

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry
Emphasis in Leadership

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

TITLE: A BIBLICAL BASED MINISTRY TO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MEMBERS IN MIXED MARRIAGES WITHIN BULAWAYO CHURCHES OF THE SOUTH ZIMBABWE CONFERENCE

Researcher: Jefrety Sibanda

Faculty advisor: Michael Sokupa, PhD

Date completed: August 2016

This study sought to trace what the Bible, Ellen White and contemporary writers have said about mixed marriages. Using the mixed methods research approach the study further investigated the prevalence of such marriages amongst Adventists, and the nature of challenges they experienced. Employing the use of questionnaires and purposive focus group interviews and discussion, the researcher identified the predominant challenges that beset Adventists in unequally yoked marriages. This included intolerance of their faith by their spouses and extended families, being coaxed to participate in spiritualistic rituals, raising Godly children, how to win their spouses to their faith and spiritual compromise.

Having identified that a significant number of Adventists in mixed marriages experienced myriad challenges, which negatively affected their spiritual, social and marital lives, the researcher designed an intervention strategy to minister to members in such marriages. An implementation of the intervention ministry strategy was implemented and evaluated.

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A dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Jefrety Sibanda

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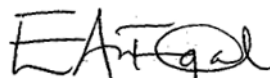
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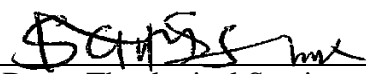
Advisor: Michael Sokupa, PhD



Programme Director, DMin
Kelvin Onongha, PhD, DMin



Reader: Tom Ogal, DMin



Dean, Theological Seminary
Sampson Nwaomah, PhD

AUA Main Campus

Date: January 2017

This study is dedicated to all Adventists in mixed marriages who have faithfully soldiered on amongst the many challenges of mixed marriages as they struggle to keep the faith and bring up children their children in Christian Adventist teaching and belief. May their efforts be rewarded in eternity.

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CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTRY CONTEXT

For the eleven years (2005-2016) that the researcher has been the President of the West Zimbabwe Conference (WZC) of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, now South Zimbabwe Conference (SZC),¹ he has realized that the church brings together different people with various needs and challenges. Members look to the church to provide answers and solutions to their problems and challenges. He has also been constantly reminded that leadership comes with responsibilities. Embedded in such responsibilities is the need to ensure that the church's programs cater even for the usually neglected and marginalized members with special needs like widows and widowers, orphans, those with physical challenges, and those in mixed marriages—defined as marriage between Adventists and non-Adventists.

Failure to address the needs of church members inevitably impedes them from meaningful worship. It is within such a framework of consciousness that the researcher has come to realize, with concern, that there is a significant number of Adventist members in the city of Bulawayo who are embattled in mixed marriages. Generally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church at large seems to believe that God has never permitted mixed marriages. Such claims are derived from both Old and New Testament texts.

¹ South Zimbabwe Conference was organized in December 2014, following the realignment of the former West Zimbabwe Conference into two new conferences. Whilst such a realignment divided the former territory into two, thus reducing membership in the new SZC to 94 000 from more than 25000, the researcher's initial territory of study, the Southern part of the city of Bulawayo was not affected.

For instance, Ezra 9:12 records God saying, “Now therefore, give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons ... that ye may be strong, and eat of the good of the land, and leave it for the inheritance to your to children forever.” Also, included in the list of such texts is Ezra 10:2-3 which records that “Shechaniah ... said to Ezra, we have trespassed against our God ... let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them.” In the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 6:14, reads, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

The injunction above sounds clearly directed towards those who are yet to make choices concerning marriage partners. Could that notion suggest that those who are already married should take Ezra’s route of reformation, that of breaking away from such alliances? Based on these and many related verses, mixed marriages are often frowned upon due to the belief that lead believing spouses are lead away from God.

Despite this, significant numbers of Seventh-day Adventists belong to these “unequally yoked” marriages. The dichotomy is that, though the church is opposed to mixed marriages, in every day practice, it regards those who hold mixed marriage certificates, as members in good standing. Incidentally, this practice seems to be in line with Paul’s advice,

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say, if any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.” (1 Cor 7:12-16)

Since the Bible allows a couple in a mixed marriage to continue life together, it suffices to assume that the church should not penalize the believing spouse in such a marriage.

There seems to be several contributory factors to the occurrence of the above challenging marital situation. These include the fact that, while the SDA Church does not approve marriages between Adventists and non-Adventists, the Government of Zimbabwe, which is the sole legal source and issuing office of Marriage Certificates for all marriages, does. The Government does not consider religious affiliation or compatibility as a prerequisite to legalizing of a marriage. Instead, it issues the same certificates to married couples, regardless of whether such marriages were conducted by church pastors or magistrates.

The fact that there are some Christian churches like Methodists, Roman Catholics and others, which have no problems solemnizing marriages for people coming from different religious backgrounds, compounds the problem. Such alternative marriage approaches somehow offer Adventist members a leeway to marrying outside the church with an assurance that their marriages end up being recognized by the church. Thus, Adventist members who choose to marry outside the church can opt for magistrate-solemnized marriages and still be considered officially married. The church consequently finds itself compelled to recognize such marriages as binding.

Not only does the Zimbabwean law disregard religion in deciding the legality of marriage, but it also recognizes three types of marriages as legal: The Civil Marriage², Customary Marriage and the Customary Law Union³ -an unregistered or traditional type of marriage. Meanwhile, the SDA Church, because of its peculiar beliefs, unlike its counterparts and the Government, finds it difficult to recognize customary unregistered traditional marriages. This is a kind of marriage in which,

² Zimbabwe Marriage Act, Chapter 5:11.

³ Zimbabwe Customary Marriages Act, Chapter 5:07.

after paying dowry, one can move in with his or her spouse and be considered as legally married.

Another contributory factor to mixed marriages is the conversion of an unbeliever into Adventism. As the church continues its evangelism thrust, some of the people convert to the church and leave their spouses behind. The third factor is a situation where one partner who prior to marriage was an Adventist decides to leave the church. The church continues to lose members because of apostasy and other reasons. When that happens to a couple, the member that remains in the church is automatically rendered as unequally yoked.

Meanwhile, Adventists in mixed marriages experience a lot of challenges that may impact negatively on their spirituality. Indeed, pastors and church leaders in the area have reported more marital complaints from members in mixed marriages compared to complaints from spouses who are both Adventists.

Further, members in mixed marriages assert that the church leadership and the Family Life Department are neither cognizant of nor do they attend to their unique needs and challenges. Rather, those members lament that during family life seminars, they are grouped together with those couples comprised of both partners who are both SDAs. In such situations, they argue that the lessons they are subjected that are best suited to the other group, while their needs remain unaddressed in such forums.

Suffice to note that these complaints are not without merit. In efforts to address the above members' pastoral and spiritual concerns – and develop a ministry geared toward them – the researcher attracted mixed reactions from some ministers. There are pastors who were skeptical about the whole issue. They strongly believed that doing so would encourage more young people within the church to marry non-Adventists. There are also some, on the other side who claim that marrying outside

the church enhances opportunities of evangelizing nonbelievers. They cite the examples of some like of Esther who, because of such a marriage opportunity, saved her people from impending elimination. Moses' situation is also cited as one instance in which God approved intermarriages, to the extent that He rebuked Miriam for opposing the marriage.

Within the SDA Church in Zimbabwe, a generally held presupposition is that all people who are in mixed marriages entered such marriages in disobedience to God. Possibly, this perception results in a situation where the church and its leadership does not do much to deal with challenges experienced by unequally yoked members.

Because the arguments above are critical in dealing with the issue at hand, the researcher's take on the two positions above is that both opinions are not strange. However, they need further study and proper application, to avoid possible misconceptions about mixed marriages. Concerning the first position, the researcher unreservedly concurs with those who maintain that God's marriage ideals are that members should marry within their religious group. However, even that notion has received varied interpretations. The definition of an outsider has not been universally accepted within the various Christian churches. Some have taken it to mean that one should only marry within his/ her own social grouping, racial grouping, tribal grouping and religious grouping. Unfortunately, in some situations, even the very religious grouping within which one ought to marry has not been adequately defined. Are all Christian churches defined as an inside group or not? Can an SDA member marry a Baptist, Church of Christ, or Brethren in Christ member, just to mention but a few? All these issues would need to be clearly understood if one were to give a proper meaning to the cited texts.

Those who argue that mixed marriages are a means of evangelism also seem to be right to the extent that such marriages create evangelism opportunities. Perhaps the questions those people may need to grapple with are, does the end justify the means? Is it spiritually safe to undertake such an experiment based on the hope of winning the spouse over? Is there any guarantee that such people are ‘winnable’? Does God allow a wrong act performed for a good cause or intent? Did Samson and king Ahab leave us plausible examples of the outcomes of such a move?

However, as alluded to earlier, the researcher’s intention in this study is neither justifying mixed marriages nor condemning those who are already in them. Instead, the researcher intends revealing the existence of a gap of neglect that both sides seem to have ignored, the need to nurture those who are already in mixed marriages and, subsequently, to establish a ministry to such members.

The question as to how these members should be regarded and treated is of critical importance in this matter. In its evangelistic thrust, the SDA Church has in the past introduced prison ministries for non-Adventist prisoners, stop smoking programs for non-Adventist smokers as well as hospital programs for the sick. Has time not yet come that those from within the church, yet struggling with challenges associated with mismatched marriages, be properly nurtured and assisted? The researcher strongly believes that ministry to members in mixed marriages is a program long overdue.

Statement of the Problem

South Zimbabwe Conference has a significant number of members who are in mixed marriages. These members experience several challenges that compromise the quality of their worship and negatively impact their spirituality. Meanwhile, an

assessment of the current church's programming reveals that the church has no deliberate and specific nurturing program for this special group of members.

Statement of Purpose

The study developed, implemented and evaluated a Bible based nurturing ministry for SDA members in mixed marriages within the city of Bulawayo in South Zimbabwe Conference.

Justification

As pointed out by Linda Davis, "No segment of the church is in greater pain, in greater need, or in greater neglect than that large group of women whose husbands have not yet joined them in the faith."⁴ Because SDA members in mixed marriages are in the greater pain of experiencing spiritual, emotional and psychosocial challenges that are impacting negatively on the quality of their spirituality and worship experiences, this study seeks to establish a ministry program that will help the church leadership and Family Life Department in SZC and the entire World Church in general, in planning nurturing programs for members in mixed marriages.

The research will also equip Adventists in mixed marriages with the skills, resilience, attitudes and approaches they need to positively relate spiritually and socially with God, their spouses and the rest of the faith community. This study will further enable church leadership and membership in SZC to accept, relate and interact with Adventists in mixed marriages in a salvific, and amicable manner, without being indifferent, blaming or stigmatizing them.

⁴ Linda Davis, *How to Be the Happy Wife of an Unsaved Husband* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker, 1987), 162.

Delimitation

While mixed marriages include intermarriages with partners from other races, cultures, religions, denominations and nationalities, this study will confine itself to marriages between Adventists and those who share a different faith. Whilst the study is a response to challenges experienced by Adventist members in mixed marriages throughout the Conference, and possibly the world over, because of time limitation and the need to work with a manageable group, the research and implementation of the dissertation will be confined to Bulawayo's nine out of the 23 districts in SZC.

To verify the scope of the perceived needs, preliminary surveys will be conducted with pastors, and a purposive selected representative group of Adventists in mixed marriages throughout the Conference. Program implementation, for the sake of monitoring and effectiveness, will then be conducted in nine districts within the city of Bulawayo. However, outcomes of the program will be deemed to be applicable to all the 23 districts in SZC.

Because members in mixed marriages face complex psychosocial and spiritual challenges, which negatively affect their spirituality, the reviewed literature will mainly be confined to these dimensions.

Methodology and Procedures

Chapter 2 of this study identifies and discusses the concept of mixed marriages in the Bible, how God regards such marriages and how those marriages impacted on the spirituality of the members then. To that end, the Bible and Ellen G. White writings will be reflected upon in a bid to establish the biblical position concerning believers in mixed marriages. Further, the chapter will establish how unequally yoked members should be dealt with by church leadership, considering the trying challenges they face.

Chapter 3 considers and discuss the concept of mixed marriages from available literature, by both Adventist and non-Adventist Christian writers. The SDA position on unequally yoked marriages will also be explored. The chapter will further seek to establish the nature and scope of challenges that unequally believers generally experience and how such challenges impact on the spiritual, psychosocial, and emotional wellbeing of a believer. It is envisaged that from such literature, the researcher will then highlight the nature of programs that can be put in place to help Adventist members in mixed marriages cope.

Chapter 4 traces both the macro and micro contexts that surround mixed marriages in SZC. The macro context will include general information about Zimbabwe, its social, economic and political outlook. The constitutional provisions of the country as relates to marriages will also be presented. The micro context will include the description of SZC: its location, foundation background, and membership. The cultural background of the Ndebele people as relates to marriages is discussed, because they form the main language group of the people around that territory.

Concerning the research design, because of its sensitive nature, the study employed the mixed methods research approach. To collect, present and analyze data that relates to the project, both the quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. A qualitative approach in the form of brainstorming session was employed at the preliminary stages of the study to ascertain the claims that Adventists in mixed marriages experience challenges that compromise their faith. Questionnaires were also administered to a purposively selected group of members in mixed marriages to collect data relating to the nature of challenges experienced by Adventist unequally yoked members.

Because the study dealt with a specific group of people, those in mixed marriages, a purposive sampling technique was used in the collection of data. A participatory focus group approach was also adopted in collecting and discussing data that validates the nature and scope of issues in mixed marriages. Data thus collected through recordings was transcribed and analyzed in a narrative form.

Based on the outcomes of the research, an intervention program was developed. Seminars, and workshops were designed, organized and conducted on nurturing and equipping of church leadership for service to the affected members. Meanwhile, similar seminars, workshops and outing programs were conducted for Adventist group in mixed marriages together with retreats for such members with their unbelieving spouses.

Chapter 5 entails the implementation of the intervention ministry strategy to members in mixed marriages. Both process and summative evaluations of program implementation were administered on intervention program to assist the researcher to identify and weed out any possible inhibiting factors to effective implementation of the program.

Chapter 6 comprises a summative evaluation of the entire research together with the presentation of the intervention outcomes. Such outcomes, have been analyzed and recommendations drawn out for future use by the local church leadership, and the Conference in programing future nurturing sessions for the Adventists in mixed marriages. A comprehensive report of the entire process was compiled and used in the dissertation write up.

Definition of Terms

Some of the terms that will be frequently used in this document include the following: South Zimbabwe Conference, unbelievers, unequally yoked, mixed marriages, mismatched marriages, spiritually discordant couples and nurturing.

A ministry program: a systematic program or process of taking care of the primary spiritual, psychosocial and emotional needs of the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in SCZ who are in mixed marriages in order to anchor the faith of such members.

Church: the Seventh-day Adventist Church in SZC.

South Zimbabwe Conference (SZC): The Seventh-day Adventist territory and church membership located in Matabeleland South, part of Bulawayo, Midlands and Masvingo Provinces of Zimbabwe.

Spiritually Discordant couples: a couple where one partner is an SDA member and the other partner is not.

Unequally yoked marriage: Also, known as mixed marriages, will be taken to refer to “two people of practicing different faiths who are currently married to each other.”⁵ Or, marriages that constitute of marriage of an Adventist to an unbeliever, an Adventist marrying a Christian who is not an Adventist and a non-Adventist Christian marrying an unbeliever.⁶

⁵ Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriages Are Transforming America* (Madison Avenue, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152.

⁶ British Union Committee on Marriage Minutes, 19 February 1934, quoted in H. W. Lowe, *British Advent Messenger*, 11 October 1940, accessed December 2014, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/BAM19401011-V45-21.pdf>.

2. This was in response to requests coming from various parts of the British Union Conference seeking for counsel regarding the policy of the church on the question of mixed marriages.

Expectations

Upon the completion of this dissertation, it is envisaged that the SDA Church in SZC will better understand, appreciate and accept members in mixed marriages as part of the membership deserving equal opportunities and fair treatment from church leadership and the rest of the church body. It is further expected that pastors, elders and departmental directors within the conference will be better equipped to program effectively for the nurturing of Adventists married to non-Adventists.

Meanwhile, the affected members will be better equipped to identify, accept and cope with challenges associated with their marriages and brace themselves to navigate their spiritual journeys to ultimate heights without compromise. They will also be emotionally, psychologically and socially equipped to enhance their interrelations with their spouses and the church community at large.

Upon adoption of the nurturing program by the entire Conference, the SDA Church in SZC will be better placed to effectively evangelize the unbelieving spouses to Adventist members.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter traces and discusses the occurrence of mixed marriages in the Bible, how God regards such marriages and how they impacted on the spirituality of the members then. The Bible and Ellen G. White writings will be reflected upon in a bid to establish the biblical injunction concerning believers in mixed marriages as well as establishing an intervention program for those members already in such trying marriages.

Marriage Ideals in the Bible

For one to understand the issue of mixed marriages, there is need to first identify marriage ideals as intended by God in instituting marriage. The Bible considers marriage to be a divine institution which, when properly entered, is meant to ennoble humanity and aid it in the worship of God. Moses states that

And the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Gen. 2: 18-24).

The text above suggests that marriage is God's means of providing companionship and complimenting man's inadequacies. It is also a covenantal relationship between husbands and wives, and a means of creating a lasting bond of intimate relationship between the two. Thus, marriage was God initiated and is as old

and original, as creation. Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:7-9 confirm that when God initiated marriage, He intended that a man and his wife be intertwined in a permanent, mystery of two becoming ‘one flesh’ bond. Accordingly, in marriage, the male and female partners become exclusively part of each other’s life with a permanent bond that should never be broken for whatever reason except death. Hebrews 13:4 further buttresses this concept concerning marriage by saying, "Marriage is honorable in all."

Ellen G. White observes that marriage, like the Sabbath, was instituted in Eden, when mankind was upright and innocent before God. However, when humankind rebelled against God’s instructions, they brought upon themselves condemnation and woe.¹ What she suggests is that due to the fall, marriage ideals have been tampered with and compromised. Consequently, that has resulted in all forms of challenges and pain in place of the intended marital blessings.

Marriage as a Covenant Relationship

Another concept of marriage that is highlighted in the Bible is that of a covenant relationship between husband and wife. Malachi 2:14 says “she is your wife by covenant.” The word *covenant* here, is used to describe an exclusive marital relationship between a man and a woman. In the same book the word covenant is used six times, and in all but one instance, it refers to the marital relationship between husband and wife. The researcher thus seeks to also discover the significance of the use of this concept in marriage. To possibly arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the term, the researcher will begin by tracing how the term is used throughout the Bible and then explore how that relates to marriage.

¹ Ellen G. White, “A Lesson for God’s Chosen People,” *Signs of the Times*, October 15, 1896, Par. 3.

The word *covenant* appears 280 times in the Bible. In the majority of the cases, it is used to explain the relationship that God enters into with humanity. A closer look at the Divine-human relationship indicates that God is a relational deity who has always been portrayed as seeking to establish and maintain a sacred relationship with human beings though the devil has desperately sought to sever such a relationship (Gen 3).

Meanwhile, Gerhard F. Hasel's comments on the first two chapters of the Bible, which describe the time and the events before sin entered the world and indicate that God intentionally authored communion between Himself and humankind. Creation, therefore, serves as the foundation of the covenantal relationship between God and humankind. In this regard, the idea of a covenant becomes one of the most profound biblical concepts that express deep communion, intimate relationship, and the closest fellowship between God and humanity.² Robert Brinsmead, in concurrence, states, "Such divine human relationship is based on a covenant."³ And that relationship is seen as a unique one that is characterized by an intimate, exclusive fellowship in mutual love, between God and humanity.⁴

Hankon and Engelsma see such a fellowship with God as "the greatest good, the highest privilege and the supreme bliss for humans." Thus, covenant keeping becomes necessary since it is a mutual relationship of fellowship between God and

² Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), 10, 14, 16.

³ Robert D. Brinsmead, *Covenant* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict, 1979), 7.

⁴ Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, *Keeping God's Covenant* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free, 2006), 3, 5.

human beings, in which relationship both God and humanity have an indispensable role.⁵

Hasel notes that such a covenant has its origins in God and was meant to enhance the relationship between God and humanity. In such a relationship, God as the superior part to the covenant graciously avails and fulfills His covenant promises. Man on the other hand as a beneficiary of the divine covenant gifts, freely accepts the enduring relationship and renders obedience to the divine obligations- the commandments, statutes, laws, and ordinances, by the assisting and enabling grace provided by God.⁶ He further notes that the term used for covenant, *berit*, is used in two major relationships; as a designation of a relationship either between human parties of equal standing or between unequal partners, and, depending on the status of the contracting parties, it can mean a ‘contract, bond, alliance, or treaty. However, he notes that the more frequent and most significant usage of this Hebrew term occurs in connection with the covenantal relationship between God and humanity.⁷

Whilst at creation mankind existed within an environment of such an exclusive, intimate God initiated relationship, after the fall that relationship was eternally interrupted and marred with “fear, alienation, and death.” In His bid to reconcile the lost relationship between humanity and Himself, God took an initiative that was to be clothed in a covenantal framework⁸ (Gen 3:9).

⁵ Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, *Keeping God’s Covenant* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free, 2006), 5, 10.

⁶ Gerhard F. Hasel, 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

Because of its underpinning nature, Brinsmead concludes that the “idea of a covenantal relationship between God and mankind is so basic and overwhelmingly predominant in the scriptures that the two great sections of the Bible have appropriately been called the Old Testament (covenant) and the New Testament (covenant)”⁹ To illustrate how God values such a covenantal relationship, Hasel notes that from generation to generation, He continued to initiate the covenant relationship, beginning with the Noachic covenant, of Genesis 6:18, Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3), the Mosaic covenant (Exod 6:7), Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:1-7), and ending with the New Testament covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34.¹⁰ He sees Abrahamic covenant as that of grace and salvation and identifies circumcision as the sign that accompanied that covenant. Through it, God intended communicating five significant truths:

First, distinguished Abraham’s descendants from the Gentiles...Second, it perpetuated the memory of God’s covenant...and symbolized a circumcision of the heart: and, third, it fostered the cultivation of moral purity...Fourth, it represented the righteousness that comes by faith...Fifth, it foreshadowed the Christian ordinance of baptism.¹¹

However, God requires that the benefits of such a relationship be conditional, characterized by several ‘if’ statements (Exod 19:5; Lev 26:3-4, 14, 16; Deut 5:33). Brinsmead asserts that “God needed a faithful partner in the covenant or the covenantal relationship would always break down.”¹²

To best illustrate this intricate, exclusive covenantal love and relationship with His people, God employs the symbol of a marriage as a covenantal relationship. Just

⁹ Robert D. Brinsmead, 7.

¹⁰ Gerhard F. Hasel, 17-22.

¹¹ Gerhard F. Hasel Ibid., 40, 41. See Ephesians 2:11; Genesis 17:11; Deuteronomy 10:16; Romans 2:29, 4:11; Colossians 2:1.

¹² Robert D. Brinsmead, 54.

as, in an exclusive marital relationship one would not allow for adultery, God declares that in His relationship with His people, they should never have other gods besides Him (Exod 20:3) Based on this typology, when a believer enters a marital relationship with a nonbeliever, that alliance is equated to an equally yoking, in which a child of God aligns with His enemy, the Devil.

In concurrence Calvin B. Rock observes that Scripture depicts marriage serving “as a symbol of the intimate relation between God and His people (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1-3)...*in which* God woos and weds Israel in a tender and intimate relation.”¹³ He further notes that, “In the New Testament, marriage is a symbol of the relation between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22, 23), with the consummation of all things referred to as the marriage of the Lamb when Christ shall wed His bride, the church to be with Him (Rev 19:7-9). . . marriage according to Scripture should be regarded in honor (Heb 13:4).”¹⁴ Dederen admonishes that “. . . never should marriage of God’s people venture upon forbidden ground and that, marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God.”¹⁵

Not only is marriage a covenant relationship but also sacramental. Kasembo, LM and Shorter see marriage as not only being covenantal, but also as a sacramental symbol of the relationship between God and His people. That sacrament, they argue, is not only expressed in the love between the two partners, but is the expression of a people’s desire to relate with invisible God.¹⁶ In this regard, marriage becomes an

¹³ Calvin B. Rock, *The Symbolism of Marriage* in, *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:726.

¹⁴ Rock, 726.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 748.

¹⁶ Benezell Kasembo L.M., and Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Marriage* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines, 1998), 40, 42.

outward sign that signifies God's intimate, exclusive saving relationship with humanity.

It can be reasoned therefore, that marriage between a believer and an unbeliever becomes an aberration of the very symbol of God's relationship with His own people. Like all other sacraments, marriage is thus meant to be a channel through which spiritual connectedness between a couple and God is enhanced. When adulterated, this means of cultivating spirituality is compromised. Thus, God does not only disapprove of such a set up, but also regards it as a violation of the very condition upon which the spiritual gains of His relationship with humanity are meant to be accrued to man. It can thus be reasoned that, being in unequally yoked marital relationships should never be taken lightly as it has the propensity to compromise the quality of the spiritual relationship that a Christian is meant to enjoy with his /her God.

Therefore, it can be summed up that God desires an exclusive covenantal relationship with His people. That such a relationship is typologically symbolized in His original design for a marriage covenant between a husband and a wife. And that He intentionally designed safeguards against defilement of such marital covenant relationships, which includes the forbidding of mixed marriages.

Mixed Marriages in the Old Testament and Ellen G. White Writings

Despite the obvious fact that unequally yoked/ mixed marriages are a violation and deformation of the covenant symbol of God's relationship with humanity, the Bible traces its origins to the earliest history of human existence, as one of the aftermaths of the fall of man. The Bible notes, "There was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the fought and his angels, and prevailed

not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast with him” (Rev 12:7).

That war between God and Satan resulted in what is known as *The Great Controversy*, where in humanity was introduced to two warring sides, one led by God and another by Lucifer. Under that Great Controversy, the Bible depicts humanity as either under the influence of God or of the Devil; the children of God or those who are rebellious; the children of light or of darkness. History traces the two groups right from the first two sons of Adam, Cain and Able. Cain is regarded as a wayward son and Able as the obedient son of God. The two represent two groups pitted against one another in the Great Controversy theme. Consequently, the rebellion that resulted from Adam and Eve’s choices has taken many forms, one of which manifests in the violation of God’s principles concerning marriage. Though the Bible outlines the benefits of an ideal marriage, reality however shows that that institution, as a result of sin, has suffered much pervasion and distortion. Mixed or unequally yoked marriages are part of such a malady.

The Bible thus, traces the first mixed marriage between the two groups of people, sons of God and daughters of man, to the Genesis 6 account. It records that “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with men, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Gen. 6:1-3) As highlighted earlier, though both were born of Adam, by choice Abel became the lineage of the sons of God and Cain became the author of the sons of mankind. From that understanding, it can be argued that, amongst many other things that define a people rebelling against their God, is a deliberate choice to marry outside

their religious group. Subsequently, ‘sons or daughters of God’ who choose to marry those who are not of the same faith render their marriages less ideal.

Ellen White, highlighting the dangers of intermarriages with unbelievers, states that, after the death of Abel,

the descendants of Seth were called the sons of God— the descendants of Cain became known as the sons of men. As the sons of God mingled with the sons of men, they became corrupt, and by intermarriage with them, lost, through the influence of their wives, their peculiar, holy character, and united with the sons of Cain in their idolatry. Many cast aside the fear of God, and trampled upon his commandments.¹⁷

In concurrence with White, the SDABC, commenting on the same issue in Genesis 6 states “the sons of God were none other than the descendants of Seth, and the daughters of men, of the godless Cainites.” That, the unholy alliances between Sethites and Cainites were responsible for the rapid increase of wickedness among the former, and further that God has ever warned His followers not to marry unbelievers, because of the great danger to which the believer is exposed and to which he usually succumbs (Deut 7:3, 4; Josh 23:12, 13; Ezra 9:2; Neh 13:25; 2 Cor 6:14, 15).¹⁸

The above statement indicates that those sons of God who intermarried with the ungodly were regarded, as having done what the ‘righteous’, should have shunned. By so doing, the children of God aligned themselves with the worldly sons of man. The Bible identifies this as part of the wickedness and evil that characterized the lives of the people of that time and formed part of the events that grieved God that He had made man. The rest of the Bible offers many texts that demonstrate how the essence and fabric of marriage has been eroded and degraded to the point of losing its

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM] (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), 3:60.

¹⁸ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1978), 1:250.

original purpose. Such a situation has resulted in varied forms of marriage aberrations, including that of unequally yoking of God's children with those of the world.

Challenges and Consequences of Mixed Marriages

God did not arbitrary forbid Israelites' intermarriage with unbelievers. In His foreknowledge, He needed to safeguard Israel against the snares of the idolater nations. That way, He warned His people, the Israelites against intermarriage with heathen nations.

