marriage, that is, marriage celebrated according to the register's certificate or the marriage officer's certificate (in this case church marriage), or according to the principal marriage officer's license, are to remain monogamous. Accordingly, any person married under ordinance is legally constrained and shall be incapable during the continuance of such marriage of contracting a valid marriage under customary law. Those who offend in this law are punished by jail term. Nevertheless, the real enforcement of the penalty remains paperwork (Amevor, 2010).

### **African Marriage Preparation Through the Rite of Passage**

In many African cultures, girls and boys are prepared for married life from a young age. Girls are trained in domestic responsibilities on how to look after a home, children, and a husband. Traditionally, boys are prepared for adulthood and the

responsibilities of being a man and a husband through various rites of passage. For example, in Xhosa tradition, boys go through an initiation process where they are schooled in what it means to be a man (McLaren, 2011). Davis (2011) asserts that rites of passage plays a crucial role in African socialization, defining the different stages in an individual's development, as well as that person's relationship and role to the larger community. Ampim (2003) observed five major African initiation rites that are fundamental to human growth and development. He further stressed that the process of initiation is about undergoing a fundamental set of rites to begin a new phase or a new life. The initiation marks the passing from one phase in life to the next advanced or matured phase. Although there are detailed variations of the rites among different societies, it is the basic component of the society to give guidance to a person from one stage to another in one's life and development.

The current study does not explore all the stages of the initiation rites, only those that are relevant to this study. One of the rites of passage is puberty initiation. Davis (2011) acknowledges that as children grow physically and therefore sexually, this puberty rite of passage or initiation is meant to help them transition smoothly from childhood into adulthood. The main objective of the initiation is mainly educational. Through this initiation, young adults learn about the traditions and expectations of their community and perform their part to maintain social order. Davis further points out that during this stage, young adults are tested and taught by their elders. Through the testing, they are to demonstrate physical endurance, mental strength, and intelligence. The initiation also prepares young adults for marriage. In most African societies, this initiation precedes

marriage as a requirement. This is often the time that young people receive information and instruction on marriage, sex, family life, and procreation.

In Africa, preparation for marriage begins with a “search.” Therefore, parents or family seeking out a wife or a son-in-law are looking for someone who will live up to their expectations. The person must have good moral qualities, be industrious in physical work, be respectful toward elders, especially in-laws, and observe the distance between in-laws, and maintain a good reputation (Amevor, 2009). At this stage, most families investigate each other’s family background before they proceed further. The investigative aspect is very important to both families because they want to ensure that their family member enjoys a successful marriage. During the investigation they explore answers to the following questions: (a) Are there any communicable or hereditary diseases such as tuberculosis (T.B.), leprosy, insanity, or epilepsy in the family? (b) Is there any criminal record (e.g., murder or stealing?) (c) Is the family quarrelsome? (d) Is the woman lazy? (e) Can the man look after a wife? (“Ghana Nation,” 2009)

In responding to how Africans are prepared for marriage, where there are limited or no initiation rites, Amevor comments,

In societies with no particular initiation rites, or where they are fading out due to modernity, technology, etc., parents and other relatives gradually educate their children on morality and values necessary for marriage and family stability. For instance, girls are taught how to prepare food or cook delicious meals, how to behave towards men, how to care for children, how to receive guests at home, how to keep the body and the surroundings clean, how to look after the husband and other domestic affairs. The boys are taught what most concerns men, like looking after cattle, farm, fish, to tap palm trees for wine, behaving properly towards one’s in-laws, how to acquire wealth which one would give to the parents of a girl as part of the engagement and marriage contract, and how to be responsible as the leader of the family. In some cases, he must now build his own separate hut in his father’s compound. If he cannot do this at this time he must at least have his own kitchen. (p. 91)

Amevor believes that one of the main challenges in African culture in preparing young adults for marriage is sex education. Sex knowledge is often difficult to impart from parent to child because sex is considered a taboo theme in African tradition. Some African religious leaders have previously protested against sexuality education because in their view, there is a rise in liberal attitudes toward sexuality (Menka, 2003). This may contribute to why most young people in Africa have woefully inaccurate sexuality knowledge (Izugbara, 2005; Mitchell, Halpern, Kamathi, & Owino, 2006). Studies reveal that home-based sexuality education is common in Africa, however, young Africans who receive direct parental teachings on sexuality do not necessarily hold or express more accurate sexuality information than do those who do not receive it (Ademola, 2003; Izugbara, 2004). The reason for the lack of difference could be due to the fact that certain parental sexuality instruction is not structured or comprehensive enough, and may simply be based on the personal experience. Obviously, the parent cannot impart information beyond his or her sexual knowledge.

Izugbara (2008) observed that the main objective in parent-child sexuality education, according to the respondents, was to scare them away from sexual activity. Thus the parents tell their children about the dangers of sex, the meaning of puberty, and its implication that the boy can impregnate and a girl can be impregnated. Abstinence and the need to remain chaste is often taught by parents to their children. Izugbara further suggests the critical need for interventions aimed at improving the role of parents in the sexuality education of young people because parents play important and primary roles in the general socialization of the young. To achieve this parent-outreach component of

adolescent sexuality, education programs should be developed that focus on facilitating parents' knowledge of young people's sexuality.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the importance of marriage preparation programs by identifying the key benefits that participants gain from such programs. Their benefits have resulted in public policy, and governments and agencies advocate the need for such programs. Scholars following such programs argue that marriage-preparation programs boost the stability of marital relationships and help to prevent divorce. A brief historical overview explored the key roles religious organizations have played and how they are still active in running such programs today.

The chapter covered some leading marriage-preparation programs and their unique features. Whereas most of these marriage-preparation programs are known and used prominently in western cultures, the chapter highlighted the informal efforts of African traditional societies, including Ghana, in preparing their young adults through the rites of passage to marriage. This chapter forms the basis for the need for marriage preparation for Christians, in addition to the theological foundation in the previous chapter that shared the biblical perspectives on some themes that relevant in relationship including marriage.

## CHAPTER 4

### A FIELD TEST OF THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the methodology that was employed to conduct this study, the building of the proposed program, recruitment procedures, and the field test of the program.

In the previous chapter, a review of relevant literature was conducted on the need for marriage-preparation education, a brief history of marriage-preparation programs, current marriage-preparation programs, perceptions of such programs, and how Africans prepare couples for marriage. In creating a program for the SCGC, this study builds on theological reflection and a literature review as a framework for drawing inspiration and employing optimal practices. Theological reflection highlighting the biblical origin of marriage as a holy institution, with its guidelines on how God intends it to be and a review of relevant literature in the previous chapter sets the tone for intervention development in this chapter.

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section addresses the method employed in designing the marriage-preparation intervention. It covers the assessment of

how pastors of the SCGC conducted their marriage programs, the resources available to them, and the methods they employed.

The second section of this chapter centers on the content of the designed marriage preparation, including its objectives. The third section describes how the designed marriage-preparation program would be evaluated after implementing the program.

Before designing and implementing this proposed marriage program, it was necessary to assess the current situation of marriage-preparation programs offered by pastors in the SCGC.

### **Method**

Two different interviews were conducted. The first type of interview was conducted prior to the design of the marriage-preparation program. The second type of interview followed implementation of the designed program. The investigator used the first interview to obtain a deeper insight into the methods, resources, and personal preparedness of marriage preparation of pastors in the SCGC. The first interview was intended to help create the designed program. The second interview was to evaluate the designed program. In order to gain prior knowledge of pastors' views and their marriage-preparation programs, the investigator needed to interview pastors who were ordained and were assigned to churches. Eight pastors were selected for the interviews based on the findings that a marriage-preparation program was to be created and to be given to the pastors for implementation in the churches of the SCGC of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Purposive sampling was adopted for this study as subjects were selected because of their unique characteristics. Participation in this study was limited to ordained pastors who conduct premarital counseling in their respective churches or districts. In all eight

subjects enrolled, pastors had to be ordained and have a church or churches. Pastors not ordained and ordained pastors without churches were excluded.

The data collection method was conducted through interviews. No risk of physical harm was associated with participation in this study. During the analysis stage of this study, pseudonyms were assigned to participants to hide their real identity. Interview questions did not seek to find information from specific couples who have sought counseling from participants. Risks were minimized through excluding direct participant identifiers such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, or place of residence.

Raw data collected from pastors were not made available to the conference, pastors' churches, or any other third party. Information gathered during research was kept in a secured locker and those on computer were password protected. Interview notes were kept in a secured locker, and audio recordings were deleted or destroyed after completion and submission of the research. Information obtained through the interviews was used solely for this study. The allotted time for the interview was 45 minutes.

### **Recruitment Procedures**

All pastors who work in the SCGC met at the conference hall during pastors' meeting in Kumasi on February 4, 2014. Potential participants were approached by the investigator of this study and given a brief introduction to the study, the main objective of the study, and the time it would take them to participate. The investigator explained what would be expected from them if they volunteered to participate in the study. He distributed copies of informed consent forms to them, and asked them to review a copy of the informed consent form. The investigator was available at that time to address any questions or concerns raised by the pastors. He scheduled interview appointments with

those who expressed interest in volunteering to participate. The first interview was conducted on February 11, 2014, and the last person was interviewed on February 14, 2014. As part of the data collection method, the investigator took notes and made audio recordings, which were later transcribed. These were done with the expressed permission and consent of the participants.

### **Response Rate and Inclusion Criteria**

This study sought out eight ordained pastors who conduct weddings in their churches. The investigator approached such pastors and found the exact number of pastors who were willing to be interviewed for the study. All of them honored their appointments and granted interviews to the researcher at different times. Participants who gave their written informed consent were recruited in the study.

### **Research Design**

This study used the qualitative approach according to the following stages: Interview questions were created, interviews were conducted, interviews were transcribed, information obtained from the interviews was meticulously analyzed, information from the interviews was verified, and lastly, the findings were recorded (Kvale, 1999) as cited in Brennen (2013). The focus was not on a large number of participants. Semi-structured interview questions were crafted for a 45-minute, semi-structured interview that assessed the level of priority pastors place on marriage preparation, the intensity, content, and methods. The interview also delved into the use of appropriate resources, their level of competence and preparedness to run such programs, and how they conduct follow-ups. The interviews were conducted in the English language.

## **Data Analysis**

The investigator used qualitative interviews as a methodology. The collected data from the interviews were then analyzed. During the data analysis, as Brennen (2013) suggests, it was useful to find ways to assess each respondent's answers in order to clarify any initial interpretations that the researcher might begin to have in the course of each interview. Based on this suggestion, great efforts were made to interview each respondent individually and to find the uniqueness of the response and similarity in comparison with other respondents in order to make sense of the answers and to draw informed conclusions.

## **Objectives and Content of the Proposed Marriage Preparation Program**

1. To help couples understand the biblical concept of marriage as a life-long union between a man and woman and as a holy institution established by God.
2. To enable couples to develop their relational skills and to live harmoniously with their partners in their transition to marriage.
3. To equip pastors with needed skills and resources and to assist them in helping couples avoid hasty weddings and decisions on marriage.
4. To help the couple to personally reflect on their final decision to marry each other, to delay their intended marriage for lack of relational growth, or to stop from moving forward due to high-risk incompatibility factors that are beyond their management.
5. To help couples prepare for their marriages instead of just weddings.
6. To sensitize pastors to help couples to know their availability and the options

that they have in seeking professional guidance and counseling services in their marriages when the need arises.

The overall goal of this marriage-preparation guide is to equip pastors with needed resources in order to help premarital couples build healthy, loving, long-lasting, and Christ-centered marriages. The program is designed to provide needed information for pastors to enhance their premarital counseling efforts with couples by facilitating, administering, and providing necessary feedback to premarital couples. This marriage-preparation guide is designed for nine sessions, 45 minutes to one hour for each session (the designed guide can be found in the Appendix). For the purpose of this study, this program has been intentionally prepared to be used by pastors preparing couples for marriage. However, it can also be used by professional marriage counselors, family life educators, church leaders considering their involvement in this ministry, and other professionals with training in premarital guidance.

The topics include certain Bible texts when applicable because the principles or guidelines for this program are Bible-based. Couples will have the opportunity to ask pastors questions when necessary.

In each meeting, the pastor will administer an inventory to the couples for the subsequent topic so that the pastor can discuss the answers before they meet each time. The inventories are not given to the couples to test their cognitive knowledge on relationship issues, but are meant to prompt discussion on real issues that are crucial to relationships. Both the man and woman will answer the inventory individually when specified. Couples completing the questionnaires and returning them to the pastor prior to their next meeting is preferable, as this will help the pastor review their responses and

provide some prior knowledge of their responses in order to maximize his assistance to them. The topic for each session has been prepared in an interactive manner so that the pastor can ask the couple questions and they can participate in the session.

The marriage-preparation program aids the pastor in addressing core areas that need some attention by highlighting areas that may require more extensive counseling. The survey questions will help the pastor to become acquainted with the couple, their current relationship, their knowledge on communication, sex, spirituality, parenting, and their view on love and marriage. The content encourages the couple to participate in the discussion during each counseling session. The pastor will assure them that what is discussed is confidential. Their responses will enable the pastor as counselor to help them establish a solid foundation for their marital lives.

The questionnaires given to the couples are tailored to help the counselor search out compatibility and incompatibility factors and any background issues that will have adverse impacts on the couples' relationships.

After the initial assessment of the pastors' marriage-preparation programs and their preparedness in carrying out such programs, the proposed marriage-preparation program will be tailored to suit the needs of the couple in a contextualized manner. The program was designed to address the following topics on a weekly basis:

Week 1- The Importance of a Relationship

Week 2- Communication

Week 3- Conflict and Resolution in a Relationship

Week 4- Financial Management

Week 5- Leisure Activities

Week 6- Sex, Affection, and Family Planning

Week 7- Relationship Roles

Week 8- Devotional Life of a Couple/Family

Week 9- Children and Parenting

Week 10- Wedding Planning

Each topic is allotted 45 to 60 minutes to lead the premarital couples.

In leading each session, the pastor must warmly welcome the couples, offer them seating, and offer a word of prayer. The pastor must establish a rapport with them so that they feel comfortable before he introduces the discussion of the day. Although this program has been developed to assist individual couples, it can also be used for group marriage-preparation programs. For the purpose of this study, it will be used for individual couples during premarital counseling.

The pastor will end each session with prayer and a brief introduction of the next session's topic. Homework or an inventory could be given to them to take home and bring back when they meet next.

The program content will be comprised of reading resources that provide an in-depth understanding of each topic for pastors who will implement the program, as well as inventories that will be administered to the couples.

Their response level will indicate their level of knowledge or experience of each topic. This information will help pastors in assisting couples who are participating in the marriage-preparation program. All materials will be prepared in the English language, and the pastor will further clarify the materials in the case of a language barrier.

The first part of the inventories or questionnaires that will be administered to the couples anticipating marriage by the pastors will focus on the couples' personal, family, and relationship histories. The personal history will begin with demographic data such as name, birth date, age, address, phone number, marital status, jobs, and level of education. This personal information will reveal their compatibility and incompatibility issues, assess their health status, and their own personal traits or attributes.

On their family history, the inventory will reveal their families, jobs, marital status, parents' traits, relationship styles, and what the couples have learned from their parents.

On the couples past relationship history, the inventory will seek to find how the couples met, how long they have known each other, how long they have dated, how long they have been engaged, when they want to marry, why they think they are right partners for each other, the reason they want to marry, their expectations in marriage, their roles in marriage, and their roles expectation.

The other inventories will focus on communication, sex, conflict resolution, how they will handle money and their views on money and money management, how they spend their leisure hours, family worship, family planning, parenting, and relating to in-laws.

During the final counseling session, the pastor will lead the discussion on how the couple will budget for their actual wedding, and the wedding ceremony. If the counseling comes too close to the wedding date, this session will not be beneficial for couples, which is why premarital counseling needs to be conducted earlier before a possible wedding

date. It is ideal for couples to finish counseling before the wedding announcement. In such cases, budgeting and wedding planning can come as the last topic.

After covering all of these topics with the couple, the pastor will bring the entire session to a close and assure the couple of his availability for support before, during, and after the wedding. He concludes the session with prayer for the couple.

### **Contextualized African Marriage Preparation for Ghanaian Couples**

This marriage preparation program is Christian-based and bears resemblance to known western programs. However, the literature review showed that some informal efforts, when adopted, can offer contextualized marriage preparation for Ghanaian couples in particular and African couples in general. Pastors or counselors conducting premarital counseling need to take the couple's cultural backgrounds into consideration.

It was found during the literature review that in Africa, marriage preparation begins with a search for a potential partner. Due diligence is crucial during the searching stage. Parents require that their children marry a person with a sound moral character, a hardworking ethic, and a respect for others. Parents can conduct background check for their children, with their awareness. They can investigate if their potential in-law has a criminal record or a hereditary disease. They can also assess if the person has the capacity to help his or her partner both economically and domestically. This background check is important and should be adopted.

The informal marriage preparation programs among African traditional societies should be revisited. The values found in preparing young adults for marriage through the rites of passage to marriage have not outlived their relevance should be adopted. This was

not factored into this designed marriage preparation because the focus was on the pastor's role in preparing couples for marriage. Parents can be encouraged to start this exercise at home with resources and other support from pastors and counselors.

