

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry  
Emphasis in Mission

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

**TITLE: BIBLICALLY APPROPRIATE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP AS A MODEL FOR MEMBERSHIP STABILITY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, OMOKU, NIGERIA**

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Date Completed: December 2016

The problem addressed by this research was the loss of membership through interfaith marriage in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Omoku. Located in the southern part of Nigeria, this town is an urban community currently serving as the administrative headquarters of Ogba, Ndoni, Egbema Local Government Area in Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of this in-ministry dissertation was to discover authentic reasons for interfaith marriage, which led to the perennial loss, or nominal standing of some members of SDA Church Omoku. Following this was the intentional development of a sustainable scheme for membership nurture and retention.

The procedure followed in this research made it one that could be replicated very easily. Both the quantitative and, qualitative methods were used. A total number of one hundred questionnaires were administered to members of the target

congregation, and the method used in selecting the participants was free sampling. The essence of this was to achieve a balance in the information given. It was discovered that interfaith marriages in Omoku SDA Church was caused by several factors; some of which are poverty, inadequate spiritual nurture, family values, acculturation, and inaccessibility of Adventist education and influence of social media. Expectedly, the research resulted in (a) greater awareness of church members' obligation towards intra-faith marriage; (b) increasing passion for Bible study among the members, especially regarding the marriage ordinance; (c) reduction of interfaith marriages among church members, and (d) development of goal-oriented programs from the family ministries department of SDA Church Omoku.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that the project was a success, not only because the process can be replicated elsewhere, but that it will enhance the mission of the church in the context of the study.

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A dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu

January 2017

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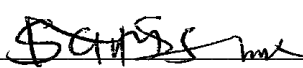
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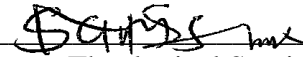
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I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved wife, Mrs. Goodness Mgbechi Ahiamadu, and to our dear children, Alvin, Allen and Alex. They were most instrumental to the successful completion of this project. They are a family in need and indeed.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ONELGA	Ogba, Ndoni, Egbema Local Government
ABOLGA	Abua Odual Local Government Area
ATR	African Traditional Religion
AMP	Amplified Bible
ENUC	Eastern Nigeria Union Conference
GC	General Conference
KJV	King James Version
NT	New Testament
NLT	New Language Translation
NKJV	New King James Version
NAOC	Nigeria Agip Oil Company
OT	Old Testament
ONELGA	Ogba Ndoni Egbema Local Government Area
RWC	Rivers West Conference
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company
SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity and Threats
SDA	The Seventh-day Adventist Church
SOP	Spirit of Prophecy

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church is an evangelical Christian denomination.<sup>1</sup> This presupposes that the church is one of the congregations which proclaim the acceptance of, and total allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Saviour. Preaching the gospel of salvation, making disciples for Christ and preparing people for the soon second of Jesus Christ are the basic factors of the church's missionary thrust. For this reason, it redoubles its effort with the passing of time to fulfil its mandate. In this process, the church not only lays emphasis on increased soul-winning, but is also concerned about nurturing them to maturity of faith in Christ (Matt 28:19, 20).

As a subset of a global organization, SDA Church in Omoku town, Rivers West, Nigeria is very passionate about accomplishing the gospel commission at its level (Figure I is map of Nigeria showing the location of Rivers State, while Figure 2 is map of Rivers State showing the location of Omoku town).<sup>2</sup> Hence, it endeavours to take the good news of salvation everywhere in its locality.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy J. Vyhmeister, "Who Are Seventh-day Adventists," Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, [www.nigerianstat.gov.ng](http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng), accessed on Friday, May 18, 2017, 2:44 p.m.



*Figure 1. Map of Nigeria Showing the Location of Rivers State*



*Figure 2. Map of Rivers State Showing the Location of Omoku Town*

Over the years, the missionary efforts of the church have yielded dozens of converts. The enthusiasm of the church members in doing this work is a natural response to the grace of God which brought them in contact with the truth about eternal life.

This congregation bears the light of the scriptures in a way captures existing historical findings and relevant interpretations on every subject. This properly enlightens the recipient and promotes the benefits of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Against this background, “Christian evangelism should be leading the hearers to experience a complete repentance and the joy of forgiveness of sins which otherwise could have led to eternal damnation.”<sup>3</sup> Such was the effect of the gospel message preached during the apostolic era. It is also the basic reasons for the existence of SDA Church Omoku.

Despite its adherence to the missionary standards of the Bible, and applying the soul-winning strategies of the apostles, the church has continued to lose its members every year through interfaith marriages. This occurrence is partly linked with influences from the interrelationship of SDAs with people of other Christian denominations. Therefore, the church still had much to do in the area of teaching its members the value of marriage within the fold. Had all the souls won into this church since 2011 remained faithful to their conversion vows, the church in question would have expanded beyond its present territorial coverage.

Another problem confronting the church is that of re-integrating those who have fallen away from the faith. These were classified into two categories namely: those who know they have backslidden and wish to return to the church, and those who believe it was alright to leave the church and do not wish to return.

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<sup>3</sup> Sampson M. Nwaomah, *The Church in Lucan Narratives* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Positive Press, 2012), 68.

Over the past decades the SDA Church in Rivers West area of Nigeria has experienced appreciable growth. Since the message came to the area in 1915,<sup>4</sup> the Church has steadily expanded its missionary endeavours to almost every part of the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. Presently, Rivers West Conference (RWC) is the constituent body under which, as at the time of this research, 78 organized churches and more than 80 unorganized churches operate. Furthermore, the field has at least 40 frontline Pastors who minister in the different worship centers and in various capacities.

The problem of membership loss resulting from interfaith marriage is a general experience among the sisterhood of churches under RWC. Omoku Church which is one of the biggest and frontline churches of RWC because of its large membership, and financial strength, was only used as a test case to prove that the said challenge exists and also to proffer possible solutions to the issue. Furthermore, because this congregation was one of the oldest and most influential, the researcher felt that whatever solutions are proffered to their situation could be applied to other worship centers in the field. Moreover, this church had give birth to many others who constitute its circle of influence. These sisterhood of churches still look up to their mother church for moral support and draw inspiration from her. Hence, Omoku church was considered ideal for this study.

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<sup>4</sup> Elder Edwin E. Owotor, Chairman of Rivers West Conference History Committee, interview by the author, Ahoada, June 13, 2015.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issues which gave rise to this research are the incidence of interfaith marriages in SDA Church Omoku. This had led to loss of members, and intentional plan effectively nurture and retain the members.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this in-ministry dissertation was to discover authentic reasons for interfaith marriages among members of SDA Church Omoku which led to yearly loss of some members. Further, a program for the sustainable mentoring and retention was developed, implemented and evaluated.