Lot's Marriage

Perhaps, one of the many vivid examples of the negative impacts of intermarriages with unbelievers is one recorded in Genesis 19:12. The Bible states,

And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and daughters, and whomsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of the place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxed great before Jehovah; and Jehovah has sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, who married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for Jehovah will destroy the city. But he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked.

Incidentally, the sons- in-law never went out with Lot. It somehow seemed difficult even for Lot, his wife and the daughters to come out, till the angels had to drag them, possibly because of the influence of, and the concern for his daughters and their husbands. Commenting on the same text, Ellen White describes Lot as having been married to an unbeliever who impacted negatively on her husband's life. She argues, "The wife of Lot was a selfish, irreligious woman, and her influence was exerted to separate her husband from Abraham. But for her, Lot would not have remained in Sodom. The influence of his wife and the associations of that wicked city

would have led him to apostatize from God, had it not been for the faithful instruction he had early received from Abraham.”¹⁹

One is tempted to even think that her daughters’ marriage outside their religious group was influenced by her own foreign religious background. This suggests that raising Godly children within an unequally yoked marriage comes with its own challenges. The SDA Commentary Volume 1, in line with this thought observes that in mingling with the Sodomites Lot’s daughters had adopted their lifestyle and thus formed the group of those who were unwilling to leave at the call of the angels²⁰ (Gen 19:15).

Esau’s Marriage

Another similar incident worthy noting is Esau’s choice to marry foreign women that had negative repercussions on his family and possibly even on his own faith. Genesis 26:34-35 reads, “And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.” Commenting on the same marriage arrangement, Ellen White notes:

Esau took two wives of the daughters of Heth worshipers of false gods. Their idolatry was a bitter grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau had violated one of the conditions of the covenant, which forbade intermarriage between the chosen people and the heathen; yet Isaac was still determined to bestow upon him the birthright.²¹

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *From Eternity Past*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD-ROM] (Battle Creek, MI: Ellen G. White Estate, 1983), 110.

²⁰ [Gen. 19:15] *SDABC*, 1:334.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *From Eternity Past*, 115.

As they left Egypt, the Israelites were joined by a group of Egyptians resulting in a mixed group of sojourners. History has it that they were joined by a mixed multitude that was of a different belief system. Ellen White says of that,

The mixed multitude who came up from Egypt with Israel were continually departing from God, and making themselves a snare to his people. God saw that Israel would, in their future intercourse with other nations, be in danger of following their example; and he provided for this. His law was to be read and explained to them as a nation; his dealings toward them were to be repeated; the warnings, the reproofs and counsels, which the Lord gave them, were to be presented before them. It was necessary that all should become intelligent in regard to its binding claims, especially in reference to the Sabbath and intermarriage with other nations.²²

The need to be wary of the dangers of intermarriage thus formed part of God's covenant conditions for maintaining an untainted relationship with His people. In His foreknowledge, God had to warn His people against living in close association with people of foreign belief systems. Of necessity, such prohibitions included desisting from intermarriages with unbelievers. In Deuteronomy 7:3 and 4 the Lord thus warned: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."

Moses also did confirm God's disapproval of intermarriages with unbelievers when he said to the Israelites, "This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry.'" (Num.36: 6) Amos who argues that it is difficult for two people of different thought patterns or

²² Ellen G. White, "A Lesson for God's Chosen People," *Signs of the Times*, October 15, 1896, Par. 2.

religious persuasions to harmoniously coexist somehow confirms the same admonition. (Amos 3:3)

From the discussion above, it can be argued that, while God allows an individual's choice of a marriage partner, He does so within some given parameters. Such marriages should be within the same religious, or faith group. Incidentally, one of the warnings given to the entire Israel community by God, after leaving Egypt is one found in Exodus 34:12-16 in which God explicitly expressed disapproval of intermarriage with unbelievers:

Take heed to yourself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land wither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee. . . Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they go a whoring after their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice. And thou take their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods.

This warning, God gave because He desired of them an unpolluted family of worshippers. He warned against intermarriage alliances that would make Israel engage in spiritual adultery with the gods of the nations they would have intermarried with. To that end, Ellen White observes that, because God had handpicked the Israelites to be His wife who would serve as agents of extending His grace to the rest of humankind, in His love He led them through the Red sea, provided for their daily needs, fought their battles and subdued their enemies. In return He expected them to model lives and relations of purity and interdependence with Him. Because of their unique assignment as agents of His mission, He warned them against intermarriage with a people who would become a snare to the faith.²³

²³ Ellen G. White, "A Lesson for God's Chosen People," *Signs of the Times*, October 15, 1896, Par. 1.

Solomon's Marriages

Another example that stands out against the effects of mixed marriages is one recorded in 1 Kings 11:1. Solomon, though born of a Godly father fell victim to loving foreign women who each brought into his life foreign gods and foreign worship. Consequently, when he was old and frail and his judgment began to fail him “his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.”²⁴

The Bible in this instance once again highlights the negative influence that mixed marriages can have on one's walk with God. Ellen White argues that during the years of Solomon's apostasy, Israel experienced rapid spiritual decline because the king had in the process, allied himself the forces of evil. Through his foreign many wives, the devil managed to introduce false worship to the entire nation. It therefore became common practice for God's people to intermarry with the heathens and in the process embraced heathen worship. The undivided love of Israelites for God was greatly compromised. That way, the enemy succeeded in contaminating the purity of the people that God had enlisted as His representatives. In the process, that led to a breach of the covenant provisions of Israel's relationship with God.²⁵

From this, and the preceding texts, one can safely conclude that mixed marriages afford the devil easier access to paralyzing and numbing the abilities of

²⁴ Ellen G. White, “A Lesson for God's Chosen People,” *Signs of the Times*, October 15, 1896.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 1, 1906, Par. 5.

God's people to detect his wives. That way, he slowly leads them to regard error as truth and truth as error.

Mixed Marriages and Ezra's Position

Because of intermarriages with the neighboring heathen nations, the Israelites' faith came to a point of almost extinction. God thus, called for Ezra's intervention. Upon undertaking this revival, Ezra later lamented the abomination that characterized the Israelites, which included the fact that, the people of Israel, their priests, and Levites, had not lived distinctively from the surrounding nations. Instead, they engaged in the abominations of their neighboring nations the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. Inter marrying with these nations had become a set back to the entire Israelite nation, "so that the holy seed had mingled themselves with the people of those lands" (Ezra 9:2).

Ezra lamenting the extent to which Israelites had fallen, cried out unto the Lord,

And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons... that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever. (Ezra 9:1-4, 10-12)

It seems that for Ezra, intermarriage with heathen nations constituted breaking the law of God and results in weakening of the believer to the point of severing his/her relationship with God. White observes that because of the neighboring Samaritans who had been born of intermarriages of heathen Assyrians with the

remnant of the Israelites, and were idolaters in heart and practice, the Israelites were thus prone to reverence their images.²⁶

Owing to those Samaritans' affinity to lure the Israelites to the worship of idols, Ezra regarded them as the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin." (Ezra 4:1)

True to the Word of God, as the Israelites undertook to build the temple of God, they encountered serious discouragement from the same group to the extent that the Israelites lost focus of their mission. Thus, Ezra records, "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose..." (4:4)

Ellen White notes that because Zerubbabel and his associates were familiar with God's instructions concerning the effects of alliances with those who do not fear God, Israelites leadership had to brace against relapse into such compromises again.²⁷ She further observes that, had the Jewish leaders accepted this offer, they would have opened a door for idolatry.²⁸ Against the dangers of giving in to idolaters nations around them, the Lord through Moses, had warned the Israelites, "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them:...for they will turn away thy sons from following Me, that they may serve other gods. The Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut 7:2-4; 14:2).

Joshua also commenting on the same issue of marital alliances with the heathen people and argued, "...if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Sacrifice*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD-ROM] (Battle Creek, MI: Ellen G. White Estate, 1913), 292.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

nations remaining among them and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this ground that the Lord your God has given you” (Josh 23:11-13).

Mixed Marriages and Nehemiah

Despite being warned so many times against intermarriages with heathen nations and suffering the consequences there of, it appears the Israelites were burnt on disregarding such warnings. In Judges 3:5 the Bible records, “Thus, the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. And they took their daughters to be wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.”

On his return to Jerusalem, one of Nehemiah’s mission was that of warning the Israelites of the looming danger of intermarriage and association with idolaters. Nehemiah that because the Jews had married wives of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and their children could no longer speak the Jewish language, but spoke half in the speech of Ashdod (Neh 13:23-31). Ellen White notes that

This assimilation to the language of the heathen was an indication of the Inroads made by heathenism. In many families, children, trained by heathen mothers, were prattling around them in the tongue of the several idolatrous nations with whom the Israelites had intermarried. These children, as they grew up in the habits and customs of heathenism, became idolaters of the most dangerous class, because they were connected with the people of God.²⁹

To express the gravity of that anomaly, Nehemiah thus records, “And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Southern Watchman*, Ellen G. White Estate, [Digital Downloads] July 5, 1904, Par. 1

their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto their sons, for yourselves.” (Neh. 13:25) White says that God had deliberately and carefully excluded the heathen from intermingling with His worshipers, “but the divinely erected barriers had been broken down, and as a consequence of mingling and intermarrying with other nations, the Israel of God were fast losing their peculiar, holy character.”³⁰ As a result Nehemiah knew that unless that evil be checked, ruin would surely come. So, he contended with these Israelites.

Nehemiah thus, firmly and fearlessly, warned the Israelites against allowing their daughters to marry the sons of the heathens, nor having the Israelites’ sons marry heathen’ daughters. White further observes that not only were future marriages with the heathen forbidden, but also even those already formed were to be dissolved.³¹ However, she notes that, some men in sacred office had pleaded in favor of keeping their heathen wives, because they had bonded themselves with them. To such, Nehemiah replied them sternly, “Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?”³²

Nehemiah contends that marrying into heathenism is an anomaly that deserves stern rebuke. The Bible records that in order to show God’s disapproval of such an abominable practice, a grandson of the high priest, who had married a daughter of Sanballat, was not only removed from office, but banished from Israel for defiling the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites (Neh 13:28-29).

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Southern Watchman*, Ellen G. White Estate, [Digital Downloads] July 5, 1904.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, Par. 5

Nehemiah went on to cleanse the Israelites from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, everyone in his business (Neh 13: 28-30).

White observes that:

Many who had married idolaters chose to go with them into exile; and, with those who had been expelled from the congregation, they joined the Samaritans, a heathen people who had combined with their idolatrous worship many of the customs of the Jews. Hither some who had occupied high positions in the work of God now found their way, and after a time they cast in their lot fully with them. Desiring to strengthen this alliance, the Samaritans promised to adopt more fully the Jewish faith and customs; and the apostates, determined to outdo their former brethren, erected a temple on Mount Gerizim, in opposition to the house of God at Jerusalem. This spurious religion continued to be a mixture of Judaism and heathenism; and their claims to be the people of God were the source of schism, emulation, and enmity between the two nations from generation to generation.³³

The texts above seem to inform the Adventist Church's decision on issues pertaining to members in mixed marriages to this day. Experience has shown that, when Adventists in mixed marriages approach church leaders for advice and counseling in their times of challenge, they are often offered Ezra and Nehemiah's resolutions.

The response has either been to blame the believer for disregarding God's law or advising the believer to terminate such a marriage. However, as shall be discussed later, this position needs further consideration, as the New Testament seems to offer an alternative to that route.

Moses and Ruth's Marriage Controversies

Often the marriages of Moses and Ruth have been cited as conflicting statements regarding unequally yoked marriages. About Moses' Ethiopian wife in the Exodus 2:11-21 account, it is recorded that Moses running away from Egypt to

³³ Ibid., Par. 8.

Midian after murdering an Egyptian, landed himself in the foreign land of Midian.

Upon his arrival, he was accepted at Reuel's home also known as Jethrow.

Concerning this family, the Bible records, "Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land'" (Exod 2:22).

This mixed marriage, though does not seem to be a direct violation of his covenantal relationship with God, later severed his family ties as it became the very source of jealousy, bitterness and bone of contention between Moses and his siblings, Aaron and Miriam. The Bible records, "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman" (Num 12:1).

However, John Piper, commenting on the same incidence, somehow seems to argue against this incidence being used to express God's forbidding of intermarriages in the Bible. Instead, he uses the same text to show that it is one of those passages that help delimit the scope of the concept of unequally yoking in marriage. He posits that to God the concept of unequally yoked marriages does not include inter racial or tribal marriages per se but rather intermarriages between believers—the Israelites and unbelievers or pagans. He thus cites the incidence above and that of Ruth as acceptable interracial marriages that have no spiritual effects. Of Moses' case, he argues that Moses though a Jew, apparently married a black African, a Cushite, and yet was approved by God. When Aaron and Miriam ceased the opportunity to speak ill of Moses because of his marriage, it was such criticism that incurred to them severe

discipline from God. Further clarifying his point Piper concludes that that is why God did not get angry with Moses, but instead got angry at those who criticized him.³⁴

Commenting on the same woman, White elaborates:

Moses's wife though called a Cushite woman... was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham. In personal appearance, she differed from the Hebrews in being of a somewhat darker complexion. Though not an Israelite, Zipporah was a worshiper of the true God. She was a timid, retiring disposition, gentle and affectionate, and greatly distressed at the sight of suffering.³⁵

Also, sometimes taken to be an unequally yoked marriage, is that of Ruth, a Moabite (Ruth 4:1) and Boaz, a Jew (Ruth 4:21-22). Piper contends that she was not only ethnically and religiously foreign, but that she had been born of incest, "born of Lot and his own first-born daughter who named Moab and became the father of the Moabites (Gen 19:36-37). But, despite her background, Ruth was a lover of God and came under the wings of His covenant with Israel" (Ruth 2:12). However, from such a background, the lineage of Christ is traced to include Ruth as "one of the four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus" (Matt 1:5). Piper then asserts that the book of Ruth illustrates the fact that in God's Word there is no forbidding of marriage on reasons of race or ethnicity. Instead, the Bible specifically forbids the marriage between a believer and unbeliever.³⁶

This analogy seems to clear the confusion around the very concept of mixed or inter marriages. It seems that not all forms of mixed or unequally yoked marriages are God forbidden. It is the marriage between a believer in God and an unbeliever that

³⁴ John Piper, *Bloodlines, Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 204, 212.

³⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Complete Ellen G. White Publications [CD ROM] (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 383.

³⁶ John Piper, 210.

God is addressing in this concept. It therefore can be argued that the prohibited intermarriages in this regard concern those marriages between those who believe in God and those who do not. Thus, the Old Testament advocates for abstinence from intermarriage between believers in the God of Israel and pagans, those who did not believe in the same God. That was a means of protecting God's people from the negative influence of the surrounding idolaters' worship. The prohibition is however, clearly not including inter racial, tribal and national marriages.

Emotional, Religious and Genealogical Challenges of Inter Marriages

Concerning the Genesis. 26:35 and 27:47 marriage of Esau to Judith and Bashemath, Frevel suggests that because of their foreign Hittite descent, they caused Rebekah much disgust and grief. He contends that emotional bias seemed to be the main reason advanced against that kind of exogamous marriages. He posits that in this case, it is only "the authority of the ancestors of Israel that provided the basis for the rationale." Apart from that, he observes, there was no other reason for the rejection of such wives except that they were of Hittite descent and not of the tribe of Israel.³⁷ Frevel argues that in this case, "identity depends on belonging to patriarchal family."³⁸

At the same time, Judges 3: 5-6 records that Israelites' intermarriages with their neighboring Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites resulted in Israelites serving the gods of those nations. Subsequently, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served

³⁷ Christian Frevel, *Mixed Marriages-Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

Baalim and the groves. Frevel, commenting on the above texts, suggests that mixed marriage provokes “failure of the belief and renunciation of YHWH and his claim for exclusive adoration.”³⁹ There are other verses that suggest the same notion.⁴⁰

Concerning Ezra 9-10, Ezra says that by engaging in intermarriages with heathen, the holy seed—the Israelites—mingled themselves with the people of the lands around them. Frevel further observes that such mixed marriages in the patriarchal times were viewed as a compromise of genealogical purity. In support of his argument, he says that the Israelites were meant to be an exclusive group of people and thus needed not corrupt their seed through intermarriages.⁴¹

Frevel concludes that it would seem as though God’s prohibition of intermarriages of the Israelites with other nations was meant to hedge them from experiencing emotional, religious, and genealogical challenges attendant in intermarriages.⁴² However, while the argument above seems reasonable in that people who are emotionally, socially, and perhaps even genealogically challenged are less likely to experience a meaningful relationship with God, such a claim is not convincing.

First, as highlighted earlier on, in the Old Testament, God likens His covenant relationship with His people to that between husband and wife (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14; 31:32). He requires marriage between husband and wife to take the same form of a covenant relationship (Mal 2:14). Such a relationship, God expects to be mutually

³⁹ Christian Frevel, *Mixed Marriages-Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 9.

⁴⁰ Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:12; 1 Kings 11:1-8; Judges 3:5-6.

⁴¹ Christian Frevel, 9.

⁴² Judges 3:5-6; Ezra 9:1-4, 10-12; and Nehemiah 13:25.

exclusive and unadulterated (Exod 20:3; Mal 2:14). Second, a closer study of the texts that speak to the warnings God advanced against intermarriage, indicate that His intention has always been the preservation for Himself, a peculiar people who maintain a covenantal spiritual connectedness with Him. From Genesis, the Bible continually reiterates the fact that intermarriage between God's people and heathen, idolater nations was forbidden for the sole reason that it would lead God's people to stray from Him.⁴³

Consequently, most of the waywardness experienced by Israel, and the resultant rebuke and chastening meted by God testified to the dangers of making marital partnerships with heathen nations. As the Israelites entered marital alliances with their heathen neighboring nations, they subsequently turned away from God and served the gods of the nations they intermarried with.

While it is indisputable that intermarriages with unbelievers bring with them several attendant ills that include emotional, social and genealogical ones, God's overarching purpose in prohibiting intermarriages was His desire to maintain an undefiled, spiritually exclusive covenantal relationship with His people.

Mixed Marriages in the New Testament and Ellen White Writings

In the New Testament is found the same prohibition concerning the marriage of believers to unbelievers, as stated in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, admonished the believers,

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in

⁴³ Genesis 6; 19:12; Exodus 34:12-16; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 1 Kings.11: 1, 2, 4; Judges 3:5; Joshua 23:11-13.

them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (2 Cor 6:14).

Here Paul suggests a direct warning for Christian believers to desist from partnering in marriage with unbelievers, because of the effect such alliances would have on the spirituality of the believing Christians. Earlier on he had advised the church concerning marriage, “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39). By the phrase ‘only in the lord’ can be taken to mean that the widow can remarry, if she marries within her own community of faith.

Commenting on 2 Corinthians 6:14, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown explain ‘unequally yoked’ to denote being yoked with “one alien in spirit...an imagery statement from the symbolical precept of the law in Lev 19:19, ‘Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind’; or the precept in Deuteronomy 22:10, ‘Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together.’ The same verse in this context compares favorably with one in Deuteronomy 7:3. ‘Neither shall thou make marriages with them, thy daughter thou shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall thou take unto thy son.’”⁴⁴

Therefore, during Paul’s era of evangelism, those who had become Christians were advised to desist from marital relations with those who were not of the same faith, non-Christians. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul admonished, “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving.” The same term is also employed to designate false believers who tried to undermine Paul's ministry. In Titus 1:15 the term is used to describe false teachers within in the church (verses 10, 14).

⁴⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical & Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1934).

Commenting on the same text, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes that “So great is the difference in ideals and conduct between Christians and non-Christians, believers and nonbelievers, that to enter into any binding relationship with them, whether in marriage, in business, or otherwise, inevitably confronts the Christian with the alternatives of abandoning principle or enduring difficulties occasioned by differences in belief and conduct.”⁴⁵

The Commentary views being unequally yoked as constituting disobedience to “God and to bargain with the devil.” The fact that unbelievers hold a different perspective about life often makes it difficult for them to tolerate a pattern of conduct that tends to restrict their own ways of living. So, any member who chooses to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever does not only commit a spiritual suicide but also seems to engage into a relationship wrestling with the very spouse she chooses to marry, a battle so difficult to win if not next to impossible. Thus, “When it comes to a binding such as marriage...the Christian who truly loves the Lord will under no circumstances unite with an unbeliever, even in the pious and otherwise commendable hope of winning him to Christ.”⁴⁶

A Reconciliation of Paul’s Positions on Unequally Yoked Marriages

Based on the many texts in both Old Testament and New Testament, it has generally been upheld that the Bible categorically prohibits unequally yoked marriages without exceptions. However, a close study of Paul’s two texts 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, urges the researcher to reconsider that view. While in 2 Corinthians 6 Paul warns the church, “Do not be unequally yoked

⁴⁵ “Unequally Yoked,” *SDABC*, 6:876.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 876.

together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?”, earlier on he had said to the very church,

But to the rest I...say ‘If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him (1Cor 7:12).

From the texts above while Paul argues that being an equally yoked is not an ideal marital set up, he was however aware that there were some in the church who were already in such marriages. Concerning, and to such members, he advised that they did not unnecessarily need to terminate such marriages.

Hindson and Kroll, commenting on the same text above, observe that Paul’s advice in this text was meant “to answer any of his Jewish converts who might be inclined to make an unwarranted application of the situation recorded in Ezra 10:3.”⁴⁷ Seeing Ezra had commanded that unbelieving spouses be divorced, Paul’s new admonition came as an address of the new prevailing situation concerning mixed marriages. Whilst he still insists on unequally yoked marriages, he however does not advocate for divorce, as would be the case in following Ezra’s advice. Paul neither suggested a suicidal marital union in which the believer should risk his/ her faith at all cost.

Instead he seems to advocate that the believing spouses should thrive to live lives that, as White states, would be a savor for life.⁴⁸ That means that believing spouses should deliberately be agents of God for saving their own spouses and children. This notion he clarifies in his statement, “For the unbelieving husband is

⁴⁷ “For the Mixed Marriages” in *The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary*, [1 Cor 7:12-13], ed. Edward E. Hindson and Woodrow M. Kroll (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 2299.

⁴⁸ Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles*, Complete Ellen G. White Writings [Soft Copy] (Mountain View CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 326.

sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband . . .” (1 Cor 7:14).

Peter’s Position on Unequally Yoked Marriages

Another writer who seems to echo the same sentiments is Peter who advises women, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Pet 3:1-6). Peter acknowledged the possibility that within the community of faith were wives whose husbands were unbelievers. To such women, he thus suggested that their lives should be the very instruments of attracting their husbands to Christ.

It can thus be argued therefore from the texts above that, whilst in the Old Testament, Ezra ordered those Israelites who had engaged in intermarriages with unbelievers, to put away those wives, in the New Testament both Paul and Peter seem to suggest a different approach. They advocated that, whilst believers should not be allowed to marry unbelievers, those already in such situations should not be advised or encouraged to divorce their spouses, unless their unbelieving spouses themselves move out or divorce the believers.

Unequally Yoked Marriages and the Early Christian Church

Perhaps a question could be asked, how could one become unequally yoked if the church then, still prohibited such marriages? Tracing the circumstances that led to unequally yoked marriages in the New Testament, Schnabil notions that the new approach to evangelism adopted by the Apostles then, resulted in new forms of challenges that had not been prevalent before. He observes that, “Jewish Christian missionaries from Jerusalem carried the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Judea, Samaria, Syria and Rome. They evidently engaged in missionary work not only among Jews

but also among Samaritans, God fearers and polytheists.”⁴⁹ In this move, Schnabil sees in the gospel commission as a fulfillment of the prophecies in Zechariah 2:11; Isaiah 19:16-25; 56:3-8 and Isaiah 66:18-24. Deducing from these texts, God foretold of other nations other than the Israelites who also were His people whom He sometime later, would invite unto Himself. That prophecy, as explained by Schnabil, found its fulfillment in Acts 1: 8, which declared that the Gospel needed to be carried unto the ends of the earth.⁵⁰ The same notion is somehow reiterated in Revival and Reformation notes to the Seventh-day Adventist worldwide reading program.⁵¹

Thus, under the new dispensation of spreading the Gospel to the entire world, people from different backgrounds, beliefs, practices and understanding were targeted. Thiselton argues that after this new approach, there arose some heretics that somehow confused many within the new church. Some of them tried to argue that “spirituality had nothing to do with bodily actions, but was in the inner, private state of mind, or ‘knowledge (gnosis). Such Gnostics either disdained the body as a domain of no consequence or disdained it as unworthy of concern for spiritual people. The former led to license, the later to ascetic self-denial...It is such disastrous heresy that provoked Paul to formulate a positive and sensitive Christian view of marriage far ahead of its time.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Eckhard Schnabil, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downer’s Groove, IL: Intervarsity Press 2004), 729.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 729.

⁵¹ Believe His Prophecy-The sequel to Revived by His Word Spirit of Prophecy Reading for the week of: Sunday, February 21, 2016, Blog post for Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter(s) 10-11 –The Tower of Babel+ The Call of Abraham, which reads, “With Abraham, God chose one ethnic group whose generations would become his covenanted mission agents until Pentecost, when all ethnic groups would be included in the mission covenant.”

⁵² Antony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 101.

Because believers during that period, either felt at liberty to abuse their sexual privileges or thought it sinful to have sexual contact, they went on to suggest that the best thing for a believer was to terminate marriage altogether. That, they believed, would keep them pure and ready for the second coming of Christ. Bruce notes that there were two possible main issues that led to Paul's 2 Corinthians letter. These were sexual immorality of Corinthians at a time of the expected soon return of Christ and the conversion of one partner into Christianity leaving the other a pagan. So, Bruce says,

The sexual laxity which was part of the Corinth way of life, and from which even the church in Corinth was not immune, made some members of the church feel that sexual relations, even within the marriage already contracted, were best avoided altogether. Those who felt like this may have been confirmed in their sentiments by the consideration that the approaching end of the age ruled out the long-term planning which was incumbent on those who undertook the responsibilities of family life.⁵³

Thiselton then suggests that in 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul seemed to have advised against separation for two main reasons,

First, that divorce in principle falls short of God's will; second, that the Christian's lifestyle, love, and witness may play a part in leading the other to faith... If the Christian spouse lives in faith, prayer and a gospel lifestyle, this will permeate the home and in fact amount to a consecrating influence on spouse and child.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Thiselton argues that Paul did not by this statement, "license a Christian's deliberately marrying an unbeliever on this basis. He simply describes a situation where the Christian is already married to a partner who has not (yet) come to faith."⁵⁵ Such advice was not only a possible deviation from Ezra and Nehemiah's

⁵³ F. F. Bruce, *Paul An Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 226.

⁵⁴ Thiselton, 108.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

declaration as noted earlier, but also of the Roman law of that time. According to it, marriage was a matter of mutual consent that could be terminated at any point if either party requested thus. Further, per the SDA Bible Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:11, “The Jewish law recognized the right of the wife under certain circumstances to divorce her husband.”⁵⁶ Because of such an arrangement, both women and men could divorce their spouses when ever need arose, a situation that promoted rapid marriages. Thus, because the church in Corinth probably experienced an incursion of such marriages, several new converts had possibly had multiple marriages before conversion. Paul faced with such a situation addressed the Christian converts who wanted to divorce spiritually divergent spouses.

He contended that spiritual incompatibility did not provide adequate grounds for a divorce (1 Cor 7:12-14).⁵⁷ Although Ellen White wrote so extensively against unequally yoked marriages, she also seems to accommodate the above understanding. Concerning those who enter into unequally yoked marriages by virtue of their conversion to the Christian faith. She advises,

He who has entered the marriage relation while unconverted is by his conversion placed under stronger obligation to be faithful to his companion, however widely they may differ regarding religious faith; yet the claims of God should be placed above every earthly relationship, even though trials and persecution may be the result. With the spirit of love and meekness, this fidelity may have an influence to win the unbelieving one.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Put away” [1 Cor 7:11], *SDABC*, 6:708.

⁵⁷ “Divorce and Remarriage at Corinth” [1 Corinthians 7:15] in *The Chronological Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 1306.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM] (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952), 69.1.

Also in agreement is the SDA Bible Commentary that states that those already in unequally yoked marriages, as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, are not at liberty to terminate such marriages merely on grounds of them being religiously unequally yoked. Instead, they need to realize that

the marriage vow is sacred, and cannot be terminated for reasons of any change in religious beliefs by either party...the only effect of the conversion of one party should be to make him or her more tender, kind, loving and loyal than before.⁵⁹

As such, marriage to an unbeliever is to be regarded as “binding on a believer so long as the unbeliever does not voluntarily separate himself from his believing companion and enter into another marriage.”⁶⁰ The comment above suggests that in the New Testament mixed marriages because of conversion were somehow permitted and were supposed to be accommodated in the new faith. Arguably, even concerning those members who knowingly marry outside their faith, Ellen White offers both a reprimand and yet accommodates them. She states,

Is it the will of the Lord that this sister should be in this state and God be robbed of her service? No. Her marriage was a deception of the devil. Yet now she should make the best of it, treat her husband with tenderness, and make him as happy as she can without violating her conscience; for if he remains in his rebellion, this world is all the heaven he will have. But to deprive herself of the privilege of meetings, to gratify an overbearing husband possessing the spirit of the dragon, is in contravention of God’s will.⁶¹

⁵⁹ “Unequally Yoked,” [1 Corinthians 7], *SDABC*, 6:709.

