

## Perceptions for solving marital problems and giving pastoral care to married couples suffering from marital instability

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### ABSTRACT

The study exposes the perceptions for solving marital problems and giving pastoral care to married couples suffering from marital instability. It is notable that some divorce are unavoidable as a last resort, churches make earnest effort to strengthen marriages and families in general. Many Christian churches are dedicated to supporting strong marriages, not least of which is Focus on the Family. What might pastors do in their roles as teachers and counsellors to help marriages stay together and even thrive? It is in the light of these anomalies that this study sought to exposed the perceptions for solving marital problems and giving pastoral care to married couple suffering from marital instability. The study employed a qualitative method. A descriptive survey research design was employed because it permits the collections of data in their natural and original setting. The discourse revealed that marriage in our broken world has fallen on hard times, yet, solution abounds to the last resort.

Keywords: Marital Problems, Solution, Marital Problems, Pastoral Care

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### INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been for centuries recognized and accepted as one of the seven sacraments of the Church instituted by Christ. Marriage is the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life. The three ends of marriage, according to Canon law are: first, the procreation of offspring; second, mutual consortium; third, a remedy for concupiscence. The first end is common to man and animal. But according to Catholic doctrine, the sacrament of matrimony gives an added strength to attain these ends [1]. [2] remarked that the heart of marriage is the mutual commitment of the spouses to share life in all its vicissitudes in as much as marriage is a union involving an undivided way of living yet, it is not without its short-comings and difficulties. The issue of marriage and family is an important one in our present society; hence, it deserves serious attention. Many families are experiencing various kinds of challenges today. Some of these family problems are between couples. Marital infidelity, separation, divorce and remarriage have become very common because understanding of marriage today is no longer accepted in many of its

essential elements. The statistic for past hundred years indicates that the permanence of marriage (indissolubility) and even monogamy itself are being fundamentally undermined by wide spread divorce in many countries of the world. There are issues of broken families probably caused by barrenness, sickness, poverty, stubborn children, amoral children and lack of basic foundation. Thus Canon Law described marriage as "covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves, a partnership of their whole life and which of its own very nature is ordered to the wellbeing of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children" Pope St John Paul II (1981) in his book Apostolic Exhortation noted that due to the nature and importance of this sacrament, it is more and ever necessary in our times to prepare young people for marriage and family life and the need for clergies to pay attention to the pastoral care of married couples became significant. This is because many families are living in infidelity to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. The question begging for answers now is how can we solve marital problems and offer pastoral

care to married couple suffering from marital instability. Hence, the study exposes the perceptions for solving

marital problems and giving pastoral care to married couples suffering from marital instability[3].

#### Statement of the Problem

Marriage in our broken world has fallen on hard times. Many couples give up, since they view marriage more as a mere contract than as a covenant. It hurts when clergies see couples who they married get divorced, nullified or separated. Divorce not only separate couples, but also injure children and alienate family members and friends. It is no surprise that the prophet Malachi writes, "Any man who hates and divorce his wife, does violence to the one he should protect" [4]. While some divorce are unavoidable as a last resort, churches

make earnest effort to strengthen marriages and families in general. Many Christian churches are dedicated to supporting strong marriages, not least of which is Focus on the Family. What might pastors do in their roles as teachers and counsellors to help marriages stay together and even thrive? Hence, the topic titled: Perceptions for solving marital problems and giving pastoral care to married couple suffering from marital instability.

#### Marital problems

Marital problems are seen as the phenomena that threatens the peace and unity of married couples. These problems bring about disagreement from which the couples perceive some threats to their needs, interests or concern which leads to struggles and contests between couples with 'opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals' [4]. Marriage in our broken world has fallen on hard times. Many couples give up, since they view marriage more as a mere contract than as a covenant. It hurts when clergies see couples who they married get divorced, nullified or separated. Divorce not only separate couples, but also injure children and alienate family members and friends. It is no surprise that the prophet Malachi writes, "Any man who hates and divorce his wife, does violence to the one he should protect" [5]. While some divorce are unavoidable as a last resort, churches make earnest effort to strengthen marriages and families in general. Many Christian churches are dedicated to supporting strong marriages, not least of which is Focus on the Family. What might pastors do in their roles as teachers and counsellors to help marriages stay together and even thrive? However, marital problems are a normal part of married life experienced by couples. This is so because, when two people come together in marriage, each partner comes with his/her individualized characteristics, needs, attitudes, values,