### **Justification**

For over decades, SDA Church Omoku has strived among other Christian groups to maintain its capacity for membership growth and retention. This characteristic was associated with the ability to develop increasing levels of responsibility and participation in church activities, possession of a clear understanding of the calling and purpose for their existence which agrees with the vision of the pioneers of the church. Since this is the first academic study on membership loss through religious mixed marriages in this church, it is an attempt to reawaken the missionary consciousness of the church and make the congregation more sensitive to the realities of fulfilling the gospel commission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Specifically, the study serves as a valuable in-reach tool for succeeding generations of family ministry leaders, youth and singles ministries departments of the church.

### **Delimitation**

To ensure an effective research into the causes of membership loss through mixed marriages, this dissertation was limited in scope to the circumstances of SDA

Church Omoku only. Because, was a congregation where cases of mixed marriages resulting in the loss of faith was experienced.

### **Description of the Dissertation Process**

During the process of this dissertation, a theological foundation was proposed from the Old and New Testaments (OT and NT) of the Holy Bible. Following this, the writings of Ellen G. White were explored for more insights on Christian marriage and church membership retention generally.

Similarly, there was a study of the writings of Protestant authors for a clearer perception on effective approaches to the issue of membership loss through mixed marriage as the phenomenon is more popularly known.<sup>5</sup> Finally, more ideas were gleaned from other books and journals dealing with the psychology of marriage and resolution of critical situations arising from interfaith marriages. By this means the researcher believed that a scholarly and biblical basis has been created for the education of church members and the practice of intra-faith marriage within the target congregation. Meanwhile, the author does not claim to have the final word on the ongoing debate because learning never ends. Actually, events determine the direction of studies at any given time in history. Yet, there is no difficulty knowing the author's opinion on the subject.

### **Expectations**

Some of the expectations of this research was that members of SDA Church Omoku would understand and appreciate the biblical teaching on marriage and order their marital interests accordingly. Through this research, Rivers West Conference

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<sup>5</sup>James H. S. Bossard et al, *One Marriage, Two Faiths: Guidance on Interfaith Marriage* (New York, NY: Ronald Press Co., 1957), 33.

would consistently maintain the global reputation of the church where membership growth, nurture and retention are concerned.

Similarly, was expected that this dissertation shall contribute to the existing milieu of knowledge. It would also be a springboard for mission expansion and fulfilment within the research context. Beyond these, the study would help to create a conducive atmosphere for contracting Christian marriages and application of strategies for the overall welfare of the families.

Additionally, the study was expected to help to increase the membership retention capabilities and opportunities of SDA Church Omoku and bring about numerical growth of both church membership and worship centers within Omoku metropolis and its neighboring communities.

Furthermore, this dissertation was expected to be a learning and maturation experience for the researcher personally. While a study of this nature was not new, church families had found themselves being helplessly carried along by the marital conventions of society at the expense of their faith. Having been bothered for years over the extent of membership loss through interfaith and also praying for the ability and opportunity to develop a support system for the family in the areas of education and vocation, the researcher perceived this project as a dream come true. At a point, the researcher found it needful to involve Pastors, elders, women and youth groups in Rivers West Conference, and especially, SDA Church Omoku, to participate in the training seminars and other meetings that were organized in the course of this research. The rationale being that they were the ones to continue with the training in the future. This created a platform for group study and exchange of ideas on family empowerment and stability of church membership.

Finally, was expected that the church membership would a experience a revival and reformation through this research. This is to happen in a way that many who had been norminal church members would not only be spiritually reawakened, but also remain active in helping others place their marital priorities right through a deep appreciation and prayerful application of the biblical principles of intra-faith marriage.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

In addition to giving a road map for the entire study, this chapter focuses on the theological foundation of intra-faith marriage. Furthermore, it examines specific themes through the dispensations of the Bible which relate to the conjugal relationship. Finally, the chapter ends with a brief examination of marital concepts in the writings of Ellen G. White and other Adventist authors.

#### **Divine Concept of Intra-faith Marriage**

The Bible account of creation implies that God intended that every couple be united in principle and purpose.<sup>1</sup> This is to be done in such a manner that marital relationship will reflect the goodness of God. The emphatic statements of the word of God on this concept indicate that marriage was made to reflect the attribute of unity of the Godhead. For example, God said: “let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). Scriptures further notes: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The account climaxes with his statements: “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man” (Gen 2:22).

The referenced passages are declarative not assumptive on the issue. It was not just about the physical appearance but also unity in the very essence of that relationship. Similarly, Christ prayed for his disciples: “that they may be one, even as

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Crago, *Couple, Family and Group Work* (England: Open University Press, 2006), 72.

we are one” (John 17:22). A secondary application of this prayer may be to the conjugal relationship. It is probable that the followers of Christ during His earthly ministry had grown far beyond the twelve whom He started with, and included not just people of different genders, but also a couple such as Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas! (John 19:26, cf. Luke 24:18).

Christ’s emphasis on oneness indicates that the characteristic of unity is expected to be a strong point for every Christian family. This kind of unity is to be functional enough to manifest and replicate itself in every aspect human existence.

### **Intra-faith Marriage through Biblical Dispensations**

To a large extent the marriage institution expressed itself through the experiences of various couples during the eras of the Bible. Since it was in God’s omniscient mind that the concept for connubial ties first originated and monogamy<sup>2</sup> being the approved pattern; the word of God speaks much about marriage. The noun, marriage and its derivatives occur at least 90 times in Scriptures signifying the importance of the union.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it is not unexpected that marriage gives credibility to family name. Consummation of the marital relationship is a deeply cultural and legal issue and preoccupies the consciousness of most individuals. For instance, by the Jewish social

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, vol 3, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London, UK: MacMillan, 1921), 2.

<sup>3</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 570.

order, the mother of Jesus had to be confirmed as the wife of Joseph in order to legitimize the birth of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The Bible account vividly describes the event:

His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child. Joseph her husband did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife (Matt 1:18-20).

Against this background, Jesus did not only identify with the Davidic family lineage as he grew into manhood, but also protected the honour of that family name (see Matt 9:27; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:38). The usage "Son of David" is a variant of the term, "Son of Man" (Luke 19:10; Jn 1:51). Both appellations not only indicate Christ's office as the Messiah-Christ, but also his lineage.<sup>5</sup> When Jesus began His earthly ministry, His positive attitude towards marriage and home making was very significant. In John 2:1, 2 the Scriptures relate that Jesus attended a marriage ceremony in Cana of Galilee. Not only did He minister to the celebrating assembly through His divine presence, He also provided wine when the earlier supply was exhausted.

The foregoing reference and others in the Bible reveals much about how divine help manifests in the affairs of families. God is said to have "staked His reputation in the world"<sup>6</sup> by establishing the marital institution. Though marriage is beset with so many challenging circumstances, especially in the present age, God is

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Edward Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1973), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Willie Oliver, *Families Reaching Out* (Silver Spring, MD: Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists: 2012), 29.

still interested in the success of each marital union. He works out modalities by which a couple can relate within favourable circumstances. The mysterious ways by which marriage partners sometimes overcome life's challenges in their homes attest to a powerful divine intervention. Because this chapter is devoted to the theological foundation of marriage, the following subsection will attempt to examine the mind of God in regard to intra-faith marriage with a view to throwing more light on the theme of the chapter.