⁶⁰ “Unequally Yoked,” [1 Corinthians 7], *SDABC*, 6:709.

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, 351.

There is also a third dimension to unequally yoked marriages, those who become unequally yoked because of one spouse leaving the faith. To such, Ellen White advises,

You now have a double responsibility because your husband has turned his face away from Jesus...I know it must be a great grief for you to stand alone, as far as the doing of the word is concerned. But how knowest thou, O wife, but that your consistent life of faith and obedience may win back your husband to the truth? Let the dear children be brought to Jesus. In simple language speak the words of truth to them. Sing to them pleasant, attractive songs which reveal the love of Christ. Bring your children to Jesus, for He loves little children.⁶²

Peter also seems to accommodate members in mixed marriages. Writing to wives who included those in mixed marriages gave advice that has stood the test of time, “ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obeys not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear” (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Challenges Associated with Unequally Yoked Marriages

Even though the New Testament accommodates members in unequally yoked marriages, such marriages experienced some challenges then, as they possibly do today. Concerning the challenges experienced by wives who became unequally yoked through conversion during the early Christian era the Chronological Study Bible observes,

In the Roman World, wives were expected to follow their husbands’ religion. Many women, however, were drawn to other religious groups, like Judaism and Christianity, often provoking their husbands’ anger. This marital conflict over religion often caused religious groups to face hostility, and the groups frequently responded by upholding Greek Roman traditional family values, insofar as they could accommodate them.⁶³

⁶² Ibid., 350.

⁶³ The Chronological Study Bible, 1383.

Therefore, “the first letter of Peter was an exhortation to wives whose husbands might have already been distrustful of Christian teachings, suspecting it would subvert their wives’ obedience.”⁶⁴ The model for how to best win over such husbands to Christianity thus entailed the adoption of the societal norms that required the wife to be submissive to her husband (1 Pet 3). In concurrence to the solution suggested by Peter, Paul to the Colossian church advised: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husband, love your wives, and be not bitter against them” (Col 3:18-19).

Ellen White writing about challenges experienced by members in mixed marriages observes that mothers whose husbands are unbelievers experience a lot of challenges. She further observes that in many cases:

The husband is a profane man, vulgar and abusive in his language to her, and he teaches the children to disregard her authority. When she is trying to pray with them, he will come in and make all the noise he can and break out into cursing God and heaping vile epithets upon the Bible. She is so discouraged that life is a burden to her...She has felt an earnest desire to do some work in the Lord’s vineyard and has thought that it might be best to leave her family rather than to remain while the husband and father is constantly teaching the children to disrespect and disobey her... In such cases my advice would be, Mothers, whatever trials you may be called to endure through poverty, through wounds and bruises of the soul, from the harsh, overbearing assumption of the husband and father, do not leave your children; do not give them up to the influence of a godless father. Your work is to counteract the work of the father, who is apparently under the control of Satan.⁶⁵

The SDA Bible Commentary also seems to confirm the fact that there are challenges that accrue to those in mixed marriages. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 6:14 which has similar principles to Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:1-3, 22:10; and Leviticus 19:19, it concludes that, “Almost without exception, disappointment is the result of a course of action contrary to the wise counsel here set forth by the

⁶⁴ The Chronological Study Bible, 1383.

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, 348.

apostle.”⁶⁶ Responding to a related issue in 1 Peter 3:1, the Commentary further states that it was not uncommon during those days for a wife to accept the truth in Jesus Christ whilst her husband rejected it and thus “set himself in opposition to it.” In such situations, the believing wife was not supposed to terminate her marriage bond, if her husband was still willing to live with her. Instead she was admonished to employ her godly life to win her husband to Christ.

The Commentary thus argues that “A believing wife must at all times be a Christian in spirit, living at peace even with her unbelieving husband. Her Christian vows do not release her from her earlier vows to a pagan husband.”⁶⁷ The same commentary further suggests that wives should endeavor to win their husbands through conduct.⁶⁸ In concurrence, Hindson and Kroll argue that in a situation where “a Christian is married to an unbelieving spouse, and the unbeliever is pleased to dwell with the believer, then divorce or separation is prohibited.”⁶⁹

Meanwhile, not only did Paul lead by example in ministering to believers in mixed marriages, but further implored the whole Christian community of his day to do so. Employing the metaphor of the *body* (Rom 12: 4-5, 15; 1 Cor 12; 12, 26) in reference to the Christian believers, he argued for unity and interdependence among such believers. Advocated that when any member of the body of believers experiences any form of suffering, the rest of the members were to suffer with such a believer, just as they were to celebrate in each other’s successes. Similarly, James D.G. Dunn observes that by use of the *one body in Christ* (Rom 12:15) metaphor in

⁶⁶ “Unequally Yoked” [1 Corinthians 7], *SDABC*, 6:877.

⁶⁷ “Your Own Husbands” [1 Peter 3], 7:569.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Hindson and Kroll, 2299.

reference to the Christian community, Paul was advocating for “a sense of interdependence in Christ, expressed in a mutual responsibility for one another which manifests the grace of Christ.”⁷⁰ Similarly, the SDABC stressing the need for interdependence among believers posits, “sympathy under all circumstances, whether good or bad, is sure evidence of genuineness of love.”⁷¹

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:26 the SDABC states,

there should be such close and living connection among members that the suffering of one member is communicated to the entire church, and the interest and the active help of all is enlisted to help the suffering member...If one is persecuted for his faith, the whole body of believers should share his trial and rally round him to give what support they can.”⁷²

From the commentaries above it is evident that God and the early Christian church, acknowledge that there are people within church who are already in unequally yoked marriages. Such believers should not terminate their marriages because of divergent religious views between them. Instead, such members need to be assisted by the entire body of believers to acquire the skills, behaviors and abilities that would enable them to live within such marriages in a manner that may win over their unbelieving spouses to Christ.

It can be further argued that, as did Peter and Paul, there is need for church leadership and the entire church even today to address issues that relate to members in unequally yoked marriages. It therefore becomes an anomaly for the church today to ignore the plight of the believers in mixed marriages.

⁷⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (NY: T&T Clark Ltd, 2005), 552.

⁷¹ “Rejoice” [Rom 12:15], *SDABC* 6:622.

⁷² “Suffer” [1 Cor 12:26], *SDABC*, 6:775

Summary

From the theological reflection on mixed marriages, the research concludes that, both in the Old and New Testaments God, for reasons of preserving an uncompromised relationship with His people, forbade their intermarriage with unbelievers, a position He still upholds to date. The research also established that God's prohibited such marriages as they negate the conditions of the very symbol of His covenantal and sacramental relationship with His people and create a rich bed for believers' spiritual lapse and compromise.

Not only does the Bible discuss the prevalence of mixed marriages and its challenges, it further provides two possible ways of dealing with such marriages. Ezra and Nehemiah instructed that such marriages should be terminated (Ezra 10: 3, 17, 19; Neh 13). Meanwhile, Malachi, who regards marriage as a covenant relationship not only rebukes those who mistreats their marriage partners, but declared "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away" (Mal 2:14, 16).

The New Testament however suggests an alternative approach like that in Malachi 2. When Jesus was invited to clarify the issue of divorce, He stated that marriage was meant to be an exclusively permanent mutual relationship. That divorce was prohibited except for reasons of infidelity (Matt 5:31, 32; 19:9; Mark 10:9).

Paul also aware of the challenges of mixed marriages concurred that believers be not unequally yoked with unbelievers. However, concerning those already in such marriages he advised that they enlist themselves to be used as God's agents to save the unbelievers. Meanwhile, he advocated that the whole Christian community as a body needed to come up with means and methods of nurturing those who suffer under such marriages. Considering the foregoing discussions, the current attitude towards members in mixed marriages within SZC negates biblical provisions. The situation

therefore calls for church leadership to embrace the need to establish a ministry to members in mixed marriages.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite God's prohibition of mixed marriages and evident challenges associated with such marriages, they are still prevalent and possibly on the increase in South Zimbabwe Conference (SZC). Sabrina D. Black admits that a lot of churches are filled with people who are in unequally yoked relationships. Meanwhile, as she observes, most of such members are not afforded the needed nurturing and support by their churches.¹

This suggests that leadership may either be not aware of the challenges faced by unequally yoked members or is incapacitated to handle such challenges. This chapter thus considers available literature by both the few Adventists and non-Adventist Christian writers who have written on mixed marriages. It is envisaged that from such literature, the researcher will be able to identify and frame the scope of the challenges that currently beset believers in mixed marriages. Information obtained will then be used to inform the intervention strategy that the project seeks to put in place.

Mixed Marriage Perspectives

Mixed marriages can be viewed from different perspectives. They could be discussed from sociological, anthropological, Christian, and even Adventist perspectives.

¹ Sabrina D. Black, *Can Two Walk Together? Encouragement for Spiritually Unbalanced Marriages* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002), 116.

The African Concept of Marriage

Africans, including the Ndebele people, generally uphold a horst of beliefs and practices that directly influence and affect their worldviews, lifestyles, behavioral patterns, and marital relations. While this study concerns itself with challenges experienced by Adventists in mixed marriages within SZC in Zimbabwe, as Geoffery Kapenzi observes, “There is a marked similarity of customs among many of the different African tribes.”²

To that end, the research here considers the general African factors that might have influenced the nature of challenges experienced by Adventists in SZC’s Bulawayo territory. Timothy Bankole observes that there is evidence of uniformity in the pattern of African religion. It “knows no sharp dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual.”³ What the two writers seem to suggest is that Africans generally have a lot in common about religion. They share a similar belief pattern, that is, their social life cannot be divorced from their spiritual life.

Though it is not the researcher’s intention to devote this study to an exhaustive treat of the marriage institution from an entire African viewpoint, the research provides a bird’s eye on main African traditional beliefs and practices that are likely to be carried over to mixed marriages. The researcher assumes that some of the beliefs and practices that surround the involvement of God, ancestors, and the not yet born—in marital life of a couple—are responsible for myriad of challenges Adventists in unequally yoked marriages experience. This section thus briefly explores the

² Geoffery Z. Kapenzi, “Rites of Passage in Four African Tribes,” in *Theology in the Context of Africa: Cultural and Religious Analysis*, ed. Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Review and Herald, 1975), 187.

³ Timothy Bankole, *Missionary Shepherds and African Sheep* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1971), 25.

influence that African beliefs patterns and practices surrounding marriage might have on mixed marriages.

Writing on African marriages, Bino argues that, for Africans, marriage is from the very onset “imbued with a religious atmosphere where God, the ancestors, the earthly community and the not yet born are all involved.”⁴ As a follow-up to his assertion, he describes an African family as comprising of three dimensions, namely the living, the dead, and the not yet born. Thus, for Africans, he notes marriage is not a private matter but one that involves the extended families of the husband and wife, the ancestors, and the not yet born. Because in an African setup, marriage involves the entire family, God and ancestors with rituals meant to appease the above deities. Marriage that excludes any of the above is believed to result in serious conflict between the couple and subsequent divorce. Bino goes on to argue that the “Western model of marriage that distinguishes between the civil and the religious has little meaning for an African who believes that marriage is always religious.” Accordingly, for an African, he asserts that there is no meaningful marriage outside the involvement of both God and living dead. And to overlook this fact in an African setup Bino says, it is to fail to understand that, “for Africans a marriage that is not performed according to traditional rituals is no marriage.”⁵

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that chances are that, although an African may convert to Adventism and marry in an Adventist manner, the convert may carry his/her African oriented worldview into the ‘Christian marriage.’ Unless that convert be properly grounded in Christian faith, his/her worldview most likely

⁴ Benezet Bino, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines, 2009), 103.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18, 17.

will interfere with the tenets of the believer's new found faith. It thus follows that, a Christian African married to a non-Christian is more likely to more often battle with allurements to syncretism. The believer's convictions about the state of the dead and their relationship with the living is more often tested and shaken to the core.

Concerning the place of the extended family in a marriage, Bino notes that in an African setting, "It is meaningless to think of the extended family or enlarging of the family, there is only family."⁶ Africans, as he argues, believe that "the community of the living includes the concept of responsibility, which cannot be considered as pertaining only to the individual," as the behavior of any one member of the family impacts all. Within such a setting, it is believed that a good deed increases the welfare and growth of the community and a bad one hinders the life of all within the community.⁷ Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou in concurrence state that in an African understanding, marriage serves many functions that include provision of entertainment and excitement to break the monotony of life, whilst providing group support and recognition for the participants. They further view marriage to be more than a social matter but one that involves the ancestors, and the clan gods. Such a view, as they observe, is somehow opposed to the perception in high religions where marriage is often seen as a sacrament, "made on earth but recorded in heaven."⁸

The discussion above shows how an African perception of marriage, tends to influence the whole of an individual's regard to marital issues. It would be difficult for an Adventist member who upholds above beliefs, even at a subconscious level, to

⁶ Bino, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 101-102.

successfully contain the pressure from an unbelieving spouse for her to participate in family rituals.

Sociological Perspective

From a sociologically point, Frevel notes that marriage takes two forms: ‘endogamy and exogamy.’ He further says that in biblical studies, the term endogamy is often used either in a narrow sense, denoting marital relations within kinship or extended families like in case of the family of Jacob. It can also be used in a comprehensive way, as in marriages within certain social groups, like the Israelites.

Exogamy, on the other hand comprises marriages that are directly the opposite of endogamous ones.⁹ Similarly, Nazli Kibria describes endogamy as an “in-group marriage or a pattern of marriage in which the partners have a shared group affiliation. Its conceptual counterpart, exogamy, is a pattern of marriage in which partners are different in their group affiliation.”¹⁰

Thus, it could be argued that it was for the sake of maintaining the Israelites’ peculiarity that God forbade them from intermarrying with those not of their group. That way, God would hedge His people from intermingling with the heathen nations, a situation that, if allowed, would contaminate their spiritual purity.

Anthropological Perspective

Anthropologically, Frevel identifies two types of endogamy. These are kin group endogamy, which involves marriage within a specified group like, a class or religious endogamy and local endogamy that entails marriage within a certain

⁹ Frevel, 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

geographical range, also referred to as village endogamy.¹¹ Because God in the Bible prohibited marriages of the Israelites with those who did not share the same beliefs with them, it could be argued that such prohibition was on religious grounds, kin oriented, than national, racial or cultural, which would be local endogamy. It can be said that, as regards marriage, God expects His people to practice a kin, religious endogamy, marriage between people of the same religious faith. That, in His foreknowledge, He forbade Israelites' exogamous marriages to protect them from spiritual maladies that would in turn, affect even their emotional, social and physical wellbeing.

The Christian Perspective

Riley sees mixed marriage as comprising of “two people of practicing different faiths who are currently married to each other.”¹² Lowe sees mixed marriages as constituted of: 1) marriage of an Adventist to an unbeliever, 2) an Adventist marrying a Christian who is not an Adventist and 3) a non-Adventist Christian marrying an unbeliever.¹³

In the same vain Alfred Jones and Doris Jones consider an ideal marriage to be a union that results from “a spiritual, emotional, social and physical connection between a man and a woman.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, Susan Katz Miller posit that

¹¹ Frevel, 5.

¹² Riley, *'Til Faith Do Us Part*, 152.

¹³ British Union Committee on Marriage Minutes, 19 February 1934, quoted in H. W. Lowe, *British Advent Messenger*, 11 October 1940, accessed December 2014, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/BAM19401011-V45-21.pdf>. This was a response to requests coming from various parts of the British Union Conference seeking for counsel regarding the policy of the church on the question of mixed marriages.

¹⁴ Alfred R. Jones and Doris M. Jones, *Making Peace in your Marriage* (Pine Forge, PA: Family Outreach, 1996), 1.

“Researchers have found that couples that pray together stay together—in that those who attend religious services together, or who share the same degree of religiosity, are more likely to stay together.”¹⁵

Accordingly, in a situation where the couple is spiritually discordant, such a marriage becomes less ideal. The same statement further suggests that, not only does marriage affect the spirituality of its host, but has impact on the emotional, social and the physical wellbeing of the individual as well. To that end, it can be reasoned that, in a situation where two individuals from different religious backgrounds marry, their union most probably results in spiritual, emotional, social and physiological hurts than blessings.

In this regard, God’s mandate against intermarriages is not arbitrary as some may want to see it. If heeded, it has some evident benefits. Stephen Duncan, religion plays a key role in every aspect of humanity. He further states that research has shown that religion is a key factor in building fulfilling marriages. He therefore argues, “For many couples, religion unifies and strengthens their marriage. For others, it tears them apart...when individuals from two different religions marry, they sometimes begin a life of disagreements that can be devastating to the sacred union.”¹⁶

In a situation where a couple is spiritually incompatible, it can be expected that religion could become the very means of tearing the marriage apart than building it. This thought is in line with Mike and Gayle Tucker who observe that “when husbands and wives are members of the same church their chances for marital

¹⁵ Susan Katz Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 83.

¹⁶ Stephen Duncan, *Interfaith Marriages*, accessed 9 February 2015, <https://foreverfamilies.byu.edu/Pages/marriage/SpiritualStrength/Strengthening-Interfaith-Marriage.aspx>.

fulfillment are significantly higher than those who are not. ... Denominational difference have a decidedly negative impact on the marriage.”¹⁷ Similar sentiments are echoed by Riley who notes that interfaith marriages generally tend to breed more unhappiness and discontentment than “same faith marriages.” Also, those marriages are usually unstable, with corresponding high divorce rates.¹⁸ Quoting Brad Wilcox, she thus says, “Evangelicals who marry non-evangelicals are typically less likely to remain as or become as devoted as those who marry within the fold.”¹⁹ Not only do such marriages have the propensity to deprive the couple of its happiness, but they also provoke conflicts and require compromises that would naturally be uncalled for in normal marriage situations.

Lee and Leslie Strobel, in concurrence, identify some hurts that accrue to mixed marriages. These include emotional isolation and loneliness, frustration, clashing of values, fear, guilt and anger over the demeaning of the believing faith by his or her unbelieving spouse. Explaining why the conversion of a wife to Christianity, leaving the husband behind, creates all sorts of issues and challenges, they point out that,

When a man’s wife becomes a Christian, it’s a whole different kind of threat. Suddenly she has a love relationship with someone he can’t even see. He can’t understand anything she tries to tell him about this new God she has come to know. All he knows is that she’s in love with someone else, and he is jealous. Instead of remaining the first priority in her life as when they first got married, he has suddenly been demoted to number two after God. ... It would be easier

¹⁷ Mike Tucker and Gayle Tucker, *Mad About Marriage* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 55.

¹⁸ Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Seven Things You don’t Know About Interfaith Marriages*, accessed 31 March 2016, www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/04/19/seven-things-don’t-know-about-interfaith-marriage.html.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

for him to understand if she had run off with another man; but she is in love with someone he can't even compete with.²⁰

When such feelings are experienced, there might develop within the unbelieving spouse some jealousy that is usually projected to the believing spouse's church friends and its leadership. The non-believer, in this instance, may even question the church's motives in working for his wife. Coupled with such perceptions, his frustration over increasing differences in values and life's general outlook may begin to negatively impact on the couple's life together. Such a situation may further be exasperated by the believing wife's strong feeling about giving money to her church even though family's finances might not be enough to meet its immediate needs. It also could be fueled by the mere fact that the wife's attitude towards certain entertainment they used to enjoy now turns negative, or the wife's sudden refusal to serve some foodstuffs she used to cook and eat with her husband.²¹

Similarly, Jo Berry argues that mixed marriages are not the best approaches to marriage because believers in such situations are not likely to lay claims on the Lord's declaration that Christian husbands have to: 1) 'love' their wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,' 2) 'love their own wives as their own bodies' (Eph 5:25; 28), and 3) be accountable to the Lord and live with their wives in an understanding way, 'as with weaker vessels, and grant them honor as fellow heirs of the grace of life, so that their prayers may not be hindered' (1 Pet 3:7).

Conversely, because an unbelieving husband is under the influence of worldly powers and not the Holy Spirit's power, that somehow makes for a big difference in how the two interact in their marital relationship. Even though such husbands may

²⁰ Lee Strobel and Leslie Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 46.

²¹ Ibid.

sometimes be moral and upright, the fact that they walk not according to the spirit is enough a reason for the believing spouse to be concerned.²²

Such concern may result from the very fact that the believing wife lives in full awareness of the ideal relationship that should exist within a Christian marriage. Thus, that awareness may place undue pressure on the husband who is destitute of any Christian virtues. Meanwhile, the wife may also have unrealistic expectations that are less likely to be satisfied. Subsequently, such a wife—on realizing that her marriage is less than ideal—may become frustrated and less committed to making her marriage work.

Donovan and Miller, in concurrence, observe that differences in worldviews, which are characteristic of mixed marriages, have a telling effect on the marital welfare of a couple. Because believers view life through the lens of God's word, they filter and process their life experiences through the truths they glean from their daily devotional reading of the Bible and prayer time. Meanwhile, unbelieving husbands are informed from a different source altogether—that of the canal humanity. Thus, naturally, at his best, the nonbeliever would struggle to understand many of the faith tenets that guide the believer's life.²³ Naturally, the two discordant partners are most likely to conflict over most of the major issues of life, like holidays, worship, food, upbringing, of children, and finances.

Sabrina Black, therefore, argues that being in an unequally yoked relationship often complicates life for the couple. The two often find themselves pulling in different directions than complimenting one another.

²² Jo Berry, *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving your Husband into the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 161.

²³ Lynn Donovan and Dineen Miller, *Winning him Without Words: 10 Keys to Thriving in Your Spiritually Mismatched Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2014), 33, 109.

Such a situation inevitably precipitates complex conflicts and misunderstandings that are difficult to deal with. While the believer might be trying to spur her spiritual growth through rigorous spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting, the unbeliever might take offence and disrupt such endeavors. Such pulling and tugging on each other often wears down the believer's efforts to win over the unbeliever. Meanwhile, the unbeliever being pulled along the spiritual lane usually suffers great pain, and in the process the relationship between the two chokes and wans.²⁴

It can be argued therefore that, in a situation where people of different beliefs come together in a marriage set up, they are bound to conflict in many ways. Not only is the couple likely to conflict, the situation inevitably makes the believer's worship experience falter in many ways in a bid to accommodate the unbelieving one. That situation inevitably inhibits the believer's spiritual growth.

The Strobels also assert the fact that mixed marriages are not God's ideal for marriage, when he states that God "loves us so much that he wants to spare us from the emotional anguish, the clash of values, and the ongoing conflict that can result when one spouse is a Christian but the other isn't."²⁵

Because one's worldview defines his/her beliefs and behavior, where a couple operates from varying worldviews, the resultant effect is that their expectations and perceptions of marriage tend to differ as well. Whilst one may consider marriage as a permanent, and holy institution, the other might consider it a means to child bearing, labor and conjugal privileges. This inevitably breeds misunderstanding and conflicting expectations and as such, cannot be the best of options.

²⁴ Sabrina D. Black, 39.

²⁵ Strobel and Strobel, 20.

The Adventist Position

As already alluded to in Chapter 1, the Adventist Church's prevailing practice seems to lean towards the New Testament position. The *Church Manual* has a few statements to that effect. It states, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly discourages marriage between a Seventh-day Adventist and a non-Seventh-day Adventist."²⁶ This is because the church rightly believes that ideally, marriage symbolizes the relationship that should exist between God and His people, which makes it a holy alliance. Thus,

For the Christian, a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of the relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His Church.²⁷

It can therefore be argued from the church's position that unequal yoking is a departure from God's object lesson in marriage.

When, for any reason marriage falls short of God's ideals, the resultant effect is distorted marital expectations, a fractured relationship between the couple and a compromised relationship with God. Bacchiocchi in this regard advocates for intra-faith marriages because, as he argues,

most marital conflicts can be resolved when husband and wife enjoy a healthy fellowship with God. If one or both partners lose his fellowship, then the possibility of resolving conflicts is greatly reduced because they are no longer able to bring their problems together to the Lord in prayer and seek His solution.²⁸

²⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁸ Samuel Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage and Divorce and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs: MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1992), 96.

Incidentally, Katherine Carey also notes that most religiously divided marriages occur between a believer and a partner who does not attend church. She further declares that being married to an un-churched husband or someone of a different faith is a lonely experience in which one frequently feels isolated. The fact that the unbeliever is not attuned to spiritual things, the believer finds it difficult to share spiritual tenets she holds dearest in life that cannot be comprehended by the unbeliever. Unless the believer finds counterparts in church with whom to share such truths, with time she may lose spiritual vigor and drift away from church and faith.²⁹

Although in some cases, a believer in a mixed marriage may remain in church for long, the fact that he/she constantly encounters serious challenges that confront his/her spirituality, it is possible that such a believer may become spiritually deformed. With time, such a believer may begin to question the foundation of his/her faith. Meanwhile, gleaning of some historical data on this issue has revealed that, while few Adventists have endeavored to address the issue of mixed marriages as far back as the 1940s, the Adventist Church was already confronted with the same issue.

Lowe records the British Union Conference as having stated that, “nothing causes much sorrow in homes as differences of religious conviction.”³⁰ What he meant was that, of all issues that have the potential to destabilize marital relations, none equals mixed marriages. It can therefore be argued that there is no true happiness in marriage outside spiritual compatibility. While money and the things that money can buy are necessary to sustain marriage needs, it can never atone for the ills

²⁹ Katherine Carey, *Married but Alone on the Sabbath: Living with an Unbelieving Husband*, accessed 15 July 2015, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/9131532-26>.

³⁰ H. W. Lowe, 1. This was a response to requests coming from various parts of the British Union Conference seeking for counsel regarding the policy of the church on the question of mixed marriages.

of being unequally yoked. Concerning the level of unhappiness that resides in unequally yoked marriages, Lowe laments, "In all these homes, however, it is safe to say there would have been far more joy and blessing had the two parents been United in God's truth."³¹ A similar view is echoed by Gabriel Rodriguez de Espinoza who argues that even children born in such families experience serious confusion concerning what to believe. Thus, most of the children from spiritually discordant marriages end up choosing not to believe anything, but becoming atheists.³²

Meanwhile, the Seventh-day Adventist Church also recognizes that mixed marriages are not only prevalent within the church, but that such marriages pose a lot of challenges. The church therefore observes, "The home is a primary setting for the restoration of the image of God in men and women. The home is also the place where, by God 's grace, the principles of real Christianity are put into practice and its values transmitted from one generation to the next."³³ Informed by this awareness, the church leadership concluded that, "Clearly, Scripture intends that believers should marry only believers. But the principle extends even beyond this. True oneness demands an agreement as to beliefs and practices. Differences in religious expectations lead to differences in life style that can create deep tensions and rifts in marriage.

³¹ H. W. Lowe, 1. This was a response to requests coming from various parts of the British Union Conference seeking for counsel regarding the policy of the church on the question of mixed marriages .

³² Gabriel Rodriguez de Espinoza, *Interfaith Marriages - The Biggest Danger*, accessed 27 February 2015, <http://www.adventistonline.com/m/discussion?id=1451550%3Atopic%3A848946> October 17, 2009.

³³ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2006), 330.

To achieve the oneness Scripture speaks of, then, people should marry others within their own communion.”³⁴

It can be deduced from the statements above that the church believes that in order to reach its intended oneness and ideals, marriage should comprise of partners coming from the same religious belief system. However, such a situation cannot be attainable in mixed marriages. It can therefore be concluded that, unequally yoked marriages result in differences that are usually costly to the believer.

Mixed Marriages and Other Religions

Incidentally, it is not Christian denominations only, like the Seventh-day Adventists that discourage mixed marriages. Many other denominations also prohibit mixed marriages. For instance, Riley as notes, “Mormons believe in something called ‘celestial marriage,’ a union that lasts for eternity and which allows both husband and wife to achieve the highest level of exaltation in the afterlife.”³⁵ Consequently, Mormons discourage interfaith marriages, as they believe that such marriages may inhibit such attainments. Not only does the church believe that mixed marriages affect the spirituality of individual members, but that such marriages endanger even the strength of the community and thus should be discouraged.

Islam also deploras mixed marriages. The Quran 2.221 states,

And marry not the idolatresses until they believe; and certainly a believing maid is better than an idolatress even though she please you. Nor give (believing women) in marriage to idolaters until they believe and certainly a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he please you.