Unlike western cultures that assess couples some few months prior to the wedding, African informal marriage preparation programs assist young people before they are romantically involved with marriage partners. This gives the young people ample time for premarital guidance and learning. Pastors who conduct marriage preparation in Seventh-day Adventist church in Ghana can also offer group marriage preparation programs for young people who do not have impending marriages.

Since in African cultures it was found that marriage is considered to be a relationship between two families, counselors and pastors should educate couples to fully understand and reflect on the African view of marriage. When couples are asked about their view on marriage, pastors should also look for what they understand about marriage in the African context. Their responses will help the pastor to share more on what marriage is in African societies.

The literature review also revealed that in African cultures there is difficulty in imparting sexual knowledge. Sex education is seen as a taboo. The pastors should explain to couples that the Bible is not prudish about sex. As it was found in the theological reflection, sex is a gift of God, and sex is one of the major themes in the Bible. Pastors should not wait until marriage to share Christian guidelines and counseling on sex. Young people should be given age-appropriate sex education. This will help them to have a proper view of sex before marriage.

Given how common the traditional or customary marriage is in Ghanaian society, pastors should encourage all those who go through the marriage rites to also go through premarital counseling.

When these guidelines complement the western marriage preparation programs they will help couples in Ghana to have a contextualized program tailored to meet their needs before marriage.

### **Implementation of the Proposed Marriage Preparation Program at South Central Ghana Conference**

The field test for this marriage program was conducted at the SCGC in Kumasi. After interviewing and analyzing the data of the eight pastors, a proposed marriage program was designed based on the interview outcomes and literature reviews. Three pastors were chosen for implementing this program based on their association with the SCGC, their ability to conduct weddings, and marriage preparation. The implementation began as soon as each of the pastors was about to conduct marriage preparation prior to the actual wedding event. This program test could be implemented without an impending wedding. So it began when the pastor and the couple were ready for the actual process. Only three pastors were selected because it was difficult to find several pastors conducting weddings simultaneously, and waiting for several wedding ceremonies would delay a project like this. This initial field test would still produce a balanced evaluative outcome that can assist further exploration or a wide implementation in the future.

The implementation was not a mock-marriage preparation; the implementing pastors were conducting actual weddings in their respective churches and they used this

proposed program to assist couples who were preparing for marriage before their wedding date.

This program was led solely by the selected pastors. The investigator was not involved in any way apart from seeking the pastors' consent, an explanation prior to their implementation, and distributing the program materials to the pastors. The investigator did not have any direct contact with the couples prior, during, and after the program, which paved the way for the pastors to conduct an unbiased program without any influence from the investigator.

Program resources were delivered to the pastors at least one month prior to the start of the premarital counseling sessions to give them the opportunity to become familiar with the program content and to be able to ask questions or seek clarification from the investigator. The three pastors were not to implement the program in tandem.

The three pastors were duly informed that their participation in this program would be voluntary. They were informed that they would not be paid for their acceptance to implement the program and their subsequent participation in the interview. They were further informed that they may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If they declined to participate or withdraw from the study, nobody would be told.

In order to recruit and select these three pastors, an email and phone calls were sent to all pastors in the SCGC who might be interested in conducting and implementing this proposed program in their churches. During the pastors' monthly meeting, an announcement was also made inviting all pastors to consider participating in the program if they have weddings scheduled in the future.

In designing the proposed program, the study considered the theological reflections of Chapter 2 of this project, the literature reviews of the previous chapter, and the outcomes of the analyzed data from the first interviews of the eight pastors. Because the first interview assessed the pastors of the SCGC and the level of priority they place on marriage preparation, the proposed program study material gave an overview of the importance of the marriage-preparation program. This study was concerned about the intensity, content, and methods of the pastors when they run marriage-preparation programs. Therefore, the proposed program ensured that key areas of marriage preparation are covered when pastors are leading such programs.

The method pastors will employ while leading the program will involve face-to-face interaction where the pastor will meet the marriage-anticipating couple in his office or at a location where the pastor and the couple will have privacy. The proposed program is intended to equip pastors, improve their level of competence, and their preparedness to run such programs.

Pastors who agreed to run the proposed program were encouraged to run all of the topics covered in the sessions to assist the couples. Pastors who could not run the entire program would be excluded.

The content of the material was easy to understand and free from any jargon. The topic for each session was not so lengthy to discourage the pastors from reading or using it in the marriage-preparation program in their churches. The inventory and questionnaires to be administered to couples covered key issues for the topic of the day. Such inventory could be completed by the couples, who can review their responses with

the pastor. All of the resource materials, including the worksheets, were printed for the pastor, along with extra copies in case of copy loss or unexpected shortage.

At the end of each session, the pastor would administer the inventory or assign practical-based homework to the couple to bring to the next session. The couple's response would help the pastor in assisting them by providing needed guidance. The pastor will begin each session by reviewing their homework and inventories before introducing the day's topic. The pastor must consider the couple's educational level and whether they understand the inventories. If either the man or the woman cannot read or write, the pastor will ask them to answer each question while the pastor writes down their responses.

### **Post-Implementation Interview**

The three ordained pastors who were recruited to implement the designed marriage-preparation program in the SCGC were all interviewed. The method of data collection for the second interview followed the first pattern of the first interview. However, the number of participants was limited to three people, who were ordained pastors in the SCGC and had the ability to conduct premarital counseling. Three participants were chosen because enlisting more people to implement and evaluate the program would take a long period and could affect the completion of this study. The procedures guiding their participation and the objectives of the study were clarified to the participants.

### **Evaluation**

The pastors who implemented the program were interviewed to evaluate the program. The post-implementation interview will be useful for wide implementation of

the program, weaknesses will be corrected and improved, and strengths will be noted in order to enhance the program.

The post-implementation interview was conducted immediately after the pastors had finished implementing the program. The reason for an early interview was to ensure that the program was fresh in the minds of the implementers so that they could provide accurate responses to the researcher.

A report focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the program was written immediately following the interview by the researcher. During the interview, the investigator asked the pastors who implemented the program a series of semi-structured questions, with some limited follow-up questions as needed.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated how the intervention for this study was developed. Both the theological reflection and the literature review served as a basis for this chapter. It described the methodology employed for this study, the participants of the study, and how they were recruited. The interviews were conducted in two stages. The first one was conducted prior to the implementation of the marriage-preparation program to evaluate premarital counseling conducted in the SCGC. The second interview followed the implementation of the marriage-preparation program designed by the investigator. The chapter also covered how the interview was conducted, the content of the intervention, and its main objective.

## CHAPTER 5

### NARRATIVE OF THE INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the detailed chronological implementation. Data were collected and then processed in response to the problems posed in Chapter 1 of this project manuscript. Two fundamental goals drove the collection of the data and the subsequent data analysis. Those goals were to develop and implement a proactive and intentional marriage-preparation program that will serve premarital couples, with the aim of enhancing marriage stability and preventing divorce. These objectives were accomplished. Before the development and implementation stages, it was necessary to find out the condition of the SCGC marriage-preparation programs, if any pastors run the program, how the pastors run such programs, their ability to run the programs, and the resources at their disposal.

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate the actual marriage-preparation program that is conducted at the SCGC. On February 4, 2014, eight ordained pastors of the SCGC were recruited as the first batch of participants in this study. The detailed procedures of their recruitment are described in the previous chapter. These eight pastors were interviewed from February 11, 2014 to February 14, 2014. They were interviewed individually at an office of the SCGC.

## **The Priority Pastors Place on Marriage Preparation**

The first area that the interview assessed was the priority the pastors place on marriage preparation. Specific questions were: “How important is premarital counseling to you?” “Is premarital counseling a requirement before marriage preparation in your church?” “Does your church have a marriage-preparation program plan?” While all the pastors recognized the importance of premarital counseling in the church, and something that they believe they must do to prepare couples for marriage, some admitted that marriage preparation is not a requirement in their church. One pastor stated that premarital counseling is not compulsory. Another pastor also said that premarital counseling is a requirement, especially when the couple wants their wedding ceremonies to be held in the church. Such a response shows that those church members who do not wish to have their wedding ceremonies to be conducted in the church can skip this important exercise. Some of them also indicated that a marriage plan is nonexistent in their churches. In certain instances, couples marry in the church without any marriage-preparation program. Only three of eight pastors indicated that they have a marriage-preparation program plan guiding their churches, although none of them could produce a written document for it. Those who said they have marriage preparation plans explained that their churches guide couples on what to do when they are about to marry. Those who have multiple churches admitted that not all of their churches have marriage-preparation programs.

One pastor answered that the marriage-preparation program in his church is in the form of a singles week that is conducted to educate singles on how to choose a partner, how to help singles conduct a background check on their partners, and other variables.

Their responses reveal that what they consider to be marriage preparation is too simplistic and lacks comprehensive guidance in helping couples with their premarital needs. This is evidenced in how one pastor responded to a question, “Does your church have a marriage preparation plan?” He said, “Yes, the plan is to inform the marriage committee, and the marriage committee informs the church board, and then the couple informs the church.” Most of the work appears to be informational. One pastor also admitted that his church does not have a regular marriage-preparation program, but sometimes they educate the youth on marriage. This general education for the youth on marriage is not specifically tailored to meet the needs of couples who are contemplating marriage, but is instead a rather broad education on marriage to guide the youth in general.

Another question intended to evaluate the priority pastors place on marriage preparation was: “How many months or days before a wedding should couples come for premarital counseling?” There was no uniformity in their responses. Three of the pastors stated that premarital counseling needs to be conducted in their churches prior to the wedding. One pastor admitted that in his church there is no fixed time for premarital counseling. He was of the view that three months would be ideal, but what actually happens in his church is that he often conducts counseling one month or two weeks before the wedding. One of the pastors indicated a premarital couple is required to attend counseling a minimum of 90 days before the wedding, with a maximum of 180 days. Another pastor also stated, “Normally it is six months, but at times situations compel us do otherwise.” Another pastor indicated that in his church, premarital couples are

counseled for six sessions before their wedding date. One of the pastors was also of the view that two months is ideal, which is what he does in his church.

One interesting revelation that came from the pastor responses showed that premarital couples fix their wedding dates before they come to see their pastors for marriage-preparation counseling. The pastors chosen for this study unanimously indicated that this is a common experience in their encounter with such couples.

There is a clear indication that some pastors go contrary to the instruction of the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* regarding premarital counseling. The *Minister's Manual* (1997) states "Before marrying a couple, Adventist pastors should insist on intensive premarital counseling. Such counseling may require weekly meetings and homework assignments over several weeks prior to the wedding." Because these pastors use their own discretion in how long the counseling sessions could take based on the individual couples and their situations, this could obviously hinder their ability to offer necessary and intensive premarital counseling for the couple before their wedding.

The pastors were asked: "What is your main objective in marriage preparation?" Similar responses revealed what each pastor thinks is important for the couple to know. The main objective for one pastor regarding marriage preparation is to create an awareness of marriage. Another noted, "To help the partners understand the real concept of marriage, to let them know that marriage is a lifelong relationship instituted by God for them to enjoy." One unique feature in seven of the eight respondents was that they want couples to understand the biblical concept of marriage, and that marriage was ordained by God. This was a common thread running through the responses of all seven pastors. They want couples to be aware of where marriage originated and the One who instituted it.

Guiding couples in gaining this important knowledge that marriage was ordained by God will instill in them the need to attach seriousness and importance to their marital relationships.

However, comprehensive marriage-preparation objectives should extend beyond helping couples to know the genesis and sanctity of marriage. It should be holistic enough to cover other important areas. The Seventh-Adventist Church (Flowers & Flowers, n.d.) identifies the following premarital guidance objectives:

Illuminate biblical principles undergirding Christian marriage. The first goal of premarital guidance is to help the couple establish a Christian foundation for their marriage. It places emphasis on the biblical principles which undergird a Christian marriage relationship.

2. Prepare the couple for the transition into married life. Another primary goal of premarital guidance is to alert the couple to the transitions they can expect within married life and to prepare them for the most immediate transition---moving from singleness to married life.

3. Enhance relational skills. The period of premarital preparation also provides opportunity for the couple to further develop the relational skills necessary for couple intimacy. By intimacy we mean the experience of being fully known and fully loved. Intimacy is not only physical and sexual, but emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual.

4. Provide opportunity to re-evaluate the decision to marry. The premarital guidance process also provides a chance for the couple to re-evaluate their decision to marry. For some, the premarital sessions will highlight immaturity, unresolved issues with parents, relational difficulties, or other reasons why it may be best to postpone the wedding or even reconsider the decision to marry each other at any time.

5. Develop confidence and trust in the pastor and the counseling process. It is also hoped that one of the significant outcomes of premarital sessions with the pastor will be the development of confidence and trust in the pastor and the counseling process. This will set the stage for the couple to turn to the pastor or a counselor in the future for marriage enrichment and for counseling when needed.

### **Intensity and Content of Marriage Preparation in South Central Ghana Conference**

Because the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* recommends intensive premarital counseling before the wedding, this study sought to find out from pastors how intensive their premarital counseling is. The pastors selected for this study were asked,

“How many sessions do couples have to go through counseling before marriage?” Based on their individual responses, there is no a standard or laid-down plan on the number of times or sessions for premarital counseling. While one pastor stated that eight sessions are sufficient, another one said that he conducts counseling in six sessions. Another pastor also indicated it depends on certain factors. He believed that five sessions are ideal, but it could differ depending on the complexity or nature of the couples. According to one pastor, if only one month remains before the marriage, he must meet with the couple four times a week. To him, time prior to the wedding event determines the number of sessions he must conduct premarital counseling.

The conditional nature of their sessions is a common feature that was seen throughout the interview. Another respondent also shared a similar view that the number of sessions is not fixed for all couples, depending on the couples’ situations and when they report to the pastor about their intended date of a wedding. These pastors shared the number of sessions they counsel couples prior to their marriages and also indicated what they believe to be the ideal number of sessions in conducting that exercise. One pastor reported that sometimes it takes him six sessions to conduct premarital counseling, whereas at other times it takes up to ten sessions. One pastor was not specific, but mentioned that it should not be less than eight sessions. Finally, one pastor said that he meets with premarital couples twice a week and winds up in 12 sessions.

In finding how intensive premarital counseling is apart from its duration, the researcher wanted to know the areas of focus in the premarital counseling by the pastors in the SCGC. One respondent indicated that he covers sex education, money and marriage, caring for the family, and spiritual growth. Another pastor also indicated that

he emphasizes individual differences or temperaments and how the couple can cope with different personalities. He further finds out whether the couple is infatuated, discusses genuine or real love, and finds out through his interaction with them whether they are marrying out of convenience. This information helps him to know the couple's actual preparedness for marriage. One of the pastors indicated that he focuses on five areas during premarital counseling, namely: communication between the couple, finance, sex life, in-laws, children, and ultimately how they will build their marriage in Christ. According to another respondent, during premarital counseling he leads the couple through the legal system of Ghana concerning marriage to ensure that the marriage conforms to the laws of the land. He also discusses subculture and universal culture, because he believes that the way a person is brought up in his or her parents' home can affect their marital relationship as they begin a new family. Thus, couples must be aware of their cultural differences in order to adjust well in their marriage.

One pastor helps couples in their ability to leave their homes and to live with their partners. He also discusses finances with them and proposes the need for combined budgets. Another pastor also draws the couples' attention to the fact that marriage was ordained by God. He discusses the need for them to stay together in marriage, the physical preparation, financial preparation such as a stable job, conflict management, and sex. Another respondent revealed that he focuses on spiritual life, jobs, sex, finances, their plan after marriage if they are students, where they will live, where they will go for their honeymoon, and why they choose that place.

One pastor discusses issues of compatibility, understanding themselves as couple, appreciating one another, tolerating each other, the need to depend on God, their involvement in church activities, and parenting.

When asked if sex education was part of their premarital counseling, six of eight respondents said “yes” and two of them said that they discuss sex with couples most of the time, but not all of the time. A follow-up question was “What specific sex education do you cover?” Their responses showed they differ in areas of focus. One pastor stated that he discusses sexual problems and foreplay, another mentioned that the discussion of sex centers on intimacy, creating an enabling environment for sex, dressing romantically, not denying each other sex, the dangers of premarital sex, sexual positions, and how to make sex exciting to avoid sexual boredom. Another pastor introduces the couple to the need of a sexual life, informs them about sex positions, encourages them to develop their own sexual style, talks about sex communication, and advises against withholding sex from each other. Whereas nearly all of the respondents talk about sex preparation, sex positions, and the need for couples to enjoy sex together without withholding from one another, only one of the respondents talks about infidelity during sex counseling, only two of them indicated that they educate the couple to understand that sex is a gift from God. Conspicuously missing from their sex talk are certain key areas such as family planning, conception, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, a sexual past that may have a negative toll on their sex lives, and ways to investigate their level of knowledge on sex in order to help them.

This interview revealed that all pastors affirm that sex is an important area in their premarital counseling. However, they widely differ on topics related to sex and choose what they deem to be important for the couple.