The creation account shows that intra-faith marriage began with God.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, additional knowledge of how the institution began is essential for proper understanding of its purpose now and hereafter. For some people, such enlightenment may not matter. Yet, for a great many, it is a matter of great interest because learning is a great privilege. Every marriage begins to exist in the subconscious mind like a mystic dynamic. It eventually materializes in a visible family structure. Thereafter, it carries on the function of being the basic factor in the identity of members of that home. Whatever divergent opinions there are may be considered as points for another scholarly research.

### **Adam and Eve**

As was earlier indicated, the marriage of Adam and Eve followed the divine concept and was consummated in the garden of Eden. Quite comfortable with this pattern of conjugal bonding, Adam exclaimed upon beholding Eve: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!" (Gen 2:23, emphasis mine). This incidence further validates the uniqueness of intra-faith marriage. The first couple voluntarily

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<sup>7</sup> Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races, Christianity, Interracial Marriage and American Law* (North Carolina, NC: University of North Carolina press, 2009), 51.

returned to God after their fall when God went in search of them and found them in their hideout of dense foliage. This indicates that it is easier for a couple who share a common religious faith to overcome their differences and stay together; or return to the faith being estranged from God. In like manner, Adam and Eve encouraged their sons, Abel and Seth to maintain the family's allegiance to God regardless of the sad effects of the curse.

Scriptures also show that the Spirit of God helps maintain the bond of a couple.<sup>8</sup> This testifies to the love of God for His creation especially, marriage. The welfare of humanity was so important to God that He decided to bridge the gap of loneliness (Gen 2:18). A lonely heart struggles with emotional, and psycho-social problems. Hence, Adam needed a companion of his own kind. It was naturally designed that Adam would have a spouse in order to have a complete circle of mutually beneficial relationship alive with warmth, care and affection. In His omniscience God also saw that a normal person cannot live in the fullest sense of the word without someone with whom to share every day life. For this reason, God decided to create a suitable helper for Adam (Gen 2:18). This union is commonly viewed as the first wedding, which was conducted by God himself in the garden of Eden and also set as a standard for all time for humanity.

The marital union of Adam and Eve in Eden has been depicted even in other pleasant light such as poetry, songs, films, books and wise sayings. But God will always remain the only absolute match-maker. That is why Paul declares that marriage is an honourable estate (Heb 13:4). Its honour lies with God. Therefore, a married person is enjoying honour that only God, the creator of the marital institution can bestow. Hence, a couple must seek to please God always.

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<sup>8</sup> Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 252.

## **Rebecca and Isaac**

Probably the most outstanding example of intra-faith marriages in Scriptures is that of Isaac and Rebecca as related in Genesis 24. This event gains such recognition because Abraham demonstrated the importance of obedience to divine inspiration regarding marital bonding. Hence, he put his servant through an oath to take a wife for his son Isaac, not from the Canaanites with whom the Semites shared nothing in common both socio-culturally and religiously, but from among his own people. Marriage along blood line was permissible in those days.<sup>9</sup> One reason for it was the fewness of earth's inhabitants. Though, Rebecca was physically attractive, industrious, humble, teachable and cooperative yet, the choice of her as a wife for Isaac was mainly based on religious oneness.

## **Mary and Joseph**

The marriage engagement of Mary the mother of Jesus to Joseph the carpenter, and the subsequent consummation of that relationship may also be cited as the union of two individuals who shared the same faith (Matt 1:18-24). The account impresses upon the mind that the shared religious values of the couple created an atmosphere of mutual understanding, acceptance, humility and fidelity towards their marriage bond. The result was that their home was blessed with the presence of the incarnate Christ. He stood for best practice in every aspect of human life. It would have been unimaginable that He should partake in violating the sanctity of marriage-- one of the two most prized ordinances He instituted at creation; that is, being born to an interfaith couple.

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<sup>9</sup> Kamila Blessing, *Families of the Bible* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 22.

## **Elizabeth and Zechariah**

Another couple in Scriptures who shared the same faith is Elizabeth and Zechariah. Their story in Luke 1:6 reflects God's blessing bestowed on a couple who worship together and sustains their connection with God.<sup>10</sup>

### **Deviation from Divine Marital Ideal**

Deviation from divine counsel on marriage was viewed very seriously among pre and post exilic Jews. Such attitude was regarded both a spiritual and physical defilement. Ezra and Nehemiah are biblical books in which, the notion of defilement are used in reference to marital unions between Israelites and foreign women. The dissolution of a mixed marriage was considered a purification.<sup>11</sup> A few examples of men and women who deviated from the Adamic principle of marriage have been considered below.

## **Lamech**

From the biblical account, deviation from the Adamic tradition of marrying someone with whom one shares the same faith began Lamech (Gen 4:19). He married two wives. Though, there is an indication that God blessed him and his family regardless of his unusual matrimonial practice. Still, the spirit of disobedience to divine will continued to torment him making him turn violent (Gen 4:23, 24). Lamech's case proves the natural law that one sin leads to another.

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<sup>10</sup> Kamila Blessing, *Families of the Bible* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

## **Sons of God and the Daughters of Men**

The Scriptures also relate that the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men and displeased the Lord thereby (Gen 6:2,3<sup>a</sup>). In this reference the ‘sons of God’ are generally believed to be the godly men of the Sethite line; while the ‘daughters of men’ are thought to be the daughters of the ungodly Cainites.<sup>12</sup> These were marriages of inequality because the religious understanding and cultural orientation of both groups were dissimilar. Individuals who fit into this character profile are identifiable in today’s world and are still prone to getting bonded in marriage if not closely guided. Many members of SDA Church who are involved in Interfaith marriage attest to this. In the subtopics immediately following this, others who deviated from the principle of intra-faith marriage or endogamy are also discussed.

## **Esau and His Canaanite Wives**

Another instance of interfaith marriage between God’s people and people of a different religious inclination was that of Esau to Canaanite women. “Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan” (Gen 36:2). The word ‘took’ in this text is derived from the Hebrew word *lā·qah*, meaning, marry.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Esau contracted this marriage in rebellion against his parents whom he believed showed partiality against him in the way they handled the matter between him and Jacob.

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<sup>12</sup> Elihu A. Schats, “Sons of Elokim as Used in Genesis,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol 36, Issue 6, Jerusalem: Jewish Bible Association, April (2008): 125.

<sup>13</sup> P. H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 13.