The Jews also hold similar views. Richard D Bank states,

³⁴ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 333.

³⁵ Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part*, 18.

In traditional Judaism a marriage between Jew and Gentile is not an issue or open to question. It is forbidden, and that's that. Some reasons are Spiritual, such as the notion that a Jewish marriage reunites two parts of the same soul. ... It would be difficult to remain a distinct religious and ethnic group if intermarriage was wide spread.³⁶

It seems clear from the foregoing discussions that both Christian and many other religious denominations almost universally discourage mixed marriages across the religious divide. Similarly, it is the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that Christians should marry within their faith, and that those who do otherwise are in violation of God's expectations, and thus, of the church as well.

Main Factors that Precipitate Mixed Marriages in South Zimbabwe Conference

Despite evident challenges that beset mixed marriages, there are two main factors that have somehow contributed to the occurrence of mixed marriages in SZC. These are Zimbabwe's statutory provisions on marriages and the general practice by some Christian denominations that allow intermarriage.

Zimbabwe's Statutory Provisions

To a great extent, marriage within the Adventist context in SZC and possibly beyond is determined and influenced by a couple of factors that exist within the Zimbabwean society, other than the Adventist Church regulations. These include cultural, economic, and political factors.

While Zimbabwe is generally regarded as a Christian country, and does provide for freedom of worship, it also embraces African traditional worldviews, beliefs, and practices. Its constitution, therefore, provides for respect of both

³⁶ Richard D. Bank, *101 Things One should know About Judaism: Beliefs, Practices, Customs, and Traditions* (MA: Avon, Adams Media, 2003), 78.

worldviews and tolerance of each view. Accordingly, the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that, “Zimbabwe is founded on respect for the following values and

principles: (d) the nation’s diverse cultural, religious and traditional values.”³⁷

Concerning the freedom of one to belong to any religion of his/her choice, the same constitution declares that,

1) Every person has the right to freedom of conscience, which includes- a) freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and b) freedom to practice and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others...2) No person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief.
³⁸

Because the Government respects and provides for freedom of worship, it thus even allows people freedom to marry within, and across religious and cultural divide.

In fact, it does not speak to the issue of religious differences in solemnizing marriages. Instead, it allows either partner to the marriage to convert into any religion of his/her choice or to abandon any religion previously upheld. The statement above also suggests that there are no religious restrictions when it comes to the choice of a marriage partner. Those members who choose to disregard the church’s regulations against mixed marriages find protection in the law. Thus, the church is compelled to accept back into membership even those members who deliberately violate the church’s expectations.

³⁷ The Government of Zimbabwe, *Constitution of Zimbabwe: Amendment No. 20 Act 2013* (Harare, Zimbabwe: The Government Press, 2013), 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sec. 60:30.

General Practice by Other Christian Denominations

While it is generally held that Christianity discourages mixed marriages, there are some denominations within the Christian faith that seem to have relaxed their emphasis on endogamy. McGowan does allude to this observation when he notes that, in solemnizing marriages, most religions no longer require both partners to be of the same church or faith.³⁹ This change of heart and position could possibly be one of the reasons why, despite the known Adventist position on this issue, mixed marriages are still a common feature in the church. There are Adventist members who might be questioning why the church has continued to uphold a prohibitive stance when other denominations have shifted their emphasis. It is possible that when they are under pressure to marry, Adventist young people may yield to the temptation to do as members in other faiths do.

Somehow, it seems that the general trend to water down God's prohibition concerning unequally yoked marriages is creeping into the Adventist Church as well. Ronald duPreez confirms this observation when he says, "More and more Adventists are becoming increasingly open to this idea of contra-faith marriages."⁴⁰ He further laments that, whilst in the past it appeared that Adventists automatically assumed that a proper biblical marriage had to be a permanent, intra faith union, such a historic view is now being challenged.⁴¹

³⁹ Dale MacGowan, *In Faith and In Doubt: How Religious Believers and Non-Believers Can Create Strong Marriages and Loving Families* (New York: MACOM American Management Association, 2014), 151.

⁴⁰ Ronald A. G. duPreez, *Redefinition of Marriage?: A Closer Look at the Genesis of Marriage IN Here we Stand*, edited by Samuel Pipim (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 482.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 481.

Such an unsanctioned position could be the sole reason why there is tension between the church leadership and members in mixed marriages. It is possible that leadership might be trying to strictly uphold the biblical position and disciplining those who err, while members see no reason for abstaining from the practice widely accepted by other Christian denominations.

The discussion above suggests that the issue of contra-faith marriages is controversial. However, as already discussed in Chapter 2 mixed marriages should not only be narrowly regarded as confined to members marrying outside their faith. There are other forms of unequally yoked marriages that equally impact on members' spirituality as well. Evangelism has become another avenue through which, by conversion of one spouse leaving the other outside church, the couple becomes unequally yoked. There is also the issue of apostasy. A couple that might have comprised of Adventists at consummation, might have one member leaving the church. That also creates an unequal yoking.

Thus, whilst some may think there is no need to care for members in mixed marriages, based on a false assumption that all such members are in violation of God's regulations regarding marriage, a more informed approach would be beneficial to the church. Knowing that the church needs to take care of the vulnerable spiritual lambs within its fold, of necessity entails that leadership deliberately comes up with a nurturing ministry to such members.

Challenges Associated with Mixed Marriages

The few encounters that the researcher has had with young people anticipating marriage have signaled that most of them do not consider the challenges likely to emanate from unequally yoked marriages. They hardly weigh the effects marriage has on spirituality. For most of them the most important thing is that they have found a

partner with whom they can share life. To such members, the fact that they have a few things in common becomes a reason enough to have them tie the knot. They obviously discuss financial matters and sometimes hold casual talks as concerns spiritual issues. But they tend to believe if they love one another, the rest of the issues will naturally fall in place once they are married.

William Lawrence argues,

But they rarely look below the surface of religious matters to answer important questions. Is either of them more deeply committed to a religious tradition or to religion at all than the other? Will they abandon religious practices altogether—or practice them only in social and cultural ways? Will they observe the rites and practices within each person’s extended family when they are with members of that family, but not practice any in their own newly formed family? . . . the burden of these matters is too great for most interfaith couples to bear. Typically though not always, they simply drop out of religious rites and practices completely. And that outcome is not good for the couples or the society.⁴²

Contrary to the above view though, Frevel argues that not all mixed marriages are meant to be a thorn in the flesh, but that some can become instruments of conversion. As examples of such agents of God, he cites Ruth, Ketura, the second wife of Abraham, as well as Joseph’s wife Asenath.⁴³

Considering the two opposing views, the researcher thinks that while mixed marriages may present evangelism opportunities, the risk involved seems to outweigh possible benefits. The better option would be to avoid the course altogether.

Spiritual Compromise

Concerning the interactive effects between marriage and spirituality of an individual, Riley argues, “the question of how Christians can be steadfast in their own

⁴² William Lawrence, *Are Interfaith Marriages Good for Couples?*, accessed 27 March 2015, Bill McKenzie Columnist Editor, <http://www.religionblog.dallasews.com.2013/06/texas-faith-are-interfaith-marriages-good-for-couples.html/>.

⁴³ Frevel, 10.

faith while remaining active and welcoming in the world is not easy to begin with...it is made more complicated by the issue of interfaith marriage.”⁴⁴ The Tuckers concurs with Riley when they observe that a family’s marital satisfaction is largely influenced by its religious compatibility.⁴⁵

What these statements imply is that, the kind of marriage one enters likely shapes his/her faith and marital satisfaction either positively or negatively. In that case, it could be argued that in a situation where a husband is an unbeliever or holds a different belief from that of the wife, that husband’s beliefs are more likely to influence the feel of the relationship and spirituality of the wife than would that of the wife. In this regard, it can be said that a woman who marries outside her faith is more likely to compromise her faith than the man in the same situation.

Tuckers further argue, “If you want a better chance of having a successful and happy marriage, you should not only become a spiritual person, you should also marry a spiritual person from the same religious denomination as your own.”⁴⁶ Expressing the power of influence in mixed marriages Riley further argues that spouses can have a powerful influence over one’s spiritual choices.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Donovan and Miller observe that in a marriage where each of the couple holds a different worldview, their core values tend to mismatch. Having been in mixed marriages themselves they admitted,

We know that the mixed marriage life of unequally yoked isn’t an easy one, and we understand the struggle to be a person of faith within a mismatched marriage relationship. We have experienced the heartache of walking alone in

⁴⁴ Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part*, 18.

⁴⁵Tucker, 55.

⁴⁶ Tucker, 55.

⁴⁷ Naomi Schaeffer Riley, “Seven Things you do not Know about Interfaith Marriages,” accessed 31 March 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion.2013/04/19/seven-things-donot-know-about-interfaith-marriage.html>.

our belief in Christ. And we understand the challenges of making a marriage work with a partner who does not share the same worldview.⁴⁸

Three things that seem to characterize such marriages are that they make one's endeavor to live a faithful Christian life very difficult, lonely, and less satisfying. It suffices, therefore, to argue that such marriages are not the best.

Meanwhile, Tuckers argues that families who attend church together three or four times a month report far greater satisfaction with their marriage and are less likely to divorce than families who do not attend church together. Engaging in weekly worship attendance improves the quality of one's marriage.⁴⁹ It suffices, therefore, to say that one's spirituality directly influences the marital atmosphere of the given family.

Dale McGowan, commenting on church going and marital happiness, also notes that in a situation where one partner attends church regularly and the other doesn't, the life of the one who attends church tends to have little impact on the happiness of the one who stays home. But for the churchgoer, it is the other way round. Marital satisfaction drops a full point lower for the churchgoer than the non-churchgoer. Where the believing partner goes to church on a regular basis and one doesn't, the believer is probably less satisfied with the marriage than the one who does not go.⁵⁰

Another writer, Chris Moss—relating her own experience as a wife of an unbeliever—stated that her choice to be unequally yoked was “an act of rebellion.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Donovan and Miller, 17, 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ McGowan, 162.

⁵¹ Chris Moss, *Spiritually Single Wives: For Christian Women who Share Everything with their Husbands ... Except their Faith* (San Diego, CA: CreateSpace Independent, 2010), ix.

Consequently, she lived for years feeling sorry for herself. At the same time, she said that she experienced challenges that included sitting alone at church, having to explain herself to other members why she was always in a hurry to leave church, as well as seldom making any commitments to God and the church at large. If ever she did make any commitments, she realized that she often got disappointed to note that she hardly kept her promises. Later in her marriage, she then realized that her marriage led her to compromise her faith, feel lonely, frustrated, and envious of those women who worshipped with their spouses.⁵²

However, there are some who argue that unequally yoked marriages present soul winning opportunities. Rich Deem refutes such a notion when he says that “expecting an unbeliever to become a Christian following marriage is unrealistic and will likely lead to years of frustration and conflict.”⁵³ This statement can be interpreted to mean that no one should risk his/her spirituality by entering into a mixed marriage, on the pretext of evangelizing one’s partner.

Psychosocial Problems

Not only does unequally yoking negatively affect a believer’s spirituality, it also has a negative bearing on the emotional and social aspects of one’s life as well. Riley argues, “The unequally yoked are making their lives difficult and leaving themselves unable to act in harmony. While, seemingly, such a choice may seem to raise problems for God, it more immediately raises problems for the couple themselves.”⁵⁴

⁵² Moss, *Spiritually Single Wives: For Christian Women who Share Everything with their Husbands ... Except their Faith*, ix.

⁵³ Rich Deem, “Unequally Yoked: Is it Okay for a Christian to Marry an Unbeliever?” accessed 16 September 2014, www.godandscience.org/doctrine/unequally-yoked.html.

⁵⁴ Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part*, 17.

According to the observation above, the prohibition on mixed marriage is not meant to benefit God as much as it is intended to protect the faith of the believer who, because of too much exposure to the challenges associated with such a marriage, has the risk of living in conflict all the days of her life. Davis makes similar observations when she observes that there is “no lonelier plight for a married person to bear, other than the death of one’s spouse, than that of being unequally yoked.” That not even physical widowhood makes a woman feel as rejected and inadequate as does the state of being married to one who is spiritually dead. She thus refers to such a situation as ‘spiritual widowhood’.⁵⁵

Her comparison of such a union to widowhood suggests that the challenges faced by this person resemble those experienced in loss of a husband. In the researcher’s focus group interviews some people seemed to suggest that they faced no challenges in their marriages because they were afforded all financial help they needed and as well as allowed church attendance.

However, per the above statement, financial support may not fill the void experienced due to loss of or absence of spiritual relationship with one’s own partner. She thus concludes that, couples in interfaith marriages are generally less happy than those in same faith. In certain faith combinations, there is a higher likelihood of divorce. Meanwhile, children of such couples are more than twice as likely to adopt the faith of their mother than that of their father.⁵⁶

Jim Keen is in concurrence with the above observation. He says that while generally, marriage is not easy and is not meant to be so, couples that tend to succeed

⁵⁵ Davis, 157.

⁵⁶ Naomi Schaefer Riley, “Seven Things You Do not Know About Interfaith Marriages,” accessed 31 March 2016, www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/04/19/seven-things-don't-know-about-interfaith-marriage.html.

are those that know they must work on their marriages. However, those in inter faith marriage, avoiding conflict may require even more effort. She attributes such a challenge to the mere fact that the issue of religion can often be the cornerstone of strife in a union.⁵⁷ Berry also reiterates the same thought when he observes that no marriage is perfect. Each marriage experiences all kinds of hurts, especially those in unequally yoked marriages. More so, he argues that Christian women who are married to non-believers, face heartaches and hindrances in their marriages that Christian women who are married to Christian men normally do not.⁵⁸

What Berry seems to observe is that life becomes more difficult for women in mixed marriages than it would normally be, were they married within their faith. Of concern is the fact that this kind of life inevitably leads to compromise of one's faith, because, as the Bible states, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Prov 15:15). This observation is also in line with Lynn Donovan who says that such people face unique struggles when compared to marriages where faith is not an issue. Women who are in such a kind of marriage have one thing in common, they at some point or another face loneliness. Consequently, they often feel alone in many aspects of marriage.⁵⁹

Describing her own trying experiences in a mixed marriage Donovan goes on to say:

I desired to attend church together like other couples, he wouldn't go. Arguments over issues in the news or over local politics and even over how to raise our kids became frequent in our house. It seemed to me that we were taking our opposite sides about everything. The pain we both felt from our

⁵⁷ Jim Keen, "Ten Tips to Avoiding Conflict in an Interfaith Marriage," accessed 13 February 2015, [http://www.interfaithfamily.com/relationships/marriage and relationships/ shtml](http://www.interfaithfamily.com/relationships/marriage%20and%20relationships/shtml).

⁵⁸ Berry, 77.

⁵⁹ Donovan and Miller, 29, 27.

mismatched life was real and, at times, almost unbearable. I hurt. He hurt. And the cycle went on and on.⁶⁰

Perhaps what that means in practical Christian living, is that chances are high that after trying to convert the unbeliever, without success, the believing spouse may give up on the unbelieving one. When that happens, he/she may thus be tempted to even find an alternative source of happiness within his/her community of faith.

Meanwhile, when the unbeliever realizes such a shift of attention, the unbelieving spouse may begin to think the church has divided his/her family and thus bar the spouse from attending church. Also, likely to happen is that when other church goers begin to sympathize with their fellow member being denied the privilege of worship, they may advise him/her to appeal to her religious rights, a situation likely to widen the gulf of discontentment between the two partners and subsequently result in divorce.

Donovan and Miller therefore argue that while attending church is an uncomplicated, enjoyable experience for most believers, for spiritually mismatched spouses, time spent in church can be a giant point of connection and conflict with their husbands and even within themselves. Looking back after the conversion of her husband, she laments that her years in mixed marriage were years of confusion, sorrow and unfulfilled expectations. As a result, she testifies, “I shed tears along the way.”⁶¹ The statements above reiterates the fact that there is no guarantee that one who marries outside his/her faith will achieve marital happiness and remain devout to his/her faith. To this end, the Strobels warn,

If you’ve experienced the anguish of being a Christian wed to a nonbeliever, you can readily understand why God prohibited his followers from marrying outside the faith. He loves us so much that he wants to spare us from the

⁶⁰ Donovan and Miller, 27.

⁶¹ Donovan and Miller, 29.

emotional anguish, the clash of values, and the ongoing conflict that can result, when one spouse is Christian and the other isn't.⁶²

The statement above re affirms the fact that unequally yoked marriages are never the easy of the available options.

Upbringing of Children

Not only do mixed marriages pose challenges on the couple, but they equally affect the children born under such a situation. Jeremy Boyle observes that differences in religion "can stir up difficult conflict over religious upbringing of children, over decisions about how to handle life events such as birth, death, and holiday celebrations, and over the absence of a religious bond in the relationship."⁶³ He ascribes this to the different views on core values, such as the meaning of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities that is characteristic of such families.⁶⁴

Susan Katz Miller writing on children born in interfaith marriages sees such children are "As children born with the potential to walk in more than one pair of religious shoes or to see through more than one religious lens."⁶⁵ To a devout Christian Adventist, the set up above would be viewed as a direct revolt against God's instructions for a believing spouse to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov 22:6).

⁶² Strobel and Strobel, 20.

⁶³ Jeremy Boyle, "Strengthening Interfaith Marriage," accessed 9 February 2015, <https://foreverfamilies.byu.edu/Pages/marriage/SpiritualStrength/Strengthening-Interfaith-Marriage.aspx>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Susan Katz Miller, 224.

Similar observations are reiterated by Dale McGowan who argues that the child “is for better and for worse, a unique vessel for the hopes and dreams of the parents.” In a situation where one parent is religious and the other is not, those expectations are never realized. That creates another dimension of marital conflict.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, as the Strobels argue,

Children are often buffeted by the turbulence of a mismatched marriage. They love both parents, yet even at young age they have an uncanny ability to sense when there’s tension in the home. Since children crave stability, they feel anxiety when they perceive that their parents are at odds. They really begin to get confused when their Christian mom and skeptical dad start to send them mixed messages.⁶⁷

In concurrence with the Strobels, McGowan observes that tension may result in a mixed marriage when, “a religious believer may identify churchgoing as nonnegotiable for himself or herself, but attendance by a nonreligious partner as negotiable. A non-believer might identify the right of the children to choose their own religious identity as nonnegotiable while seeing certain religious practices in the home, such as prayer and church going, as negotiable.”⁶⁸

From the number of books and articles the researcher has consulted so far that most writers seem to agree that mixed marriages are not only prohibited by God, but that they present unique challenges that tend to compromise the emotional, spiritual and social fabric of family life. Some of such challenges are spiritualism, spiritual compromise, raising Godly children and some psychosocial ones. It can therefore be ascertained that such marriages are less than ideal.

⁶⁶ McGowan, 212.

⁶⁷ Strobel and Strobel, 108.

⁶⁸ McGowan, 191.

Ministry to Adventists in Mixed Marriages

From both the Old and New Testaments, and even Adventist standpoint, the reasons why God prohibited mixed marriages are very clear. Such marriages bring with them serious challenges that tend to affect the believer spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically. What perhaps remains a gap is how the church can help Adventist in mixed cope within such situations without compromising their spiritual, social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

In the Bible, both Peter and Paul left a landmark that the researcher believes all serious church leaders need to follow, that of ministering to unequally yoked members of the church. Following Paul and Peter's nurturing initiatives for members in mixed marriages, this section explores approaches that can be adopted for nurturing Adventists in mixed marriages.

This notion is in line with the Seventh-day Adventist Church that in 1934, in one of the unions in Britain resolved that: "the Conference should sustain the same attitude towards these members entering upon such marriages as towards those who for other reasons need the tender help and encouragement of the church. Special efforts should be put forth to win to the truth the non-Adventist companions of such members, thus helping to establish these families in faith."⁶⁹ Also, expressing the same concern Berry argues that,

Unequally yoked wives are spiritually isolated...[they, over and above learning] the principles taught in regular Bible classes, also need special instruction on how to apply [such principles] to their everyday lives. Sometimes they need to be with other women who have a 'soul' identity with their problems and concerns. Yet very few churches do anything out of the

⁶⁹ British Union Committee on Marriage Minutes, 19 February 1934, quoted in H. W. Lowe "Mixed Marriages," *British Advent Messenger*, 11 October 1934, accessed December 2014, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/BAM19401011-V45-21.pdf>. This was a response to requests coming from various parts of the British Union Conference seeking for counsel regarding the policy of the church on the question of mixed marriages.

ordinary to provide that kind of specialized fellowship and individualized instruction for the unequally yoked.⁷⁰

Such concern is stated in the SDA Church Manual that reads: “Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church.”⁷¹

Thus, while the church is called upon to uphold and affirm God’s ideals for marriage, the same church is expected to be redemptive to those who fall short of the ideals, and thus to be a forgiving reconciling community, showing understanding and compassion when brokenness occurs.⁷²

So far, this research somehow shows that the church is not totally oblivious of its need to minister to members in mixed marriages. Perhaps what is at stake is the fact that the same church has the tendency to take actions that hardly translate into action on the ground. That could be the reason why the church continues to debate as to whether it should embark on a ministry of this nature. Unfortunately, the researcher’s endeavor to obtain written materials by Adventist authors that address challenges experienced by members in mixed marriages proved to be unsuccessful. This seemed to suggest that this area of study is a road travelled by very few.

Meanwhile, there are many other contemporary writers who have suggested intervention programs for these tried members. One such writer is Schaefer who notes that interfaith marriage is on the rise with “a rate of 42 % for Protestants being married to evangelicals, and 36 % if one considers all Protestants as one faith.”

⁷⁰ Berry, 162.

⁷¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 164.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 150.

However, as she observes, currently it appears the bulk of programs for interfaith couples are based in Jewish congregations. Leaders of other religious communities, while they may offer individual counseling for members of interfaith couples, have either not detected or not acknowledged a need to address mixed marriages families in a more formal way.⁷³

In concurrence, Davis laments that there is “no segment of the church that is in greater pain, in greater need, and in greater neglect than that large group of those women whose husbands have not yet joined them in their faith.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Berry acknowledges that, there can be no denying that Christian women who are unequally yoked face some different kinds of problems in their marriages than those who are married to believers. But the burden is not hers alone. It also belongs to the church.

So, the problems these unequally yoked wives face become corporate problems. Since we are to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) and ‘have the same care for one another. Therefore, if one member suffers, all the members must suffer with it (1 Cor 12:25-26). Thus, it seems that the body of Christ must be more sensitive to these women and even those few men who are in such precarious positions.⁷⁵

The authors above thus suggest that because this group of members is not experiencing the best of the ideal marriage that God had intended for them, church leadership should do something to equip and or assist such members to cope. Incidentally, the researcher’s own experience and informal research he carried out a few years back, following several counseling encounters he had carried out with many Adventist members in mixed marriages, revealed that within the Seventh-day

⁷³ Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part*, 142.

⁷⁴ Davis, 162.

⁷⁵ Berry, 161, 162.

Adventist Church the percentage of such members could be as high a number as about 30% of the married women in the then West Zimbabwe Conference.

Meanwhile, Riley argues that, “Religious institutions face a litany of questions about how to present themselves to interfaith couples. It is not merely an issue of how strictly to follow the theological dictates that their own faith tradition has established.”⁷⁶ Implied in her statement, is the fact that the church can no longer continue to be indifferent to or play the blame game with those already entangled in this dilemma. Instead, there is need for the church to be proactive in coming up with a toolkit that can be utilized by such members as they maneuver their way in the marital battlefield.

Based on the discussions and observations so far made, concerning the challenges experienced by believers in mixed marriages, it somehow becomes difficult to imagine how a member in a mixed marriage can safely scale the ladder of faith without much sacrifice and bruises and later experience marriage satisfaction.

Trying to wish away such marriages and their challenges may not be the lasting solution. Ignoring their impact might not help either. Inevitably, the way forward would be that of finding out how the church should help those who are embattled in such kind of challenges. Meanwhile, it is encouraging to note that as Willie and Elaine Oliver citing Hart and Morris observe:

Staying married and working on your marriage may be a risk, but so is walking away from it. Choosing to try again puts you back in a vulnerable place, but so does casting yourself upon unsheltered waters...Fostering a close emotional connection and working toward a healthy relationship is very possible, no matter how bad marriage may seem to be. God will hear the cry of your hurting and lonely heart. He will meet you where you are.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Riley, *'Til Faith Do Us Part*, 142.

⁷⁷Willie and Elaine Oliver, *Healthy Families for Eternity*, (Silver Spring, MD: Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 23.

What Hart and Morris seem to suggest is that those who are already in mixed marriages should brave their situation and cooperate with God in making their marriages work. They also seem to say there is no hopeless situation that God cannot turn into joy when invited to.

Summary

From a spiritual, emotional, social and cultural point of view, it can be argued that mixed/unequally yoked marriages posit numerous challenges that render such marriages less ideal. Some of such challenges include engaging in spiritualistic rituals, spiritual compromise, raising Godly children, extended family interference and marital dissatisfaction.

Meanwhile, since such marriages are prevalent within the Adventist Church in SZC, it is incumbent upon the leadership of the church to come up with an intervention that combats the negative impact such marriages have on members' family and spiritual wellbeing. It is in this regard that the following chapter will endeavor to come up with a comprehensive intervention strategy of assisting Adventists in mixed marriages not only to contain the pressures resulting from their marital situations, but also to help them in their endeavors to win over their spouses to Christ.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The church in SZC has a significant number of more than 1,500 of its members in mixed marriages. These members experience various challenges that negatively impact on their faith. This chapter focuses on: 1) confirming if Adventists in mixed marriages indeed face challenges that inhibit their spiritual wellbeing, 2) verifying the notion that the conference has no deliberate programs of ministering to the needs of its members in mixed marriages, and, 3) establishment of an intervention program for the members embattled in mixed marriage challenges.

To that end, the chapter first considers the ministry context that serves as the foundation of this study. Within such a context, the research looks at both the macro and micro circumstances that surround mixed marriages in Zimbabwe in general, and South Zimbabwe Conference. It then goes further to describe the research design that the study adopted, followed by data collection and analysis procedures that were used. The chapter then describes the intervention strategy designed to address the issues identified during the research.

The Macro Ministry Context

According to the 2012 Zimbabwe Statistical information, the country's population stood at 13 061 239 people. Of these, 6 280 539 (48%) were males while 76 780 700 (52%) were females. Sixty-seven percent of that population was concentrated in rural areas. Concerning marital status, fifty-eight percent of the population was married, twelve percent, either divorced, separated or widowed and

twenty-nine percent never married. Thirty-seven percent of the males and twenty-one percent of the females respectively, had never married. Those who were married comprised of fifty-eight percent males and fifty-nine percent females.

Literacy rate stood at ninety-six, with fifty-eight percent of the population at school. About employment, sixty-seven percent of those above the age of fifteen were in the labor force bracket. Eighty-nine of those in the labor force were employed, fifty percent of them in the agricultural related occupations.¹

Concerning the economic situation of the country, the *Sunday News* of 24-30 April 2016 observed that because Zimbabwe is experiencing an economic turbulence, spouses have been forced to separate in search of livelihood. With time, such couples have found it difficult to keep their beds undefiled. Many of those marriages have thus encountered conflicts that have often ended up in separation or even divorce. Consequently, emotional heartache, bullying, hopelessness and trauma are some of the effects faced by young people who have been hit hardest by escalating divorce rates of their parents. Langelihle thus noted “Per statistics, couples seeking divorce jumped from 96 to 157 per month between 2012 and 2015.”²

Marriage Act of Zimbabwe

Constitutional provisions more overly guide marriages within Zimbabwe than individual religious and social groupings. Concerning solemnizing of marriages ‘The Marriage Act states that:

In solemnizing any marriage the officer, if he is a minister of religion, may follow the rites usually observed by his religious denomination or organization, but if he is any other marriage officer he shall cause each of the

¹ “Zimbabwe National Statistics: 2012 Census Report,” accessed 11 July 2016, www.ZimStat.co.zw/sites/files/img/National_Report.pdf.

² Langelihle Dube, Noko, “Children Hit Hardest by Zim’s Escalating Divorce Rates,” *The Sunday News*, 24-30 April 2016.

parties in some part of the proceedings to make [specified declaration statements.] Certain marriage officers may refuse to solemnize certain marriages ... Nothing contained in this Act shall be constituted as compelling a marriage officer who is a minister of religion to solemnize a marriage which would not conform to the rites or discipline of his religious denomination or organization.³ (Article 26, 27)

Though the laws of the land recognize and uphold as valid marriages conducted along either Christian or African Traditional beliefs, the statutory provisions however stipulate that such marriages should not be in violation of given guidelines and should be authenticated through issuance of a Government Marriage Certificate per statutory regulations.

Because the Government respects and provides for freedom of worship, it thus even allows people freedom to marry within, and across religious and cultural divide. In fact, it does not speak to the issue of religious differences in solemnizing marriages. Instead, it even allows either part to the marriage to convert into any religion of choice or to abandon religion previously upheld.