Their responses indicated that although they all focus on unique areas of premarital counseling, some of them focus on shallow content areas. Only one of eight respondents indicated that he discusses spirituality or family devotion. Perhaps this can pass as advice during counseling, but seven of them did not mention spirituality as a major focus during their sessions with the couple. This is very surprising, and should be included as important topic of discussion. Combining individual focus areas with family devotion or spiritual life can create great content for couples. Unfortunately, none of the pastors cover all of the areas; some omit essential topics such as communication, conflict management, finances, sex, parenting, and planning the wedding event. One cannot help couples without talking about the wedding event, the nature of the wedding, where it is to take place, who will be involved, and when it will take place. These items are also important, but this was not considered an essential topic to address during counseling.

The absence of a marriage-preparation plan in place necessitates that pastors decide on what they feel they need to talk about during premarital counseling. A plan in place would provide a comprehensive checklist or vital areas of focus to guide pastors in helping couples preparing for marriage.

Based on the responses from pastors, couples who decide on their wedding date before going for counseling have an impact on the counseling sessions and how intensive they should be. Another reason why the number of sessions differs is because of the lack of a stipulated timeframe that couples should report to their pastors about their intended

marriage. Although some couples report as early as six months, some wait and report to their pastors as late as one or two months before the wedding, and when they come they have a specific date that they will marry. Within that time, some pastors must work around the clock or do what they can to offer some limited premarital counseling. This was a general problem that all the respondents revealed that they face often when it comes to helping couples before marriage. When asked how they deal with such challenge one pastor said, “In such situations you consult your elders, and sometimes conference officers.” Some pastors find this experience very annoying as one said, “I seldom agree with such dates, because most of the time it conflicts with my time schedule.” Another respondent opined, “All the time they come with their dates, sometimes annoying, sometimes they are traveling and a pastor has to come in to conduct a marriage.” Another pastor believes that when they insist on quick weddings with their own dates then there is a skeleton in the closet. He added that he experienced a situation where the couple strongly insisted on a quick wedding, only to find out later that the woman was pregnant and wanted a quick marriage as a cover up. One of the pastors reported a funny situation, “One girl gave me an invitation card with my name on the card as the one going to conduct the marriage, which was less than a week before the wedding.”

Because this problem is not unique to a single pastor, and all acknowledge that they have frequently encountered such a problem, it is clear that some of these church members are not really aware of the best practices and procedures that must be followed prior to marriage. This calls for creating intensive awareness in order to educate all

members regarding what they must do before marriage, setting up a timeline for premarital counseling, and the need to adhere to it.

Some of the respondents admitted that they sometimes compromise and allow the marriage to go on as scheduled by the couple and provide the services that the couple need. However, giving in will encourage future occurrences. Not standing firm on this principle has created a false belief that one's wedding can be conducted at his or her wish. Some workable plan must be in place and followed by all stakeholders, including the pastors as program implementers and the couples as beneficiaries of the program. All singles, including other church members, need orientation on such an education.

### **Pastors' Methods and Resources of Marriage Preparation**

This study also examined how pastors in South Central Ghana carry out their marriage-preparation programs in their churches, with a special focus on the methods they employ in carrying out the exercise and resources at their disposal. On a question of whether they use any inventory or assessment tools to assess the couples' potential strengths and weaknesses, four pastors indicated that they do not use any inventory, two pastors said they use an inventory, one pastor said sometimes he uses an inventory, and one pastor said he has his own questions and answers that he gives to couples. It has been noted (Flowers, 2008) that in addition to their own intuition and judgment, certain assessment tools are available that can help pastors in assessing temperaments, personal and relationship adjustment, and relational skills of the premarital couple. The assessment instruments provide numerous ways whereby the couple may grow, know, and understand themselves and each other personally. These tools will also help pastors during premarital counseling to evaluate relational strengths on which the couple can

build, and areas where growth is needed. Because most pastors in the SCGC are not using these assessment tools regularly or not at all, it may become challenging to make a fair assessment of the couple's strengths and the weaknesses that may have adverse effects on their marital relationship. Relying on personal judgment and intuition in place of assessment tools can lead to erroneous conclusions. Failure to use these tools can be attributed to pastors' lack of access to such resources or lack of knowledge about the need to use such tools to help couples, or both.

When asked if the pastors give premarital couples any homework to return in their subsequent sessions, five pastors said they give some homework to the couples, two said they do not give any homework, and one pastor indicated that sometimes he gives homework and sometimes he does not. The responses revealed that only two of the eight pastors give workbooks to couples, and two said they do not give workbooks to couples. One of the pastors who uses a workbook said that he asks those who are illiterate what they have learned that they did not know previously. Because they cannot read he asks them about anything they have learned. This could be a source of challenge to pastors and couples when it comes to using such workbooks, even if they are available. Adapting in such a way to help those people who cannot read and write is a good idea for pastors.

When the pastors were asked specifically what resources they use in carrying out marriage preparation for couples in their premarital counseling they listed marriage books (including Nancy Van Pelt's books), the Bible, the section in the *Minister's Manual* on marriage, the *Church Manual*, counseling books, sex videos, Spirit of Prophecy books by Ellen G. White, and personal experience. One useful book that is sold at several Adventist Book Centers in Ghana is Jeffrey and Pattiejean Brown's *The Total Marriage*,

presenting a guide to successful marriage. The pastors' list of resources reveal that they rely on a variety of materials when it comes to premarital counseling. Apart from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy books that are timeless, whether the other materials they use are current and meet the needs of a couple is unknown. One of the pastors indicated that in addition to the books he uses, his personal experience is an added resource to help couples seeking assistance from him before marriage.

### **Pastors' Level of Competence and Preparedness in Running Marriage-Preparation Programs**

The study evaluated the pastors' level of competence and preparedness in carrying out marriage-preparation programs in their individual churches. On a question of how they prepare themselves for premarital counseling, one pastor revealed that he reads books on marriage, marriage references from the Bible, and consults with retired ministers because they have marriage resources at their disposal. Above all, he prays over and over before the wedding day. Another pastor similarly responded that he reads counseling books and prays before premarital counseling. Another pastor said that he has his own personal notes on marriage, so before he starts premarital counseling he goes over his notes to see if they need revisions or not. He added that he reads other books and prays. One of the pastors reiterated that in light of the sacredness and seriousness of marriage, he considers counseling a spiritual business, so in his preparation he prays and fasts in consultation with God for guidance.

One pastor also said that during his preparation he assesses the compatibility of the couple, reviews his personal notes, schedules what to talk about each day when he meets with the couple, and includes prayer as part of his personal preparation. The remaining pastors follow the same pattern of prayer, reading books and the Bible as a

form of personal preparation before meeting the couple preparing for marriage. One central line in their responses is their unanimous reliance on prayer, Bible reading, and sometimes Ellen G. White books as a form of spiritual guidance in carrying out their respective duties in premarital guidance.

The pastors were asked what previous training, seminars, or conventions they have attended to improve their counseling of premarital couples. One pastor responded that during his seminary training he took four different courses on counseling that help him offer needed assistance to couples preparing for marriage. Apart from his theological courses that included some counseling courses, which this pastor took nine years ago, he has had no recent training.

Another pastor indicated that the training he has received in helping premarital couples comes directly from personal experience, the experiences of other people, and the books he has read. He admits that he has had no previous formal training. One of the respondents stated that he had previously taken some courses on marriage, and he constantly buys books on marriage to improve himself so he can help couples. Another pastor also said that he has had no opportunity to attend seminars, so engages in personal self-study and chats with fellow pastors. None of these pastors have received a formal degree in counseling or family life education. Only two indicated that they had attended marriage and counseling-related seminars. In the absence of the opportunity in their professional training of handling core matters of marriage-preparation programs, some pastors find themselves in situations where they must draw inspiration from their own experiences and those of other people, which may not be the best, as circumstances alter cases. Some also help themselves through self-study. Those citing their past seminary

training alone may be limited in using the best practices in the field to support young couple preparing for marriage.

The pastors were further asked if there are books they have read or are still reading to improve themselves. All of them responded in the affirmative, but some indicated that they have forgotten the titles of the books, and only one was able to name a book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, by Stephen Covey. In addition to their Bibles, the pastors read some books on marriage and family. When asked to conduct a self-appraisal or rating of their own performance as premarital counselors on a scale of 1 to 10 (1=low, 10=high), only one gave himself 10 marks. Three pastors rated their performance as 8, two pastors rated themselves as 6, one pastor rated his performance as 7, and one rated himself between 7 and 8. This self-rating is based on how pastors see their own performance as they prepare couples for marriage.

Regarding how church members express satisfaction after going through premarital counseling led by the pastors, one pastor stated, “They appreciate me as their marital counselor, and they recommend me to other couples who will marry in the future. Elderly people also contact me when they have problems in their marriages, all because of what they have heard from others through my previous premarital counseling.”

One respondent also indicated that the couples enthusiastically express their satisfaction, which is confirmed by their body language.

Another pastor indicated that couples express their satisfaction by thanking him for how they have been assisted, and after the counseling they call him on the phone to thank him again. The remaining responses by the pastors follow a similar pattern.

### **Marriage Preparation Follow-up**

Respondents were asked if they have follow-up plans for newly-married couples. Three pastors said they do not have any follow-up plans, but one of the three added, “But once in a blue moon you call to ask how they are faring.” Five pastors responded that they have follow-up plans. They were further asked if they make any personal visits, calls, or test the newly-married couples. All eight of the pastors said they do. On how often they pray for the couples after their weddings, one pastor said he seldom prays for them because he easily forgets. Another one said he prays for marriage in general and if he remembers specific couples then he prays for them. Another pastor indicated that immediately after the wedding he prays for them and on the first Sabbath after the couple is invited to come in front of the congregation to be prayed for. Another pastor also said he prays for them, but not very often. The remaining pastors said they pray often for the couples after their weddings. In investigating whether the pastors conduct a group marriage program for newly-wedded couples, only one pastor said that he does, another one also said that he has done it once. Six pastors reported that they do not conduct such programs. The findings clearly show that pastors do not have comprehensive follow-up plans in their churches for premarital couples.

Lack of adequate follow-up does not allow pastors to know how newly-wedded couples are adjusting in their transition to married life. Following up will help pastors to know the challenges and joys of the couples and how they can be assisted by the pastor if they need his services through prayer, guidance, or counseling. Therefore, pastors should know the crucial role that follow up plays after premarital counseling.

Following this interview, in 2015 a marriage-preparation program was designed for pastors in the SCGC. The implementation did not start that year; the investigator looked for pastors who would be conducting real weddings in order for them to use the designed marriage program as the first implementers. These pastors received the program guide on February 2, 2016. Before the weddings, they led the premarital couples through marriage-preparation counseling sessions as outlined in the designed program, which can be found in the Appendix.

### **Evaluation of the Marriage-Preparation Program**

Three of the pastors who implemented the program were interviewed in order to evaluate the program's impact on the pastors, the impact on the couple, and its overall success. Key strengths and weaknesses were assessed. First, the evaluation investigated whether running such a program has increased the pastors' competence, knowledge, and confidence levels. All the pastors expressed satisfaction in running the program to help premarital couples. One pastor indicated that it has improved his counseling skills. Another pastor admitted, "I did not have such detailed materials in the first place, so it has been my crucial source of counseling materials." Another pastor added, "It has been the right tool for my counseling sessions. It is not difficult to understand." When expressing his general impression about the program, one of the pastors said that he had read and used many counseling materials, however, he rated this program as one of the best. Other pastor responses were similar, stating that it substantially added to an understanding of counseling and expanded their view on counseling. One pastor was of the belief that pastors possessing such materials would improve their premarital counseling. As mentioned in the previous chapter about the resources and inventories

pastors in the SCGC use in their premarital counseling, most of them have no reliable source in their marriage-preparation programs. In response to a question on what specific areas the program improved premarital counseling, one pastor revealed that he has been using his own counseling material for a long time and added, “So I cherish every bit of this material as gold in my hand.” Pastor Joseph Boakye (a pseudonym to protect his real identity), responding to this same question expressed the worry that a lack of counseling materials has contributed to poor information to previous counselees, but now he is happy to use these rich materials to share with clients. Pastor Thomas Tutu shared how the program has increased his knowledge, competence, and level of confidence: “With these materials in hand, I see myself as a resourceful counselor. Again, the joy and understanding of couples tells me that I am now a skillful counselor. With these materials, I see myself as someone who is covered with courage and strength.” The other pastors expressed a similar satisfaction and how confident they are in carrying out premarital counseling after having the needed guidance program.

Second, the evaluation focused on how the program helped the couple at the end of the program, their satisfaction level, their enhanced relationship, and how they planned to practice what they had learned through the program. One pastor stated that the program is fantastic and responded that the couple testified that they obtained a new meaning of marriage after going through the program. Another respondent also said it helped him personally, as well as the couple, because they made positive remarks about it. Another pastor also shared a similar position on how the clients showed how the program helped them. Pastor Justice Frimpong shared how one couple revealed to him that before the marriage-preparation program there was a conflict in their relationship,

but at the end of the counseling there was mutual understanding. The couple assisted by Pastor Thomas Tutu expressed positive appreciation and gratitude for the marriage-preparation program and even asked him to introduce him to their colleagues who were about to be married. Pastor Boakye also pointed out that he saw smiles on the faces of the couple and appreciation from them at the end of the program, showing how they were helped. On the question of how the program content improved interactivity and promoted positive discussion between the pastors and counselors, Pastor Justice Frimpong indicated, “In fact, the arrangement of the questionnaire itself makes it easy to interact with the couples. Again, a counselor is well trained in the field of counseling not to offer advice, but rather to let them do more talking.” This is true since the questionnaires provided more avenues for the pastor to seek for further clarification or information from the couples instead of the pastor doing all the talking. Other respondents also said that the program content provided interactivity and gave a chance for the couple to feel free to communicate.

When asked if the allotted time for each session was enough to finish each day’s topic, the responses varied. Pastor Thomas Tutu said the answer could be yes or no, because there were people who did more talking than others, which also determined the time involved in each session and the areas that could be covered. Overall, he said the time allotment was good. Pastor Boakye recognized that the problem was not with the materials, but with the couple who sometimes failed to report on time to the session. Obviously, a client who fails to arrive on time could significantly affect the session and areas to be covered. Pastor Justice Frimpong noted that the sufficiency of the allotted time for each session depended on the involvement of the couple. He said that sometimes

the time was not enough and other times they finished early. Regarding couples reporting any disappointment as a result of the program, two pastors said that they rather expressed happiness. One pastor said one couple saw the material as lengthy. All the pastors reported that the program met the overall needs and expectations of the couples. In response to how the satisfaction or frustration of the couples was measured, one pastor said that immediately after the session he allowed them to express themselves on how they saw and felt about the meeting. One pastor asked them about their areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The other pastor conducted this evaluation after the counseling session.

When asked if they conducted follow-up after the marriage, all of the respondents said that they did. But they varied on when they followed up. Whereas some did it immediately, others took months. Responding to the question, “How did you conduct the follow-up?,” one pastor said he arranged for a meeting to discuss their new experience of married life. The other pastors invited or visited them. The reactions of couples during the pastoral follow-up were positive. Some praised God for what He was doing in their marriages, some expressed maximum satisfaction and encouraging words. The pastors were asked to point out some possible strengths and weaknesses that were identified during implementation of the program. Two pastors highlighted how it has helped them and has given them tools to understand couples. The resources are also something to be used to build stronger marital relationships. One pastor said that some couples cherished the program, whereas others thought that the time to cover the session was too long. This response is not surprising as there was no existing program to provide a framework for a comprehensive marriage-preparation program in the conference. As mentioned in the

previous chapter, some pastors indicated that they used their own discretion in deciding the number of sessions and topics to be covered. One pastor indicated that sometimes when the wedding was only four weeks away, he would conduct premarital counseling for four sessions, covering needed areas. Based on previous experiences from their peers, going through a nine-session marriage preparation would naturally seem time consuming.

When asked if the program was easy to carry out, all of them answered in the affirmative, except for one who added that it would depend on the knowledge of the one who would implement it. I am of the view that if one has some background in counseling on marriage preparation one will see all of the steps as necessary, not a waste of time. When the pastors were asked if they would recommend additional areas or topics to include in the program they suggested the following topics: a retirement plan, married people battling with pornography, dealing with special friends when married, and the effect of modern communication devices on marriage. On how to improve the program, the pastors recommended that the content of the program should be shared with other experts or scholars to add their views, and that other authoritative books on the topics should be consulted.

When asked if they would recommend this marriage preparation guide to their ministerial colleagues who conduct premarital counseling before marriage, all of them indicated in the affirmative. In response to a follow-up question as to why they would do that, one of the pastors said, “I have noticed that all the unions in the Ghana field lack counseling materials of this nature. This is a good tool to share with my colleagues.” Another pastor stated that of all the marriage-preparation programs he had tried, he found this one to be more useful than all the others. Another pastor also said, “As a conference

secretary, I have already shared the materials with many of our pastors because the standard is good to be used in our conference.”

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided the narrative of the actual chronological implementation of the intervention. The chapter highlighted the responses of pastors recruited for this study on the importance of the marriage-preparation program to them. Whereas all of them recognized the importance of marriage preparation, they differed significantly in their approaches on carrying out the programs in their churches. They used their own discretion on the number of sessions, areas of premarital counseling, and its intensity, which is a departure from the requirements of the *Ministers' Manual* for pastors to run several premarital counseling sessions for couples before their marriage. Their responses show clearly how they lack a standard program to guide them in this significant program for premarital couples.