and idiosyncrasies [6]. Be that as it may, the lists of marital problems cannot be exhausted at a particular time. This entails that the list is endless and they include but not limited to; finance, children, sex, time apart, household responsibility, friends, irritating habits, family, personality, expectations and poor communication.

Finance: Most couples argue over bills, debt, spending, and other financial issues. How they decide to deal with money problems in their marriage will determine whether those problems have a negative or positive effect on their marriage.

Children: Discipline, diet, and other parenting issues can be sources of disagreement between couples. A child is the number one stressor in a marriage and can accentuate differences in beliefs on issues like how to discipline, who is responsible for most of the child care or what educational options to choose. And, there is the matter of lost sleep, who has to change dirty diapers, run after them when they start walking and the exorbitant cost of daycare. It's easy to see who children can put a strain on even the best marriage.

Sex: Frequency, quantity, quality, and infidelity are all common sources of stress and disharmony in a marriage. Withholding sex to punish a spouse breaks the marital bond. Cheating on a spouse destroys trust. Sex can be a huge

issue when it comes to undoing the vows you took.

**Time apart:** Time apart and a lack of quality time together causes couples to become out of sync with each other. Having shared interests and activities you participate in on a regular basis helps couples stay connected. Military couples fall victim to this problem in their marriages. Enduring long deployments and constant temporary assignments away from home couples have to have a special bond for a marriage to last.

**Household responsibility:** Many couples argue over equitable distribution of household work, and how to do it. Instead of sitting down and dividing household chores fairly they quibble over who did or didn't do what. Don't quibble or divide up chores, you're adults, if you see something that needs to be done, do it. Or, decide together to split household chores based on those you each enjoy or can tolerate the best.

**Friends:** Not all friends are helpful to relationships some of them are toxic. Be sure you know the difference between a friend who will enhance your relationship and one who will break it down.

**Irritating habits:** Many people are married to someone who has one or more habits they find undesirable. My ex never got angry with me. I ask him once why and told him there had to be things I did that irritated him. He responded by telling me he "loved everything about me." This was

#### Perception of Solving Marital Problems or Conflicts

According to the Scripture, "Since, as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife... In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself" [3]. In this pericope, a deep truth is revealed which is applying to Christ and the Church. But it also applies to couples because every husband must love his wife as himself and every wife must respect his husband. Taking this as a point of departure, marriage probably is the easiest sacrament to understand because the motivation is always easy to comprehend. Marriage is a rite of passage from

shortly before he decided he no longer loved me! So, don't be afraid to point out habits that irritate you, just be sure you do it in a non-defensive way.

**Family:** In-laws, siblings, children and step-children can all create stress within a marriage. When coping with negative issues because of family step gently. Our spouse should come first but there are times you have to be willing to take a backseat and bite your tongue.

**Personality:** There are personality traits that can doom a marriage to failure. Are you a conflict avoider? Do you like to "one-up your spouse? Do you bend over backward to please your spouse, neglecting your needs in the process? If you answered yes to any of these, your need to work on changes these negative personality traits.