However, while there is a written code of what needs to be considered in matters of marriage within Zimbabwe, there is a traditional, somehow similar but parallel, way of conducting marriage that permeates throughout the different cultures within the country. In the Ndebele culture, for instance, and possibly others, marriage is entirely a family issue. The son-in law to be, through a mediator approaches the wife's family for necessary cultural negotiations.

That process, though not written down anywhere in the legislative documents, is known, accepted and left with individual families to negotiate. Once a young man has thus gone through the initial negotiations with his in-laws, which includes

³ The Government of Zimbabwe, *The Marriage Act No. 81 of 1964 amended through At No. 18 of 1989* (Harare, Zimbabwe: The Government Press, 1989), Chapter 5:11; Article 26:27

fulfilling some rituals and agreements, he is immediately welcome as a member of the entire family.

At that stage, the two are usually regarded as husband and wife and can share in the conjugal privileges of the married, though without legal documentation of that status. Though these days, most then go on to legalize their marital status through the official marriage steps as provided for in the Government statutory instruments, practice is such that the two would be already considered as married by their two families.

While Zimbabwe is generally regarded as a Christian country, and does provide for freedom of worship, it also embraces African Traditional worldviews and beliefs. Its constitution thus provides for respect for both worldviews and tolerance of each view. Accordingly, the Constitution of Zimbabwe states, “Zimbabwe is founded on respect for the following values and principles-(d) the nation’s diverse cultural, religious and traditional values”⁴ (Chapter 1:16). As regards marriage, the same Constitution states,

The state must take appropriate measures to ensure that- a) no marriage is entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses; b) children are not pledged in marriage; c) there is equality of rights and obligations of spouses during marriage and at its dissolution; and d) in the event of dissolution of a marriage, whether through death or divorce, provision is made for the necessary protection of any children and spouses.⁵

From the statements above, it can be observed that the constitution provides a platform for people of both genders and from all cultural, religious and traditional worldviews to freely exercise their rights and beliefs. Meanwhile, concerning the

⁴ *Constitution of Zimbabwe*, Amendment No. 20 Act 2013; Chapter 1:16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 222:26.

freedom of one to belong to any religion of choice, Section 60 page 30 of the same constitution states that,

Every person has the right to freedom of conscience, which includes- a) freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and b) freedom to practice and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others. [Thus,] 2) No person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief. 3) Parents and guardians of minor children have the right to determine, in accordance with their beliefs, the moral and religious upbringing of their children, provided they do not prejudice the rights to which their children are entitled under this Constitution, including their rights to education, health, safety and welfare.⁶ [Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013.]

The researcher's interpretation of the statement above is that the constitution provides liberty for each person in a marriage to exercise his or her choice as regards faith, without undue interference and/ or pressure from the other partner.

Cultural Setting

Matabeleland South region and Bulawayo are home to the Ndebeles, from whom the province derives its name. Whilst their culture has evolved over years and incorporated the surrounding cultures, they still maintain some distinctiveness that permeates their life style. About marriage, Geoffrey Kapenzi rightly describes them in stating that:

Marriage among the Ndebele is a rite de passage by means of which the bride and groom have transferred from the group of the unmarried to the married. In fact, it is the uniting of two families. The symbol of this unity is payment of *lobola*—the bride price by the prospective son-in-law to his father-in-law. Once lobola is paid, the wife is the sole property of the groom.⁷

⁶ *Constitution of Zimbabwe* Amendment No. 20 Act 2013; Chapter 1:16, Sec. 60:30.

⁷ Geoffrey Z. Kapenzi, "Rites of Passage in Four African Tribes," in *Theology in the Context of Africa: Cultural and Religious Analysis*, edited by Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Review and Herald, 1975), 187.

To strengthen the relationship established between the two families, there are rituals that include, among many others, invitation of the ancestors to bless the marriage. Included in such blessings is protection of the couple from enemies. That involves the invoking of each family's ancestors by each family, to protect their own son or daughter. Prior to building a dwelling place for the new couple, another ritual called *ukubethela umuzi* is also performed. That is a ceremony in which the elders of the husband together with the newly married man go to the place allocated for the building of the new home and perform some rituals that conjure the family spirits to hedge the territory against all evils that may target the new family.

Also, part of the blessings pronounced upon the new family is the request for children from the ancestors. Subsequently at the birth of a child, the old women who are members of the family also perform some rituals of welcoming the member believed to be coming from the spirit world. Sometimes the child, depending on whether is male or female is even named after a certain ancestor in hope that that child becomes the family link with the departed grandparent. Also, involved in such a ritual is the use of some traditionally prepared medicines that are applied to specific parts of the child to protect him/her from attack from other children.

The challenge that this cultural practice presents is that it has no regard for the person's faith. Parents of the marriage candidates usually take control of the whole exercise and perform it per their beliefs. For fear of retribution, most young people, though converts to Christianity, are often compelled to participate in such rituals. Meanwhile, the church is never consulted. Instead, by the time the church solemnizes a marriage, some traditional rituals are already performed.

In some set ups, as soon as the son-in-law finishes paying *lobola* (dowry), the two families consider the two as officially married. From a Christian perspective, such

situations contribute heavily to mixed marriages. The approach provides another avenue to marriage that bypasses the church. In situations where young people are tempted to marry outside the church, the whole process can be performed outside church advice. Consultation usually comes a little too late, often when wedding procedures are being discussed. At such a stage, a lot will have been agreed upon within the family setup and marriage deal sealed. What the church or magistrates often regard as marriage is certifying an already consummated marriage. This arrangement has also seen several people within this tribe staying together for years without proper documentation of the marriage.

Incidentally, such traditional and cultural practices do not end with the consummation of the wedding ceremony but form part of the new couple's everyday life. Naturally, though the believing member may make claims to Christianity, often, she may find herself having to balance between Christian and Cultural practices in times of sickness, pregnancy, rites of passage, death, and upbringing of children.

Even though some of such members enter into some kind of verbal contract with their husbands to be, concerning their religious affiliation, it has been observed that in the majority of the situations in Zimbabwean such contracts do not last. Instead, as Buti Tlhagale rightly stated that despite prior agreements between the two partners: "Faith creates a new culture, a new meaning even though this new culture may use distinctive features of the host culture."⁸ This implies that, brought to constantly interact with a foreign cultural system, one's faith tends to evolve and allow some elements of the host culture to influence and possibly alter it. Once marriage has been solemnized, the previously negotiated gentleman's agreement often

⁸ Buti Tlhagale, *Theology in the Context of African Cultural and Religious Analysis*, in Rudi Maier, (2007 June 5) Doctor of Ministry Global Mission Leadership, 105.

plays a secondary role in the life of the family. The husband's word is what usually carries the day.

Thus, it is possible that a good number of African Christian marriages in Zimbabwe somewhat reflect a cocktail of both African and Christian beliefs. Because marriages in the Zimbabwean society in general, and among the Ndebele people, who are the largest subset of population within the study area, in particular, are informed by a cocktail of both Christian and African worldviews, this section seeks to design an intervention strategy that addresses the kind of challenges Adventist members in mixed marriages contend with.

The Micro Context

South Zimbabwe Conference was organized in December 2014 because of a realignment exercise that saw the former West Zimbabwe Conference divided into two. The new conference covers the whole of Matabeleland South, about half of Bulawayo, and small portions of Midlands and Masvingo Provinces of Zimbabwe. The conference has a total book membership of 96,922 members (38% of the former West Zimbabwe Conference). The Conference has 184 organized churches and 321 companies in 23 districts.

The city of Bulawayo, in which this study was conducted, hosts 32,641 (34% of the total Conference membership), in 9 districts. It is the largest of the four towns and cities in the region. With 34% of the entire conference in one city indicates that the city hosts the largest concentration of Adventists in the region. If, of the 2,000 Adventists who formed the nucleus of those members in WZC who were in mixed marriages in 2013, thirty four percent of them joined SZC, the researcher would expect that the conference to have a conservative minimum of 680 Adventist in mixed marriages. Of the above figure Bulawayo would then have a minimum of 231

Adventists in mixed marriages. Bulawayo therefore becomes the most ideal set up for this study.

Per national statistics, both Bulawayo and Matabeleland provinces that house SZC are the smallest of the country's ten provinces. Bulawayo, the smallest, has a population of 653 337 people, which is five percent of the national population. Matabeleland South has 683 893 people (5.2%) of the national population.

However, when it comes to marital status, Bulawayo has the largest percentage of people who never married, (39.5%) followed by Matabeleland South with 37% of the people who never married. Matabeleland South has the highest (5.2%) of the people who either are divorced or separated. This possibly is because of its proximity to South Africa where most of the men from this province work over long periods of time leaving the spouses behind. Such a situation is likely to cause estrangement and infidelity, which often results in divorce or separation.

Similarly, the same province had the highest percentage of widows (9.8%). Again, this could owe to the fact that spouses leave apart for long periods of time and are therefore likely to engage in illicit sexual behaviors, raising the risk of them contracting deadly diseases. The same statistic also indicated that, while trends generally showed that female-headed households were as low as fifty percent of those headed by males, the figures were different for Matabeleland South. Out of a total of 154 875 households those headed by males were 86 180, while those headed by females were 68 695, a figure almost as high as that of the males. That also, could be indicative of the fact that most of the husbands in that area, do not stay home, are more prone to divorce / separation and or due to high mortality rate. In terms of

unemployment rates, of the ten provinces, Bulawayo has the highest, 27.4 followed by Matabeleland South with 11.3 unemployment rate.⁹

Realizing that Matabeleland South, which forms the largest portion of SZC, has the highest (5.2%) of the people who either are divorced or separated and more female headed households than any other province in the country, it is possible that the church is equally affected, though such cases are neither recorded in the conference nor Union statistical offices. Despite the Government statutory provisions in support and protection of religious freedom even within marriage setting, informal discussions and counseling request from Adventists in mixed marriages suggest that they do experience challenges due to religious differences in their marriages.

The researcher has in the past counseled many couples in such situations. Some of those marriages have been redeemed whilst others, regrettably have dissolved. With between 600 and 1,500 of our married members living with non-Adventist spouses, one can assume that the rate of desertion or separation is significantly high. Divorce though, is often the last resort for members as they believe that they are married till death do them part. Thus, most of such members though not quite happy with their marital situations, tend to suppress their emotional and spiritual pressures in hope of God's intervention.

To this end, prior to establishing an intervention strategy meant to minister to Adventist members in mixed marriages, this research employs a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to authenticate the claims that Adventists members in mixed marriages might be experiencing serious challenges owing to the nature of their marriages.

⁹ "Zimbabwe National Statistics: 2012 Census Report," accessed 11 July 2016, www.ZimStat.co.zw/sites/files/img/National_Report.pdf.

The Research Design

According to Pamela Davies, research design refers to “a design or strategy that justifies the logic, structure and principles of the research methodology and methods and how these relate to the research questions, hypothesis or proposition.”¹⁰

This study took a three-pronged approach. The approach entailed finding out if Adventist in mixed marriages experienced challenges that had significant impact on their spirituality, establishing the nature and scope of the challenges experienced and developing an intervention strategy. This approach, the researcher termed the ‘FED’ approach to mixed marriages. The approach combined the qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, resulting in what is known as the *Mixed Methods Research* approach.

This is an approach, according to John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark that includes “at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words...multiple ways of seeing and hearing).”¹¹ This type of research entails a “combined use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies within the same study in order to address a single research question.”¹²

The approach is built around a central premise that “the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”¹³

¹⁰ Pamela Davies, *Research Design, in the SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, 2ed. Victor Juppe, ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2006), 265.

¹¹ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano, Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2011), 2.

¹² Claire Hewson, *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, 179.

¹³ Creswell and Clark, 5.

Characteristics of the Mixed Methods Research Design

Claire notes that there are some core characteristics that make it more effective and user friendly than any of the two other designs alone. She states, that in the mixed methods research, the researcher;

1. Collects and analyses persuasively and vigorously both quantitative and qualitative data (based on research questions);
2. Mixes (or integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them), sequentially by having one build on the other, or embedding one within the other;
3. Gives priority to one or both forms of data (in terms of what the research emphasizes);
4. Uses those approaches in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study;
5. Frames these procedures within philosophical world views and theoretical lenses and
6. Combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study.
7. Collects data on quantitative instruments and on qualitative data reports based on focus groups to see if the two types of data show similar results but from different perspectives.¹⁴

Advantages of Using the Mixed Methods

It should be noted that no one method is overly perfect. Both the qualitative and quantitative methods have weaknesses that are taken care of in the mixed methods approach, as it taps on the strengths of each of the two. For instance, the weakness of the quantitative research is that it is, “weak in understanding the context or setting in which people talk. Also, the voices of participants are not directly heard in the quantitative research... On the other hand, qualitative research is deficient because the personal interpretations made by the researchers, the ensuing bias created

¹⁴ Hewson, 5, 6.

by this, and the difficult in generalizing findings to a large group because of the limited number of participants studied.”¹⁵ This way, the two approaches complement each other to bring about a more user-friendly effective approach.

Also, worth noting about the mixed methods research approach is that it,

Encourages the use of multiple world views, or paradigms.”(i.e., beliefs and values), rather than the typical association of certain paradigms with quantitative research and others for qualitative research. . . is ‘practical’ in the sense that the researcher is free to use all methods possible to address a research problem. It is also practical because individuals tend to solve problems using both numbers and words, combine inductive and deductive thinking and employs skills in observing people as well as recording behavior.¹⁶

Creswell and Clark suggest that key amongst the advantages attendant to this approach is the fact that it focuses on “collecting, analyzing and the mixing of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or series of studies...provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”¹⁷

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data collection procedures in this study, merged two sets of questionnaires with focus group interviews/discussions in a sequential mix and in multiple phases. However, because of the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher, needed to break through the defense walls that had been built around the whole issue. By sensitive in this regard is meant, as Julia Davidson observes, a research that “addresses difficult areas such as sexual deviance, or that which is conducted with vulnerable groups of respondents”¹⁸

¹⁵ Creswell and Clark, 12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2, 5.

¹⁸ Julia Davidson, “Sensitive Research,” *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, 278.

Similarly, this study was undertaken within the context of members believed to be living in rebellion against God's guidelines concerning marriage. Because, such members regard such a notion as offensive, it somehow became very difficult for the researcher to get accurate figures regarding the number of such members within the conference. At first those members were not cooperating with church leadership as it sought to register them.

After realizing there was no formal grouping of members in mixed marriages within the Adventist Church, the researcher had to first use the qualitative approach, owing to its interactive and observatory nature. To that end brainstorming sessions were held during the Conference Camp meetings and women ministries retreats.

Following a successful breakthrough outlined above, and an identifiable group of women in unequally yoked marriages established, the researcher engaged pastors and elders in a participatory approach in discussing challenges that confronted Adventists in mixed marriages to solicit their buy in. During such meetings, held during workers' meetings and Conference Launch programs, pastors and elders were enlisted in organizing members in mixed marriages into teams.

They were requested to each supply a coordinator for each church who would spearhead the formation of the coordinators group. The group was organized into three focus groups. One group comprised those who had been Adventists before marriage and married outside the church. The second included those who had both been Adventists at marriage but one later left the church. The last group comprised those who had been non-Adventists at marriage and later converted to Adventism leaving their spouses out. Focus group discussions were held with each of the groups concerning the challenges they experienced because of them being in unequally yoked marriages. At the close of the meeting, having discussed the researcher's intention to

develop a ministry to the group, the group was tasked to go back to the churches and register all members in mixed marriages.

This exercise netted in a total of about 800 members. However, because some coordinators indicated that there were some members who were still skeptical about the whole exercise, the researcher embarked on another promotional thrust. Towards the end of the year 2015, the researcher designed a Christmas Greetings Card meant for unbelieving spouses to the members. Pastors and coordinators were asked to get the names of those members who wished to have their unbelieving spouses sent the Cards. The number of Adventists in mixed marriages rose to 1,500 from the initial 800. A total of 1000 cards were finally sent out to non-Adventist spouses to our members through the church pastors and coordinators.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect data at the initial stages of the study because, as Craig McLean observes, they are “a set of carefully designed questions given in the same form to a group of people to collect data about some topic(s) in which the researcher is interested.”¹⁹ When a quest had been created, and an identifiable group of women in unequally yoked marriages established, quantitative questionnaires were then designed and administered at the preliminary stages of the study.

Respondents to such questionnaires at that stage were drawn from among Adventist women in mixed marriages who attended the kinds of meetings mentioned above. Questionnaires thus designed were of a closed ended nature to delimit the scope of the area of concentration. Using this method, the researcher found out, the

¹⁹ Craig McLean, “The Questionnaire,” *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, 252.

challenges faced by Adventists in mixed marriages, that negatively impacted their spiritual wellbeing. He also verified the claims that the church generally has a negative attitude towards members in mixed marriage. At the same time, he managed to ascertain whether the church had a ministry program to those people. A second and similar set of questionnaires was administered to the nine pastors within the Bulawayo districts in a bid to verify and authenticate the first questionnaire's findings.

Focus Group Interviews and Discussions

The second data collection method used was qualitative focus group interviews. Pamela Davies defines an interview as “A method of data collection, information or opinion gathering that specifically involves asking a series of questions.”²⁰

Creswell, in the same vein, sees an interview as a situation in which the researcher conducts face to face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone or engages in focus group interviews, with six to eight interviewees in each group...involve unstructured and general open ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.²¹

To that end, because the study deals with a specific but unique group of people, those in mixed marriages, a purposive sampling technique was adopted and used in the collection of data. However, realizing that it would not be ethically feasible nor safe to visit or invite the participants to one-on-one interviews, the researcher opted for the focus group interview approach in which several participants attended interview sessions at the same time. Such a participatory approach in which open-ended questions were administered was utilized during focus group interviews

²⁰ Pamela Davies, *Interview*, The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods, 157.

²¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 181.

and discussion sessions. The merits of this mixed method approach, is that it allowed an interaction between qualitative and quantitative data, thereby helping the researcher authenticate the various quantitative findings.

Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures

A sequentially timed approach to data analysis was used. The researcher first collected and analyzed the two sets of data from questionnaires before engaging on focus group interviews. When focus group interviews were done, data thus obtained were also analyzed. After that, both data from the first two phases and the third phase were compared and conclusions made. While the first phase involved members in mixed marriages, the second phase comprise of pastors from the nine Bulawayo districts. Data collected from each of the questionnaires and focus group interviews together with discussions, are presented and analyzed below.

Questionnaires to Adventists in Mixed Marriages

This study made use of questionnaires (See Appendix 1) to obtain data that relates to challenges faced by Adventists in mixed marriages. The exposition of the results is given below.

Data collection approach.A survey questionnaire was administered to the members of the group. Because it became apparent that the group was somehow sensitive to any seemingly intrusive inquiries, the researcher had to explain his program, its basis and intention before dispatching the questionnaires. The respondents were further advised not to indicate their names to enhance free and open information sharing. However, two of the respondents did not return their questionnaires (See Appendix 1).

Description of respondents.In response to the findings from informal discussions and interviews highlighted above, the researcher then instituted surveys

and interviews with various groups of both, church leadership and unequally-yoked members' representatives. A purposive sampling approach in which respondents were chosen from the specific group of Adventists in mixed marriages was adopted for the entire study.

Because the researcher was not aware of the total number of such people, the first group was randomly selected by request from a group of ladies who had attended a Women Ministries Congress way back in 2013. That first group comprised of women in mixed marriages from the then, WZC's 68 churches in Bulawayo. However, because the study had to be carried out in the Southern part of Bulawayo, responses from 30 women that came from that area were identified and used.

Table 1 below indicates that most the respondents were non-Adventists at the point of marriage. In the above 60 age group, one of the respondents did not indicate whether she had been an Adventist or not at the point of her marriage.

Table 1. Respondents by Age and Baptismal Status at Marriage

Age	SDA	Non-SDA	Total
20-30	1	0	1
30-40	2	5	7
40-50	3	9	12
50-60	1	3	4
60 and Above	3	2	6

Majority, 19 of the respondents, had been in marriage for more than 20 years. Eleven of them had been in married for more than 30 years. It could be said therefore that most respondents, 19, had been in mixed marriages long enough to know what kind of issues relate to such marriages, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents by Years in Marriage

Years in marriage	Total
0-5	2
6-10	3
11-20	6
21-30	7
31-40	11
40 and Above	1

Table 3 below indicates that half of the respondents felt that their spiritual life had been negatively impacted through their mixed marriage. It is worth noting that 5 respondents indicated that the mixed marriage had had a positive impact on their spiritual life.

Table 3. Impact of Mixed Marriages on Member's Spiritual Life

Impact	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Negatively	15	50.0
Positively	5	16.7
No Effect	10	33.3

However, concerning challenges related to mixed marriages, 26 respondents indicated that they experienced serious challenges that they felt had to do with them being unequally yoked. Meanwhile, only 4 others said their nature of challenges were not directly related to them being in mixed marriages.

Concerning a follow up question on specific challenges they encountered, the most prominent issues raised included being denied attending camp meetings church outings, and being coerced to participate in non-Christian rituals within the family setup.

Many of the members in mixed marriages felt that unequally yoked marriages have a negative effect on the upbringing of children, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Effects of Mixed Marriages on Children and Interpersonal Relationships

	Positive	Very Positive	Negative	Very Negative	No Effect
Children	5	0	12	4	8
Interpersonal relationships with fellow believers	6	1	7	2	14

Meanwhile, as concerns such members' relationships with other members of the church there was no clear position as to the effects that such marriages have.

While those who indicated that their marital status had no effect on how they related with other church members were more than the other two, they were neither on the majority. It could possibly be said that members have not felt the direct impact of mixed marriages on their relationships with fellow members in the church. Hence those who said their marital status had no effect on their relations with other worshippers were more than those on the negative and positive groups

Whilst there seems to be no clear majority position as to whether the church's attitude is positive or negative, it could be argued that members in mixed marriages are not very sure of the church's position on their situation, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Church Attitude towards Members in Mixed Marriages

Attitude	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Negative	12	40.0
Positive	5	16.7
Indifferent	13	43.3

However, considering those who indicated that the church had a negative attitude towards members in mixed marriages together with those who said the church was indifferent, not concerned, it can be said that the majority, 25 respondents felt that the church was not doing enough to take care of their spiritual needs.

Responding to the question:

Would you want your spouse to convert to your faith? Twenty-eight of the 30 respondents wished their spouses would convert to their faith. Two of them did not respond to the question.

What would you advise young people who wish to marry non-believers? All of them, 30, said they would advise young people never to marry outside their faith.

What assistance would you wish your pastor to render to you? Seventeen of the respondents indicated that they would wish their pastors to visit their families; seven (7) of them respondents indicated they would wish their pastors to visit and evangelize their spouses, while nineteen (19) of the other respondents said they wished for pastoral prayers.

Have you experienced any specific challenges because of being in a mixed marriage? If so, what do you consider as your greatest challenge? The main challenges obtained from the responses were: Many of them felt they were unable to keep the Sabbath, as they should. Sometimes they are denied going to church, while at other times they are forced to work on Sabbath or to attend extended family related meetings. Others cited being denied the privilege to attend church outings like camp meetings as their greatest challenges, while others still said they were denied attending to any church programs other than those held on Sabbath. There are some who indicated that they were pressured or coaxed to participate in family rituals and

others still, who said they had to put up with infidelity publicly practiced by their spouses.

Summary of the Adventists in Mixed Marriages Findings

Three main findings from this phase of the research are:

1. Contrary to the popular notion that mixed marriages comprise of members who chose to marry outside the church, the research findings indicate that most the members (19/30) who are unequally yoked in SZC were non-Adventists at the point of marriage.
2. Most of Adventists in mixed marriages (26/30) indicated that they experienced a myriad of serious challenges because of being in mixed marriages.
3. Most Adventists in unequally yoked marriages felt that the church is either not concerned about them or has a negative attitude towards them.

From the findings above, it appears that majority of our members in mixed marriages experienced a lot of difficulties as a result of their mismatched marriages. Additionally, they felt that the church was not doing enough to assist them, and yet they felt they needed help in dealing with the kind of challenges they faced.

Questionnaire to Pastors

To verify the findings above, a similar survey (See Appendix 2) was administered to the 9 Bulawayo pastors. The pastors were asked a set of seven closed ended questions. Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Pastors' Responses

Statement	Response	
	Yes	No
The church has an effective ministry to members in mixed marriages	2	7
The church understands, accepts and tolerates members in mixed marriages	7	2
Members in mixed marriages are spiritually nurtured	4	5
Members are equipped to emotionally and socially interrelate with their families and church	5	4
The church knows how to effectively evangelize spouses to members in mixed marriages	1	8

To the question: What are the main challenges Adventists in mixed marriages experience? Respondents identified the challenges of: verbal and physical abuse of members by unbelieving spouses, religious intolerance on the part of unbelieving spouses, failure to return a faithful tithe by members, Sabbath observance, lack of support from the church and being coaxed to participate spiritualistic rituals.

To the question: How best can the church help in addressing the issues above? Responses were that the church should: have a ministry program to the members in mixed marriages, organize programs that include both spouses, use friendship evangelism to win unbelieving spouses to Christ, organize outing programs for such couples, pray for and offer counseling to Adventists in mixed marriages and equip such members with relevant information.

Data Analysis of the Pastors' Questionnaire

While the responses to question one clearly indicate that the church has no deliberate program of attending to the needs of its members in mixed marriages, the response to question 2 needs scrutiny. The responses seem to suggest that the church

has concern for the welfare of Adventists in mixed marriages. However, if that were true, then the church would have had a ministry program to such members.

Similarly, responses to question 3 had almost half of the respondents indicating that the church has a means of nurturing its members in mixed marriages, yet the same respondents in question 1 indicated that there is no structured program for taking care of the needs of the members. In fact, the responses to question 6 concerning major challenges experienced by these members refutes the claims in question 3. The mention of such challenges as failure to return a faithful tithe, engaging in spiritualistic rituals and Sabbath observance are symptomatic of lack of proper nurturing of such members.

Furthermore, it does not sound logical to suggest that such members are socially, emotionally and psychologically equipped to interrelate effectively within their church community and families when they are said to be experiencing the kind of challenges as mentioned in question 6. The fact that they are not able to handle the issues of religious intolerance, continue to experience spiritual loneliness, and are subjected to physical and verbal abuse suggests that they need to be better equipped to deal with such issues.

Summary of the Findings from Pastors' Questionnaire

From the findings above, it can be argued that the church, seemingly, lacks a deliberate ministry that takes care of the issues of Adventists in mixed marriages. Thus, such members continue to experience serious challenges that have the potential to compromise their faith. It can also be concluded that there is a great need for the church to come up with programs that equip members in mixed marriages to deal with the kinds of challenges they face. There also seems to be a need for the church to

develop evangelism strategies that target spouses to Adventists in mixed marriages as well as building bridges of religious tolerance between spouses in mixed marriages.

Somehow, the findings in this second survey, confirm the claims by members that the church is not doing enough to address their challenges. This provided the basis upon which a ministry to members in mixed marriages was constituted.

Group Interviews and Discussions

Seeing both the Bible and contemporary writers revealed that mixed marriages pose a great number of spiritual, marital and social challenges to believers, the researcher then engaged church leadership and the concerned members in the designing and implementing of an intervention. That process comprised of a debriefing with pastors of the targeted churches, who were then asked to request members in mixed marriages within their districts to choose representatives who would then serve as their coordinators for this study.

Typical of the qualitative approach, the researcher had to engage a purposive group of mixed marriages coordinators in focus group interviews and discussions (See Appendix 1). Kristin Esterberg confirming the necessity of this approach observes that

this kind of research is grounded in the ‘behaviors, languages, definitions, attitudes, and feelings of those studied... To accomplish this, the researcher has to develop close, personal, and empathetic relations with those being studied; she or he has to become fully engaged with their world.’²²

During the first meeting a total of twenty members attended a coordinators’ meeting. To further confirm and ascertain the most predominant and critical challenges that members in unequally yoked marriages experience within SZC, the

²² Kristin G. Esterberg, *Qualitative Methods in the Social Research* (Boston, NY: McGraw Hill, 2002), 13.

same group of twenty coordinators was formed into three focus groups comprising: a) those who were Adventist before marriage and married outside the church who were 9 in number, b) those who, together with their spouses were non-Adventists at marriage and one later joined the church who coincidentally were also 9, and c) those who were both Adventists at marriage but one later left the faith who were 2 in number. Each of the groups was subjected to interview questions. Both the questions and their responses were recorded and later transcribed.

Interview of Converts to Adventism

The nine who had converted to Adventism leaving their spouses out were asked seven questions: 1) which churches did you belong to before joining the Adventist Church? 2) How did your spouse view your conversion? 3) How has your conversion affected your relationship with your spouse? 4) How far true is it that being unequally yoked can affect one's spiritual wellbeing? 5) What are the issues you usually fight over that relate to your marital setup? 6) What is your comment about the church's nurturing programming for people in your situation? 7) What do you feel needs to be included in programs meant to minister to your needs?