## **Sampson**

Making interfaith marriage alliances was a tradition in the life of Sampson. Some of his relationships recorded in Scriptures include the lady of Timnah (Judges 14:10), the prostitute in Gaza (Judges 16:1) and Delilah (Judges 16:4). Even though there is a clause in the account that through Sampson's action God was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistians, the effect of the former's marital activities shows that he was walking in disobedience against God.

## **Solomon**

King Solomon was another Bible character whose profile was outstanding for interfaith marital relationships. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1Kings 11:3). One can deduce from the account of Solomon's marriage adventures that more than ninety percent of his wives belonged to religions other than that of Israel. Hence, he was led astray (1 Kings 11:4).

## **Ahab**

Among the characters who practiced mixed marriage in Scripture, King Ahab considered it something pleasurable live that way. However, he lived with the consequence of that relationship till his end. The account says "he took for a wife Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and served Baal and worshiped him" (1Kings 16:31).

## **Exceptions to Interfaith Marriage**

In both the Old and New Testaments, there are a few exceptions to the instruction against interfaith marriage. An instance is marriage to captive women. As long as the prescribed rituals were performed, a Hebrew man could marry a woman

gotten as a booty from war (Duet 21:10-13 NLT). Other exceptions are considered below:

### **Joseph and Asenath**

The marriage of Joseph to Asenath, a heathen girl, was also an exception to the divine rule against interfaith marriage between the Israelites and other people. “And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphenath-Paneah and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife” (Gen 41:45 AMP).

Apparently, Joseph had very little choice in that marital arrangement. It was difficult for him to reject the royal gift of a wife. His marriage to the maiden seemed prerequisite to his accession to the exalted office. Furthermore, Joseph was a slave and could only turn down the king’s offer at the risk of estrangement from the royal family. With a new name and wife, he was to become a bona fide Egyptian and permanently assimilated into the religion and culture of the kingdom. In this way. However, the Bible was silent as to whether God disapproved of this relationship or not. Joseph’s testimony as reflected in the name of Ephraim, his second son, which means, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” that God actually blessed his marriage.

### **Moses and Zipporah**

The story of Moses is one of the most compelling accounts of multiculturalism in the Bible. His inclusive way of life extended to marital interests. “Moses was born a Hebrew, raised as an Egyptian, and married as a Midianite (Exod 2:21).<sup>14</sup> Yet, it was a relationship that received divine approval. After his marriage had been

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara Johnson, *Moses and Multiculturalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

consummated, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exod 2:2), and declared His intention to send him to Egypt to deliverer of the children of Israel. Probably the circumstances in which Moses found himself in Midian, and also at the point of his call to the office of Israel's deliverer, did not give room for the choice of a Hebrew wife as it should have been. It could be said that God understood the plight of Moses and did not press the matter.

### **Esther and King Xerxes**

Scriptures present another vivid picture of exception to interfaith marriage in the event of Esther's marriage to King Xerxes. Not only did her uncle a devout Jew play a vital role in the choice of his niece as Queen, but the story also presents God as controlling the entire process leading to the emergence of Esther as the King's bride.

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti (Esth 1:7).

From this account, it could be deduced that wherever God permits such intermarriage, He has a special purpose to accomplish. Just like Joseph and Moses, Esther was going to be instrumental to the deliverance of the Jews from the murderous designs of the wicked Haman.

### **Boaz and Ruth**

The story of Ruth indicates that she hailed from Moab, a predominantly animistic nation with whom God did not want His people to intermarry. Still, the Lord approved the marital union of Boaz,<sup>15</sup> an Israelite and Ruth a Moabitess as shown in

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<sup>15</sup> Peter S. Hawkings, ed., *Scrolls of Love: Reading Ruth and the Song of Songs* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 59.

the following passage, “So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son” (Ruth 4:13).

### **God’s Reaction against Interfaith Marriage**

In view of the corrupted religious, social and political disposition of the Palestinian nations, God expressly warns His people not to intermarry with them. Israelites were not to give their daughters to the sons of their heathen neighbours nor take their daughters as wives for their sons. Because, the heathens will turn the Israelites away from following God to serve their gods. In this way, the Lord's anger will burn against the Israelites and will speedily consume them (Deut 7:3, 4).

The theological motif for instructing the children of Israel against interfaith marriage could have been derived from the principles expressed in the Shema: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength” (Deut 6:4, 5). This presupposes that whatever was capable of turning the people away from their avowed allegiance to the one true God was not to be encouraged or practiced.<sup>16</sup>

### **Pauline Counsel on Interfaith Marriage**

Another exception to the norm against interfaith marriage is found in Paul’s analogy of the conjugal relationship of a believer and unbeliever (1 Cor 7:12-14, NLT). This is a special case towards which Paul counsels a tolerant spirit. In the case of a man becoming a Christian, or decides to join a denomination different from his family’s faith, yet, his wife is not convinced to join him at that point in time, Paul counsels that the man and the church should respect the woman’s wishes. Such a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 2.

couple are not to be divorced on account of that difference in their religious understanding so long as they wish to live together. There is no question of compromise here. Rather, spiritual and socio-psychological considerations have been brought to bear on the issue.

### **Christ's Teaching on the Marriage Institution**

Christ's teaching on marriage shows that every normal person may get married. Though marriage is not compulsory, it is important for the fulfilment of life's purposes.

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator “made Them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?” (Matt 19:4-5 cf., Mark 10:6, 7, 8).

Perhaps, an exception to this rule of everyone getting married applies to three categories of people mainly: eunuchs, those made eunuchs by their fellow human beings, and those who by themselves chose to live like eunuchs (Matt 19:11, 12). A eunuch is a castrated male human being.<sup>17</sup> Those who chose to live like eunuchs believe that bodily mortification is necessary for spiritual growth. However, the word eunuch is used generically in this context to characterize members of different sectarian bodies who submit to observances that prevent them from raising a family through conventional marriage.

Christ's teaching indicates his full support for marriage. While speaking on the virtue of humility (Luke 14:8-11), He alludes to a wedding feast. Furthermore, as he taught about the Second Advent, Christ allegorically uses virgins in a bridal party

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence T. Lorimer, et al., *The New Webster's Dictionary of English Language, International Edition* (New York: Lexicon Publications, 1995), 325.

(Matt 25:1-6) to represent those who profess the pure faith of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Christ effectively demonstrates a positive attitude towards marriage though he did not get married himself; perhaps because marriage is made for earthly beings. The circumstances of earthly life requires the companionship of a spouse but, this is not the case with heavenly beings.

### **Conjugal Relationship between a Christian and a Non-Christian**

From a macro point of view, marriage between a Christian and someone from a different religion is an example of mixed marriage. Also in a micro sense, marriage between Christians from different Christian denominations can also be considered a mixed marriage. Most Christians object to the choice of a spouse from another Christian church due to different worldviews in theology, doctrine and liturgy.