Pastors in the SCGC are obviously saddled with problems on marriage preparation. However, the post-implementation interview showed that the presence of needed resources and training could alleviate this challenge. The pastors who implemented the program admitted how confident and resourceful they were when they received the marriage-preparation guide. The content encouraged interactivity, the pastors found it to be helpful, and the couples expressed satisfaction; however, some of them indicated it was lengthy. The pastors' readiness in recommending the marriage program to their ministerial colleagues shows that they found the material useful.

## CHAPTER 6

### PROJECT EVALUATION AND LEARNING

#### **Summary of the Project Manuscript**

This project aimed at building an intentional marriage-preparation program for the SCGC to assist premarital couples contemplating marriage. The investigator first evaluated how the pastors conducted their marriage-preparation programs before designing one for them. The designed program was made to be conducted in nine sessions. The content of the designed marriage-preparation program covered relevant topics that enhance stability of the marital relationship and how to build relational skills. The importance of this program is based on the initial theological reflection and literature review that shed expert knowledge on the topic. The participants of the study were equipped with tools and resources to conduct an intensive program that differed from what they had previously been doing.

The inventories and worksheets provided to the couples prior to each meeting encouraged interactivity and optimal ways for the pastors to analyze their self-disclosures in order to lead the discussions that demanded maximum attention. The design facilitated the pastor to listen to the couple and provided pastors a blueprint to help them navigate the sessions. The returned inventories and workbooks from the couples assisted the pastor in preparing for each session and in conducting personal study. The worksheets and

inventories also added variety to the program and helped couples evaluate their relationships.

The pastors who implemented the program reported that it added to their professional knowledge and that they are willing to recommend it to other colleagues in ministry who conduct premarital counseling. Their combined feedback on the program was positive. The post-implementation data collected provided insights into areas that worked well and areas needing further improvement when adopted on a large scale.

### **Description of the Evaluation**

This section offers a brief description of how data from the intervention in the previous chapter was evaluated and interpreted, including the report of conclusions and outcomes.

As indicated in Chapter 4, this study employed a qualitative research approach. A total of 11 pastors were recruited for this study. Two different interviews were conducted, with the first interview using eight participants, and the final interview relying on three pastors. Written notes and audio recordings were used for data collection, which were later transcribed for analysis.

### **Interpretation of Data--Chapter 5**

The data analysis of the first interview showed the challenges that pastors of the SCGC face in their marriage-preparation programs. Some pastors have no marriage-preparation plans, and those who indicated that they have plans in place have simplistic marriage-preparation programs, having no standard as a guide, but instead conduct programs using their own discretion. The intensity and content of the program also show that it is not comprehensive enough to cover relevant topics for couples preparing for

marriage. One big challenge these pastors encounter is working with couples who come to the counseling sessions with fixed dates for their weddings. According to the pastors, the number of counseling sessions depends on how soon the wedding will take place. If the wedding is only a month or two away, the pastor must decide on the number of sessions. Some couples report to their pastors two months ahead or sometimes only one month before their intended marriage. This happens because there is no policy on how many months before the wedding couples must begin premarital counseling. The application of the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* could have solved that problem.

Regarding pastors' own preparedness and competence in running the marriage-preparation program, they showed uniformity in their own spiritual preparation through praying, consulting the Bible, and fasting. They take every premarital counseling seriously, but they also lack resources such as inventories to assess couples in different areas of their relationships. Some use personal experience or consulting other senior ministers in helping couples. Although this can be helpful, it may have some limitations. Resources such as inventories on premarital counseling are necessary tools for optimal practice.

The first interview showed the challenges of pastors in SCGC. When pastors implemented the program, it revealed how a standard marriage-preparation guide and resources can make a real difference in helping pastors conduct a smooth-running program. The program helped pastors by increasing their confidence level and providing them needed tools to help couples preparing for marriage.

## **Conclusions Drawn From the Data--Chapter 5**

The initial interviews of the eight pastors of the SCGC demonstrated the state of marriage preparation of the conference, with its lack of resources or standard plan. Even at the start, all the pastors recognized the importance of marriage preparation as a requirement for couples contemplating marriage.

The lack of an effective marriage-preparation plan in place provides a loophole for church members to fix their wedding date before coming to the pastor to begin premarital counseling. This lack of a plan or creation of an awareness of the importance of marriage preparation might explain why some people wait as late as four weeks prior to the wedding before starting premarital counseling. Such a situation does not help in providing the best marriage preparation and couples by that time have made plans and announced their wedding to others even before starting counseling.

The analysis of the second interview with the three pastors shows that when pastors are equipped with the right tools and resources, it improves their marriage preparation dramatically. The pastors' general impression and feedback after using the designed marriage-preparation guide attests to this fact.

In the absence of a standard, discretion is used as a yardstick. The lack of a needed marriage-preparation guide has caused pastors to use different tools, including personal experience, in helping couples.

The satisfaction of the couples and the pastors during the program implementation show the impact that marriage preparation resources have on both pastors leading the program and premarital couples. The opposite might also be true. A lack of adequate and optimal resources in place may adversely impact pastors and couples preparing for

marriage. The right resources give pastors the confidence that they are acting as effective and qualified counselors.

### **Outcomes of the Intervention**

This study did not recruit a large number of participants to measure the results, however, the insights from the first and second interviews provide a legitimate academic and professional interest on the need of a marriage-preparation program for Christian couples preparing for marriage. The data indicates that when a needed marriage-preparation program is put in place with right resources, pastors will be well equipped and in turn will increase their level of competence and confidence in running such programs to assist premarital couples.

One obvious outcome of this study is the need for developing a marriage-preparation program for the SCGC. Although the type of content or topics that can bring positive results to couples were not the main concern of this study, the additional topics suggested by the pastors such as fidelity, a retirement plan, the effect of pornography on marriage, dealing with best friends in marriage, and the effects of modern communication devices on marriage show that discussing these issues during premarital counseling might be helpful. In enhancing this program for future implementation, such topics could be considered.

The second outcome from the intervention is the need for premarital couples to undergo an attitudinal change and to show seriousness in their participation of a marriage-preparation program. The lack of a proper marriage-preparation program might lead to low motivation in attending such programs.

## **Summary of Other Conclusions**

This section briefly touches on the summaries of Chapters 2, 4, and the overall conclusions.

### **Theological Conclusions—Chapter 2**

A theological reflection of Chapter 2 was conducted in order to find a theological basis in creating a marriage-preparation program to assist couples preparing for marriage. It was concluded that based on the finding in that chapter, establishing that God is the originator of marriage, and that He instituted the first marriage as a life-long union between a man and a woman, still holds and that the sanctity of marriage must be upheld. The investigator further concluded that God, who instituted marriage, has given to us timeless principles in the Bible that provide guidance for premarital and marital couples that strengthen the foundation of relationships and promote the stability of life-long union between a husband and wife. Instead of seeing this as a mere human institution that one can go in and out of, one must view it as an important and holy institution that demands reflection and planning before one enters into such a relationship. The study shows prescriptions for healthy marital life, including enjoying the gift of sex within the marital boundary, couples not depriving each other of sex, equality, respect, love, and responsibility.

Whereas the theological reflection dwelt much on marital life, it also emphasized that singleness is a gift, not a curse. Several instances can be cited in the Bible where certain biblical characters were singles at some point in their life. Thus it could be concluded that sometimes singleness may be the best condition for a person, as found in the Bible. Whether married or not, the rules for sexuality, entreating singles to refrain

from fornication and for married people to enjoy sexual exclusivity with their partners, still applies.

### **Theoretical Conclusions—Chapter 3**

A review of literature on the importance of marriage preparation, a brief history of marriage-preparation programs, perceptions of marriage-preparation programs, marriage-preparation assessment tools, the African traditional marriage process, types of marriages in Ghana, and African marriage programs through the rite of passage were conducted. The findings show that premarital counseling offers several advantages to couples, including enhancing a couple's management skills, reducing potential risk of divorce, and improving communication, which is a means of reducing marital distress. Helping couples during marriage preparation is far superior to helping them through therapy when they experience marital problems. The researcher therefore conclude that it would be more prudent to spend considerable efforts and needed resources in helping to prevent marital conflicts and other associated problems than trying to cure them in marriage. The adage that says prevention is better than a cure still holds in this situation as well. The literature review revealed that most people do not go for marital therapy when engulfed in marriage problems.

The literature review also revealed the theoretical approach, best practices, content, and establishment of a strong argument for the need of a marriage-preparation program. Connecting the dots, using the theological reflection as a foundation, and building on this with theoretical reflection helps in establishing a solid marriage-preparation program with necessary elements. That is why in designing the intervention, the investigator also relied on this theoretical approach.

## **Methodological Conclusions—Chapter 4**

After conducting analysis of the two interviews of the pastors who participated in the pre-implementation and post-implementation stage, the investigator concluded that the designed program for the SCGC on marriage preparation was well developed and captures the core elements of an effective premarital program for couples preparing for marriage.

As indicated earlier in Chapter 4, the study employed a qualitative method for the intervention, and did not focus on a large number of participants to evaluate the marriage-preparation program of the SCGC or and to develop a new one.

## **Overarching Conclusions**

After an analysis of the conclusions of previous chapters, excluding the first chapter, the investigator arrived at the following overall conclusions gleaned from this project: First, the positive impact of a marriage-preparation program was noted. Governments and public agencies know the benefits of such programs, and are making great efforts in promoting and encouraging premarital couples to participate. In recognizing this fact, in synthesis with the theological reflections and its instruction that God is the originator of marriage and instituted the first union in the Garden of Eden, every marriage should be planned, not hastily, or be driven by one's impulse. The associated biblical guidance shows that the marital union, like any other serious contract, should not be entered into without thoughtful consideration, planning, and a willingness to stay committed to its guiding principles and rules.

Second, for the pastors who participated in the implementation of the program, it became obvious that when pastors obtain right resources and a guiding or standard

marriage-preparation program, it will improve the way they run the program, boost their confidence, and enhance their skills, which in turn will have a positive effect on the couples they assist before marriage. The absence of effective resources negatively affects the work of the pastors and recipients of the marriage-preparation program.

Third, the content of the marriage-preparation program matters. A comprehensive content covering broad areas of marital relationships in areas that cause constant conflict, learning relational skills, how to enhance stability, and how to resolve conflicts are all important in helping couples address their relevant issues. The use of relevant inventories is also important in finding unique issues of the couple in order for the pastor to assist them. Chapter 5 noted that the pastors suggested additional topics to be included in the program sessions. Taking the recipients' background into consideration, offering a contextualized content will be helpful in addressing all issues that are meaningful to them. Even if suggested topics such as fidelity and pornography issues cannot be listed as a topic of their own, they can be aligned with other related topics on sexuality and addressed. In addressing those issues, there should be no oversight on the key areas of a relationship such as the biblical view on marriage, communication, conflict resolution, family worship, sexuality, and other core topics. This was noted in the first interview when pastors were asked to list the areas they covered in their premarital counseling. There was no uniformity, and some key areas were missing from the pastors' list. To avoid this problem, a standard marriage program must specify all of the topics in the sessions with an outline and resources.

## **Personal Transformation**

From the beginning to its end, this project has impacted on my life personally as an investigator and pastor who conducts premarital programs. Four changes were noted. First, my interest and passion in marriage preparation programs and research increased significantly. This led me to read a lot of books and research works on marriage preparation. Second, what I gained from this project helped me to play an advocacy role on marriage preparation by encouraging my ministerial colleagues and singles in my conference on the need for premarital counseling. Third, this project has personally shaped the marriage preparation I have been conducting since I started my research. I made sure that best practices were followed by giving couples inventories and needed homework prior to each counseling session. The frequency of my sessions with couples was enough to cover all the needed topics that were relevant for marital relationship. The premarital counseling was not too close to couple's wedding event. I did that to avoid rushing the counseling process. I firmly believe that the best practices I found while conducting this study has enhanced my premarital counseling professionally. Lastly, the Biblical basis of marriage identified in the theological reflection has broadened my spiritual understanding of marital relationship. This has provided me a framework for what helps and hurts relationships. It also taught me that God is the originator of marriage, He offers the guidance, and this has deepened my trust and reliance on Him for support for my personal marriage and others'.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the intervention and research project, the investigator recommends the following for further action:

1. As established in the theological reflection of Chapter 2 in this study, marriage is holy, an important institution. Couples going through marriage preparation should be guided by these principles. Those who want to marry sometime during their lifetime must prepare before they get married. People who undertake a major decision in life obviously need to reflect and plan before they start. If people plan and prepare for things that are important in their lives, then marriage preparation should not be ignored. One should not enter into marriage simply because all one's friends are getting married, or jump into marriage without seeking counseling from professional counselors or pastors. Awareness creation and promotional activities should be conducted for church members to become aware of the availability of such services in order to participate in the program when needed.

2. Given the lack of a standard marriage program with needed resources at the SCGC, I recommend that the conference adopt and make this designed program available to all pastors in the conference. As the pastors who implemented the program showed their satisfaction in how they found it useful and their readiness to share it with their colleagues, such a program will equip pastors in helping premarital couples in their churches.

3. As it was found from the pastors in Chapter 5 that church members fix their wedding dates and some people wait as late as a month before the wedding to inform their pastors and churches about their impending marriage, I recommend that pastors explain the process and procedures involved, and that months before marriage, couples need to inform their pastors. Such procedures should be upheld and not compromised.

Any compromise or concession made for one couple will make it difficult to enforce the rules for another couple.

4. Even though this project designed a program, including inventories, to help couples in the English language, I recommend that adequate effort be made for couples who are illiterate. In such situations, the pastor can perform additional activities by filling in the inventory after asking the couple questions in order to obtain an accurate evaluation of their individual cases.

5. Given the knowledge that pastors equipped with needed marriage preparation tools do well in helping couples preparing for marriage, I intend to open an online portal where pastors can access the designed program, as well as other needed resources and tools that will make their work easier. I will constantly update such resources so that pastors in different locations can also use it.

6. One of the reasons why some pastors are under pressure to conduct marriages in haste and reduce the number of sessions is because one or both parties are traveling or are busy with their daily routines. To avoid this, I recommend utilizing an online marriage-preparation program where a pastor can log into his access page and the couple can also log on to participate. It is my intention to design such a program where all of the resources will be available online, and the pastor can track their progress and provide feedback through video, audio, or text chat. This innovation will provide flexibility and convenience in reaching couples anywhere without pressure. This will not be a replacement for face-to-face premarital counseling when it is possible.

7. As was found in the literature review, it is better to prevent marital distress than to

cure problems during marriage. With this in mind, I recommend that considerable efforts be exerted to make premarital available to all people who marry. An intensive marriage-preparation program should be conducted prior to marriage.

8. Couples who do not have a church wedding should be advised about going through a marriage-preparation program. A marriage-preparation program is not intended only people who choose to have weddings in the church. This study found that those couples who have customary or traditional marriages do not even inform the church or the pastors. All such people should be encouraged to know the great benefits associated with premarital counseling.

9. To improve this designed program, I recommend that the healthiest family life practices from the richness of Ghanaian culture be incorporated.

10. I recommend that the Family Ministries Department in conjunction with the Ministerial Department of the two Ghana Union Conferences make the designed marriage-preparation program available to all pastors in Ghana.

## APPENDIX A

### ANDREWS UNIVERSITY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY INFORMED CONSENT FORM (1)

I Volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Francis Tuffour, a graduate student at Andrews University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about academic work on the topic: **“A Marriage-Preparation Program in the South Central Ghana Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”** I will be one of approximately eight people being interviewed for this research. The objective of this interview is to assess the level of priority pastors place on marriage preparation, as well as the intensity, content, and methods that are used. The interview also delves into the use of appropriate resources, their level of competence and preparedness to run such programs, and how they conduct follow-ups. Based on the findings, a program will be developed for pastors on how to conduct marriage-preparation programs for singles and premarital couples in the South Central Ghana Conference.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, nobody will be told.
2. If I feel uncomfortable in anyway during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any questions or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Francis Tuffour of Andrews University. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be protected. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the confidentiality of individuals and institutions.
5. Church members, elders, and conference administrators from my conference will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ My Initials

\_\_\_\_\_ My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ My Printed Name

For further information, please contact:

[Francis Tuffour] [Email: [tuffuor94@yahoo.com](mailto:tuffuor94@yahoo.com), phone: 0244292822]

Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Brown, Email: [jbrown@bermudaconference.bm](mailto:jbrown@bermudaconference.bm), Phone: 4412923081

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of the Investigator

I consent to having the interview recorded

Sign\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

#### MARRIAGE PREPARATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

By Francis Tuffour

**These questions are semi-structured and may demand follow-up questions when necessary.**

1. How important is premarital counseling to you?

Count	Response
1	It is very important because it helps couples to prepare for marriage, it helps them to know what they are preparing towards to.
1	It is very important because it opens the concept of marriage to the prospective marriage partners, it makes them understand what it is to marry and problems and challenges and what they are going to enjoy
1	Is very important to me as a pastor, because if you look at most of the issues we meet during marriage we can say that it all began prior to marriage, people do not get the needed counseling, in Ghana here few people do attend this premarital counseling, and I believe that it is source most of our problem. To me it is paramount, it supposed to be first and foremost.
1	It is very important; in Ghana the law requires the consent of parents. So in counseling the first question to ask if there is parental consent.
1	It is very important to me as a pastor because a lot of problems I have encountered in churches and homes are due to lack of marriage preparation.
1	It is important, it helps us to know what the couple has in mind.
1	Is very important in the sense that those about to marry are new to marriage.
1	Premarital counseling is important because it gives couples needed preparation. It helps them to know what marriage is

	about.
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2. What is your main objective in marriage preparation?