Presentation of Converts' Interview Data. Responses were as follows:

To Question 1: All the nine (100%) respondents in that group had belonged to some other churches before conversion- Apostolic Faith Mission, Roman Catholic, Brethren In Christ, and Anglican. To question 2: Respondents gave the following responses; one said there were no challenges at first, but as she grew in understanding what she needed to be, do and not do, her new life style like avoiding cooking on Sabbath, and not eating or preparing certain foods sparked some controversy at home. One faced problems of being denied going to church by her in laws. Some said they were denied the privilege of not doing house chores on Sabbath. Others still said they

would go to church in the morning and be elsewhere in the afternoon with the spouse. Some said they were still expected to participate in consulting of spirit mediums in times of hardships.

To the third question respondents gave the following answers: One said her husband was excited and supported her very much because his own parents had been Adventists, so she had finally joined the church of the family. Another noted that he was happy to see some changes beginning to take place in the home due to her prayerful life style. The other said a serious conflict ensued when she refused to participate in conjuring some spirits for them to get a girl child. One said she experienced challenges with her in laws who expected her to participate in family programs that were conducted on the Sabbath.

Concerning the fourth question the responses were that; sometimes the believer is restricted from attending some worship services. Sometimes one is discouraged from accepting church duties that would take her away from home like youth outings. Some even find it difficult to get to church on time and or stay till programs are over as they are expected to leave and come back at set times. Some cannot attend mid-week and vespers prayer sessions because they are told they can only be free on Sabbath. One male Adventist said though he was the head of the home, he always felt guilty that he was oppressing his wife if he insisted on her doing things the Adventist way.

To question five pertaining to issues they usually fought over they said that at times some husbands coax them to join their own churches. One said they usually clashed over what she taught their children. The husband tells her to leave children alone to do what they wanted which she knows is not right. Responding to the sixth question concerning the church's nurturing programs for such people, one said we are

a group that is always left out. Another said the church does not include us when planning couples and Women Ministries programs. Another said their identity was not all that clear— “It’s like we are half members”, she said. One said her church sometimes do program for them. Another one said that when tried to take her challenges to the church she was well received but could to be helped much as the leaders could not break the barrier between them and her husband to solve her issues.

To question six that sought to find out what they considered to be the greatest challenge associated with mixed marriages; the group cited being forced to participate in spiritualistic rituals that are opposed to their faith as the biggest challenge. There was also the issue of being coaxed to join the church of the husband.

Concerning the areas of concern, they would wish addressed in an intervention program; some said that the church needed to plan and run family/ couples’ programs and outings for them as well. One said they needed the church to accept them as part of the whole church. One said that a topic on bedroom life needed to be included. One said she would appreciate the church identifying her husband’s social needs and use such to evangelize him. Some said they appreciate presentations on how to raise children in such a setup, speaking with one voice.

Analysis of convert data. Based on the interviews above, the researcher discovered that Adventists in mixed marriages face numerous challenges the affect their worship, marital life, and the upbringing of children. Meanwhile, such members seem to think that the church somehow has neglected and marginalized them. They also felt that in planning family life programs, the church needed to consider their unique needs. It can therefore be concluded that: 1) indeed members in mixed marriages experience numerous challenges that have the potential to tone down their spirituality. 2) It also can be said that the issue of spiritualism is a major challenge for

members in mixed marriages. 3) It is also true that, because of the pressure to strike a balance between their marital peace and worship of God, some members sometimes succumb to the temptation to compromise their faith's dictates. 4) And lastly, it can safely be concluded that the church is not doing enough to nurture its members in mixed marriages.

Interview with Adventists Whose Spouses Left the Church

The second Group of two whose husbands had left church later after marriage were, in addition to the questions asked the other group, asked: 1) *How did it feel like to be left in church as your spouse gave up faith?* 2) *What are the challenges that are associated with being unequally yoked?*

To the first question one of the respondents said that she felt like she had failed nurturing her marriage and keeping her husband. And that she blamed herself for his apostasy. Concerning the nature of challenges, they experienced one said her husband brags that he was better experienced in worship that he knew everything about Adventism. He thus boasted that no one could tell him anything new about the church. Another one said her husband criticized church leadership which he accused of un-Adventist behaviors and hence could not follow such leaders. They both agreed that the church does not tolerate people of their caliber. They were even suspected of trying to lure fellow believers' husbands if they were seen talking to them, even if it had to do with church responsibilities.

The two also said they felt sidelined by fellow believers who segregate themselves against them in most of the church's activities like music and others. They further stated that there somehow stigmatized—those with spouses in the church did not want to associate with them.

Findings from Adventists whose Husbands Left the Church. Again, from these responses above, it emerges that Adventists whose husbands had left the church experienced some unique challenges. These included feelings of failure and self-blame. They also suffered from false accusation, stigmatization and segregation. They further felt that they lacked church support in their battles.

Interview of Adventists Who Married Outside the Church

The third Group comprising the nine who married outside the church the following questions were asked: 1) *What motivated you to marry outside your faith?* 2) *How easy is it to bring up Godly children in an unequally yoked marriage?* 3) *Are there any challenges you face emanating from in-law relationships?* 4) *To what extent do you feel accepted by the church?* 5) *How easy is it to conduct family worship?*

6) What would you consider to be the most trying challenges in your marriage?

Findings. The various responses given to the first question were as follows: One respondent said that her loss of parents and pressure from step parents to marry and take care of self and siblings had led her to marry the person she felt would take care of her immediate needs. Another one said she had been let down by Adventist suitors who had proven to be unfaithful and so opted to marry anyone who appear morally upright.

To the second question many of them agreed that they had a hard time trying to raise Godly children in unequally yoked marriages—there was confusion as to whose words should carry the day. One said she found it difficult for the children to be consistent in their worship as they were sometimes denied going to church. Some of the respondents said they were faced in-laws' interference. They said these in-laws

faced forced them to participate in family spiritualistic rituals that are contrary to their beliefs. They also said that they conflicted with their spouses over whose religion should be the guide in the marital life.

Pertaining to their acceptance by the church, they said the church generally does not give ear to their problems, because it accuses them of having walked themselves into such challenging lives. They, like their counterparts above observed that those members of the church who worship with their spouses did not appreciate any form of interface between their husbands and those discordant spouses. As concerns family worship, they noted that it was not all that easy, as their husbands did not participate in such worship even when they are around home. What they considered to be the most serious challenges included; being blamed for the family ills because they would have refused participating in various family rituals, there by invoking ancestral anger and retribution against the entire family.

Three issues that once again seem to surface in the third interview are that the church is considered as being indifference or exhibits a negative attitude towards those in mixed marriages, some church members falsely accuse them of infidelity and that members in mixed marriages are often pressured to participate in spiritualism.

Analysis of the three Interviews Findings

The three interviews above have indicated that there are obvious challenges in mixed marriages. These include, 1) in-laws' interference, 2) difficulties in raising Godly children, 3) the pressure to try to strike a balance between keeping marital peace and rendering true worship to God, and being coerced to participate in spiritualistic practices. 4) Meanwhile the church is viewed as not doing enough to equip its members to cope with the many challenges those members in discordant marriages experience.

Intervention Design

After establishing that Adventists in mixed marriages indeed experience several challenges that negatively impact their faith, an intervention program meant for such members had to be designed. The intervention is described below.

Goal of the Intervention

The intervention below was intent on ministering to the needs of Adventists in mixed marriages within Bulawayo districts in SZC. However, as Gratton rightly observed, “There is no great strategy, only great execution.”²³ This statement suggests that the effectiveness of a strategy is determined by how well it is executed on the ground than its mere articulation. In concurrence, John Mark and JD Payne argues that the “right strategy tailors mission to fit each of the thousands of separate communities, so that in it the church may grow...will devise hard, bold plans for planting churches and put them into execution.”²⁴

They further state that a good “strategy therefore involves making plans. The future orientation component of strategy is a dream or a vision...Strategy therefore includes not only prayerfully discerning future realities but also developing a plan of action to reach them... assists in putting feet on future desires...helps move a team from where it is to where it believes the Lord would have it go.”²⁵

To this end, after collecting and analyzing data obtained from the two sets of surveys and the three different focus groups, the researcher designed an intervention

²³ Michael Armstrong, *A hand Book of Human Resource Management Practices*, 10th ed. (London: Kogan Page, 2007), 124.

²⁴ J. D. Payne and John Mark Terry, *Developing a Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

strategy covering the predominant areas of concern that were identified. To enhance and monitor the progression of the intervention a nine-step program was adopted.

Phase one involved selling of the program to local church leadership, the pastors and elders. This involved creating of an awareness of the challenges faced by members in mixed marriages in order have a buy in of the program. Phase two comprised a seminar meant to equip Adventists in mixed marriages in five key areas that include: 1) how to maintain faith in a mixed marriage without being offensive, 2) how to win your spouse to Christ without words, (1 Peter 3 woman), and through deeds; (Proverbs 31 woman), 3) raising Godly children in a mixed marriage and 4) religious freedom; constitutional rights to worship. 5) Issue of Spiritualism.

The third phase comprised an outing for families in mixed marriages aimed at building bridges of tolerance among mixed marriage couples, as well as invoking in non-Adventist spouses an appreciation of the role of Adventist beliefs and life style in marital satisfaction. Phase four involved the selling of the ministry program to church leadership for adoption by the local districts and phase five involved the recruiting, training, and equipping of a team of facilitators to superintend the ministry to members in mixed marriages.

The program outline below summarizes the entire process followed in establishing a ministry program to Adventists in mixed marriages. Of necessity, it was done in three parts: the pre-intervention, intervention and post intervention stages. The first four steps comprised the pre-intervention stage, steps five, six and seven formed the intervention stage and steps eight and nine comprised the post intervention stage. The program above took a total of forty-nine hours over a period of four years.

1. Step 1

Activities: Informal brainstorming sessions with members in mixed marriages.

Expected Outcomes: A conducive atmosphere in which members in mixed marriages freely volunteer information pertaining to challenges they experience in their marriages.

Time Frame: A one-hour session during the September 2013 DORCAMO rallies.

2. Step 2

Activities: Survey questionnaires administered to members in mixed marriages.

Expected Outcomes: Data concerning the extent of prevalence of challenges in mixed marriages and information as to whether the church in SZC has programs that address challenges experienced in mixed marriages.

Time Frame: A one-hour session of explaining the intention of questionnaire during 2014 Women Ministries outing held.

3. Step 3

Activities: Discussion forums with pastors and elders in order to create in them an awareness on the plight of Adventists in mixed marriages and to clinch a buy-in from the church leaders for establishing an intervention ministry. Pastors appoint district coordinators from mixed marriages members.

Expected Outcomes: Pastors and elders are aware of the challenges experienced by members in mixed marriages, appreciate the need for an intervention program and participate in the development and implementation of a ministry to members in mixed marriages. A team of coordinators from Adventists in mixed marriages established.

Time Frame: Two sessions one hour each held with pastors and elders during January 2016 workers' meetings and Conference wide launch program.

4. Step 4

Activities: Focus Group interviews and discussions with three teams of coordinators: those who became unequally yoked because of their conversion to Adventism, those whose spouses apostatized and those who married outside the church.

Expected Outcomes: The nature and scope of challenges experienced by Adventists in mixed marriages as well as whether the church has a ministry program to such members ascertained. Coordinators have a buy-in of the need to establish a ministry to address their needs. Adventists in mixed marriages are identified and registered in every district.

Time Frame: A one-day five-hour interview session held in October 2015.

Mixed marriages coordinators tasked to register all members in mixed marriages within their districts by January 2016.

5. Step 5

Activities: Three Sundays coordinators forums four hours each, held for purposes of planning for members in mixed marriages seminars couples retreat. Facilitators for the two programs identified.

Expected Outcomes: A two-day seminar for Adventists in mixed marriages and a couples' retreat for the same are effectively planned and scheduled for.

Time Frame: A two-day seminar and a one-day retreat scheduled for February and May 2016.

6. Step 6

Activities: A two-day seminar for members in mixed marriages conducted covering the following topics: Marriage ideals, Marriage Legalities, How to Survive a Spiritual Mismatch, Dealing with Extended Family Issues, Bringing up Godly Children and How to Win an Unbelieving Spouse to Christ.

Expected Outcomes: Members in mixed marriages are equipped to deal with the challenges they experience in mixed marriages. Members in mixed marriages in mixed marriages appreciate the need for establishment of a ministry that attends to their needs.

Time Frame: A two-day, eighteen hour seminar held in February 13-14 2016.

7. Step 7

Activities: A one-day mixed marriages couples' retreat held in May 2016. The program covered the following topics: The Best Gift ever—marriage as God's gift to humankind, Building Happy Fulfilling Marriages, The Place of Religion in sustaining Marriage, Family Finance, Your Adventist Friends—dealing with Adventists Fundamental Beliefs, To Have and to Enjoy—playing couples games and Focus Group Discussions and presentations.

Expected Outcomes: A platform for interaction with non-Adventist spouses is established. Non-Adventist spouses tolerate their spouses' faith tenets and appreciate the place of religion in building stable fulfilling marriages. Adventists in mixed marriages adopt a friendly approach to evangelizing their spouses.

Time Frame: A one-day eight hour couples outing held in May 7, 2016.

8. Step 8

Activities: A Family Life Directors and Elders' Forum for planning the adoption of the ministry program to members in mixed marriages held.

Expected Outcomes: Family life leadership appreciates the need to incorporate programs that attend to members in mixed marriages in their departmental programing. Family life programs include ministering to the needs of members in mixed marriages.

Time Frame: A one-day, three hours' forum held in May 2016.

9. Step 9

Activities: A mixed marriages facilitators' training program held.

Expected Outcomes: That a team of facilitators chosen from amongst mixed marriages coordinators is setup, trained, and resourced to deal with mixed marriages challenges. That facilitators can give presentations on how to handle various issues associated with mixed marriages.

Time Frame: A one –day three hours seminar held in May 2016.

Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the population, cultural, socio-economical and statistical factors to the issue of mixed marriages in Zimbabwe, together with the Constitution of Zimbabwe about the issue of marriages. Per both the macro and micro contexts surrounding this study, it was discovered that two provinces Bulawayo and Matabeleland South with the lowest population of 10% of national total population host SZC. That, the major part of the conference, Matabeleland South, has the highest level of divorce/ separation cases, widows and female-headed households. It also is a new conference that was only organized in 2014 and as such is still in the process of discovering its identity.

Because of the unique nature of the intervention program meant to minister to the perceived needs of Adventists in mixed marriages, a mixed methods research approach was adopted. Data collection methods meant to find out whether Adventists in mixed marriages really faced challenges that significantly impacted their spirituality; social and marital lives were put in place. These comprised two sets of questionnaires administered to members in mixed marriages and Bulawayo's nine pastors. To establish the nature and scope of the challenges experienced by Adventists in mixed marriages, focus group interviews and discussions were organized for a

purposive group of members in mixed marriages. Data collected from the three phases were presented and analyzed one after another before being merged and analyzed in a sequentially timed manner.

Based on the findings of this study, it emerged that, whilst statistically, the two provinces that comprise SZC, Bulawayo and Matabeleland South, have the smallest population, in terms of marital stability they are the least. They host the largest number of divorced/separated females and widowed females in the entire country. The bigger of the two provinces, Matabeleland South has the largest number of female-headed homes in the entire country. Meanwhile, SZC has within its twenty-three districts, a significant number of members in mixed marriages (over 1,500). These members face numerous challenges that negatively impact on their social, marital and above all, spiritual wellbeing.

Unfortunately, it has become evident from the study that the conference has no deliberate ministry that helps such members to cope. It is along this vein that a five-phased intervention strategy was developed to minister to Adventists in mixed marriages. It was envisaged that this intervention would grow to encompass the entire conference to the benefit of all its members in mixed marriages there.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGY

Research findings have indicated that Adventists in mixed marriages within ZSC experience challenges that negatively impact on their spiritual, social and marital wellbeing. Such challenges include being coaxed to participate in spiritualistic rituals, religious intolerance on the part of the unbelieving spouse, in-laws interference, how to keep one's faith within mixed marriages and how to raise God fearing children. Having identified the predominant challenges experienced in such marriages, and developed an intervention program; this chapter covers the implementation, evaluation and summary of the intervention program that was undertaken.

Implementation of the Intervention

The implementation process comprised of a five phased, nine steps approach that included, selling of the program, seminar meant for members in mixed marriages, mixed marriages couples retreat, meeting with family life elders and directors to see how the project could be adopted for use by all churches in the conference. The training of mixed marriages coordinators to become facilitators during future church programs was also undertaken as the fifth and final phase.

Meanwhile, because the intervention dealt with qualitative issues, opinions, beliefs and attitudes, process evaluation was administered at the end of each implementation phase. At the close of the entire intervention program, a summative evaluation was done, leading to some conclusions being arrived at.

Organizing for the Intervention

In preparation for the implementation sessions, preliminary brainstorming sessions were held for various stake holders. These included pastors, elders and coordinators of the ministry to mixed marriages group.

Brainstorming with Pastors and Elders

In response to the many challenges that beset Adventists in mixed marriages, the researcher proceeded to come up with an intervention ministry, as outlined in Chapter 4. To clinch support from church leadership, the researcher simultaneously worked on the attitude of the church leadership and membership. Local pastorate and church elders from all the 23 districts were engaged during the workers' meetings, conference wide launch sessions as well as assessment sessions. Here the researcher not only narrated the plight of members in mixed marriages but also made use of some of the recorded interview discussions that highlighted some of the issues faced by members in mixed marriages. An explanation on the various forms of mixed marriages was also highlighted.

In a deliberate effort to remove the stigma with which affected members were viewed, the researcher took time to explain to the various leadership groups that findings had revealed that most the surveyed members comprised of those who had become unequally because of the conversion of one spouse leaving the other an unbeliever. The other group comprised of those who had both been members of the SDA Church and later, one left the church thereby leaving the partner now unequally yoked. Less than half of the respondents were those who had married outside the church. Upon playing some of the audio recordings in which several members within our churches narrated their challenges, pastors were visibly shaken and promised to support the project meant to assist such members, which they did.

Formation of the Coordinators Committee

When it became evident that most church leadership had bought into the program, the researcher utilized a participatory approach in which he requested pastors, elders and family life directors from different churches to identify, from among members in mixed marriages, those who could serve as coordinators of the ministry to be established. A meeting for all such coordinators was arranged for October in 2015. In that meeting, the researcher, citing the research findings, explained the need for an intervention ministry.

During the same initial meeting the coordinators, of necessity, were formed into three focus groups; depending upon the mechanism by which they became unequally yoked: through marriage to a non- believer; through conversion to the church leaving a partner outside and through backsliding of a partner. The three groups thus comprised the researcher's teams through which he formulated the scheduling of the implementation program the researcher had to organize for. The focus groups were then incorporated into teams that were tasked to organize and coordinate the intervention programs for the entire conference. They were also tasked to enlist and coordinate their colleagues for all upcoming ministry programs/projects.

Seminar for Adventists in Mixed Marriages

The seminar was meant to assist Adventists in mixed marriages come to grip with realities of their challenges, as well as equipping them with skills needed to deal with the predominant challenges that had been identified. The first preparatory step of the intervention program comprised registration of members in mixed marriages within the nine Districts of Bulawayo. That exercise took place between the months of October and November 2015.

That registration exercise was later followed by sending, to the identified unbelieving spouses through their Adventist spouses, of a total of 1,000 Christmas Cards during the December 2015 holidays. A month later, in January 2016, a meeting with pastors indicated that more members in mixed marriages had come up in need of the cards. And that those who got them and gave them to their spouses commented that they were highly appreciated by most of the recipients. Because of that exercise, four of the unbelieving spouse recipients immediately promised to join the church with one finally converting to the church in April 2016 and indicated his readiness for baptism.

Through several coordinators' meetings a seminar exclusively meant for members in mixed marriages was held in February of 2016 at Maranatha Evangelism Centre. A total of 400 members in mixed marriages, coming from all the nine districts in Bulawayo and four outlying districts attended the two days' seminar. Topics covered included: ideals of marriage, marriage legalities, how to survive a spiritual mismatch, dealing with extended family challenges, bringing up godly children in mixed marriages and how to win over your spouse to Christ. Three main presenters who facilitated during the two days were: Pastor Moses Nceku Msimanga, the Zimbabwe union Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Director, Pastor Alvin Wabile Ndhlovu, a frontline pastor and Doctor of Ministry Candidate majoring in family life, and the researcher. The local Union President Pastor Micha Choga also graced the occasion and gave the charge to participants at the end of the seminar.

Program Evaluation

Of the 400 members who attended the Sabbath session, only 250 were in attendance on Sunday. Some of the attendees had come from outside Bulawayo and

were unable to come back because of the distance. Evaluation forms were given to the 250 attendees on Sunday. (See Appendix D)

Responses to question 1, *how long have you been married?* revealed that one 196 of the attendees responded and returned the evaluation forms. These comprised of 43 (22%) who had been married for 0-10 years, 62 (32%) married for 11-20 years, 48 (24%) in the 21-30 range and 53 (27%) married for 30 years and above.

While the seminar was meant for Adventist members only, there were some members who brought their spouses with them. At the close of the program on Sunday, four of the six non-Adventist spouses who had attended the meeting publicly announced their decisions to join the Adventist Church.

To verify and ascertain the relevance of the intervention to the critical issues that related to mixed marriages challenges, an evaluation form comprising of eight questions was given to participants at the closed of the seminar.

To the question 2: *Which of the topics covered during the presentations did you find most helpful and relevant to your situation?* The following responses were obtained: Of the 196 who returned the evaluation forms, 56 (29%) of the respondents espoused the presentation on *How to Raise Godly Children*, 47 (24%) chose the topic, how to survive spiritual mismatch, while 30 (15%) indicated that they benefited from all topics. Twenty-two (11%) chose the topic *How to Deal with Extended Family Issues*, sixteen (8%) opted for the topic *Marriage Legalities* and sixteen (8%) chose the topic *How to Win your Spouse Over to Christ*. Two respondents (1%) identified with the topic *Marriage Ideals*, while the other eleven (6%) did not respond to this question.

The responses above indicate that the highest number of respondents felt that the issue of raising God fearing children within mixed marriages was a crucial one.

Second to that topic was learning to deal with mixed marriage challenges themselves. Fifteen percent of the participants indicated that they benefited from all topics presented. Of significance in this study was the lowest nominated topic, marriage ideals. Only one percent of the respondents saw this topic as beneficial. The researcher's observation was that the presentation raised the notion that those in mixed marriages were in violation to God's instructions concerning marriage.

Many of participants did observe during the discussions that the church was being un fair to regard all people in mixed marriages as having violated God's commands. Instead, they felt that the very church that converted them, and left their spouses behind was responsible for their conditions. That, rather than condemn them for their situation, the church needed to help them contain the challenges they experienced.

Otherwise, from the information above, it can be argued that generally, all presentations except for one were of help to the members who attended the seminar.

Question 3. Which of the topic was not covered to your expectation? A total of 109 people identified topics they felt needed in depth coverage. However, only a few people here and there had some topics the considered not covered satisfactorily. A total of 65 (60%) identified the following four topics: How to win your spouse to Christ with 23 (12%) respondents; how to survive spiritual mismatch with nineteen (10%) respondents; dealing with the extended family with fifteen (8%) respondents and raising Godly children with eight (4%) respondents. The responses above show that generally all topics were covered satisfactorily. However, it could be argued that there are four topics that still need more attention. These are: how to win your spouse to Christ, how to survive a spiritually mismatched marriage, dealing with extended

families and raising Godly children. These topics will be considered in preparation for the next phase of the seminars.

Question 4 *How would you rate the program?* 114 said the program was excellent, 51 said it was well done, 19 said it was good, 11 said it was fair, and one said it was below their expectations.

Question 5 *How would you rate the amount of time allocated to the program?* 62 said it was adequate, 98 said it was fairly adequate, 34 said it was not adequate and two did not respond to the question.

Question 6 *How would you rate clarity of the presentations?* 145 said it was very good, 43 said it was good; eight said it was fairly good, and no one indicated that it was poor.

Question 7 *Did presenters allow enough participation?* 68 said there was enough participation, 69 said it was fairly enough, 41 said it was not enough and eighteen did not respond to this question.

Based on the responses above it can be concluded that the seminar was a great success as the majority 184 (94 %) of participants saying that it was relevant to their needs, and all participants (100%) said the presentations were clear. Also, a majority, 160 (82%) of the participants said there was adequate time allocated the program, with one hundred and thirty-seven (70%) of them saying there was adequate interaction between the presenters and participants.

To help the researcher find the gaps in the intervention that would need to be attended to in future, participants were requested to make additional suggestions concerning issues they desired to see addressed in future. Several topics were listed with the most prominent ones being:

1. The issue of tithes and offerings

2. How to deal with infidelity
3. How to reclaim a backslidden spouse and children
4. Balancing between being a 1 Peter 3 wife and insisting on non-negotiables
5. How to secure the marriage certificate
6. How to handle stepchildren born within marriage with five members identifying it.

From the above list one can clearly see that, for members in mixed marriages, the issue of tithing featured most prominently. Assuming the church has a significant number of married women being in mixed marriages, it can be argued that any endeavors to raise the level of member faithfulness that do not address the challenges experienced by women in mixed marriages in this regard might not succeed.

From the researcher's analysis, these topics seem legitimate for people in mixed marriages and as such should attract the attention of any serious intervention of this magnitude. The researcher thus, intends suggesting the incorporation of these topics in the conference's family life Camp Meeting programs for couples in mixed marriages. This owes to the fact that within the confines of this study, it will not be possible to deal with those surfacing issues exhaustively. Seeing that the main purpose of this study is coming up with a ministry to members in mixed marriages, the issues identified will help in designing a curriculum that will outlive the duration of study. At the close of this study, the researcher intends forwarding these issues to the leadership of the family life department for further research and implementation. Further, the researcher intends suggesting the adoption of the same topics for Camp Meeting family life presentations.

Mixed Marriages Couples' Retreat

Although the constitution of Zimbabwe does provide for religious freedom even within the family setting that one can invoke to protect Adventist spouses from abusive spouses, the researcher strongly subscribes to a non-confrontational approach that does not only build bridges of tolerance but has the affinity to lead non-believers to accept Christ. To that end, this phase of the intervention series intended engaging non-Adventist spouses. In this regard, a mixed marriages seminar outing was finally held in May 7, 2016.

Objectives

Because of the identified challenges, the retreat was organized as an endeavor to address specific arrears of concern. Seeing the previous seminar had revealed that most of the members needed more information on how to win their spouses to Christ and how to survive spiritual mismatch, the retreat was designed such that it incorporates such areas.

To that end the following objectives were pursued: 1) to create an appreciation among non-believing spouses to our members, of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, its mission and contribution to the welfare of families. 2) to build bridges for tolerance and acceptance among unbelieving spouses and possibly winning them to Christ.

The Sabbath long program was held within the Bulawayo low-density suburbs. This was deliberately arranged for outside the confines of the church environment to provide a nonthreatening environment. A total of 400 participants, including 62 non-Adventist spouses attended the retreat. Contrary, though to the plans that this program would be wholly for mixed couples, most the attendees (338) came without their spouses. As the researcher inquired, it became evident that trying to net

in this group was not an easy task. This could suggest Adventist spouses still had difficulties in convincing their unbelieving spouses to attend the retreat. Many women stated that for one reason or another, their husbands had turned down the invitation at the last minute.

It thus remains true that, while the church must organize programs for these couples, the greater bait should be the equipping the very believing spouses with effective means of creating bridges to winning their spouses *without words*. The following topics were covered during the day 1:

God's ideals for marriage. This topic dealt with marriage as the Greatest Gift that God gave to humankind. The goal of that presentation was inviting non-Adventist spouses to view marriage from a Biblical perspective in which marriage is a union of two, the husband and wife in a permanent bond. That marriage is meant to provide mutual love and companionship between the two, who become one flesh. Such an understanding was perceived by the researcher, as being a stepping stone to helping non-Adventist spouses appreciate the church's motivation in working for the welfare of their families.

How to build happy fulfilling marriages. This topic intended to allow for the presenter to deal with common issues that have the tendency to compromise the stability of marriages. Included in the presentation was the discussion on the roles that both husbands and wives need to assume in the family, how to keep marital love aflame, how to recover the lost attraction between husband and wife, the need for tolerance, acceptance and forgiveness of one another.

Marriage and religion. This intended helping non-Adventist spouses appreciate the influence that religion has in building happy, permanent and fulfilling marriages. Issues of faithfulness in marriages, permanence of marriage, prayer as

means of dealing with marital problems, training up children in the way they should go and keeping with each other till death, were dealt with. Here the presenter intended introducing religion as, not only sure antidotes against the many marriage ills, but as the very foundation upon which lasting relationships are built.