Mixed marriage has both religious and socio-cultural implications. The polemics on this subject is as varied as the difficulties it poses both to theologians and individuals. The Scriptures consider mixed marriage as a paradigm shift from the Edenic example to a more convenient tradition. The expression “the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose” (Gen 6:2), underscores the first divine aversion towards intermarriage between God’s people i.e. those who live in obedience to the revealed will of God and those who do not.<sup>19</sup> The New Testament more explicitly speaks on this. It remarks that believing “Jesus is the Christ ... is how we know that we love ... God: by loving God and carrying out his commands” (1 John 5:1-3). This means that a person who does not

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Nichol, ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1980), 508.

<sup>19</sup> Tokumboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alife Publishers, 2006), 20.

fulfil this criteria is not a Christian. Paul also decries any affinities that is capable of corrupting a believer in the following statement, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). Though this text is not particularly speaking about marriage, it expresses the risk factors inherent in making a wrong choice thereof.

A Christian who marries a non-Christian is also caught up in a clash of cultures. Religion and culture are aspects of social life. Experience has shown that the attempt to fuse together widely differing social orders through marriage have often produced a relationship of inequalities. In every age, marriage plays a vital role in the continuity of God’s covenant. Hence, ordering one’s marital interests in line with God’s ideals is a way of identifying with his everlasting covenant.

### **Divorce and Remarriage as a Factor of Interfaith Marriage**

Divorce is a serious concern in Scriptures. Experience has shown that it is one of the factors behind interfaith marriage. An individual who had a bad marital experience sometimes dislikes anyone who is of the same faith as the offender. If such a relationship crashes, the offended may go out of the way to marry someone of a different religion.

The word divorce occurs 18 times in the Bible. In each instance there is an indication of divine disapproval of bringing a permanent end to a properly consummated marriage. The only exception to this rule is divorce that is based on Bible injunction. Aside from this, God intended that marriage should be for permanence.<sup>20</sup> His purpose is fulfilled in a happy marital relationship among his

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<sup>20</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2006), 102.

people.<sup>21</sup> Since marriage is a life-long affair, the only grounds for divorce are those espoused by Christ and Paul.<sup>22</sup>

Christ said: “anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress” (Matt 5:32). Additionally, the Bible indicate that divorce is also allowed in a case of abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. Paul confirms these in the statement: “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances” (1Cor. 7:15). This presents the following assumptions: 1. There is no basis for divorce other than what is biblically allowed. 2. Remarriage is permissible only for individuals in the aforementioned circumstances and; 3. a couple who do not share the same faith are not expected to get married.

Similar to this, remarriage is another issue that calls for close attention. Some of the Bible passages which have been examined under this subsection and more have solemn implications on remarriage. On the basis of such concerns it is understandable that remarriage often has far-reaching consequences for the parties involved. Remarriage has direct spiritual and social effects on those involved. Jesus declares, “anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery,” (Matt 5:32). This means that even the remarriage of a divorced woman must follow a biblically prescribed procedure in order for it to be a valid undertaking.

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 49.

<sup>22</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 18th Edition* (Hagers Town, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2010), 152.

Several remarriages outside of biblically approved divorce has been termed ‘serial polygamy’<sup>23</sup> because in each event, two women bear a man’s name as his wives and vice versa. It is an arrangement that works against the human psyche. The totality of unbiblical remarriage reveals that it involves three individuals who are caught in an evil web. They are more or less acting a script not written by God. Their roles are those of the displaced, the manipulator and the infiltrator. The middle person who is the manipulator uses both the displaced and the infiltrator (the third party) as mere chattels. The infiltrator appears to be the favoured one in the drama. Nonetheless, both the third party and the displaced spouse are pawns in the hands of the manipulator.

### **The Role of Religion in the Marriage Covenant**

The Holy Writ is clear on the fact that reverence for God is fundamental to the success of the marriage covenant. It is through worship that a couple expresses the extent of their regard for God. The right relationship with God creates a conducive atmosphere for the maximization of marital values. Marriage is a fusion of two different humans lives. Therefore, it requires a high degree of spiritual guidance which God alone can effectively provide.

Accordingly, examples abound in Scriptures about those who sought divine guidance as they planned for marriage and the positive effect of that surrender to God. A case in point is the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca as recorded in Genesis 24. Unlike plants and animals whose association is not always mutually beneficial, a

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<sup>23</sup> Raoul Dederen, ed., et al., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hgerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 737.

married couple is expected to enjoy a symbiotic relationship that will lead into a deeper experience of the saving grace of God.

Religion often influence culture. History records instances where people have changed their socio-cultural orientation as a result of the religion they imbibed later in life. A person's religion also determines that person's pattern of worship. As a result of their religious understanding, some people worship quietly, some worship noisily with high-sounding musical instruments, while others revere images. The mantra that keeps many connected to the deity they devote themselves to is a weird chant or oration that produces unnatural atmosphere around them. Besides these, each religion approves certain foods for its adherents which may not meet the satisfaction of their spouses. Therefore, it is always difficult for two religions to coexist side by side in a home. The intricacies of interfaith marriage moved White to declare, "Never should God's people venture upon forbidden ground. Marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God."<sup>24</sup>

It cannot be overemphasized that the understanding of marriage is as diverse as there are many races of people and religions on earth. Yet, the machinery of marriage functions on the same fundamental principles of love, exclusiveness, sharing and caring. The conjugal relationship is deep and affective in nature. Hence, marriage affirms and fulfils itself through a mutually beneficial, goal-oriented partnership.

Most people only develop the right consciousness about marriage when they get married. Until then, marriage is nothing more than loving someone, sharing one's life with that person and raising children together. However, experience has shown that such a simplistic notion lacks much substance and reduces the marital ties to an

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<sup>24</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 500.

enterprise of little value. The family circle has been reduced in many instances to just what social conventions make of it. Yet, marriage remains the basic context for the development of human character and personality.<sup>25</sup>

The Greek word *gamos* and the Hebrew *ba'al* used in the OT and NT respectively express the degree of responsiveness of the Semitic inhabitants of the area Southwest of Asia between the Jordan River and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea to both the social and spiritual demands of the marriage institution. Hence, the cultural and spiritual tenor of Isaac's marriage in Genesis 24 represents the high marital ideals of the OT. In the same way, the marriage ceremony attended by Christ in Cana of Galilee and the parable of the ten virgins in Luke 15 indirectly signify the extent to which marriage was esteemed in the NT dispensation.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, in dealing with the phenomenon of marriage and home building, White adds much insights to biblical concepts. In her analogy, she demonstrated the power of intuition over the subject of marriage. Even situations which are often glossed over, such as the role of religion, that in the end have far-reaching effect on marriage and home-building, did not escape her attention. She wrote on a number of marriage themes which have been considered in this chapter. Among the subjects she examines is the origin of marriage in the garden of Eden.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1893), 161.