Count	Response
1	To create awareness of marriage.
1	To help partners to understand the real concept of marriage. To let them know that marriage was instituted by God.
1	To prepare people who will live the ideal marriage as portrayed in the Bible, marriage should be Christ-centered. So I want them to understand how marriage is.
1	Marriage is an institution of its own. To tell them of the lasting nature of marriage. To inform them why they should not divorce and to remain focus in their marriage.
1	To have couples who will understand the Biblical concept of marriage and to stay as couples in their lifetime.
1	To make couple to understand that marriage was ordained by God and for children.
1	To prepare the couple to know what marriage really is, the Bible concept of marriage, what it entails in being one flesh.
1	To introduce the couple to appreciate the importance of marriage and to understand the origin of marriage and how God started marriage. And to ensure that they understand what they are to go through.

3. How does your church carry out marriage preparation?

Count	Response
1	The couple has to see the church pastor, then family ministries committee, the committee investigate the couple and report back to the pastor.
1	The members approach the family ministries department and introduce themselves to the committee, and the committee informs the church board, then announcement follows, the committee investigates to know if they are singles, their

	residence and economic statuses.
1	The Church does so by calling the attention of the two people intending to marry, and the family life ministries department is also there to assist the pastor.
1	To find out from the family ministries department if the parents have consented, and to work with the family ministries department.
1	We have Family Life Ministries, we call it Home and Family Life, consisting of five to seven people with experience who have passed through marriage process. When one wants to marry they inform they inform the committee and this committee assist them on the procedures of the marriage. The committee tries to investigate their background.
1	We have marriage committee, the couples report to the marriage committee first, and it is further reported to the pastor and the elders.
1	When couple intend to marry they have to inform the pastor, and they are asked questions.
1	There is a body that prepares couple, that is Home and Family Life. It is a committee together with the pastor work and the pastor does the counseling and couple is introduced to the congregation.

4. Is premarital counselling a requirement before marriage in your church?

Count	Response
6	Yes
1	It is not compulsory
1	Yes, especially when the couple wants their marriage to be blessed in the church.

5. How many counseling sessions do couples have to go through before marriage?

Count	Response
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1	8
2	6
1	It depends on the nature of their marriage, ideally it should be 5, but complexity of some people it could differ
1	If it is a month prior to the wedding it is 4 times a week. 16 times in a month.
1	It depends, normally in my church I conduct at least 10 sessions
1	Normally not less than 8 sessions
1	It is 6 months mandatory, 2 times a week. Normally I do 12 sessions.

6. Do you use any inventory to assess the couple's potential strengths and weaknesses?

Count	Response
1	No inventory, I ask questions
2	No
1	Sometimes I use somethings to assess their strengths and weaknesses
1	Yes, I design questionnaire on what one likes and dislikes
1	Well, we normally when we meet we have key points to discuss and to explain marriage in our culture. Formally we do not have structured inventory.
1	Yes, I have an inventory for the couple to fill and return to me.
1	Certainly

7. Does your church have a marriage-preparation program plan?

Count	Response
1	No

1	It depends on the church. I have more churches
1	Now trying to have one in place. It is in the process.
1	Yes, singles week programs, I teach how to choose a partner, to check a person's background and other variables.
1	Yes, the plan is that, to inform the marriage committee, and the committee informs the church board, and the couple informs the church.
1	It is not regular but sometimes we educate the youth.
2	Yes

8. What are your areas of focus during premarital counseling?

Count	Response
1	Sex education, money and marriage, caring for the family and spiritual growth.
1	I stress on the individual differences, temperaments, how to cope with various personalities, real love and the couple's preparedness for marriage.
1	Communication, finance, sex life, in-laws, children, and how marriage should be built on Christ.
1	Legal systems of Ghana, by making sure that the marriage conforms to the laws of Ghana. Sub-culture and universal culture, the way a person was brought up, and cultural differences.
1	A lot but we focus on how they will be able to leave their homes and to live with their partners. I also help them on their finances, and combined budgets.
1	Marriage was ordained by God, the need for couples to stay together, physical preparation, financial preparation (job), conflict management, and sex.
1	Spiritual life, jobs, sex, finances, houses, and where they want to have their honeymoon.
1	Compatibility, understanding themselves, appreciation, tolerating each other, dependence on God, parenting, and

	their involvement of church activities.
--	---

9. In what areas do you feel inadequate during premarital counseling?

Count	Response
1	Family finances
1	Health issues
1	Investigating the past sexual life
1	Not having enough time to counsel the couple
1	Medical and health aspect. I don't know what test to conduct and how to go about it.
1	Sexual aspects, because of the cultural prohibitions on sex.
1	I haven't come across anything like that but legal and medical issues are difficult areas.
1	Sex counseling

10. Is sex education part of your premarital counseling?

Count	Response
6	Yes
2	Most often it is part of it.

11. What specific areas of sex education do you cover?

Count	Response
1	Sexual intercourse, problems of sexual intercourse, and foreplay
1	Intimacy, I counsel them not to deny each other of sex, how to dress appropriately, creating enabling environment for sex, I advise against premarital sex, I discuss sexual positions so they can avoid boredom.
1	I introduce couples to the need of sexual life, to inform them sexual positions, and also to develop their own sexual

	styles. I talk on sex communication and the need not to deny each other with sex.
1	Sex positions, how to reach orgasm, preparation prior to sex, type of dress to wear before sex, and how to keep body clean.
1	I find out if they have had sexual activity before, if they have had sexual partners before, and also I find out if one has more sexual activity in the past.
1	I cover sex as ordained by God and to be confined in marriage only, how to prevent affairs, and lack of time to prepare ladies for sex.
1	I discuss with the couple that before sex, there is a need for foreplay, I talk on how to have sex from different angles. After sex they need to ask themselves if they were satisfied or not.
1	I talk about the importance of sex, how God instituted it, sex came from God. I also talk about how to have sex.

12. Do you give couples any homework?

Count	Response
3	Yes
2	Sometimes I do
1	Yes, telling the woman to prepare a particular meal for the man to know how she cooks, I tell the man also to give a gift to the woman
1	Yes, normally we meet more than one hour. I give them assignment
1	No

13. Do you use any workbook?

Count	Response
5	No

1	Yes
1	I assign them to read specific books, Bible, Spirit of Prophecy books. The illiterates I ask them what they have learned in the past.
1	I read from other sources.

14. In your premarital counseling, what resources do you use?

Count	Response
1	Marriage books and Bible
1	Marriage books, Nancy Van Pelt 's books.
1	I use <i>Minister's Manual's</i> pages on marriage and marriage books
1	I use Bible, <i>Minister's Manual</i> , counseling books, and videos.
1	Marriage books, Spirit of Prophecy books, and other simple materials.
1	Bible and personal experience
1	Bible, Spirit of Prophecy books, and other books in my library.
1	I heavily depend on Bible, and Nancy Van Pelt's books

15. Do you have any experiences of couples coming to you who fix their wedding dates before premarital counseling? How do you deal with that situation?

Count	Response
1	A lot, they come with their own dates. In such situations you consult your elders, sometimes conference officers.
1	Yes, I seldom agree with such deals, because most of the time it conflicts with my schedules.
1	All the time they come with their dates, sometimes annoying, sometimes they are travelling and a pastor has to come in to help them. Sometimes I compromise and provide the services that they need.

1	They come with their dates of wedding. A particular couple came not knowing that the woman was pregnant, that was the reason they were looking for a quick wedding. When most often they insist on the date then there is a skeleton in the cupboard
1	Yes, not less than twice. There was one funny situation, one girl gave me an invitation card for wedding and my name was on the card as one going to conduct the marriage or bless it, it was less than a week. Sometimes I help them.
1	Yes, dealing with such situations I tell them the need to postpone and to go through premarital counseling.
1	Yes, I try to adjust time to help them.
1	Yes, few fix the date before counseling.

16. What common incompatibility factors do you find among couples during counseling?

Count	Response
1	Age, one being jobless and one working, tribe, educational, and financial differences.
1	One being too quiet, finances, one studying and one pursuing a trade, one more educated than other, one more enlightened and other simpler.
1	Sports and hobby interest and differences in occupation.
1	Differences in blood group, cultural differences, tribal differences, wide gap of education, and belief systems.
1	Finances, and education.
1	Educational background, spiritually, some are deeply rooted in the church and others are not, and also differences in sexual experience.
1	Educational and professional background, cultural and financial background.
1	Temperaments

17. Do you have a group marriage program for newly-wedded couples in your church or district?

1	I had once
6	No
1	Yes

18. Do you have a follow-up plan for newly married couples?

Count	Response
1	No, but once in a blue moon I call to find out how they are doing
3	Yes
1	I go for visitation
1	I take phone numbers and call to check on them
2	No

19. Do you make any personal visits/calls or text newly married couples?

Count	Response
8	Yes

20. How often do you pray for the newly married members in your church after their wedding?

Count	Response
1	I seldom pray for them, I easily forget that.
1	Almost all the time
1	I pray for marriages in general, if I remember specific couple I pray.
1	A lot
1	Immediately after the wedding, most of the time after the wedding, the first Sabbath the couple comes to church and

	they are called forward to be prayed for.
1	Daily
1	Often
1	Not very often

21. How do you prepare yourself for premarital counseling?

Count	Response
1	I study books on marriage and reference from the Bible, I also consult the retired ministers because they have the resources and I prayer over and over before the wedding.
1	Prayers, I read about counseling.
1	I go over my notes, and see if I need revision. I read books and pray.
1	Marriage is a serious spiritual business, I pray and fast.
1	I go through my notes, I schedule on what to talk about each day, I pray also.
1	Prayers, Bible study, books on marriage. I consult a pastor with counseling background.
1	Prayers, study, and fasting
1	I pray, study, and reading

22. What previous training/seminars/conventions have you attended to improve how you can help premarital couples?

Count	Response
1	3 or 4 at Andrews University and 1 at Valley View University.
1	Some personal experience, reading and experiences of other people
1	I take courses on marriage, I buy books through self-improvement.

1	I have attended a lot of them
1	From time to time our church organizes marriage programs, so it compels me to prepare well. People fall on pastors so I try to read a lot from marriage books and also share experience.
1	In my theological studies I did a course on family dynamics. Sometimes I attend workshops.
1	I haven't had opportunity to go through seminar so I do self-study by reading and also by chatting with fellow pastors.
1	Not too many seminars, I do self-study.

23. Are there any books you have read or are currently reading to improve yourself to support premarital counseling in your church?

Count	Response
1	Yes, but the books don't come to mind.
1	Yes, but I forgot the titles.
5	Yes
1	Yes, 7 Habits of Highly Effective Family.

24. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate your own performance as a premarital counselor? (1 = low, 10 = high)

Count	Response
3	8
2	6
1	7
1	10
1	Between 7 and 8

25. How do church members express their satisfaction after going through premarital counseling led by you?

Count	Response
1	They appreciate me as marital counselor and recommend to other premarital couples. Elderly people also contact me when they have problems in their marriages. They do this because of what they have heard from others through my previous premarital counseling.
1	Heartily, they tell me. The body languages also show.
1	Thanking me, they express how they have been assisted. They call to thank me.
1	They tell others my background as a lawyer. I take them through legal system, I take them through a lot so they are happy.
1	When we have singles' week people express their appreciation.
1	They show appreciation by calling to thank me as a pastor, giving gifts to show appreciation.
1	They call on phone or come personally to express their satisfaction.
1	Amazed by their appreciation.

26. Do you assure your clients about confidentiality before counseling?

Count	Response
8	Yes

27. How many months or days before the wedding should couples come for premarital counseling?

Count	Response
3	3 Months
1	Our situation is not organized. Ideally 3 months would be needed, but most often about a month or two weeks.
1	Minimum should be 90 days and maximum should be 180 days

1	6 months but some situations compel us to do otherwise.
1	I think 2 months should be ok
1	6 months

28. In helping couples in their wedding event planning what areas do you emphasize?

Count	Response
1	Time management, so people do not wait for too long, finances so they do not waste money on the wedding, their make-ups so it conforms to the principles of the church.
1	To pray a lot, to prepare financially, to have a laid out plan for the wedding.
1	Vehicles they will use, if they have their own or they will hire one, how to minimize cost, decoration of the venue, their clothing, and the accessibility of the wedding venue.
1	Type of dress they should wear, and how to cut cost.
1	Cost. Money for the wedding.
1	Simplicity in dressing, punctuality to the wedding venue, to promote solemnity of the program.
1	Expenditure, dressing, promptness, and the need to provide refreshment for their guests.
1	They shouldn't be ostentatious, the need for simplicity and how to cut cost.

29. If an opportunity for marriage-preparation training was to be offered to you, would you accept the offer?

Count	Response
8	Yes

## MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

**By Francis Tuffour**

1. Were you able to go through all the required topics of the program with the couple?

Count	Response
3	Yes

2. After going through this program, what is your general impression of it?

Count	Response
1	Really, if every counselor may have such materials then I can say with all boldness that our clients will enjoy all the proper counseling sessions
1	Additional understanding about counseling has been added to my view
1	I have read and have used many counseling materials; however, I rate this material as one of the best at this time.

3. How did the program help you as a premarital counselor guiding couples for marriage?

Count	Response
1	It has improved the skills I have acquired already.
1	I did not have such detailed materials in the first place, so it has been my right source of counseling materials.
1	It had been the right tools for my counseling sessions. It is not so not difficult to understand, and also it is the type of questions that our generation need to experience.

4. In what specific areas did the program improve your premarital counseling?

Count	Response
1	Most especially conflict resolution.
1	I have used my own way of counseling materials for a long time, so I cherish every bit of this material as gold in my hand
1	Lack of counseling materials has contributed to poor information to our previous counselees, but now I am happy that I have these rich materials to share with the clients.

5. By running this program, how did it increase your level of competence, knowledge, and confidence as a premarital counselor?

Count	Response
1	Indeed, it has improved the already acquired counseling

	skills with different styles.
1	I have noticed that my clients express their satisfaction at every session with me, and in terms of knowledge, the counselees use words like “It’s good to attend counseling before marriage”, finally, with the materials in hand it is like a powerful gun in a hunting expedition.
1	With these materials in hands I see myself as a resourceful counselor, who understands what he is doing. Again, the joy and understanding of the couples tell me that I am now a skillful counselor. With the materials in hand I see myself as somebody who is shielded with courage and strength.

6. How helpful were the inventories to you and the couple?

Count	Response
1	I realized that I have a good resource for my clients and they too compliment it
1	The material has provided me with a tool that is precious to me, and also they positively testify about how this counseling materials, will provide them a great marriage
1	It’s a fantastic, and the couples testify that they get a new meaning to marriage than that of their previous perceptions.

7. Can you describe how the program helped the couple?

Count	Response
1	From what they said, there were some conflict before attending this session, however through the counseling sessions there was a mutual understanding among themselves.
1	I see smiles in their faces after the counseling sessions, and their way of expressing their gratitude and appreciation is a great message of hope.
1	Oh yes, they express positive appreciation and gratitude to me for having such opportunity to sit under my counseling sessions. They also seek permission to introduce me to some of their colleagues. I have seen that they are doing the marketing, because of some misunderstandings that have gone away from their relationships.

8. How did the content of the program improve interactivity and promote positive communication between you and the couple?

Count	Perception
1	Because counseling differs from admonishing and is more of discussions and expression of ideas, the way the questions are arranged make it more interactive and also encourages quality communication.
1	The felt free to communicate during the counseling.

1	In fact, the arrangement of the questionnaire itself makes it easy to interact with the couples. Again, a counselor is well trained in the field of counseling not to advice but rather let them do more talking.
---	---

9. Was the allotted time for each session enough to finish the day's topic?

Count	Response
1	It depends upon the involvement of the couples, sometimes the time is not enough and at times we finish as early as possible.
1	The problem is not with the materials, rather the clients who sometimes fail to honor their time of session.
1	The question can be yes or no. There are some people who do more talking than others, that fact also determines the time involved in each session and the areas you can cover. In all I can say it is good.

10. Did the couple express any disappointment as a result of this program?

Count	Response
1	Instead, they say things which are very recommendable.
1	Only one of them said the materials are lengthy but good, but the rest of them were so happy
1	Nobody has done that rather they enjoy the whole program

11. Did the content of the program meet the overall needs and expectations of the couples?

Count	Response
1	I will rather talk about their happiness. They usually say that it is better to attend counseling before marriage, they rather choose to promote counseling as the best tool to have before marriage.
1	Oh yes, because of the reference they make during and after the program is a testimony.
1	I hope so, because the questions they ask always fall within the questionnaire.