Family finance. The emphasis in this topic was the need for families to plan together and be conservative in their spending. Also discussed was the concept of tithing as seed preservation.

Your Adventist friends. The discussion was meant to explain some of the tenets that make for a true Adventist. It was also meant to help non-Adventist spouses appreciate some of the issues that set them at loggerhead with their spouses like, participating in spiritualistic rituals, tithing, the state of the dead, abstaining from preparing and eating certain foods and so forth. Thus, such fundamental beliefs as: i) The law of God, ii) Marriage and Family, iii) Death and Resurrection, iv) The Sabbath, v) Christian Behavior, vi) Stewardship and vii) The Experience of Salvation, were discussed.

Other Program Activities

The day's programs comprised of presentations on the topics above, games, and focus group interviews/discussions. These are described below.

Games. In addition to the presentations, there were sessions of games in which couples were subjected to teamwork and spouse appreciation. These included blindfolding while identifying one's spouse amongst several others by feeling the fingers, and eating of apples that hang on ropes without handling them by hands. These games were deliberately meant to build friendship between the church and non-Adventist spouses, while helping them to appreciate the fun side of church life as opposed to the popular perception that it is all series of mundane rituals.

The entire day's program was interspaced with sessions of prayers for various identified issues that beset marriages these days, especially in Zimbabwe. Prayers were conducted by one of the retired pastor who had been identified for that specific task. A singing couples group was also made use of to present talks and music throughout the day to aid the non-Adventist partners to appreciate the beauty of Adventist family life and benefit of them engaging in life's activities as families.

Two couples whose husbands had earlier been won over because of some efforts by the church the researcher and the family life department were also invited as guests of honor to the day's function. Towards the close of the program these were given an opportunity to share their experiences, before and after their conversion. At the close of the program they were privileged to present the day's couples with certificates of appreciation.

Focus group interviews and discussions. As part of the program, the researcher inserted a slot for focus group discussions (See Appendix 1). The objective of this session was inviting non-Adventist spouses to feel accepted as part of the church family and to help them realize that they could dialogue with the church and even their spouses over any religious issues. That way, the researcher sought to do away with the, *we, them* attitude characteristic of such spouses, whilst assuring them that the church values their contributions to its wellbeing.

Participants were separated into two groups: non-Adventist couples and Adventists. While Adventists engaged in question and answer session punctuated with prayer sessions, non-Adventist spouses were placed in ten groups of six, and subjected to some focus group interviews and discussions. A questionnaire comprising of eight questions was administered to each of the groups. They had selected scribes who took down the responses and later reported to the main group.

Questions 1-3 were meant to invoke in non-Adventist spouses a realization and appreciation of Adventism as well as enhancing tolerance in such spouses, of their Adventist partners' faith. Incidentally, initial surveys conducted prior to this intervention indicated that there was generally, a wide spread prevalence of intolerance of believing spouses by their non-Adventist spouses.

Question 1: What are some of the things you like about Seventh day Adventists?

The following answers were given: One group said they liked the fact that the church raises disciplined children, the other group said they know how to explain the Bible, and another one said that Adventists were strict commandment keepers. Another group noted that Adventists have a consistent prayer life—they like having prayer bands, mid-week prayers and Friday night meetings. Another group said Adventist were known for their helpfulness in the community and working as a unity in social functions while another one said they were best known for their singing. One group said Adventists were known for their education system and grooming while another one noted that they had sound doctrinal teachings, were students of the Bible, and had a temperate life style. One other group said they knew Adventists as a people who had programs that enhance family unit. Another group believed Adventists were truthful and ethical while another one said they were known for worshipping on the right day—the seventh day of creation.

Assuming these respondents represent the views of the many who did not attend, their answers to the above question are invaluable. These responses suggest that, though non-Adventist spouses outwardly seem to be intolerant and opposed to their spouses' church, they are aware of the impact the Adventist Church has had on their families. And as such do appreciate what the church stands for. This information

is valuable in building friendship bridges, in the church's endeavors to evangelize non-Adventist spouses.

Question 2: Do you think the Adventist Church has contributed positively to the wellbeing your wife/ husband and children? Yes No. If yes, supply evidence in favor of your response.

All groups (100%) answered *Yes*. Amongst the evidences cited were that the church helped in raising up well-cultured children, well-behaved and respectful children. Another group said they knew the church for its witnessing programs to its neighbors, another said the church had taught their wives to engage on daily praying schedules. One group noted that the church was noted for family building and nurturing programs, another one, appreciated it for its beautiful youth programs and choirs that help children keep away from vices. Another group noted that the church contributed to building homes that are characterized by honest, reliability and integrity—evidenced by family happiness and life changing teachings.

Question 3: *Do you think your wife/ husband's faith has any positive influence on your marital life? Explain your answer.* All focus groups (100%) responded *Yes*. To substantiate their answers, one of the groups stated that their homes were different from those that do not have Adventists, because in their homes there is praying and read the Bible on a daily basis. Another group said that in their homes God is put first in all the family does, and as a result, their families relatively enjoy living respectfully with one another. The other group indicated that each time there are problems, they had observed that God is invited to be part of the problem solving process through prayer.

Another group said that their wives' behaviors had significantly changed positively since they joined the Adventist Church. The recording secretary of one of

the groups even testified that his wife had helped him to stop drinking and influenced him to consider buying a house, which they finally managed to buy. Another group said Adventist wives exercise restraint, and are generally respectful, patient and faithful in their marriages. There is another group that noted that Adventist spouses tend to influence family values, are peaceful, loving and tolerance at home. There is yet another group that said their wives' faith had evidently changed them, and thus, they now lived better and happy lives. Meanwhile, another group said they appreciated positive criticism from their spouses.

The researcher has met and even counseled with several Adventist women who felt that their endeavors to live Christian lives were fruitless, and that, holding to their faith had caused them more marital problems than happiness. While that could be true for some, the responses above, tell a different story altogether. Instead, they seem to confirm that Adventists in mixed marriages have the propensity to become open letter written and clearly read by their spouses. That though they are never openly told, there is a wide spread acknowledgement by their unbelieving spouses that they are in the right faith and their lives are appreciated.

Question 4 was meant to alert the church and Adventist members in mixed marriages of those things they could be and do that may be a hindrance to the church's soul winning mission, especially to non-Adventist spouses.

To the Question, *What are some of the things that you do not like about Adventists?* The responses below were given: One of the group indicated that they did not like the idea of scheduling night prayers, because they felt such meetings were not safe. Another group said they did not appreciate the selection criteria at Adventist institutions that tended to favor students from Adventists homes only. There is

another group that observed that the church put too much emphasis on dressing, a practice that put undue pressure on family finances.

There was another group that said that they did not appreciate the Adventist tendency to look down on other congregations that worship on Sunday. Another one also said they did not like the very idea that their spouses refused to attend family functions that happen on Saturdays. Another group said the church scheduled too many programs throughout the week and thus deprived them of quality family time. Another group went on to say that they did not like the fact that their wives refused converting to their husbands' faith, yet they expected their husbands to join them in theirs. Instead, they said Adventists were proud, thinking of their church as better than that of others. Another group said the church was not able to perform healing rituals indicating that it was barren of the fruits of the spirit.

The other group said Adventists were too conservative, and thus were difficult to live with. They went on to say that they were thus forced to put up with vegetarian diet that is expensive and eating of cold food on Sabbath. The same group went on to say Adventists exhibited a judgmental attitude towards other faiths and thus in violation of texts like Colossians 2:16 and 1 Timothy 5:23.

There is also one group that lamented immoral behaviors exhibited during camps. The group went on to cite some instances in which members of the church were implicated in immoral behaviors. Meanwhile, two of the groups said that there was nothing amiss with Adventists and instead, stated that Adventists were helpful in many ways within the communities, sharing the Word of God in a friendly manner.

While the church might enjoy the feeling that many people for its standards and unique beliefs acclaim it, a look at the responses advanced above invokes sobering thoughts. Whether the observations above are valid that not, it would be wise

for the church to be alert on perceptions that may taint its image and there by inhibit its evangelistic mission. The church may even need to closely scrutinize the perceptions above and come up with ways and means of enhancing a positive image.

Seeing the researcher has unveiled some of these inhibitors, he intends recommending further study around the above areas of concern. Beyond that, the researcher is now better informed about the areas to include in planning for future presentations.

To prepare non-Adventists to be accommodative of their Adventist spouses and the entire church, Question 5 was asked: *If the church were to do something of lasting value for you, what would that be?* To this question respondents had the following requests: one group said they wished pastors could visit their families and give Bible studies. Another one said the church should continue to educate children to be God-fearing. Another one said, the church should continue to uphold its sound teachings. The other said through programs like the intervention strategy, the church should continue to help them keep their marriages. There is another group that said they would appreciate church visits especially during difficult times. One other group requested the church to be more accommodative and receptive to other people's views. While another one said that they expected their spouses to also accept invitations to attend their church programs.

One other group requested the church to consider running open leadership seminars, to promote and increase the number of divergent couples' meetings. Another requested the church to consider providing scholarships for needy children and or soft loans.

The desires expressed by some unbelieving spouses to have their Adventist spouses to visit their own churches needs to be analyzed. It may be interpreted to

mean that these non-Adventist spouses who had attended the retreat desired reciprocal visits by their spouses or that by attending the retreat, they were also in a mission to win their spouses to their churches. Whichever case, Adventists in mixed marriages ought to be grounded in their faith to the extent that they are free to interact with other faiths without the risks of losing theirs in the process.

One group that called for more of such programs and requested for a wide promotion of the meetings highlighted an appreciation for the very ministry program that was being held. This somehow serves to validate the need for such an intervention as the greatest contribution the church can give to those in such set ups. The researcher, as a follow up to the responses promised the program would be made an annual/ bi-annual event and that willing nonmember spouses would be incorporated in the planning processes. The researcher also intends sharing some of these interview findings with church leadership in SZC, with the aim of having the programs cascade down to local levels than remain individualized at conference levels.

Questions 6 through 8 were deliberately crafted to provoke non-Adventist spouses to consider taking decisions for Christ.

Question 6: *Have you ever joined your family in worship? If yes, how has your wife/ husband reacted?* Except for one group, the rest indicated they had one time or another participated in worship with their families. One group of non -Adventist women said their husbands greatly appreciated the visit.

Question 7 that further sought to request non -believing spouses to appreciate the need to allow their children attend church read: *Do your children go to your wife/ husband's church? If so what are some of the things they have shared with you they learnt from church?*

Responses: All the ten groups that responded indicated that they allowed their children to go to their wives' church. One group said their children shared Bible stories and songs with them. Another group said their children could lead in the evening singing of songs and reciting of verses. Another group said children shared with them Bible verses that expressed moral behavior. One respondent said his girl child had almost turned the family into Adventism.

Another group stated that children had led in family worship programs and another group said they noticed that their children exhibited good behavior and faith. There is yet another group that said children told them stories that emphasized the need for faithful stewardship and good family relationships. The other group said children had somehow improved social interactions and were helpful to the elderly people within the community.

To a follow up question: *How would you feel if your children stopped going to church?* All the ten groups indicated they would be troubled to have their children stop attending church with their Adventist spouses, meaning that they treasured the work that the church does and were ready to support their children in that regard.

To the final question 8: Do you think your wife/husband would wish you to join her/his church? All responded 'Yes' to this question.

The responses above in a nutshell indicate that non-Adventist spouses are aware of their spouses' desires for them to one day become members of the church. As such, both the church and the member spouses would do well to capitalize on the now existing relations. That would call for the church and spouses to such non-Adventist spouses to order their programs and life styles such that they give compelling reasons for such members to appreciate the place of Adventism in their families and even lives.

The researcher is tempted to believe that there are many non-Adventist spouses who are constantly on the lookout for strong enough reasons to join the Adventist Church or to allow their spouses and children to continue in the church. The researcher thus, intends recommending life style evangelism as one of the effective methods that can be employed in winning non-Adventist spouses to Christ. Further to that, the researcher desires that, upon completion of this program, he would expend time in evangelizing non-Adventist spouses to the extent of possibly designing a manual to be used in such work.

To conclude the day's retreat, one step further of consolidating the program included interviewing of the two couples that had converted to Adventism through similar programs conducted in one of the pilot churches in the city. These were asked to narrate those things that they didn't like about their Adventist wives before conversion, how they got converted and what their lives had become following their conversion. As the interviews went on, one could sense some excitement amongst the participants. Even the non-Adventists visibly showed appreciation of the steps taken by their fore runners. That was evidenced by how non-Adventists, accompanied by their member spouses conversed and congratulated those now Adventists, who presided over the certification program of the attendees. Towards the close of the day, an evaluation form was given to all the 300 participants to complete.

Evaluation of the Couples' Retreat

At the close of the program, participants were requested to submit their completed evaluation forms. (See Appendix F) A total of 199 (50%) of the total participants returned their forms. Of the 199 who returned the forms, 42 (21%) were non-Adventist spouses while the rest, 157 (79%) were Adventists. The table below shows the breakdown of those participants who evaluated the program, by years they

have spent in marriage. Table 7 below indicates that all groups of mixed marriage couples were represented in the seminar and evaluation exercise, which allows the researcher to obtain a balanced view of perceptions about the project.

Table 7. Distribution of Respondents by Years in Marriage and Religious Affiliation

Years in Marriage	0-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	Above 30	TOTALS
Number	10	21	56	60	53	199
SDAs	8	14	47	48	40	157
Non-SDAs	2	7	9	12	12	42

A total of 17 questions were asked, with the first five meant to find out if the atmosphere had been conducive to the kind of meeting or not. Because the data from these questions does not speak to the impact of the intervention per se, but merely addressed issues of suitability of venue and timing of the program, their analysis will not necessarily be presented in this section. Numbers 6-8 were meant to generate general information about the quality and suitability of the program itself. Questions 9-11 sought to evaluate the quality of presentations, while question 12 intended inviting non-Adventist spouses to an appreciation of and attendance to future possible seminars as it engages them in the built up towards such programs.

The most crucial questions were 13-15. These engaged non-Adventist spouses to consider the issue of religious tolerance. They were meant to gauge their appreciation of the issues dealt with during the seminar as well as giving them the opportunity to consider joining their spouses in their worship. The last two, 16 and 17, were meant to identify interests that would inform follow up programming by individual churches.

Because this particular program targeted non-believing spouses, and whereas responses from both Adventist and non-Adventist spouses were quite bulky, the researcher's analysis considered all 42 non-Adventist respondents and 50 (32%) of the 157 Adventist respondents.

Non-Adventist Respondents. Questionnaires comprised a total of 17 questions. As already preempted, questions that were analyzed were numbers 9-17, with special emphasis placed on questions 13-15.

Question 9: *What was new to you in today's presentation?* The responses below were given: One respondent said that the fact God assigned different roles to the husband and wife in marriage life was new; another one said he did not know that the Adventist Church ran family life programs and discussed marital issues like *love at home*; and another one said that he appreciated spending the whole day with his wife listening to couples' presentation. One other respondent said he had never known that spouses could play fun games together and cheer each other, while another said he did not know that religion could directly influence the quality of family life.

There is one who appreciated that the church was willing to give non-Adventists a chance to express their perceptions of the Adventist Church, and one who said he had never realized before that the church cared enough to organize for them such a retreat—this is awesome. Another one said he appreciated realizing that the church was aware of the challenges that people in mixed marriages faced, while another one said he had never heard that he needed to love his wife, and that it was his first time to listen to such presentations. There is another respondent who said he was excited to realize that the Adventist Church was different from other denominations, and another one who said that the very idea of being in a retreat with his wife and other couples was fascinating. One observed that the turnout of non-Adventists in the

retreat was amazing, and the other said the need for a couple to try to understand each other in marriage was wonderful. There was yet another respondent who said there was nothing new.

To question 10, *Which presentation did you find most beneficial to your marital situation?* Thirteen (31%) of the respondents indicated that they benefited most from the topic, *Building lasting relationships*; six (1%) said they benefited from the topic, *The Place of Religion in Marriage*; five (1%) benefited from focus group discussions and presentations; and another five (1%) said that they benefited from all presentations. The rest of the topics received too few nominations to be analyzed.

Responses above indicate that most non-Adventist spouses were aware that their marriages are not the best they were meant to be, and thus appreciated being assisted to build happy marriages. Also, worthy noting is that they came to realize the need to let their spouses continue worshipping as it is one way they can keep their marriages from most of the ills found in marriages that are not founded on biblical principles. The fact that they seemed to appreciate focus group discussion is testimony to the fact that bridges to friendship had been built, and that they are now ready to engage in more discussions with the church.

Question 13: *What will you do differently as a result of this seminar?* One respondent said he would go and teach others what he had learnt, another said he had decided to worship and praise God, while another one said he would read the Bible, love his wife, and be a good father. There is one who said he wished to start going to church, another one who resolved to change his future for better, and another one who said he wished to be baptized and be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

One promised to be supportive to his wife and children, another promised to improve communication with his wife, and another one said he would endeavor to

build a happy fulfilling marital life. There is one who promised to begin praying, another one who said he now knew his wife better, and still another one who said he would, from that day, attend the SDA Church. Another respondent said he would try to listen and understand his wife's points of view and suggestions as his helper, and another one who wished to be converted and be a member of the SDA Church.

Another respondent promised to put to practice what had been taught, another one promised to be more fatherly and warm as a husband, while another one said he would join his partner in the next program so they could learn together. One said he would endeavor to practice what he learnt, another promised to support his wife and children, while another one vowed to start tolerating his spouse. Another respondent said he would begin to behave positively within the community and be God-fearing, another one said he would change attitude towards his marriage, and one promised to love his wife.

There was also one who promised to become a better communicator at home and focus on his family duties, another one who planned to live a happy life with his family, while another one said he wanted to be with his wife in each and every prayer or seminar, and another one who decided to read the Bible more and seek understanding. There is one who wrote, *nothing*.

The responses above can be put into three main categories. There are those who indicated they wished to change their behaviors, attitudes, life style and live happily with their spouses. These can be thought of as now being tolerant of their spouses as they are. Another group is one that comprises of those who decided to read the Bible and pray more, join the church or to join their spouses in worship. This group indicated signs of conversion. The third group was that of the one who said

nothing. This individual can be classified under those who still had some issues with either his spouse or with the church that needed more time to be resolved.

Of the 42 who returned their evaluation forms, five indicated their decision to join the church, three wished to begin reading the Bible and praying, nineteen took the stand to live happy, better, loving, and tolerant lives with their spouses, while three vowed to put into practice what they learnt. There is one who went on to indicate that he was not positively impacted by the seminar. It can be concluded that the seminar was a success in that most the attendees indicated they were positively impacted by the seminar. What then remains is designing a follow-up program that would ensure netting in those who have already made decisions to join the church and even continue some Bible studies and visitation for the rest.

A similar question that sought to invoke cordial relations between the spouses in the same area of religious tolerance was also posed.

Question 14: *What help do you plan to give to your spouse in order to enhance your marital satisfaction?* One indicated he would encourage open dialogue with his wife, another one said he would hold prayers with his wife, and another one said he would continue to encourage her to remain prayerful. One said he would go to church with his wife, another said he would begin Bible studies, and another said he would encourage the atmosphere of seeking to understand one another. One said he would be deliberately loving towards his wife, another said he would be prayerful and supportive to his spouse, while another one said he would help in his wife's spiritual journey. There is another one who promised to encourage that, as a family, they be God-fearing, another one who promised to offer financial support to his spouse, and another one who said he would endeavor to live peacefully with his wife. Another one

vowed to be good to his spouse, and another one who said he would love his wife and give her 100% support.

Again, from the responses above, the researcher can safely say a lot of positive change was wrought in the lives of the participants. The same responses express positive desires by non-Adventist spouses to work towards happy, supportive families in which there is tolerance of each other, regardless of evident religious differences.

Following a few bridge building questions, Question 15 was perhaps a more direct one for non-Adventist spouses and a follow-up to a similar one asked during interviews:

Question 15: *Do you think it would be a good idea for you to start attending worship services with your spouse?*

Responses: Twenty-six (60%) of the 42 respondents said *Yes*, one (2%) said *No*, and twelve (28 %) indicated that they were undecided. Another one (2%) said God will help, while another one (2%) did not respond. From the above responses, it becomes clear that the majority, 26 (60 %), indicated having considered the decision to join the church, with the other twelve still battling with the issue. The twenty-six spouses can be considered as ripe fruits that are ready for harvest and thus call for a deliberate move by the church to work on nurturing the friendship created and possibility of harvesting them at the earliest, while the twelve would be considered as potential candidates to be labored for.

The follow-up question (17) inquired, *Would you appreciate the pastor to visit your family?* Twenty-six (60%) indicated a 'yes', five (12%) said 'no' while twelve (28 %) did not respond to that question. The 26 seem to be a confirmation of the decisions for Christ indicated earlier, thus calling for urgent follow-up reaping

programming. Six of them even provided their contact details in separate papers to facilitate desired visitation.

It was also sobering to note that there are some amongst them who were candid enough to say that they did not need visitation. This somehow re-echoed the observation that some of them still harbored ill feelings towards the church. Such a reaction somehow helps the church to understand the fact that there are some Adventists out there who come from very difficult marital settings, and thus need the church's help to cope. Meanwhile, 28 (67%) of them indicated that they needed pastoral prayers; six said they had no need for prayers and nine (21%) did not respond to Question 16.

To bargain for participation and buy in for future church programs, the researcher deliberately inserted question 12. *If this program were to be done again, what topics would you wish to be included?*

Responses to this question included the following list: mental, and physical health issues; taking care of a chronically ill spouse; legal issues and violence; causes of unhappiness in marriage; living with those of different denominations from us; how to deal with stress; dealing with financial hardships; discuss self-help projects.

From the list above, it could be argued that non-Adventist spouses somehow have gained confidence in the church that it can help them deal with their challenges. This attitude sets a positive platform for counseling and possibility of them attending to more of the church originated programs.

Adventist respondents. Because of the bulkiness of the number of respondents (157), only 50 randomly selected from the above total responses were presented and analyzed. Respondents were grouped according to the number of years they had spent in marriage, with each group comprising of ten respondents. Data from

such respondents were captured and analyzed. However, only a selected number of responses that concerned Adventist respondents were presented and analyzed.

Responding to Question 9: *What was new to you in today's presentation?*

Those in the 0-5 year old group said they appreciated seeing their visiting spouses and pastors interacting in a friendly manner, including how the pastors' wives welcomed the couples to the meeting. Another woman said she was excited to see her husband well dressed, looking smart like an Adventist, while another said she enjoyed taking photos with her husband. One other woman said she appreciated hearing what our non-Adventist husbands liked about Adventists, while another benefited most from the presentation on family finances.

The 6-10 years olds had this to say: One said she appreciated learning her indispensable roles within her family, another said she liked the non-Adventists group presentations on what they liked and did not like about Adventists, while another woman said she was awakened to know that for marriage to last, the couple needed to continue renewing love one for another.

One said she learnt with appreciation that non-Adventist spouses were willing to support them in their journeys of faith, while another woman said she was pleased to learn that her husband appreciated her life style though he had never said so. The other woman said that she learnt with appreciation that their spouses expected them to stay in church as that has wrought much good in the family atmosphere. Another woman said she appreciated the talk on strategies of building a happy marriage.

Those in the 11-20 year group gave the following responses; One said that she was touched by the statement that marital love needs to be renewed as in the parable of the wine in Cana, another said she was blessed by the experience of spending a day

in worship with her husband while another one said she learnt that there is a funny side to marriage-playing games as a couple.

One woman said she liked the affirmation that, like incubators, women are meant to process and respond to men's treatment accordingly. Another woman said she was happy to learn that non-Adventists spouses do notice and appreciate Adventist life style, while another woman said she appreciated the non-formal, non-threatening approach to inviting and allowing full participation of the non-Adventist spouses in the whole program. Another woman said she liked the idea of interspersing presentations with the playing of games among spouses. Another woman said she appreciated the presentation on building happy marriages.

The ten respondents in the 21-30 years' group said that they learnt a lot of concerning how one could win her husband to God, that one needs not be ashamed to show endearment to her spouse in public and the need to forgive each other as spouses even when one thinks she is right. One said she was surprised to know that there are even Adventist men who are in mixed marriages. One said she appreciated the informal approach that the program adopted in wooing their spouses to the church,

While the other respondent was glad to learn that non-Adventist spouses do take notice of the good things the church and their spouses do. One said throughout the day she felt the presence of God because the atmosphere was highly welcoming.

Those married for over 30 years indicated that they were captivated by seeing couples sharing sweets and hugging each other, the family games that were played, and the opportunity to welcome our husbands to worship. One said she liked the interpretation of the parable of the finished wine in marriage, the other said she was calmed to know that disagreements and misunderstandings are normal in marriage, while the other said she appreciated realizing that non-Adventists spouses understood

them better than she thought. One said there was nothing new that she learnt.

However, the very responded requested for family visitation suggesting, that she had issues that she needed to be resolved.

From the responses above there are some statements that appeared in more than one group. Three of the four groups of responses indicated that they were amazed by the feedback that came from non-Adventists, another three sets of respondents indicated that they appreciated the fact that their spouses appreciated their life styles, while two other groups indicated that they were excited to have time to play with their spouses. Another two groups said they appreciated the need for spouses to deliberately renew their love for each other from time to time.

One thing is clear from the presentations above, that the program had some positive impact on all who attended, there are lessons they benefited from the various activities of the day and that they are ready to make amends and improve their marital lives. Several were fascinated by the very fact that their spouses spent the day with them and that their spouses openly declared that there are things they admire about them and their faith. There is therefore a clear indication that Adventists in mixed marriages do appreciate the church's efforts to help them evangelize their spouses and seem to be ready to play their own part in the whole process.

Question 13: What will you do differently because of this seminar?

Those in the 0-5 years' group said that they would begin having family prayers with spouses, another said she would do all she can to satisfy her husband's need for love, while another said she would always be calm as she now realized she was under spotlight.

From the 6-10 years, one said she would begin praying diligently and accepting her spouse as he was, another said she would change her behavior and walk

in the footsteps of Christ, while another one said she would stop being judgmental of her spouse. One said she would be true to her family roles, another said she would be faithful to her husband, while the other said she would now be willing to apologize when needed and appreciate her spouse as well as forgive him when he errs. One vowed to humble herself before her husband, giving him all the due respect, while another said would love her partner till death separates them.

From those between 11-20 year group, one promised to change her attitude towards her husband, another promised to live happily and support her spouse and help him in decision making, while another said she would submit to her husband and yet another said she wished to go and practice everything she had learnt in that seminar. One said she desired to change her behavior, another said she would improve her communication with her spouse, while another said he would apologize to his wife for the wrongs he had committed deliberately. Another one said he would change the way he used to treat his spouse and earn exercise forgiveness.

Those in the 21-30 had this to say: One said he would work towards improve her life and that of her spouse, another said she would change her behavior, while another said that she wished to correct what he was doing wrongly. One vowed to start tithing regularly, budget accordingly and practice financial discipline, another said she would revive every good thing in his marriage, while another said he would improve her family life, pray with them even though they are not members of my church.

One said she would work on replenishing the wine her my marriage, pray more than she used to and thank God for touching bringing her husband to the seminar, another vowed that though there would face storms in her marriage, she

would will not leave God. And another one said she wished to witness to those who do not know this God, while keeping her faith.

The over 30 years group gave the following responses: One said she wished to change her life, another said she would appreciate her spouse when needed, and another said she would be submissive to her spouse, while another said she would pray without ceasing. Another one said she would persuade and pray for my husband to accompany her next time such meetings are held, while another one said she would devote her life to reading the Word of God. There is one who said that she wished to repent of the wrongs she was doing to her family, and another one who said she intended to live differently. One said she would do nothing about what she had learnt in the seminar.

From the responses above it can be concluded that while there is a general tendency to view non-Adventist spouses as the ones to blame for the many ills experienced in mixed families, many of the Adventist spouses testified that they had a lot of adjustments to make in their own lives to bring about the happiness they desired in their marriages. It is thus encouraging to note that resolutions are made to contribute positively to the building of satisfactory marriages.

Concerning the question: *If this program were to be done again, what topics would you wish to be included?* a wide range of answers were given as summed below: conflict management, enhancing communication, prayer, baptism- why one should be baptized and how to deal with extended families; How to raise children in mixed marriages, marriage and religion, bedroom life, and family finance; The Sabbath and food, building happy marriages, sex life, and forgiveness; Communication, the need to acquire marriage certificate, and self-help skills programs for non-employed spouses; Discussion on salvation as a personal experience

as opposed to a corporate approach, inter relationships in marital life, and how to deal with those husbands who do not tolerate anything church related; How to win a non-Adventist spouse over to Christ, legal matters in marriage, building happy, fulfilling marriages, how to live a debt free life and lessons for children: One requested, *Help us come with our spouses.*

The other question that needed to be analyzed was Question 14 What help are you going to give your spouse in order to enhance your marital satisfaction? The following responses were submitted: One respondent said she would begin having Bible study with her spouse. Another one said she would request a member whom she respects to study with her husband while she continues in prayer for him. One other respondent said she would help her husband to appreciate the need to come to church, while the other said she intended begin respecting her spouse and offer him spiritual support.