<sup>26</sup> S. R. Howard, "Jewish Christians and Jewish culture" *Ministry Magazine* (Silver Spring, MD: 1995), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Despo Kritsotaki, *Oxford Journal*, "Mental Hygiene and Child Guidance in Post-war Greece: The Case of the Centre for Mental Health and Research, 1956–1970" (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10.

Parenting and child guidance also play a prominent role in Mrs. Whites thesis on marriage. She identifies children as a gift from God in affirmation of the words of Psalms 127:3 which says: “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him”. Similarly, it is observed that mental health is a product of child guidance.<sup>28</sup> These are a few of the benefits of effective parenting.

### **Summary**

This chapter has endeavoured to establish a theological basis for the issues at stake. Due to varied experiences people have from a broad-based study such as marriage, and the manner in which such pressure influence their lives, they came up with new concepts about marriage and home building. For instance, many who earlier practiced interfaith marriage, or witnessed its disadvantages are realizing the value of intra-faith marriage and are either turning away from mixed marriage or encouraging others to assent to the new cultural trend of endogamous marriage. It is for this reason that the philosophical foundation of Christian marriage as articulated herein is not exhaustive, yet it provides a compass by which to find a stronger Christocentric basis for intra-faith marriage. The ideas which are brought to bear on the subject matter have been presented in such a manner as to lead to reasoning from cause to effect, and perhaps make for further enquiry on the most controversial points of emphasis.

The various marital dispensations of the Bible which were examined in this chapter shows beyond reasonable doubt that, not only has the marriage institution originated from God, it remains honoured by him. The Judeo-Christian history also

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<sup>28</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 44.

confirms that marriage played a significant role in the development of an individual and the larger society.<sup>22</sup>

The next chapter deals with literature review. It is an effort to find a solid academic basis for the subject of intra-faith marriage vis-à-vis interfaith marriage from two dispensations: (a) seminal, and (2) contemporaneous writings. The author assumes that interacting with scholars on this subject matter will provide a clearer viewpoint from which to approach the question of membership stability in SDA Church Omoku by means of intra-faith marriage.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A greater part of relevant literatures which forms the foundation of the entire study has been reviewed in this chapter. Such materials cut across learned books, journals, magazines and newspaper articles. They all throw light on the intricacies of interfaith marriage and express the values of intra-faith marriage. However, the chapter begins with an overview of certain important considerations arising from contemporary Christian marriage.

#### **Context for Literature Review**

The direction of literature review is marital health based on proper religious incentives.<sup>1</sup> Nuptial bonding is an important and interesting subject. Its importance lies in the question of being the bedrock of every society. On the other hand, it arouses curiosity because it is dynamic. Little wonder why scholars do not take matrimonial issues for granted. Very often studies on marriage follow a systemic approach to make room for practicable solutions. No research covers all the concerns of a particular conjugal context because the components of marriage are as varied as the multiple questions it generates. Therefore, when nuptial matters become complicated, the solution emanates from a higher capacity of ‘emotional and/or

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<sup>1</sup> Don S. Browning, “The Language of Health Versus the Language of Religion: Competing Models of Marriage for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Revitalizing the Institution of Marriage for the Twenty-First Century*, Alan J. Hawkins, et al. (Westpoint, CT: Praeger, 2002), 29.

aesthetic response.’<sup>2</sup> Such remedy usually, apply to the psychological, sociological and spiritual essence of personality.

Against this background, far reaching analogies will continue to bear on the marital institution. Perhaps there is only half as much written materials as there should be on the marital institution. However, what appears to have been misdirected is the conceptual framework upon which some nuptial systems are built which contrast significantly with the key issue being addressed in this research. On the other hand, there are authors whose line of thought is in harmony with the intent of this study.

In order to establish a balanced viewpoint, such differences will be examined in this chapter. It is equally noteworthy that the context for literature review in this study is that non-traditional and post-modern observers are at crossroads over the realities and acceptable form of marriage. The reactions of both schools of thought require objective examination to determine what is applicable and what is not so far as marriage within the faith community is concerned.

### **Opinions of Religious Groups on Interfaith Marriage**

At this point it is important to consider a number of representative views on the issue of interfaith marriage. This opinion poll may serve as a window to the heart of leading religious bodies on the issue at stake. Foremost among religious groups to be considered is Judaism. They believe that people practice interfaith marriage in order to "conform to religious rules and traditions ... for reasons having to do with family and self rather than God."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Catholic position on interfaith marriage is

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<sup>2</sup> Kelly E. Cichy, et al., "A Double-Edged Sword: Race, Daily Family Support Exchanges, and Daily Well-Being" in *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 35, November 11 (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2014), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

significant to this study because of her global membership of over 1 billion.<sup>4</sup> What appears to be the personal opinion of Catholic scholar indicates that contemporary marriage has assumed a shift from the traditional biblical model to a more conventional trend.<sup>5</sup> To this writer and his colleagues, what meets the fancies of the masses should be the most encouraged. By this assumption, the author projects cross-cultural marriage style as pivotal to the fulfilment of societal interests, and perhaps those of frontline religious groups.

However, the question of mixed marriage showcasing a new perspective in the cross-fertilisation of ideas is an after effect of postmodernism. Every notion is measured by its value. Therefore, if the basic aim of mixed marriage is to try something new, it becomes irrelevant to the essence of the marriage covenant and future of the society.

On a different note, another author from the Catholic communion refers to the Papacy as having opposed the practice of interfaith marital unions early in time. Pope Innocent III particularly, was cited as having promulgated two decrees expressing the church's displeasure against sexual union between Christians and Muslims specifically. Nonetheless, the Baptists share in a slightly modified view of intra-faith marriage. They believe that as generations come and go, considerations about this form of marital union has grown quite insignificant. Personal attitudes toward specific issues or things in general are developing rapidly, often into something more complex or advanced. Students who are mostly the transmission link for such change scarcely

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Hyland, "Number of Catholics at Record High, Despite Lowest Percentage Ever – CSO" *The Journal.ie* (Dublin, United Kingdom: Journal Media Ltd., 2016), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Flake, *The Emotional and Priestly Logic of Plural Marriage* (Logan, UT: Utah State University, 2010), 9.

believe that any hardline on marriage relationship is necessary for this age. The Baptists contend that students “attend multi-faith, multicultural, multiracial schools”<sup>6</sup> and, are perhaps excited about the resultant exchange of orientation.<sup>7</sup> If this submission is anything to go by, the possibility of an existence without direction on the part of the said younger generation cannot be ruled out. Yet, someone else may view the foregoing position as more of an obsession than what is real to human nature.