**Expectations:** We all go into marriage with certain expectations. Most of the time, marriage is the opposite of what we expected. We romanticize marriage and become disillusioned once those romantic expectations aren't met. Unmet expectations are a major source of conflict in marriages. Each of the above is a very common problem dealt with in a marriage. Although they are problems, they can also be opportunities for growth, learning, and accord. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in your marriage or become an opportunity for growth is up to you.

independence to partnership. It is a sacrament conferred after the initial sacrament, the baptism. According to O'Malley, "A marriage is the basic human experience of what creative, salvific, redemptive love means: you are not alone, you are not meaningless, you and I are home" [4], which implies that they become absorbed in the other and yet each still be an autonomous self. This position is clearly stated in the book of Genesis, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh" (2:24). This is what happens during wedding; the young man and the young woman cut themselves off from their

families and fuse themselves into single and new reality. In this way, it becomes a sacrament, indissoluble and of course a life covenant. Marriage is often considered as a complex interaction in which every problem area is the responsibility of the both partners. It is difficult to see a couple with marital problems to which both have not contributed. [5] insists on what the couple must do for the marriage to grow especially when there is problem: "For the marriage to grow, sometimes with the aid of a counselor, must look behind the "problems" in order to examine who and what they are and what their overall attitudes and actions have meant to the

#### Adequate/Honest and Effective Communication

Communication from its Latin origin means "communicare" which is often translated as lecture, presentation, communication; to communicate is to announce, it is to deliver, it is to be connected to something or someone. Communication is broadly seen as the means of exchange of messages between two or more persons in a dialogue form, conversation form or discussion form, speech form etc. So, the serenity of marriage depends much on a quality relationship in communication and interaction between the couples and of course other members of the family. These communications must be direct, open, clear and unambiguous. According to [3], Brajsa and Beevar emphasizes on the need for existence of congruent

The key concept in marital therapy is communication training [and this] communication includes accurate and empathic listening as well as the direct and constructive expression of feelings. Effective communication pervades and mediates all aspects of married life: recreation, socializing, child management, money and budgeting, household chores, affection and sex, companionship, and conflict resolution (p.215).

For Schwertley, there are preconditions for problem solving in marriage or home. This problem solving are for him biblical and profitable to Christians who truly believe in Christ and are willing to set Both husband and wife must trust in Jesus for salvation and must believe in the infallibility, inspiration, perfection and sufficiency of Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

marriage" (p.18) In this part of our work, we want to present different ways of solving marital problems which is called marriage counselling. We talk about marital problems as a result of disagreements between couples in the process of cooperation, interaction and daily communication. Lack of basic human values has changed the face of marriages in our different families. These conflicts are part of married life but handling them or solving them is our priority here, as such they lead to the strengthening of such relations thereby making the marriage to become firmer than it was. The following are some of the ways of solving marital conflicts:

communication, meaning a clear verbalization of what you are thinking, feeling and experiencing. This implies that incongruent communication is to be avoided at all cost. It is without doubt that happy couples communicate openly and honestly, try to solve their problems, share their opinions as [4]. Communication becomes a tool for the spouses to connect themselves in order to accomplish and coordinate their common goals and interests because of their marital obligations and responsibilities. Honest communication is noted to be an indicator of a successful way of solving conflicts. And this honesty according to [6] must firstly be personal before its extension to the other. We agree with [4] that:

aside their own preconceptions, interests and prejudices in order to submit their thinking and behaviour to the Word of God:

correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Here, Schwertley says that everything husband and wife need for salvation is explicitly contained in the Bible. The Bible becomes the textbook for counseling

because it contains all the principles of loving God and neighbour.

Both husband and wife must view themselves as one organic, covenantal body and an understanding of love

The proper understanding of this fact helps in problem solving. The Christians believe that God took one of the ribs of Adam (man) to create Eve (woman), and Adam said "this is finally the bone of my bones and the flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman... (Gen. 2:22-24). With this passage always in mind, the husband must love his wife as though they are one body because he who loves his wife loves himself (Eph. 5:28-29).

Husbands and wives must deal with their problems under the authority of a truly Reformed, local Church of Christ/Pastoral Counseling (Matt 18:15)

#### Reciprocity between husband and wife

Once there is no marital satisfaction, there would be conflicts. Due to this, it is highly encouraged that this marital therapy be observed by the couples in solving their issues. Frequency of mutually pleasing behaviour are needed. Frustrations, anger, irritation etc. are

The Church offers marriage counseling to spouses who are in conflict through prayer support and other injunctions for them to grow in grace. So, the participation of the couples in the various activities of the Church would help them know that such offer is given by the Church to her children who are undergoing marital conflicts. Older women can teach the younger women how to be effective managers of the household, how to love their husbands and teach their children (Tit. 2:4-5) and older men can as well help the younger ones in dealing with the various difficulties or crisis seen in marriage as God requires the elders to be hospitable in 1Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8.

normal in marriage, but handling them properly makes a difference between happy and unhappy marriage. Through the help of a therapist, the couples are educated and given skills to bring about positive change in their behaviours and attitudes.