12. In what ways did you measure the couple's satisfactions and frustrations, if any?

Count	Response
1	Immediately after every session I always allow them to

	express themselves how they see and feel about the meeting.
1	By asking them.
1	Their own expressed words and nonverbal cues.

13. Did you conduct follow-up after marriage?

Count	Response
3	Yes

14. How did you conduct the follow-up?

Count	Response
1	I sometimes invite them or sometimes visit them at home based upon their invitation.
1	I usually ask them to come to meet me after the wedding.
1	Sometime after the wedding I arrange for a meeting to discuss their new experience in marriage life.

15. What were the couple's reactions during your follow-up effort?

Count	Response
1	All that I see is that they express their maximum satisfaction and appreciation for the quality of time they spent during their counseling sessions
1	They use words which encourage me as a counselor. Example: "I will tell all my friends who may need a counselor". And truly they bring many beginners to me for counseling
1	They praised God for what He has done for them through me.

16. What are some possible strengths and weaknesses that you identified during the implementation of the program?

Count	Response
1	Some couples cherished the program, however, their time to enjoy the whole stuff seems another set-back against the whole program.
1	The strength is that it provides tools to overcome the marital problems and put joy in the heart of the clients.
1	I have noticed that: Strengths: A. It brings some sort of happiness to the counselees. B. It has provided me the best tool in my premarital counseling. C. It prevents future divorce and puts some oil at every joint of the marriage. D. It provides deep understanding between the couples. Weakness: A. It's only if the couples deliberately decide not to apply what they have learnt, then they will pay for it.

17. Was the program easy to carry out?

Count	Response
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1	I hope so. Because as a counselor who has been trained may know how to handle such a valuable material.
1	Oh yes.
1	Yes. It may depend upon the knowledge of the one who will use it.

18. Do you recommend additional areas or topics to be included in the program?

Count	Response
1	If there is a way out, add more to the faithfulness as a wife or as a husband.
1	Yes, that is marriage and our modern communication devices. 1. The differences between using mobile phone before and after marriage. 2. Pornography and marriage life. 3. Cherished friends and our marriage.
1	Can you add some materials about couple's retirements plan immediately after wedding?

19. In your view, how can this program be improved?

Count	Response
1	I want to suggest that do comparisons with other writers on how they improve their existing counseling programs.
1	Read other known authors on premarital counseling.
1	If possible, share these materials with many other scholars to add their views. Read other counseling materials like what you have prepared.

20. Will you recommend this program to your ministerial colleagues who conduct premarital counseling before marriage?

Count	Response
3	Yes

21. If yes or no to the above question, why?

Count	Response
1	For those I tried have enjoyed this approach than the previous method of counseling approach.
1	I have already started sharing the materials with many of our pastors, because the standard is good to be used for our Conference.
1	I have noticed that the whole Unions in Ghana Fields lack counseling materials of this nature. And it's a good tool to share with my colleagues.

22. Were the number of sessions enough, too short, or too long for premarital counseling?

Count	Response
1	I will like to say that as of now it serves a good purpose. So

	it's enough.
1	It is okay.
1	It depends upon the counselor and the clients. There is no complaining as of now about the time of meeting and duration.

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM (2)**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Francis Tuffour, a graduate student at Andrews University. The project is designed to gather information about academic work on the topic: **“A Marriage Preparation Program in the South Central Ghana Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church.”** I am one of three pastors chosen for implementation of this program. Three of the pastors who implement the program will be interviewed in order to evaluate the program. A report focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the program will be written by the researcher after such interviews.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my acceptance to implement the program and my subsequent participation in the interview. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, nobody will be told.
2. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Francis Tuffour of Andrews University. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be protected. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the confidentiality of individuals and institutions.
5. Church members, elders, and conference administrators from my conference will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ My Printed Name

For further information, please contact:

[Francis Tuffour] [Email: tuffuor94@yahoo.com, phone: 0244292822]

Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Brown, Email: jbrown@bermudaconference.bm, Phone:  
4412923081

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of the Investigator

I consent to having the interview recorded

Sign\_\_\_\_\_



**SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH**

**SOUTH-CENTRAL GHANA CONFERENCE  
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

30th July, 2013

The Chairman  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs  
MI 49104-0355  
USA

Dear Board Chairman,

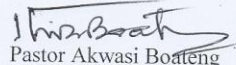
**LETTER OF CONSENT: PASTOR FRANCIS TUFFOUR**

The administration of the South Central Ghana Conference is aware that Francis Tuffour, a Pastor in this Conference and a student at Andrews University will be conducting a research study at the conference on, "A MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL GHANA CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH"

The Conference administration supports this and will provide any assistance necessary for successful implementation of the study.

If you have any question, please do not hesitate to call on 233-3220-22923

Sincerely,

  
Pastor Akwasi Boateng  
Executive Secretary

Xc: The Officers, SCGC

P. O. BOX RY 336  
Kumasi - Ghana  
+233(0)3220 22923  
scgcghana@yahoo.com  
//http.scgcadventist.org

## APPENDIX C

### RESEARCH APPROVAL AND CONSENT



October 2, 2013

Francis Tuffuor Tel:

Email: [tuffuor94@yahoo.com](mailto:tuffuor94@yahoo.com)

**RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

**IRB Protocol #:** 13-133      **Application Type:** Original      **Dept.:** Doctor of Ministry

**Review Category:** Expedited **Action Taken:** Approved      **Advisor:** David Penno

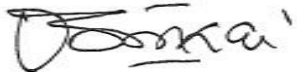
**Title:** A Marriage Preparation Program in the South Central Ghana Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your IRB application of research involving human subjects entitled: “*A marriage Preparation Program in the South Central Ghana Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*” IRB protocol number 13-133 under Expedited category. This approval is valid until October 2, 2014. If your research is not completed by the end of this period, you must apply for an extension at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. We ask that you inform IRB whenever you complete your research. Please reference the protocol number in future correspondence regarding this study.

Any future changes made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Please use the attached report form to request for modifications, extension and completion of your study.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risk with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Reichert, by calling (269) 473-2222. Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions.

Best wishes in your research. Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mordekai'.

Mordekai Ongo

Research Integrity & Compliance Officer

**Institutional Review Board - 4150 Administration Dr Room 322 - Berrien Springs,  
MI 49104-0355 Tel: (269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6543 E-mail: [irb@andrews.edu](mailto:irb@andrews.edu)**

## APPENDIX D

### MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM

#### **A Designed Marriage Preparation Program for Pastors in the South Central**

#### **Ghana Conference**

##### Introduction

This marriage preparation guide is designed to help you as a pastor/counselor lead premarital couples in preparing for marriage. Your task, among other things, includes leading them through key areas that need some minimum attention in areas that may require more extensive counseling from you as a pastor and premarital counselor. Before meeting the couple, it is important for you to go through their responses from the questionnaires or the inventories you sent to them. This will help you to understand who they are, their current relationship, their knowledge on communication, sex, spirituality, parenting, their view on love and marriage, and other areas you might not be aware of. Sometimes a couple may feel shy about certain questions. However, you can overcome this challenge by assuring them that what is discussed is not shared with any third party. You must inform them that their self-disclosure and honest response will enable you as a pastor to know how best to support them and to help them establish a solid foundation for their marital lives.

The questionnaires that you will be giving to the couples will help you to search out compatibility and incompatibility factors and any background issues that may negatively impact their relationships, and areas that need to be nurtured to enhance their marital satisfaction.

## **Couple's Assignment before Session 1**

**Let the couple complete Worksheet A: "Am I Ready for Marriage?"**

**Before you begin the first session ask each partner to fill this short inventory and return to you:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Best time to call you: \_\_\_\_\_

Church attending: \_\_\_\_\_

Church/Facility of wedding: \_\_\_\_\_

Tentative date of wedding: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

High school graduate? Yes— No—

Undergraduate degree? Yes— No— If yes, major \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate degree(s)? Yes— No— If yes, field of study\_\_\_\_\_

Current job/career:

\_\_\_\_\_

Career goals:

---

When did you first start dating each other?

---

When did you become engaged? \_\_\_\_\_

Married before? Yes— No—

Do you have a child/children from a previous relationship? Yes— No—

What are your expectations during this period of marriage preparation?

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### *Health and Sickness*

Do you have, or have you had, any sicknesses or physical problems that could affect your relationship? (allergies, cancer, eating disorders, venereal disease, etc.) Yes— No—

Describe your general health:

Very good— Good— Average— Poor—

Describe all major present or past illnesses or health issues:

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---

Do you have any habits that adversely affect health? Yes— No—

Are you presently taking medication? Yes— No—

If yes, what kind and for what purpose?

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## **The Importance of Relationship**

### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 1**

- Get acquainted. Introduce yourself and let the couple introduce themselves.
- Let the couple feel at ease. Build and maintain rapport throughout your conversation with them. It is common for couples during the initial meeting to feel stressful and nervous. You can break the ice by using their names as early as possible in conversation with them, asking them how their days are going, the weather, and how they found their way to the session venue. Ask them how they are feeling about their initial counseling. You can add your sense of humor.
- Explain to the couple the process of marriage preparation or the premarital counseling you are about to lead and what you expect from them.
- Prepare ahead for the sessions by reviewing this resource guide, inventories, and action items from previous sessions. This resource serves as your guide; however, it should not be read during your time with the couple.
- Assure confidentiality to the couple.

The God of love created human beings for love and relationships.

-Ask the couple to give examples of the importance of relationships and the importance of the marriage relationship.

-Ask them individually what marriage means to them.

-Ask them about their personal reasons for marrying. In asking this question, Flowers (2008) advises pastors and counselors to look for both negative and positive reasons and to make mental notes: “Among the unhealthy reasons for marriage: Attempting to improve one’s negative self-image, fear of lifelong singleness, marrying on the rebound from a former painful relationship, escaping an unhappy home, guilt because of sexual intimacy or pregnancy. Positive reasons include: Companionship, partnership in work for God and others, fulfillment of one’s own and one’s partner’s needs, fulfillment of sexual needs in the way God intends, conviction that marriage to this person is in harmony with God’s will.”

Ask them their personal views and reflections on Genesis 2:15-25, Proverbs 5:15-23; Malachi 2:14-16, Ephesians 5:21-31; Hebrews 13:4. Specifically highlight God as the originator of marriage, “leaving and cleaving,” faithfulness in marriage, love, divorce, and marriage as a life-long union between a husband and wife.

-Explain to them that the marital relationship provides:

**Companionship-** When a couple exchanges affection, love, and respect as they live together (Amos 3:3).

**Physical intimacy-** When a couple grows through love, sex, and touch as they become “one flesh” and are “naked” without shame (Hebrews 13:4; Genesis 2:25).

**Reproduction/Fruitfulness-** When children are added to the family if it is God’s will (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:7).

**Protection-** As found in Ephesians 5:25, a husband is to protect his wife through love, and the wife is to protect her husband and children through love and housekeeping (Titus 2:4-5).

It is also the responsibility of both husband and wife to protect and train their children in a Godly manner (Malachi 2:15; Psalm 112:1-5).

Ask them individually: “Of all the persons in your life that you have met and could have married, why are you choosing this person?”

*Collect previous assignment(s), and give next assignment(s) including the handout 1 on “An Affirmation of Marriage” by Ron Flowers.*

## **Session 2- Communication**

### **Couple’s Assignments before Session 2**

-Complete Worksheet B individually

### **Pastor’s/Counselor’s Outline for Session 2**

-Warmly welcome the couple

-Begin with prayer

-Discuss action items or homework from the previous session

-Discuss responses to Worksheet B

-Discuss the following communication skills to increase intimacy adapted from

PREPARE-ENRICH Couple’s Workbook:

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INCREASE INTIMACY •1. Give full attention to your partner when talking. Turn off the phone, shut off the television, make eye contact.

2. Focus on the good qualities in each other and often praise each other. 3. Be assertive. Share your thoughts, feelings, and needs. A good way to be assertive without being critical is to use “I” rather than “You” statements (e.g. “I worry when you don’t let me know you’ll be late” rather than “You are always late”). 4. Avoid criticism. 5. If you must criticize, balance it with at least one positive comment (e.g. “I appreciate how you take the trash out each week. In the future, can you also remember to wheel the trash can back from the end of the driveway?”). 6. Listen to understand, not to judge. 7. Use active listening. Summarize your partner’s comments before sharing your own reactions or feelings. 8. Avoid blaming each other and work together for a solution. 9. Use the Ten Steps approach. For problems that come up repeatedly, use the Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict. 10. Seek counseling. If you are not able to resolve issues, seek counseling before they become more serious.

Some selected Bible texts on communication: Psalm 19:14, Proverbs 12: 18, Proverbs 17:27, Proverbs 18:13, Proverbs 20:19, Matthew 7: 3, and James 1:19. You can select two or three and share with the couple and ask their views on them.

### **Session 3- Conflict and Resolution in Relationships**

Couple’s Assignments before Session 3

-Complete Worksheet C individually

#### **Pastor’s/Counselor’s Outline for Session 3**

-Warmly welcome the couple

-Begin with prayer

-Discuss action items or home works from the previous session.

-Bible texts on conflict resolution:

“A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.”

Proverbs 14:29.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

“The Heart of the righteous weighs its answer, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.”

Proverbs 15:28.

“Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” Proverbs 16:32.

“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.” Proverbs

19:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”

Proverbs 29:11 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Matthew 5:43-44.

“Do not be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:1

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

Ephesians 4:26 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:29 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

Give the *TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT* inventory to the couple to take home. They are not expected to fill that and bring it back to you. It can serve as a guide in the future or currently when dealing with conflict resolution.

Give the Handout 2 on conflict resolution to the couple as a reading assignment to be done at home.

#### **Session 4: Financial Management**

##### **Couple's Assignments before Session 4**

-Let the couple complete Worksheet D and E individually

##### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 4**

-Warmly welcome the couple

-Begin with prayer

-Discuss action items or homework from the previous session.

-Discuss Worksheets D and E (Financial Management)

-Ask the couple about their practical knowledge of stewardship

-Share with them some Bible texts on money and stewardship: Proverbs 3:9-10, Proverbs 13:11, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Hebrews 13:5, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, and Matthew 6:19-21.

## **Session 5: Couple's Assignments before Session 5**

-Let the couple complete Worksheet F on leisure activities individually

## **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 5**

-Warmly welcome the couple

-Begin with prayer

-Discuss action items or home works from the previous session

-Discuss Worksheet F

-You can discuss some of these Bible texts on leisure with the couple.

Genesis 2:2 "By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done."

Leviticus 23:3 "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."

Mark 6:31-32 "And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.' For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves."

Psalms 23:2 "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters."

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Proverbs 10:5 "He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully."

1 Corinthians 10:31 "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Ephesians 5:15-16 “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”

1 Timothy 5:13 “At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.”

Proverbs 24:30-31 “I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down.”

Proverbs 26:14 “As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed.”

2 Thessalonians 3:11 “For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies”

Luke 8:14 "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

Proverbs 21:17 “He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.”

Isaiah 5:11 “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!”

Luke 15:13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.”

1 Timothy 5:6 “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

James 5:5 “You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.”

## **Session 6: Sex, Affection, and Family Planning**

### **Couple’s Assignments before Session 6**

-Let the couple complete Worksheet G on sex individually. Note that there are two separate worksheets, one for the prospective bridegroom, and one for the prospective bride. Please reserve questions 16-32 for Session 9, when the couple can answer those questions, but don’t discuss their answers with them. Those questions are on children and parenting; discuss their answers for Session 9 when discussing children and parenting.

### **Pastor’s/Counselor’s Outline for Session 6**

- Warmly welcome the couple
- Begin with prayer
- Discuss action items or homework from the previous session
- Discuss Worksheet G
- Ask the couple about their understanding of affection, how they intend to express affection to their partner, and how they want their partner to extend affection to them.
- Ask them how they will guard against sexual unfaithfulness
- Find out their views on pornography
- Ask how they will respond if their expectation of affection is not met in their relationship

-Discuss with them their decision about birth control/family planning

-You can share any of these Bible texts on sex with them

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

1 Corinthians 7:9

Hebrews 13:4

Genesis 2:24

Proverbs 15:19

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

1 Corinthians 6:18

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

Matthew 5:28

Song of Solomon 7:6-12

Ephesians 5:33

### **Session 7: Relationship Roles**

#### **Couple's Assignments before Session 7**

-Let the couple complete Worksheet H on relationship roles individually

- Let the couple read the following Bible texts: Ephesians 6: 4; Galatians 3: 28; Ephesians

5: 21-33; Titus; Titus 2: 4-5; Colossians 3: 18-19, and Proverbs 31: 10-31

#### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 7**

-Warmly welcome the couple

-Begin with prayer

-Discuss action items or homework from the previous session

-Discuss Worksheet H

## **Session 8: Devotional life of a Couple/Family**

### **Couple's Assignments before Session 8**

- Let the couple complete Worksheet I on religion
- Let the couple read the following Bible texts: Deuteronomy 12:5-7; Philippians 2:9-11; James 4:8; Revelation 5:9; Revelation 4:11; Psalms 100:4; Romans 12:1-2, and Psalms 66:4

### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 8**

- Warmly welcome the couple
- Begin with prayer
- Discuss action items or homework from the previous session
- Discuss Worksheet I on religion
- Discuss with the couple the need to make God first in their relationship by maintaining constant connection through family devotions, personal devotion/Bible studies, and participation in church activities

## **Session 9: Children and Parenting**

### **Couple's Assignments before Session 9**

- Let the couple complete Worksheet G (from question 16-32, questions on children and parenting). Note that there are two separate worksheets, one for the prospective bridegroom, and one for the prospective bride).

### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 9**

- Warmly welcome the couple

- Begin with prayer
- Discuss action items or homework from the previous session
- Discuss Worksheet G (questions 16-32)
- Ask the couple about their understanding of parenting
- Share some Bible texts on children and parenting with the couple: Ephesians 6:1-3; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Proverbs 1:8-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 19:18; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13-14; Proverbs 29:15; and Proverbs 29:17.

## **Session 10: Wedding Planning**

### **Pastor's/Counselor's Outline for Session 10**

- Warmly welcome the couple
- Begin with prayer
- Discuss with the couple about their wedding plans regarding date, venue, guest list, officiating team, budgeting, honorarium, transportation, refreshment for attendants, photography, video coverage, honeymoon, decorations, and other vital plans unique to the couple.
- Lead the couple through marriage registration process. And tell them to register.
- Encourage them to arrive at the wedding venue on time.
- Arrange wedding rehearsal with the officiating minister.
- Ask them if they have questions.
- Close the session with prayers.

## INVENTORIES/HANDOUTS

**Worksheet A: AM I READY FOR MARRIAGE?** If you are contemplating marriage, think carefully about the following questions. Can you answer each one Yes? Which answers are No? Of which are you uncertain? In the space provided, place a "Y" if your answer is Yes, "N" if your answer is No, and "?" if you are uncertain. Discuss your answers with God in prayer. Also seek confirmation of your marriage plans from your parents, your pastor, a relative, or another person whom you trust as a spiritual guide.

**Evaluating your personal preparation.** Is my relationship with Jesus Christ personally satisfying? — Do I have a positive outlook on life? — Can I carry responsibility? — Have I chosen my life career? — Do I recover quickly when I am emotionally hurt or angry? — Am I a source of encouragement for others? — Do I relate to my parents in an adult manner? — Am I ready to make a commitment to one person? — Do I feel that I am ready for marriage? —

**Selecting a potential life partner.** Is this person committed to Jesus Christ? — Is he/she personally prepared for marriage? — Do I have a strong conviction that this person values many of the same things in life as I do? — Do I love this person deeply even with his/her flaws? — Can I be flexible and accommodating of the ways in which this person is and will be different from me? — Would a marriage between us help both of us spiritually? — Can this marriage be blessed in our church? — Do others feel I know this person well enough? —

**Preparing as a couple.** Have we prayed often together?— Have we shared our thoughts and feelings about God, the church, Christian service, careers, money, sexuality, in-laws, and children?— Do we know and accept each other's family?— Have we planned how to reach our goals in life and how to adjust should we fail to reach them?— Have we discussed our marriage pattern, what his/her responsibilities will be?— Can we trust each other with our deepest fears?— Have we honestly compared our expectations of each other, including the things we'd like to change in one another?— Does our love bond allow for the individuality of each other?— Do we know by experience that we can solve problems and handle conflicts well together?— Will we have the support of relatives and friends in our marriage?— Have we sought the wisdom of our parents, a pastor, a counselor, or someone else who knows us well enough to help us make our final decision to marry?—

Adapted from Flowers, R. (2008) *“A Program of Premarital Guidance”* Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

## Worksheet B

Questions relating to your family:

T F 1. The hardest topic for my family to talk about is sex.

T F 2. In my family, when my parents were angry, they would hit or slap each other.

T F 3. In my family, I often heard the phrase “I love you” frequently spoken among family members.

T F 4. In my family, every person’s feelings were important, and we were encouraged to share and talk about them.

T F 5. My father would say one thing and do another.

T F 6. In my family, yelling was one way of getting what we wanted.

T F 7. There is a great deal of arguing and fighting in my family.

T F 8. My parents listened to my opinion and tried to understand me.

T F 9. My mother was the parent in charge and her word was law.

T F 10. My father had to have the last word on everything.

T F 11. It’s important in my family to respect the rights and privacy of each other.

T F 12. In my family, God and Christ were the center of everything.

T F 13. My parents would go for hours without talking when they were angry.

T F 14. In my family, everyone was encouraged to express their thoughts openly.

T F 15. Honesty, integrity, and truth were at the forefront of our lives.

T F 16. My family enjoys playing together.

T F 17. My mother frequently complimented my father.

T F 18. My father frequently complimented my mother.

T F 19. I frequently saw my mother and father kiss and make up after fights.

T F 20. It was OK to cry in front of other family members.

---

How you want communication to be between the two of you:

T F 1. It's very important that you accept my feelings.

T F 2. I think that we should be able to disagree without fighting.

T F 3. Sometimes I'm afraid to tell you what I really think.

T F 4. I believe that arguing is bad for a marriage.

T F 5. I believe that both the man and the woman should be able to express their feelings.

T F 6. I think I am an attentive listener.

T F 7. I think that it's alright to talk about our married life with whomever I please.

T F 8. Sometimes I need "space" before I can discuss something I'm upset about.

T F 9. I find it difficult to share my feelings.

T F 10. When I have a problem, I believe you'll be there to help me.

T F 11. Loud yelling bothers me and I withdraw when it occurs.

T F 12. I find it difficult to criticize you without your getting angry.

T F 13. Sometimes I need time to myself, but that doesn't mean I don't love you.

T F 14. I think that we should be able to put each other down and tease each other.

T F 15. The hardest topic for us to talk about is religion.

T F 16. I think that you frequently talk down to me.

T F 17. I think that it's important to keep our families informed as to how we are doing in our marriage and with our health.

T F 18. I'm willing to compromise to keep peace in our relationship.

T F 19. I would like to have our serious talks just before bedtime.

T F 20. Sometimes I can be very pushy and to the point.

T F 21. Disagreement can be healthy in a marriage if both people fight fairly to resolve differences.

T F 22. It's very important to me to know how you feel and what you think.

T F 23. I'm very sensitive to criticism.

T F 24. I believe that it's important to you to be right all the time.

T F 25. When I get angry and you ask me what's wrong, I will answer "Nothing."

T F 26. I think the man should be the head of the house.

T F 27. It's very hard for me to change my mind once I've made a decision.

T F 28. I believe that it's OK to keep secrets from each other.

T F 29. I think that you often interrupt me and try to dominate the conversation.

T F 30. I believe that if you don't get your way, you'll be angry with me.

T F 31. I feel close to you when you let me help you.

T F 32. I have no difficulty lying.

T F 33. I will say or do anything to get what I want.

*Now that you've finished both parts of the communication worksheets it's time to compare.*

*This is not the time to find fault with one another, but a time to find what you have in common and to find the strong and weak points on which you can build.*

Adapted from Currier, J.H., *Counseling for Marriage*

## **Worksheet C**

### **Conflicting, Fighting, and Being Hurt**

This section of the inventory focuses on one aspect of communication — conflict. The importance of this review is to help you identify some of the causes of being hurt and the feelings you experience in fighting or being hurt. But before you get busy, here is our bias on this – we think that conflict is normal (that is, it happens in even the best relationships) and that it can motivate you to change and grow. Hence, conflict is not all bad.

1. When I have been hurt by something my partner has said or done, I (mark as many as apply): •Withdraw from my partner

- Do something to hurt him/her
- Get angry at him/her
- Play the martyr
- Pretend everything is fine
- Drop hints
- Get in a “mood” or pout
- Wait till he/she initiates forgiveness

2. The reason I respond like this is (mark as many as apply):

- To clear the air
- To get my partner to listen
- Because we're too different
- Making up is so nice
- The pressure piles up

- I want attention
- We can't agree
- I want something very much
- I have a short temper
- He/she starts it
- Nothing else works

3. I am most hurt by my partner when he/she (mark as many as apply):

- Pays more attention to work than me
- Puts another relationship first
- Is careless about money
- Doesn't keep up his/her appearance
- Embarrasses me publicly
- Does all the talking
- Leaves everything up to me
- Doesn't listen to me
- Goes out too much with friends
- Doesn't give me any space/peace
- Says "no" to sexual advances

4. " How would you describe your way of handling conflict? -----

-----  
-----

How would you describe your partner's way of handling conflict? -----

-----  
-----  
How would you describe your parents' way of handling conflict? -----  
-----  
-----

5. The worst things about our disagreements are (mark as many as apply):

- Name calling
- Physical violence
- Never finishing
- Hard to apologize
- Bringing up the past
- I always lose
- They're so frequent
- They last too long
- We never solve the problem
- They are vengeful
- My feelings are hurt

6. "Fighting fairly" is (please define what you think it is): -----  
-----

7. When there was fighting in your family of origin (the family you grew up in), you  
would (describe what you would do): -----  
-----

8.The key to handling conflict in marriage is (this is your opinion): -----

-----

(Adapted from The Ducklows, *Conflicting, Fighting and Being Hurt*

<http://theducklows.ca/downloads/MaritalPremaritalQuestionnaire.pdf>)

## Worksheet D

### Financial Management

#### Marriage Preparation Worksheet

1. How do you understand this Bible text; “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, The world and all its people belong to him.” in Psalm 24:1? -----  
-----
2. Do you believe that you are an overseer of God’s property, including your personal monies? Yes----- No -----
3. If yes, how does that belief affect the way you manage your finances? -----  
-----
4. Is budgeting important to you?
5. List three areas that you often spend money on: 1-----  
2 ----- 3 -----
6. Do you have a loan/credit/debt? Yes----- No-----
7. If yes, have you told your partner about this? Yes----- No-----
8. If your partner knows about your loan/debt/credit, how does he/she feel about it? -  
-----
9. If you have a pending loan/credit/debt, how do you manage it? -----  
-----
10. Do you have savings account/asset? Yes---- No----
11. Have you told your partner about this? Yes--- No---
12. Do you and your partner have an investment plan? Yes--- No---

13. Will you and your partner pool your money together? Yes--- No--- If yes or no, why? -----
14. At what amount of money should you need to discuss a purchase before buying it? -----
15. How will you and your partner support the church with your money? -----  
-----
16. How do you plan to support the members of your extended families in times of need? -----
17. Do you have insurance? Yes--- No --- If yes what type of insurance? -----  
-----
18. What is your attitude on debt? -----
19. What is your attitude on a will? -----
20. What future plans do you and your partner have in acquiring your own house if you do not have one now? -----

## Worksheet E

### Budget Worksheet

Monthly Income: (Take Home Pay)	
	Total Partner 1:
	Total Partner 2:
	Total Couple

Monthly Expenses		Current Spending	Future Budget plan
Giving	Contributions/Tithe		
Housing	Rent or Mortgage Utilities Phone		
Loans and Debt	Car Personal Credit/Loan		
Car	Gasoline Repairs/Maintenance		
Food	Food at home Food away from home		
Healthcare			

Insurance	Medical Car Home/Life/health		
Clothing			
Personal Goods			
Household Supplies			
Services	Cell Phone Cable/Dish Internet Dry Cleaning/Laundry Other		
Other Expenditure	Savings Gifts Entertainment Daycare Child Support Other		
<b>Total Couple Income</b>			
<b>Total Expenses</b>			
<b>Surplus or Deficit</b>			

(Adapted from Workbook, PREPARE-ENRICH (2008))

## **Worksheet F**

### **Leisure Activities**

#### **THE DATING EXERCISE**

If you want to keep your relationship alive and growing, our best advice is to date your mate! Dating will help you maintain a friendship and is one of the best indicators of a successful, long-term marriage. The habit of dating is the catalyst for building your couple friendship and staying emotionally connected through the coming years. This exercise will help you establish, reestablish, or reinforce the dating habit.

#### **1. Separately write down your answers to the following questions:**

As you think about the life of your relationship, what have been your most favorite dates?

-----

What do you enjoy doing together? (sports, hobbies, interests, and recreational activities)

-----

What are some things you would like to learn or pursue together? (e.g. sports, cooking, hiking)

-----

**2. Share your answers with each other and brainstorm a combined list of potential dates.**

a. ----- c. -----  
b. ----- d. -----

**3. Evaluate your combined list and rank the order in which to do them.** Use the criteria below to evaluate your dates. For instance, if your budget is tight, you may want to recreate a favorite date when you made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and had a picnic in the park.

**Tim required for a date** (for instance, 1 hour, 2 hours, evening, afternoon, morning, or whole day) **Financial resources needed for date** (\$ = inexpensive, \$\$ = moderate, \$\$\$ = expensive) **Energy level** (low energy, medium energy, high energy)

a. ----- c. -----  
b. ----- d. -----

**4. Now pull out your calendars and write in one date a week for the next two months.**

It takes three weeks to make a new habit (or relearn an old one) and six weeks to feel good about it. Date your partner once a week for the next two months and you will be well on your way to energizing your relationship with fun, romance, and laughter!

(Adapted from Workbook, PREPARE-ENRICH, 2008)

## Worksheet G-Prospective Bridegroom

### Sex

1. Do you know of any reason why you cannot have a normal sex life (damage to sexual organs by accident, disease, or organic malfunction)? -----  
-----
2. Do you know of any reason why conception would not be possible due to impotence or other physiological problems? -----  
-----  
-----
3. Have you ever had any form of venereal disease? ----- If yes, explain-----  
-----
4. State any fears you have concerning sexual intimacy: -----  
-----
5. Have you ever been molested, raped, subject to indecent exposure, or had homosexual encounters/relations? ----- If yes, explain what

happened (when it happened and what effect you feel this may have on your future marital relations): -----  
-----  
-----

6. What impressed you positively or negatively about your parents' sexual relationship? -----  
-----  
-----

7. Do you feel adequately informed about sexual processes? Yes ----- No-----

8. What is the extent of your sex education, and from what sources did your information come? -----  
-----  
-----

9. Have you talked about sex with your fiancée? -----  
-----

10. State areas where you feel you still have questions concerning sex: -----  
-----

11. What do you think is the purpose of sex in marriage? -----  
-----

12. What do you expect to give and receive in your sexual relationship? -----  
-----

13. Do you look forward to sex in your marriage? Yes---- No ---- Why -----

-----  
-----

14. Describe any discussions you have had with your parents about sex. -----

-----  
-----

15. Do you feel that previous sexual encounters can have an effect on marriage? If so,  
in what way? -----

-----

16. Do you believe in birth control? Yes ---- No ----

17. If yes, who do you feel is responsible for contraception? -----

18. Also, if you believe in contraception, what method (s) have you discussed and  
chosen for yourselves? -----

-----

19. Would you consider abortion? Yes ---- No ----

20. If yes, under what circumstances? -----

-----

21. Are you planning to have children? Yes----- No -----

22. If no, explain -----

-----

23. Do you know of any physiological or psychological reason why you cannot have  
children? Yes ---- No ---- If yes, explain -----

- -----
24. How many children would you like to have? -----
25. What do you believe is an ideal spacing between children? -----  
-----
26. In what ways do you believe the husband should be involved in the raising of  
children? (Be specific.) -----  
-----  
-----  
-----
27. In what ways do you believe the wife should be involved in the raising of  
children? (Be specific.) -----  
-----  
-----  
-----
28. Do you believe in the concept of a “working mother” (a) during the children’s  
pre-school years?-----  
(b) during childhood years?-----
29. Who should bear the responsibility of disciplining children? -----
30. What methods of discipline are you planning to use with your children?-----  
-----

-----  
-----

31. I want to teach my children the following values: (List in order of importance)

- 1) -----  
2) -----  
3) -----  
4) -----  
5) -----

32. What will you do to instill these values? (Be specific.) -----

-----  
-----  
-----

If you cannot have children, what are your feelings regarding adoption? -----

-----  
-----

(Adapted from Thompson, D.A. (1979). A premarital Guide for Couples and Their Counselors. Minnesota, Minneapolis, Bethany Press International)

## Worksheet G-Prospective Bride

### Sex

1. Do you know of any reason why you cannot have a normal sex life (damage to sexual organs by accident, disease, or organic malfunction)? -----  
-----
2. Do you know of any reason why conception would not be possible due to impotence or other physiological problems? -----  
-----  
-----
3. Have you ever had any form of venereal disease? ----- If yes, explain-----  
-----
4. State any fears you have concerning sexual intimacy: -----  
-----
5. Have you ever been molested, raped, subject to indecent exposure, or had homosexual encounters/relations? ----- If yes, explain what happened (when it happened and what effect you feel this may have on your future marital relations): -----  
-----  
-----
6. What impressed you positively or negatively about your parents' sexual relationship? -----

- 
- 
7. Do you feel adequately informed about sexual processes? Yes ----- No-----
8. What is the extent of your sex education, and from what sources did your  
information come (books, friends, parents, etc.)? -----  
-----  
-----
9. Have you talked about sex with your fiancé? -----  
-----
10. State areas where you feel you still have questions concerning sex: -----  
-----
11. What do you think is the purpose of sex in marriage? -----  
-----
12. What do you expect to give and receive in your sexual relationship? -----  
-----
13. Do you look forward to sex in your marriage? Yes---- No ---- Why -----  
-----
14. Describe any discussions you have had with your parents about sex. -----  
-----
15. Do you feel that previous sexual encounters can have an effect on marriage? If so,  
in what way? -----  
-----

16. Do you believe in birth control? Yes ---- No ----
17. If yes, who do you feel is responsible for contraception? -----
18. Also, if you believe in contraception, what method (s) have you discussed and  
chosen for yourselves? -----  
-----
19. Would you consider abortion? Yes ---- No ----
20. If yes, under what circumstances? -----  
-----
21. Are you planning to have children? ----- No -----
22. If no, explain -----  
-----
23. Do you know of any physiological or psychological reason why you cannot have  
children? Yes ---- No ---- If yes, explain -----  
-----  
-----
24. How many children would you like to have? -----
25. What do you believe is an ideal spacing between children? -----  
-----
26. In what ways do you believe the husband should be involved in the raising of  
children? (Be specific.) -----  
-----  
-----

-----  
-----

27. In what ways do you believe the wife should be involved in the raising of children? (Be specific.) -----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

28. Do you believe in the concept of a “working mother” (a) during the children’s pre-school years? -----  
(b) during childhood years? -----

29. Who should bear the responsibility for disciplining children? -----

30. What methods of discipline are you planning to use with your children?-----  
-----  
-----

31. I want to teach my children the following values: (List in order of importance)

- 1) -----
- 2) -----
- 3) -----
- 4) -----
- 5) -----

32. What will you do to instill these values? (Be specific.) -----

-----  
-----  
-----  
If you cannot have children, what are your feelings regarding adoption? -----  
-----  
-----  
-----

(Adapted from Thompson, D.A. (1979). *A Premarital Guide for Couples and Their Counselors*. Minnesota, Minneapolis, Bethany Press International)

## TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show that the number of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled.

Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding common and destructive patterns.

Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

**1. Set a time and place for discussion. 2. Define the problem - Be specific.** -----

-----

**3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem**

Partner 1: -----

Partner 2: -----

**4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.**

1)----- 3) -----

2)----- 4) -----

**5. Brainstorm—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem.**

Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) ----- 6) -----

2)----- 7) -----

3)----- 8) -----

4)----- 9) -----

5)----- 10) -----

6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions. (Be as objective as possible.  
Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.)
7. Agree on one solution to try.

-----

8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution. (Be as specific as possible.)

Partner 1: -----

Partner 2: -----

9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.

Place: -----Date: ----- Time: -----

10. Reward each other for progress. (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)

(Adapted from Workbook, *PREPARE-ENRICH* (2008))

### Worksheet H-ROLES EXPLORATION

In your marriage, who will do the following things? Check the

appropriate space under Husband, Wife, Both, or Other. Endeavor to be realistic.

Too many "Boths" will be suspect (Adapted from Flowers, R. (2008). *A Program for Premarital Guidance*. Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

	HUSBAND	WIFE	BOTH	OTHER
1. Earn income	-----	-----	-----	-----
2. Plan the family budget	-----	-----	-----	-----

3.	Supervise husband's spending	-----	-----	-----	-----
4.	Supervise wife's spending	-----	-----	-----	-----
5.	Supervise child(ren)'s spending	-----	-----	-----	-----
6.	Pay the bills	-----	-----	-----	-----
7.	Make major purchasing decisions	-----	-----	-----	-----
8.	Make decisions regarding his vocation	-----	-----	-----	-----
9.	Make decisions regarding her vocation	-----	-----	-----	-----
10.	Made decisions regarding her education	-----	-----	-----	-----
11.	Made decisions regarding her education	-----	-----	-----	-----
12.	Decide on the community for home	-----	-----	-----	-----
13.	Choose the actual dwelling	-----	-----	-----	-----
14.	Choose decor and furnishings	-----	-----	-----	-----
15.	Plan the menu	-----	-----	-----	-----
16.	Do the grocery shopping	-----	-----	-----	-----
17.	Put away groceries	-----	-----	-----	-----
18.	Decide when to eat out	-----	-----	-----	-----
19.	Do the baking	-----	-----	-----	-----
20.	Prepare the meals	-----	-----	-----	-----

21.	Set the table	-----	-----	-----	-----
22.	Wash the dishes	-----	-----	-----	-----
23.	Vacuum or sweep	-----	-----	-----	-----
24.	Take out the trash	-----	-----	-----	-----
25.	Clean the refrigerator	-----	-----	-----	-----
26.	Clean the oven	-----	-----	-----	-----
27.	Clean the bathroom(s)	-----	-----	-----	-----
28.	Wash the windows	-----	-----	-----	-----
29.	Change the beds	-----	-----	-----	-----
30.	Make the beds	-----	-----	-----	-----
31.	Choose his wardrobe	-----	-----	-----	-----
32.	Choose wife's wardrobe	-----	-----	-----	-----
33.	Choose child(ren)'s wardrobe	-----	-----	-----	-----
34.	Wash the clothes	-----	-----	-----	-----
35.	Iron the clothes	-----	-----	-----	-----
36.	Put away the clean clothes	-----	-----	-----	-----
37.	Care for minor household repairs	-----	-----	-----	-----
38.	Arrange for major repairs	-----	-----	-----	-----
39.	Cut the grass	-----	-----	-----	-----
40.	Trim shrubbery	-----	-----	-----	-----
41.	Plant flowers and/or vegetables	-----	-----	-----	-----
42.	Keep walkway clean	-----	-----	-----	-----
43.	Weed flowers and/or vegetables	-----	-----	-----	-----

44.	Rake leaves	-----	-----	-----	-----
45.	Decide the type of vehicle to buy	-----	-----	-----	-----
46.	Select the actual vehicle	-----	-----	-----	-----
47.	Care for the vehicle's exterior	-----	-----	-----	-----
48.	Care for the vehicle's interior	-----	-----	-----	-----
49.	Care for auto servicing	-----	-----	-----	-----
50.	Decide the kind(s) of pet(s)	-----	-----	-----	-----
51.	Feed the pet(s)	-----	-----	-----	-----
52.	Keep the pets(s) clean	-----	-----	-----	-----
53.	Decide the kind of entertainment	-----	-----	-----	-----
54.	Decide which TV program to watch	-----	-----	-----	-----
55.	Decide on recreation	-----	-----	-----	-----
56.	Choose friends	-----	-----	-----	-----
57.	. Keep a social calendar	-----	-----	-----	-----
58.	Decide the church you attend	-----	-----	-----	-----
59.	Decide how often you attend	-----	-----	-----	-----
60.	Lead in family worship	-----	-----	-----	-----
61.	Decide church & charity gifts	-----	-----	-----	-----
62.	Plan holiday activities	-----	-----	-----	-----
63.	Plan the vacation	-----	-----	-----	-----
64.	Decide vacation expenses	-----	-----	-----	-----
65.	Decide gift expenses	-----	-----	-----	-----

66.	Decide when to visit in-laws	-----	-----	-----	-----
67.	Decide when to invite in-laws	-----	-----	-----	-----
68.	Initiate sexual intimacy	-----	-----	-----	-----
69.	Decide about contraceptives	-----	-----	-----	-----
70.	Decide if you will have children	-----	-----	-----	-----
71.	Decide the number of children	-----	-----	-----	-----
72.	Name the child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
73.	Change diapers	-----	-----	-----	-----
74.	Wash diapers	-----	-----	-----	-----
75.	Feed the child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
76.	Bathe the child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
77.	Play with the child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
78.	Put child(ren) to bed	-----	-----	-----	-----
79.	Care for child(ren)'s toys	-----	-----	-----	-----
80.	Get up at night with child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
81.	Nurse child(ren) when sick	-----	-----	-----	-----
82.	Discipline child(ren)	-----	-----	-----	-----
83.	Help child(ren) with homework	-----	-----	-----	-----
84.	Transport child(ren) to school	-----	-----	-----	-----
85.	Transport child(ren) from school	-----	-----	-----	-----
86.	Transport them to activities	-----	-----	-----	-----
87.	Instruct child(ren) spiritually	-----	-----	-----	-----
88.	Teach child(ren) about sex	-----	-----	-----	-----

- |     |                                   |       |       |       |       |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 89. | Select babysitter                 | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| 90. | Make decision to adopt child(ren) | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| 91. | Decide which child(ren) to adopt  | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |

## Worksheet I- Religion

Briefly describe your parents' religious affiliation and depth of religious commitment

Father:

---

---

---

Mother:

---

---

---

How often do you go to church?

---

How often do you read your Bible?

---

How often do you pray?

---

Do you have a devotional time with your fiancée/fiancé? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes,

how often? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you believe it means to be a Christian?

---

---

---

---

Would you characterize yourself as a Christian? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what basis do you have for making such a statement?

---

---

---

---

Would you say that your fiancée is a Christian? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

On what basis have you made that judgement?

---

---

Have you been baptized? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, when?

---

Describe a time when you felt very close to God:

---

---

---

---

Describe a time when you felt very far from God:

---

---

---

---

Describe where you believe you are now in your relationship with God:

---

---

---

---

What issue(s) is God dealing with you right now that keeps you on the “growing edge” spiritually?

---

---

---

Describe the level of religious commitment you believe your fiancée to have:

---

---

Do you see any areas of conflict on spiritual issues with your fiancée? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Explain\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

What do you think constitutes a truly Christian marriage?

---

---

---

Who do you believe is responsible for spiritual leadership in the home?

---

How does that affect you?

---

---

---

Write a brief autobiography of your spiritual life to date:

---

---

---

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Counselor's Additional Questions:

(Adapted from Thompson, D.A. (1979). *A Premarital Guide for Couples and Their Counselors*. Minnesota, Minneapolis, Bethany Press International)



## **Handout 1: AN AFFIRMATION OF MARRIAGE**

**Marriage is very good.** In response to a question about marriage, Jesus pointed His hearers back to marriage as ordained at creation (Matt. 19:3) when God pronounced all things "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The marriage of the first human pair portrayed God's ideal for this relationship. They were "one flesh" and "naked and unashamed" (Gen. 2:24, 25). In their union, God provided for love, affection, and companionship, as well as the perpetuation of the human family (Gen. 2:18; Prov. 5:18; Gen. 1:28). Marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4). A man who finds a wife "finds what is good" (Prov. 18:22 NIV). Marriage has been perverted by sin, but restored by grace. The sin of the first couple altered their relationship. In obedience to God, their married lives had been harmonious and peaceful. Disobedience brought consequences that adversely affected them personally and in their marriage (Gen. 3:6-16). Power struggles in marriage, blaming, distrust, and abuse have been exhibited everywhere since the fall of the first married couple. The entrance of sin changed the way couples experience marriage. The selfishness of human hearts caused it to be something far less than God's ideal. But the good news of the gospel concerning marriage is that sin's power is broken. By the grace of God, the experience of marriage can be very good. Marriage is a three-fold, lifelong covenant. When a man and woman marry, they enter into a covenant with each other, with society, and with God to be faithful to one another until death (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). As the gospel is experienced in marriage, the relationship of the partners with each other is fashioned after the likeness of the divine covenant with humanity (Psalms 89:34;

Lament. 3:23). They are to love, serve, and forgive as He loves, serves, and forgives (John 15:12; Matt. 20:26-28; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:4, Eph. 4:32). The couple draws strength from the provisions made in the divine covenant, God promising grace and power to enable them to do what they could not do on their own (Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13). His covenant love knits together what sin separates (Col 2:2). This covenant, with the cross of Christ at its center, makes possible the intimate union of a man and a woman in marriage. As the cross is uplifted, spouses who have become alienated may be brought near to God and to each other. The blood of Jesus breaks down the walls of hostility that the enemy has built up (Ephesians 2:13, 14).

Marriage is a union of equals. From the very beginning, male and female were equally formed in the image of God, equally blessed, and made co-regents over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Jesus elevated the partially lost status of women, treating them with love and respect and restoring their original creation equality with men (Mark 10:2-12; 14:3-9; John 4:7-30; 8:1-11). The Apostle Paul declares that all human beings, regardless of race, sex, or age are one by virtue of creation (Acts 17:26) and redemption (Gal. 3:28). He proclaimed that Christ has broken the barriers of prejudice, religious tradition, and customs that cause one group to view another as inferior (Eph. 2:14, 16). Paul upheld the rights of husbands and wives as equals in their marital relationship (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Peter speaks of married couples as being "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). While some obvious capabilities pertaining to human reproduction belong uniquely to each of the sexes, the potential of each spouse is not otherwise

limited or fixed by gender. In their loving, trusting relationship, each is able to pursue interests, fill roles, and take responsibilities according to their spiritual giftedness, aptitudes, talents, and abilities. Marriage is a dynamic relationship. Marriage is a union of two people who undoubtedly share some common values, but who will nevertheless need to work at making numerous adjustments throughout their lives together. Spouses frequently are very different in temperament, habits, and tastes. Education and backgrounds, lifestyle and the structure of the families in which they grew up all have an impact on the new marriage. The two who link their lives in marriage bring to their union their hopes, their plans, their strengths, and their weaknesses. At their wedding they begin a process of blending their dreams, modifying their expectations, and dealing with each other's imperfections. Forces at work within and around them will produce changes in them personally, in their marriage, and in their relationships with others. In their passage through life, various phases will be encountered, each with some built-in, predictable crises that can and often will occur. These life-cycle stages and other stresses of life will require on-going adaptation. This process of maturing, coping with change, and adjusting to each other in ways that provide satisfying levels of intimacy--this growing--is a continuous experience. Marriage is therefore not static, but dynamic. Some couples are better equipped than others in dealing with their differentness, handling changes, and making the adjustments necessary for a healthy, lifelong marriage. Virtually all, however, need some help in anticipating change, preparing for it, and living successfully through the seasons of their lives and marriages. Enrichment

programs that assist couples in developing relational skills, support networks of caring couples, and marriage counseling are important resources to enable couples to meet the demands of contemporary marriage and life together.

Marriage is a ministry. Each couple is a ministry unit that can be highly effective in reaching out to strengthen and encourage other couples and individuals. A great need is present in the lives of countless husbands and wives for guidance and encouragement in their marriages. Fewer and fewer couples have models of lasting, committed, satisfying Christian marriages at which to look for a pattern for their own relationship. Societal pressures against marriage are such as to necessitate the enlistment of every available Christian couple in outreach and support for other married couples. In the presence of such caring couples, many husbands and wives will see a practical demonstration of God's love, find reassurance for their identity, comfort in the midst of difficulty, and hope to carry them forward.

Adapted from Flowers, R. (2008) *“A Program of Premarital Guidance”* Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

## **Handout 2**

### **Conflict Resolution reading assignment for couples**

#### **The “Don’ts” of Marital Warfare:**

1. *Don’t avoid conflict with “the silent treatment!”* 2. *Don’t save up emotional trading stamps!* 3. *Don’t strike while the iron is “hot” --- at the wrong time or place!* 4. *Don’t attack your mate, rather attack the problem!* 5. *Don’t throw your feelings like stones or “hit below the belt.”* 6. *Don’t get off the topic or drag in other issues – clarify the real problems.* 7. *Don’t criticize without offering solutions.* 8. *Don’t tell people what they feel or think or “should” feel or think.* 9. *Never say “You never. . .” or use sarcasm, exaggerations, and hysterical statements.* 10. *Never manipulate each other, resort to name calling, or verbal power plays!* 11. *Don’t use “mercenaries” – dragging in third parties – keep things private.* 12. *Never let pride take over – you just may be wrong!!*

#### **Steps Toward Resolution of a Conflict**

1. *ASK YOUR PARTNER TO DISCUSS A DIFFERENCE.* In order to get off to a good start, both of you need to agree to talk; when, where, and how long to talk; and what the difference is that is under discussion.
2. *EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS.* Listen to yourself, identify what you feel, and acknowledge your feelings. Look behind angry feelings for feelings of hurt or fear that often precede anger. Risk expressing those feelings to your partner. Listen attentively to your partner's feelings, accepting and seeking to understand them.
3. *IDENTIFY THE REAL ISSUE.* Beneath the difference that triggered your first feelings may lie another need involving important personal needs. See if you can identify the needs you each have that are being blocked or unmet. Attempt to clarify the issue between you in light of these underlying needs.
4. *STAY IN THE HERE AND NOW.* Don't drag up the past. You can't change what has been done before, work on the present. (Long withheld feelings need to be expressed at an appropriate time, but not in the midst of resolving a present conflict.)
5. *SPECIFY WHERE YOU AGREE.* Find something that each of you can agree with in the other's side of the difference. Summarize what you both hold in common about the issue.
6. *NEGOTIATE THE ISSUE.* Brainstorm various alternative solutions to the difference. Evaluate them in light of their potential for meeting your identified conflict: agree to implement one or a combination of preferred solutions.
7. *CLOSE THE DISCUSSION.* Signify to each other by word or touch that you are concluding the discussion. You may either celebrate the resolution or agree to continue to

explore the issue at another time. Pray together, asking God's forgiveness for your anger and His help in reconciling your hearts.

8. *IF AFTER DISCUSSION, SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES REMAIN*, you may agree to disagree; or offer to give the other what they want as a free gift (remember gracious receiving is as important as gracious giving); or meet in the middle with a compromise. Sometimes temporary solutions are necessary.

(Adapted from Barry McWilliams, *Marital Conflict*,  
<http://www.eldrbarry.net/marriage/clas/bm09.pdf>)

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