Furthermore, the view of the Mormons regarding interfaith marriage differs significantly from the Baptist worldview. Mormonism posits that a couple who came together from different faith circles are less likely to find lasting satisfaction in their marriage.<sup>8</sup> The rationale is that interfaith marriage is practicable, but the general outcome may not be as exciting as it seems at the onset. Curiously, the Methodist takes a middle ground in the debate. In an official statements issued by the Baptist Convention, the question of consummating conjugal ties between a couple of different religious backgrounds is left to the conviction and dictate of a minister and the local parish.<sup>9</sup>

Such a passive stance could pose more difficulties than taking a definite position on the matter. The challenge about it is that the reputation of the church is at

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<sup>6</sup> Fr. Marius Cisternino, *The proverbs of Kigezi and Ankole* (Kampala, Uganda: Comboni Missionaries, 1987), 348.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Bossard et al., *One Marriage, Two Faiths* (New York, NY: Ronald Press Co, 1957). 33.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Camp, Ken, “Navigating interfaith marriage” *The Baptist Standard*, February 7 (Dallas, TX: Baptist Standard Publishing, 2014), 23.

stake. As the defenders and upholders of good morals, the church cannot play a passive role in such a sensitive issue. On one hand, the church will take credit for the success of intra-faith marriages among its parishioners. But if the reverse is the case, the church is to blame. In this consideration, it is pertinent to note that African Traditional Religion (ATR) lends itself to a mythology of transmission of life through marriage.<sup>10</sup> The understanding is that the stream of life flows from age to age through successive marriages and childbearing. To achieve this, choice of a spouse is not restricted to one's tribe. A man, for instance, can choose a wife, or wives from anywhere, and from any religious group, provided such marriages will result in the birth of children.<sup>11</sup> Hence, ATR not only favours multiple partner practicing other faith continues to live in the marital bond with the Christian partner, he or she is living within God's holy intervention for marriage."<sup>12</sup> From this standpoint, interfaith marriage should be encouraged and upheld as a divine instrument for the positive transformation of a faulty marital union. Another author also shares the same viewpoint. In his opinion, Paul was optimistic about mixed marriages. His discourse in 1 Corinthians 7:14 is supposedly a support for interfaith marriage.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, Paul was only referring to a couple who were already married before the conversion of one of them to Christianity. His counsel cannot be presented in favour

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Ogola et al., *Cardinal Otunga: A Gift of Grace* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1999), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: St Paul Publications-Africa, 1992), 120.

<sup>12</sup> William S. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday,

<sup>13</sup> John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 163.

of interfaith marriage. This author also argues that the acceptability of interfaith marriage is a function of one party in a marriage contract upholding the faith regardless of the defection of the other to a different faith. However, many other groups and scholars contend against interfaith marriage. One of such commentators declare that intermarriage of individuals from different cultural groups is “marriage assimilation” and is a subset of “structural assimilation.” This subsequently leads to acculturation. The perception is that the consequence of such integration is disappearance of the group with the lesser influence, and the evaporation of its distinctive qualities and values.<sup>14</sup>

In 306 A. D. the Catholic Synod of Elvira banned marriages, sexual intercourse and community contacts between Christians and Jews. Although this might be viewed as Classical Christian Anti-Semitism, yet in a remarkable way, it reflects the reservation of the early church towards mixed marriage.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, studies show that “a third of all evangelicals’ marriages end in divorce, that figure climbs to nearly half of marriages between evangelicals and non-evangelicals.”<sup>16</sup> Like many other religious groups, Jews discourage intermarriage of a Jew and Non-Jew. Aside from the strict observances of the former, socio-cultural differences makes it difficult for a Jewish spouse to be compatible with a gentile.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon, Milton M., *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1964), 81.

<sup>15</sup> David Matas, *Aftershock: Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism* (Toronto, Canada: Dundurn, 2005), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Till Faith Do Us Part* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

## Early Church Fathers

During the post apostolic era, one of the earliest individuals to articulate ideas on Christian virtue was Augustine of Hippo. He was born in Tagaste, North Africa (modern day Algeria). Augustine was the product of an interfaith marriage. His mother St. Monica was a Christian while his father Patricius was a pagan. Augustine did not expressly make declarations in favour of intra-faith marriage, yet his marriage to a fellow Catholic<sup>18</sup> speaks volumes of his convictions about intra-faith marriage and his support for that form of marriage.

Another individual who reacted against the changing value system in the early Christian church was St. Clement of Alexandria. He spoke of marriage as co-operation between a couple.<sup>19</sup> Such mutuality transcends the social and physical boundaries of marriage. It leads to a harmonious implementation of the basic elements of a couple's religious culture. Clement believed that one of the ways in which a marital union expresses itself is through worship. Unity in worship leads to the development of other virtues in marriage aside from permanence which is a life-long expectation.

In support of the foregoing, Origen, a disciple of St. Augustine saw in marriage a mutual giving.<sup>20</sup> To him, mental, physical, social and spiritual consensus is the benchmark of a true Christian marriage. Origen reflected on Christian marriage as

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine Confessions (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>19</sup> William Wilson, ed., From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2. (Buffalo, NY: Lionel

<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 27.

typical of the unity between Christ and His Church.<sup>21</sup> In context of the Parousia, and as a prototype of Christian marriage, espousal of the earthly Church to Christ is expressed in the apocalyptic vision: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev 21:2 NIV).

As earlier stated, the post apostolic Church had a strong aversion to the marriage of a Christian to people of a different religious conviction. To the church fathers, mutual agreement in all respects is the essential fabric of a conjugal bond. Compared with the trendy nature of mixed marriage in the twenty first century, the values upheld by the combined fora of the apostles and church fathers reveals that marriage is now faced with a more difficult situation than ever before.

In the same manner, Polycarp was another church father who disapproved of interfaith marriage. As Bishop of Smyrna,<sup>22</sup> he was a student of the apostle John and applied the truth he learnt to his personal life and ministry. He was branded a heretic and martyred in Asia Minor for insisting that the Bible alone is the rule of the Christian faith. He was a strong proponent of intra-faith marriage.

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<sup>21</sup> Christine A. Bachrach, “The Changing Circumstances of Marriage and Fertility in the United States” *Welfare, the Family and Reproductive Behavior* in Robert Moffitt, ed. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998), 9-32.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril Charles Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1953), 121.

## Contemporary Scholars

It is noted in learned circles that interfaith marriage often has serious concerns with such variables as “satisfaction or adjustment and marital stability.”<sup>23</sup> From the Muslim background, it has been stressed that even the Islamic legal system as interpreted by the Sharia Law stresses intra-faith marriage, not only in a normative sense, but also as an expression of personal commitment to the tenets of the religion.<sup>24</sup> What may be viewed as a radical turn in the debate is the consideration of a nuptial connection between a Muslim lady and a Christian man based on the criterion of the absence of forcible conversion to another religion.<sup>25</sup> Such a cause could be accepted in favour of religious tolerance. Moreover, it is believed that inter-religious coupling could be an operational device for the formation of diplomatic ties.<sup>26</sup> Still, from a different perspective, a Jewish scholar argues that marital union with a non-Jew may not necessarily mark the end personal commitment to the values of one’s faith.<sup>27</sup> To this school of thought, interfaith marriage is not wholly injurious to faith.