#### Planning Recreational and Leisure Time

Poor use of time in social and recreational activities is seen as a cause of problems in marriage. Therefore, a well-balanced recreational and social life is necessary for a marriage relationship. Liberman et al (1980), say that "sometimes, all that is required to repair a torn marriage is teaching the couple how to better distribute and share their recreational and

leisure time" (p.218).Therefore, there is need to see to the time spent as an individual alone or with other people without the spouse's presence or as a couple alone, and as a part of social group, or with other couples and as a family with children and other relatives. Time budgeting in a marital relationship solves a lot of issues.

#### Mutual Agreements and Contracts

As we have aforementioned, communication is very important in marital life, whereby its adequacy is found wanted, marital issues evolve.

When there is an effective communication, there are mutual agreements. There must be negotiations, dialogue etc. in solving marital conflicts.

#### Pastoral care to married couples

Many Christian families are experiencing various kinds of challenges today. Some of these family problems are between couples. Marital infidelity, separation, divorce and remarriage have become very common because understanding of marriage today is no longer accepted in many of its essential elements. The statistic for past hundred years indicates that the permanence of marriage

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#### Preventive pastoral care

Preventive pastoral care demands that throughout their married life, couples be offered possibilities and opportunities to go back in spirit to the beginning for their reflection and inspiration. This guidance

#### Promote support of newly-wedded by the Clergies

It is desirable that the married couples who accompany the engaged couples in their immediate preparation for marriage, will continue to follow them in the first years of their union to help them face Priest ought to give chance for prayer and Much should be made of the Feast of the Holy Family or of other celebrations in which couples meet, to offer them the opportunity to renew their marriage vows publicly in church; and to encourage husbands and wives to take the time and the necessary means to deepen the dialogue between them, so that their communication becomes a communion of hearts. In this preventive pastoral approach, one must foster all that can reinforce cohesion and communication in the family. It is necessary to develop a true spirituality of marriage, as the Holy Father has pointed out "Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake of God's own 'strength'.... This 'visitation' of the Holy Spirit gives rise to the inner strength of families, as well as the power capable of uniting them in love and truth" (Letter to Families, n. 4). In times of crises, all of the abovementioned means can help solve the sources of tension. They will enable the spouses to return to the starting point of their love, to relativize the stress of the moment and to overcome crises. Within themselves they possess the energies of the grace of

significant. This is because many families are living in infidelity to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. The question begging for answers now is how we can give pastoral care to married couple suffering from marital instability. The numerous ways through which pastors can provide pastoral care to married couples includes but not limited to the following:

should take such forms as encounters with other families, recollection, retreats or other meetings. Parishes and apostolic movements must be able to ensure they take place.

tensions and misunderstandings before they degenerate into a crisis. Couples who have benefited from this kind of support will in turn be able to offer it to others.

meeting with other families on Holy Family Feast marriage. These energies only wait to be reawakened and guided. It is here that an encounter with a mentor, a "spiritual director", a help network, a couple whose witness is an example or even a welcoming community can play an essential role. As often happens in these cases, a crisis overcome can be the starting point of a new phase in the life of a couple. The Christian community must strive to make available to couples welcoming places where they may find people they can talk to in difficult moments. In addition to the support of the Christian community, centres for marriage counselling should provide their professional expertise and wisdom. They must also have had a solid Christian training. Bishops, in their teaching, must remind married couples of the grace of the sacrament of marriage. They will know how to encourage them in their commitment to fidelity, in their concern to give themselves to one another and to invite them to mutual forgiveness. They must recall to both parents their responsibility for their children, reminding them that their children's happiness must have a central place in

their lives. They will prudently point out to them that separation and divorce destroy a way of life without doing away

with responsibility, since parents continue to be responsible for their children after their separation.