There is one who said she would invite her husband to church, another who said she would try to keep her spouse happy and to persuade him to join the church, and another one who said she would continue to pray for her spouse till he accepts Christ as his Savior. One respondent said she would show him love always, another said she had decided to dedicate her life to knowing her role in the family and being the best helper for her spouse while another one said she would endeavor to understand and listen to her husband.

One vowed to help her husband to stop drinking, another one said she had decided to surrender her husband to God in prayer and support him in all ways possible, while the other said she would exercise tolerance towards her spouse, and will be patient with him and pray for him. There is another one who said she would always surrender her marital challenges to Christ and discuss such issues in a friendly

manner with her spouse, while the other said she would work for her husband to come to the Lord. Another said she had resolved to be kind and let her husband suggest what he wanted, while the other respondent said she would encourage her husband to participate fully in Bible studies, especially around family life issues. The other said she had decided to be forgiving and to encourage her spouse to start coming with her to church.

From the submissions, advanced above, it could be argued that all respondents, regardless of the number of years they had spent in mixed marriages, were still battling with some issues that the seminar addressed. There are also a couple of tangible evidences to the fact that the program was indeed a success story. First and foremost, a good number of Adventist respondents expressed their deep desire to do something about their spouses' salvation.

All the respondents indicated positive attitude and willingness to invest in their marriages. Further, it would seem, from their contributions that most them, if not all, do realize that they have a role to play in the attainment of marital satisfaction and happiness. It is indeed humbling to note that they all seem to believe that the seminar had opened for them a new lease of doing things differently. That suggests that the intervention did meet their needs.

From the group of non-Adventist spouses who participated in the seminar and responded to both interview questions and evaluation forms, there were indicators to suggest that the program had a positive impact on them. Contrary to the popular notion that such spouses have nothing to do with Adventism, most Adventist spouses were stunned to listen to a long listing of things that different spouses appreciated about the church. Their narration of the impact that their believing spouses had wrought in their families was enlightening.

However, it was sobering to note that the non –Adventists were aware of those negatives that tend to mar the mission of Adventism. Meanwhile, all in all, it can be concluded that the list of those things they appreciated about Adventism, their decisions to support their spouses as they worship, together with their requests for visitation and resolution by some to be baptized is enough evidence to suggest that bridges of tolerance have been successfully constructed.

It can be argued as Peter advised, that the best argument in favor of Christianity is a sermon in shoes, one preached without words. It now remains with the church and believing Adventist spouses to cultivate amongst themselves awareness that Christian life is lived under the spotlight of those they associate with. And that it is the duty of the church to nurture the positive relations that seem to have been built between the two parties. Deliberate visitation programs that further cement the relationships and foster decisions for Christ that a good number of them secured need to be planned for.

Family Life Departmental Forum

Analysis of the evaluation forms and group discussion reports under taken during the retreat revealed that several resolutions had been taken by both Adventists and non-Adventist participants. These include the resolution by many non-Adventist spouses to be accommodative and appreciative of Adventism. Some of them promised to support their wives in their worship while others resolved to start attending church with their spouses. To ensure that the resolutions above are followed through, the researcher engaged the family life department leadership in planning the adoption and cascading of the intervention to all levels of church life. In that regard, a forum was thus held on May 15, 2016, at which family directors and elders from seven Districts of Bulawayo were present.

During that forum, the researcher began by highlighting the two functions of the church- in reach and outreach. He further highlighted the fact that the church was organized in departments for specialized attention to members' needs. He then discussed the gap that existed in the family life department as regarded having a deliberate ministry program meant for members in mixed marriages. Further to that he then outlined the steps that he had taken in consultation with conference leadership, pastors, elders and mixed marriages coordinators in addressing the felt needs in that area.

Findings of the research that had been secured to the point of coming up with an intervention were distributed to those in attendance and discussed by the group. The group was then taken through the two main programs undertaken with, first, members in mixed marriages and later with such members and their spouses. The group was then divided per the districts they came from and were given interview questions to respond to. Subsequently, each district drafted a way forward that would ensure the adoption and adaptation of the program to local church needs. The four questions posed to each group were:

Question 1: After going through the evaluation forms, what do you hear non-Adventists spouses to members in mixed marriages to be saying to the church?

At the end of the session each group was asked to give its responses to the main group and the following information was gathered. Respondents said they heard non-Adventists to be saying that Adventists were known for being a people of the Bible and prayer, that non-Adventists appreciate Adventist life style and that some of them desired to join the church. They went on to say that they seemed to notice that, non-Adventist spouses were thirsting after truth, they appreciated the fact that their Adventist spouses had the affinity to raise disciplined children, and that non-

Adventists were aware and appreciative of the positive influence that Adventism had over their family life. Another group said that non-Adventist spouses appreciated the church's awareness of the challenges they experienced and the church's proactive decision to come up with intervention programs for them. And another group said that non-Adventist spouse were ready for the Gospel.

However, the forum noted with concern that non-Adventist spouses were not happy with the church's emphasis on high dress standards that puts such husbands under undue financial pressure to keep their Adventist spouses abreast with the church standards. That the image of the church was being marred by alleged glaring immoral behavioral practices during Camp Meetings, and that there was a worrisome judgmental attitude the church had towards other denominations. The forum also noted that non-believing spouses also were heard to be concerned about late night meetings by the church, and having a feeling that the church's weekend programs were too congested and thus denied them quality family life with their spouses.

Concerning the question: *Do you think the church is doing enough to address the challenges faced by members in mixed marriages?* They all said *No*. When they were asked to say what they thought should be the church's response, to the identified needs associated with mixed marriages, the different districts came up with the following suggestions: One group said they were planning to develop effective programs that would address the cited challenges. Another group said that they were planning to prepare appropriate in-reach programs to members in mixed marriages, while another group said they were planning to cultivate a positive attitude towards members in mixed marriages.

One other group said they were going to prepare the church to nurture the souls that are ready to join, while another one said they would begin scheduling

family life programs that accommodate members in unequally yoked marriages as well. Another group advised that the church should embark on family visitation programs to the mixed marriage families, with another one saying there was need for members to stand firm on the Fundamental beliefs, as they seem to be a point of attraction for non-Adventist spouses that the church needs to avoid night programs as much as possible.

There is another group that suggested that the church embarks on friendship evangelism and that the church should do more of the programs like the one done on May 7, 2016. One other group said that the church should start identifying and training facilitators who would work for non-Adventist spouses to our members, as well as educating the local church members on how to deal with non-Adventist spouses.

Summary of the Family Life Department Dialogue

From the interaction with the family life department and having exposed them to the very work of ministering members in mixed marriages, it appears that they are prepared to spearhead the department into planning programs that include members in mixed marriages. The responses given by the same groups are indicative of their readiness to work for those in mixed marriages. Meanwhile, the indications by non-Adventists who participated in this intervention program are that they are now appreciative of Adventist life style, and are willing to join the church.

Adventist spouses have also resolved to do everything possible to be the best they can to their unbelieving spouses. This is an assurance that the project has had a positive impact on the stakeholders of the study. It can therefore be confirmed that this project has secured a buy-in from church leadership. This is suggestive that,

assisted with relevant information, and materials, the program can now be safely seeded over to the church as a fully developed ministry to members in mixed marriages.

Mixed Marriages Facilitators Team

As the program drew to the close, the researcher realized that a lot of interest had been generated around this ministry. There are churches and pastors who indicated they needed the program run in their various churches. The researcher having seeded the program to the family life department went further to surrender all the seminar materials to the team that he had worked with as coordinators. This team was then tasked to organize its self to a facilitators group that could be invited to present in any church or camp meeting set up. These facilitators are expected to have their first organized encounter as 2016 camp meetings in any of the conference venues where needed.

Summative Evaluation of the Intervention Program

There are several observable indicators to the fact that the intervention was effective. These are:

1. The appointment of mixed marriages coordinators in all the nine districts in Bulawayo clearly indicates that the selling of the program was successful, seeing the exercise was not mandatory but merely explained to both pastors and elders who then supported and facilitated the rest of the implementation.
2. The high attendance average of 450 members in mixed marriages, during both seminars and their successful invitation of their spouses to the couples' outing are also indicative of their positive acceptance of the intervention.

3. The number of non-Adventist attendees and their participation during the program was more than the expected response to an initiative that had been surrounded by fears that they would turn down the invitation.
4. The Conference family life department during the first quarter assessment in April 2016 had already developed an assessment form that required all districts and churches throughout the conference program to indicate programs that had been undertaken to address the needs of those in mixed marriages. The assessment revealed that, already 17 of the 23 Districts in the conference had already included this group in their programs and a total of 52 seminars had been held by that time.
5. Analysis of Both seminar evaluations and participants' testimonies revealed that the participants felt adequately equipped to cope with the challenges they experience in mixed marriages.
6. The level of participation by both elders and directors of the family life department together, with their contributions in planning future programs for members in mixed marriages can be viewed as a proof that the church now appreciates the need to incorporate the needs of this group in its nurturing programs.
7. The successful training and equipping of 16 former coordinators as future resource personnel and facilitators for future mixed marriages seminars and Camp Meetings also is also a milestone achievement in the development of a ministry to mixed marriages couples within the church.
8. The production of training materials to be used during forth coming Camp meetings is another observable outcome of the intervention program. Interviews with pastors, family life directors and some of the members in mixed marriages

have also availed testimonies that testify to the impact the program has had in the conference.

9. Meanwhile members have organized themselves into group charts and prayer groups as testified by one of the members in appreciation of the support she had received from her teammates when she lost her son.

Based on this level of adoption and programming, one can safely conclude that a ministry to hurting and ailing members in mixed marriages has been established and is now operational in the SZC.

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LESSONS LEARNT
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The possibility of a serious challenge besetting Adventist members in mixed marriages was first noticed in 2013, when a woman attending a Conference meeting approached the researcher sobbing because her non-Adventist husband she had brought with her more than 500km away had disserted her in the middle of the meetings. Seeking for counseling she lamented the amount of prayers, resources and assistance she and her friends had put into trying to win her husband over to Christ.

That her husband had come all the way to attend that meeting had seemed to her to be a lead that her prayers were being answered. However, the fact that two todays later, he decided to leave the meeting without even consulting with her was unthinkable and embarrassing. She felt her mission had failed, and that she had let down her friends. She also felt that God had left her to battle alone. She thus approached the researcher from this dejected emotional quandary. Her narrative of what she had gone through the fifteen years in marriage leading to the decision, together with her friends to fast, pray and join hands in working her husband into the faith, left the researcher wondering how many others were in a similar situation.

That same evening the researcher sought dialogue with other Adventists attendees married to non-Adventist. It was in that forum that the researcher first came into awareness of the extent of the challenge. More than half of the 4,000 attendees remained. The request by the researcher that they help him understand the scope of

the challenges they faced, by writing such challenges in pieces of anonymous papers resulted in over 400 responses netted in. Each respondent enumerated similar challenges differently.

After the analysis of the lead findings, the researcher as a leader realized that there was a significant number of Adventist in mixed marriages who experienced numerous challenges that negatively impacted on their spiritual wellbeing. The researcher thus felt the urge to further investigate the attendant difficulties with the aim of gaining an appreciation of the very nature of the challenges they experienced and the possibility of establishing a response ministry for such members. That urge saw him utilize a mixed methods research approach to data collection that included brainstorming sessions, questionnaires and focus group interviews and discussions.

Initial brainstorming sessions were deliberately made informal and undocumented to facilitate a non-threatening environment necessary for disclosure. During 2013 and 2014, as the researcher visited various meetings, he requested to meet with members in mixed marriages in which platforms he promoted his desire to help establish an intervention ministry to the many challenges besetting them. The researcher would always end such sessions with individualized counseling and prayer sessions that always attracted many counseling requests. As the researcher came to realize the magnitude of the challenge and resolved to respond to the felt needs of such a group of people, more concentrated investigations were administered. Both survey questionnaires and focus group interviews and discussions were employed.

Summary

To gain an appreciation of the issues that surround mixed marriages, the Bible, Ellen White writings, commentaries and contemporary writers were reviewed. From the theological reflection on mixed marriages, the researcher concluded that, both in

the Old and New Testaments God, for reasons of preserving an uncontaminated relationship with His people, forbade their intermarriage with unbelievers, a position He still upholds to date. Not only does the Bible discuss the prevalence of mixed marriages and its challenges, it further provides two possible ways of dealing with such marriages.

According to Ezra such marriages should be terminated (Ezra 10: 3, 17, 19). Meanwhile, Malachi, who regards marriage as a covenant relationship not only rebukes those who mistreats their marriage partners, but declared “For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away” (Mal 2:14, 16).

In the New Testament, when Jesus was invited to clarify the issue of divorce, He stated that divorce was not in God’s plan for marriage. Instead, His plan was that marriage would be an exclusively permanent mutual relationship. Divorce was therefore prohibited except for reasons of infidelity, (Matt 5:31, 32; 19:9; Mark 10:9). Paul also aware of the challenges of mixed marriages concurred that believers be not unequally yoked with unbelievers.

However, in face of an unprecedented situation of mixed marriages that had resulted from conversion into Christianity of many from pagan practices, Paul advised that it was not proper for believers to terminate such marriages on condition of religious incompatibility. Instead, he advised that such believers could be used as God’s agents to save the unbelievers. While such a position may seem to contradict that of Ezra, the researcher finds the position plausible in that it agrees with Christ’s position on divorce. The New Testament’s Gospel to whole World led to the conversion to Christianity of individuals who previously were, together with their spouses, pagans. Such conversions resulted in the prohibited unequally yoked situations that both Paul and Peter had to deal with.

The researcher has also established that God's prohibition of believers to marry unbelievers is legitimate in that, such marriages negate the conditions of the very symbol of His covenantal relationship with His people and create a rich bed for a believers' spiritual lapse and compromise. However, for those already in such situations, the researcher has confirmed from the Bible that such marriages need not be terminated on grounds of religious incompatibility. Instead, church leadership is called up on to come up with means and methods of addressing challenges associated with such marriages.

Literature review in chapter 3 also confirmed that;

1. Indeed, spouses in mixed marriages experience challenges emanating from the very fact that they view life from different perspectives altogether.
2. That, whilst marriages in general have a share of challenges, unequally yoked marriages result in some unique forms of challenges that impact negatively on believers.
3. Marriage to an unbeliever has the propensity to lead the believer to compromise her faith's tenets, experience a sense of hopelessness, loneliness and dejection.
4. Women who walk the mixed marriage road experience hurt that they most likely project to their family members, and in the process, breed unhappy homes.
5. Husbands who lose their wives to conversion usually develop the same kind of jealousy and agitation experienced when one spouse walks away from marriage.
6. The fact that the wife suddenly seems to ignore their instructions in favor of another man's orders, makes such husbands feel provoked, and agitated and thus resolve to fight back and making life difficult for their wives. Thus, because living in a spiritual mismatch can put the Christian under a cloud of gloom that usually starts a downward spiral of negativity, it is critically important that the believing

spouse be assisted to come up with deliberate plans to contain their marital challenges.

Having arrived at the conclusion that believers in mixed marriages experience a lot of challenges that negatively impact on their faith, the researcher resolved to contextualize the very findings of his study to his local situation. To do that, the researcher employed the mixed methods research design that used a combination of three data collection instruments: brainstorming sessions, survey questionnaires and focus Group interviews and discussions.

The initial phase of this work involved brainstorming sessions with Adventists in mixed marriages, during camp meetings and retreats. That was followed by questionnaires meant to find out if indeed Adventists in mixed marriages experienced challenges that negatively impacted their spiritual wellbeing, as well as verifying the notion that the Adventist Church in SZC had no ministry program suited to such members. Focus group interviews and discussions were employed to verify data collected from questionnaires and to establish the very nature and scope of the challenges that Adventist members in mixed marriages experienced in their marital setups.

Analysis of the questionnaires and focus group interviews revealed that;

1. Contrary to the popular view that un equally yoked marriages are mainly due to disobedience of God's instructions in choosing marriage partners, un equally yoked marriages can result from other reasons that include the church's evangelism mission of converting people to Adventism.
2. Un equally yoked marriages present members and the entire church with serious challenges that have the propensity to compromises the spiritual DNA of the very members.

3. The Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, Commentaries and a good number of contemporary writers do advocate for an intervention that helps members in mixed marriages to cope with the challenges they encounter in their marriages.
4. The Adventist Church is called upon to bare together with members in mixed marriages the burdens they carry, and that church leadership equips such members to be the primary agents of the salvation of their spouses.
5. There are possible and effective strategies that members in mixed marriages can use to witness to their spouses and that such methods can be contextualized to suit members' individual circumstances to the extent that they can even use them to win their spouses over to Christ.

Following the various intervention phases, summative evaluation forms were also distributed to all participants. Data collected was presented and analyzed. From such data conclusions were drawn as to how effective the intervention was. Looking back at the whole session of intervention stages, the outcomes below were realized.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of the implementation of the intervention was tested through summative evaluation forms that were given to all participants and filled at the close of each program. Data collected was presented and analyzed in chapter 5.

Based on the evaluation forms completed by those who participated at the various phases of the intervention implementation, an overall conclusion was reached that:

1. A ministry to members in mixed marriages has successfully been established and adopted by the majority, 17 of the 23 Districts of South Zimbabwe Conference.

2. There is an observable appreciation of the program by both Adventist and non-Adventist spouses in mixed marriages and commitment to being tolerant of each other's religious differences among most those participated in the project.
3. Church leadership now appreciates their need to program nurturing programs that include members in mixed marriages.
4. Majority of those members in mixed marriages who participated in the intervention programs now appreciate the intervention that was executed to help them cope with challenges they experienced because of being unequally yoked.
5. Adventist members in mixed marriages who engaged in all phases of the intervention are now better equipped to deal with their major challenges.
6. A fair number of those non-Adventists spouses who participated in the intervention programs appreciate the church's move to help build their marriages and that they appreciate Adventism as a denomination that is Bible based, has sound family life teachings, raises well behaved children, grooms well behaved spouses, and is committed to the welfare of the community.
7. Because of the positive influence and life style that members in mixed marriages exhibit to their spouses and, because of this very intervention program, evangelizing of the non-Adventist spouses has been rendered a lot easier.

Lessons Learnt

Embarking on this study revealed several valuable lessons that are enumerated here:

1. Leading from assumptions can be destructive. For years, the church has held back ministering to the needs of its unequally yoked members because leadership presumed that such members were in rebellion to God's instructions concerning marriage. Meanwhile, this research has revealed that, while it is true that there are

members who choose to marry outside their faith, most members in mixed marriages are a result of their conversion into the church leaving their spouses behind and some are a result of apostasy of a partner, leaving the other unequally yoked.

2. Different research areas require different designs and methods of data collection. While it is generally held believed that effective interviews are those that have a face- to -face interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, dealing with a sensitive research topic compelled the researcher to seek for alternative methods. Realizing that he could not safely conduct one on one interviews with women whose husbands could not be consulted, neither could he use telephone interviews without being misunderstood, the researcher opted for focus group interviews and discussions.
3. Because in a traditional Ndebele culture, the man is in charge of the affairs of his family, men who lose their wives to Christ tend to perceive it as loose of control, and thus highly contest such decisions. In such situations, dialogue and open discussions in nonthreatening platforms like focus groups helps deal with negative underlying bitterness that an unbeliever might harbor towards his own spouse and her church.
4. Friendship approach to evangelizing non-Adventist spouses helps disarms their prejudices against Adventists, and that those people have a lot of things they admire about Adventists which could be used in evangelizing them.

Recommendations

Seeing the scope of this project was limited to a given time frame, and territory, and while the outcomes of this study can be used in a wider range of issues

that relate to unequally yoked members of the Adventist Church, it is recommended that:

1. This ministry program be adopted and replicated in each church in SZC and even beyond, as it has proven that it has the affinity to equip members in mixed marriages to cope with the challenges they often experience, and help them to effectively witness to their spouses.
2. Because of the possibility of a wide spread prevalence of members in mixed marriages within the SID territory the church's pastoral training institutions explore the need to incorporate a course in this area.
3. Further research be conducted around the challenges faced by children born into mixed marriages and how they could be assisted to deal with such challenges.
4. The many areas of concern that both members and non-Adventist spouses identified for future seminars be adopted and be considered by all who desire to nurture members in mixed marriages and evangelize their spouses,
5. Each Adventist Church identifies all its members in mixed marriages to keep track of the pace at which it nurtures such members.
6. Because there possibly seems to be several the church leaders who somehow have a negative and or repulsive attitude towards members in mixed marriages, a situation that leads to the neglect of such members by some churches, it is recommended that the findings of this project be made available for church leadership training in evangelism and nurturing aspects.
7. Further studies are undertaken to bridge the gaps that this study might have unearthed and or overlooked.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRES

Survey Questionnaire for Members in Mixed Marriages

Tick the Correct Answer

1. What is your Age? (a) below 30 years (b) 30- 40 years (c) 40-50 (d) 50-60 (e) above 60
2. Gender a) male b) female
3. For how long have you been married? (a) 0-5 years (b) 6-10 years (c) 11-20 years (d) 21-30 years (e) Over 30 years
4. Were you already an Adventist when got you married?)a) Yes (b) No
5. Does your spouse belong to any denomination? (a) Yes (b) No
If your answer is Yes, which denomination is it?.....
6. How has your marriage to a non-Adventist affected your spiritual life?
a) Positively (b) very positively (c) negatively (d) very negatively (e) no effect
7. How has your marriage affected the upbringing of your children? (a) Positively b) very positively c) negatively d) very negatively e) no effect
8. How has your marriage impacted your relationships with other fellow worshippers?
a) Positively b) very positively c) negatively d) very negatively e) no effect
9. What do you consider to be the general church's attitude towards members in mixed marriages? a) positive b) very positive c) negative d) very negative e) indifferent
10. Have you experienced any significant challenges as a result of being married to a non-Adventist? If yes, what has been your greatest challenge?.....
11. Have you ever wished your spouse could join your church? a) Yes b) No If yes what assistance would you wish to be given by a) your pastor?.....
b) your fellow church members?.....
c) your friends?.....
- 12 What advice would you give to a young person who plans to get married to a non-Adventist.....

Questionnaire to Pastors in SZC

Kindly respond to all questions below.

1.The church in my opinion:

a) has an effective ministry to members in mixed marriages that deal effectively with the challenges they experience.....

b) better understands, accepts and tolerates members in mixed marriages.....

c) spiritually nurtures Adventists in mixed marriages.....

2.Are members in mixed marriages are emotionally, psychologically and socially equipped to enhance their interrelationships with their spouses and fellow church members?.....

3.Does the church know how to effectively evangelize unbelieving spouses to Adventist members?.....

4.What are the issues that members in mixed marriages face most?

.....
.....

5.How best would you as a pastor help resolve such issues.....

.....

Focus Group Interview Questionnaire

a) Converts to Adventism.

1. Which church did you belong to before joining the Adventist Church?
2. How did your spouse view your conversion?
3. How has your conversion affected your relationship with your spouse?
4. How far true is it that being unequally yoked can affect one's spiritual wellbeing?
5. What are the issues you usually fight over that relate to your marital setup?
6. What is your comment about the church's nurturing programming for people in your situation?
7. What do you feel needs to be included in programs meant to minister to your needs?

b) Interview with Adventists whose Spouses Apostatized

1. How did it feel like to be left in church as your spouse gave up faith?
2. What are the challenges that are associated with being unequally yoked?
3. What are the issues you usually fight over that relate to your marital setup?
4. What is your comment about the church's nurturing programming for people in your situation?
5. What do you feel needs to be included in programs meant to minister to your needs?

c. Adventists who married outside the Church

1. What motivated you to marry outside your faith?
2. How easy is it to bring up Godly children in an unequally yoked marriage?
3. Are there any challenges you face emanating from in-law relationships?
4. To what extent do you feel accepted by the church?
5. How easy is it to conduct family worship?
6. What would you consider to be the most trying challenges in your marriage?

Non-Adventist Spouses Focus Group Interview Questionnaire

1. What are some of the things you like about Seventh-day Adventists (SDA's)?.....
2. Do you think the church has contributed positively to the wellbeing of your wife/husband and children? a) Yes b) No If Yes, what are some of the things you can cite as evidence?.....
3. Do you think your wife's/husband's faith has any positive influence on your marital life? a) Yes b) No Explain your answer
.....
4. What are some of the things you do not like about the SDA's?
.....
5. If the church were to do something of lasting value to you what would you wish that to be?.....
6. Have you ever joined your family in worship? a) Yes b) No If yes, how did your wife/husband respond?.....
7. Do your children go to your wife's/husband's church? a) Yes b) No If yes,
 - a) What are some things they have shared with you that they have learnt from there?.....
 - b) How would you feel if they stopped going to church?
 - i) Troubled ii) Good iii) would not care iv) Not sure
8. Do you think your wife/husband would wish you to join her church? a) Yes b) No c) Not sure

APPENDIX B

EVALUATION FORMS

Adventists in Mixed Marriages Seminar Evaluation Form

1. For how long have you been in marriage a) 0-10 years b) 11-20 years c) 21-30 years d) over 30years
2. Which of the topics covered during the presentations did you find most helpful and relevant to your situation?
3. Which of the topics was not covered to your expectation?.....
.....
- 4 *How would you rate the program?* a) Excellent b) Quite good c) Good d) Fairly good e) below Expectation
- 5 How would you rate the amount of time allocated to the program? a) Adequate b) Fairly Adequate c) Not Adequate
- 6 *How would you rate clarity of the presentations?* a) Very Clear b) Clear c) Fairly Clear d) not Clear
- 7 Did presenters allow for enough participation? a) Enough b) Fairly Enough c) Poor
- 8 Are there any topics you would wish to be covered in future?.....
9. Evaluation Questionnaire for Couples' Retreat
Do not write your name on the form. Complete the form as honest as you can and return it back.
9. a) Adventist b) Non-Adventist
10. How long have you been married 0-5yrs 6 -10yrs 11-20yrs 21-30yrs Over 30yrs
11. How would you rate the suitability of the venue? a) Poor b) Fair c) Good
d) Very Good e) Excellent
4. What is your rating of the food? a) Bad b) Average c) Good d) Very Good
5. How welcoming was the seminar atmosphere?
a) Not welcoming b) Quite welcoming c) Very Good d) Excellent
6. Do you think that this seminar was necessary? a) Yes b) No
Why?
7. How do you rate the amount of time given to each presentation?
a) Inadequate b) Adequate c) More than enough
8. What is your perception of these kinds of programs?

a) Not necessary b) Necessary c) Very necessary d) Not sure

9. What was new to you in the day's presentations?

10. Which presentation(s) did you find most beneficial to your marital situational life?
.....

11. Which topic do you feel was not adequately covered?

12. If this program were to be done again in future what topic would you wish to be covered?.....

13. What will you do differently as a result of this seminar?
.....

14. What help are you planning to give to your spouse in order to enhance your marital satisfaction?.....

15. If you are a non-Adventist, do you think it would be a good idea for you to start attending worship services with your spouse? a) Yes b) No c) Not decided

16. Do you have any prayer requests? Do you have any prayer requests you would wish pastors to pray for?.....

17. Would you wish for a family visit by the pastor? a) Yes b) No

If yes, find a separate paper and fill in your details i.e. Name, phone number and address.

Any comments/suggestions about this program and anything you wish to let the organizers of this program know? If yes, use the space below to write your comments.....
.....

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal identification:

Name: Jefrety Sibanda

Date of Birth: 18/08/1966

Married to Thembekile Sibanda:

Children: Two daughters, Nomthandazo and Nobubele

Education:

Educational Qualifications: 5 O' Levels and 1 A' Level Subjects

Professional Qualifications: Certificate in Education 1988 (United College of Education)

- Bachelor of Education Degree in Educational Administration 2000 (University of Zimbabwe)
- Bachelor of Arts in Theology 2002 (Solusi University)
- Master of Arts in Church Leadership 2009 (Adventist University of Africa)
- Master of Arts in Theology "Candidate" (Solusi University)
- Doctor of Ministry in Leadership "Candidate" (Adventist University of Africa)
- Master of Education in English and Communication (Solusi University)

Work Experience:

- Teacher, 1988-1992
- Education Director and Pastor WZC, 1993-1999
- Pastor 2001-2003
- Assistant Registrar, Solusi University 2003-2006
- President, West Zimbabwe Conference, 2006-2014
- President of South Zimbabwe Conference, 2015 to date