#### Teaching and Catechetical Instructions

Pastors can teach and preach what the Bible says about marriage in the light of today's social pressures that undermine healthy relationships. More important than any "how-to list" is the divine dynamic of love. Paul tells us that love is patient, kind, and is not irritable or resentful (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). It is by love that those outside the church can know that the Gospel is real (John 13:34-35). Constant screen time, making entertainment the default mode for living, and endless multitasking easily undermines love. Love needs to be untasked, as spouses attend to each other in gentle and touching ways. Just imagine as a priest you visited home, you heard your mother whispering to your father, 'you

are so attentive to me! May that continue. The Bible is the fixed point in a degenerating world because it is "God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17; see also Psalm 119). As teachers of the word of God, pastors call to draw people back to our ultimate fixed reference point, (Hebrews 4:12). This task takes courage, and God is there to give it. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:7-8).

#### Clergies Visitation

When clergies visit their parishioners they are able to use that opportunity to help their faithful who are suffering from marital instability. It is also a medium for the clergy to use it as an opportunity to right the wrong impression of all kinds, of adultery, out-of-wedlock pregnancies (which must be brought to term), the

pornography pandemic, and more. Sexual restraint, saying "no," is an essential aspect of a clean conscience, a godly life and is the price of civilization. Saying "yes" to heterosexual monogamy means saying "no" to many other socially acceptable "options," which are really wide roads that lead to destruction.

#### Priest paying more attention for holy commitment in married life

In marriage, sex will not get you through times of no love. But love can get you through times of no sex." Thus, clergy should underscore the need for holy commitment in married life. Married love is sealed and consecrated through the exchanging of vows, which are made before the face of God. I recommend the traditional Christian vows, all of which involve pledging unconditional love "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance." Francis Schaeffer lamented that he saw many perfectly good marriages fail because of unrealistic expectations. As he put it in True Spirituality, "substantial healing" is possible as part of the Christian's sanctification within marriage and in other relationships. The Holy Spirit imparts the fruit of the Spirit to mend

deep wounds and renew loving bonds. However, we still live in a fallen and broken world. Thus, we sometimes have to make due with less than our dream come true. We may even have to live through some nightmares. What keeps us on the straight path is not constant emotional satisfaction, but sacred commitment before our God and our neighbors. As a Christian in the family of God, a pastor can model an honest and healthy marriage before the congregation. As a preacher in the pulpit, a pastor can bring the congregation living truths about the realities of marriage straight from Holy Scripture and in the power of the Holy Spirit, come what may. Since the church is "God's household" and "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), there is no better place to honor and support holy matrimony.

In the light of the above there are three aspects of this pastoral care to marital instability

- to prevent;
- to accompany;
- to reconcile and to start over again.

One must insist on the prevention of these situations, hence on the prevention

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of separation and divorce in themselves. Certainly, this prevention passes through a full, thorough and extensive preparation for marriage, as the Pontifical Council stresses in the document it has dedicated to this topic, observing the teaching of *Familiaris consortio*, n. 66 (Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 13 May, 1996).

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In the light of the above there are three aspects of this pastoral care to marital instability

- to prevent;
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One must insist on the prevention of these situations, hence on the prevention of separation and divorce in themselves. Certainly, this prevention passes through a full, thorough and extensive preparation

#### CONCLUSION

We present this conclusion in the firm conviction that the problem couples are facing today, which weaken their union, have a true solution in the return to the solidity of the Christian family, a place of mutual trust, of reciprocal giving, of

for marriage, as the Pontifical Council stresses in the document it has dedicated to this topic, observing the teaching of *Familiaris consortio*, n. 66 (Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 13 May 1996).

respect for freedom and of a training for social life. For this reason, we have confidence in the witness of those radiant, joyful homes that draw their energy from the sacrament of Matrimony.

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