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<sup>23</sup> Larry R. Peterson, “Interfaith Marriage and Religious Commitment Among Catholics,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 48, No. 4. (1986), 725.

<sup>24</sup> Alex B. Leeman, “Interfaith Marriage in Islam: A Examination of the Legal Theory Behind the Traditional and Reformist Positions” *Indiana Law Journal*, Vol. 84, Issue 2 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2009), 474.

<sup>25</sup> Md. Zahidul Islam, “Interfaith Marriage in Islam and Present Situation,” *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, Vol. 2, No.1 (European Centre for Research Training and Development: UK, 2014), 36-47.

<sup>26</sup> Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines* (Philadelphia, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Jaffe McClain, *Embracing the Stranger* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995), 152.

However, another study points out that affiliation along religious lines, by whatever means, results in the loss of adherents to the stronger system of worship.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, through a research that spanned over a decade, the researcher and his team came to the conclusion that couples belonging to different religious faiths usually experience adjustment difficulties.<sup>29</sup> Given this situation, a newspaper publication which stresses that mixed marriage gives room for conflict and compromise<sup>30</sup> evoked much fear in the minds of readers. In this light, the present trend of multiculturalism<sup>31</sup> adopted by many Christian churches tends to make fulfillment of the gospel missions a tasking endeavour in the sense that converts are easily lost to other religions through mixed marriages. This point is reinforced by the opinion that the changing culture of the new generation<sup>32</sup> has adversely affected the mission of the Christian church to the world. In a remarkable way, such stalemate could be resolved by proper marriages.

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<sup>28</sup> David A. Roozen, "A Framework for Understanding Congregational Affiliation: Suggestions from Research within the Christian Tradition," *Church and Synagogue Affiliation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>29</sup> James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stoker Boll, *One Marriage, Two Faiths: Guidance on Interfaith Marriage* (New York, NY: Ronald Press Co., 1957), 101.

<sup>30</sup> Gee and Pat, "Openness Fortified Interfaith Marriage" *Honolulu Star*, December 15 (Oahu Publications, 2012), 21.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory A. Crawford, "Religion and American Cultures: Tradition, Diversity, and Popular Expression," *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2015).

<sup>32</sup> André F. Droogers, "Changing Culture and the Missiological Mission," *Fulness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 59.

## The Seventh-day Adventists

Efforts to find extant documents on Intra-Faith Marriages among SDA Pioneers proved completely unsuccessful. Hence, the author has no information from the earliest members of the church on the subject. Probably, interfaith marriage was not an area of contention at that time and did not draw a wide attention. The only information that may pass for a discourse on the issue are the counsels of Mrs. White regarding the need for Christians to maintain the sanctity of the marital relationship by avoiding intimacy of any sort with those who are averse to the faith of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scriptures.

For the most part, what has been presented here are comments from contemporary Adventist writers. At the moment these may be considered a fair representation of the opinion of Adventists on intra-faith marriage.

For whatever reason, I've found that when half-Adventist marriages are on the rocks, the Adventist half often identifies faith as the reason, in situations where there are clearly larger personality difficulties. So although I know some happy interfaith couples of other faiths, I agree with our church manual that we Seventh-day Adventists are not especially equipped for interfaith marriage.<sup>33</sup>

It is noteworthy that some Adventists assume a middle position on the interfaith marriage debate. Such individuals believe that refusal to wed an Adventist with a non-Adventist "is religious bigotry."<sup>34</sup> They however fail to realize that the theocentric understanding of the church obliges her to fulfill a divine mandate that is embedded in the Holy Scriptures and devoid of personal sentiments. Beyond this is

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<sup>33</sup> Loren Sebold, "Adventist and Interfaith Weddings", *Spectrum* (Silver Springs, MD: 2009), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Jack Robinson, "To Wed or Not to Wed ... That Is the Question," Unpublished Manuscript, February, 1994, 10.

the question of a feminist Adventist who would champion the cause of same-sex union and still claim to be spiritual, and called by God to enlighten the church in regard to conventional family structures.<sup>35</sup> The fact is that each individual is entitled to a personal opinion on an issue of interest. However, well-intentioned such feelings may be, they cannot change the clear standards of the word of God.

However, what is more importance in this aspect of the study is the mission trust of the church which is clearly explained by its policy withing the framework of marriage and family life. This concerns led the church to declare that Adventist Ministers should not perform the marriage ceremony of Adventists with non-Adventists.”<sup>36</sup> Although, much later the intensity of this statement was somewhat toned down by the words: “Strongly urge Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings.”<sup>37</sup> In affirmation of this stand, it is further stated that:

Marrying outside the Seventh-day Adventist faith is discouraged by the church, for some very good reasons. It is difficult enough for people of two other faiths who marry, to experience the full unity and harmony that married people should have. One or the other must usually yield his or her beliefs, unless both are not very committed to their faith...we believe that we are not just another church among many, but we have been called by God to be His remnant, taking his last message of warning to the world. What could be more important than that?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lin Ennis, “Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality,” *In Our Own Words*, eds., Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, CA: Adventist Women’s Institute, 1993), 229.

<sup>36</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual* (Silver Springs, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 246.

<sup>37</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook* (Silver Springs, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997), 261.

<sup>38</sup> William Fagal, Director, Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, USA. Interviewed by Dr. Theodore Dickson, Babcock University, Tuesday, December 20, 2016.

Still, other Adventist writers express their convictions regarding the theological validity of the origin of marriage and human sexuality in the narrative of the first two chapters of Genesis.<sup>39</sup>

In support of this concept, reference is made to the Genesis account, which in a considerable way authenticates the biblical theology of marital relationship. This is because all creation was declared ‘good’ by God during the creation week.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, some basic assumptions have been made by various interest groups within the Adventist movement in respect of interfaith marriage and the advantages which intra-faith marriage has over it. While such insights might not be wholly representative of the opinion of the church on the issue at stake, they shed an amount of light on the church’s position in the matter. Characteristically, SDA Church is another denomination that is concerned about fostering biblical marriage. A conservative SDA writer does not mince words in expressing the conviction that the marital pattern of Adam and Eve (Gen 1:27, 28; 2:18, 21-24), remains a model for Christians.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Ethical Issues*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 165.

<sup>40</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 (Spring 1988), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ron Du Preez, “The God-Given Marital Mandate: Monogamous, Heterosexual, Intra-faith” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Theological Society Publications, 2000), 23-40.

Following the theological doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*,<sup>42</sup> the church refers to the marriage of Adam and Eve as the orthodox model of Christian marriage.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, White gives more counsels that provide inspired basis for articulating doctrinal ethics on marriage. She admonishes against marriage to an individual with whom one does not share a common understanding of the word of God and for that matter, a harmonious devotional life. Drawing from her personal marital experience, and years of marriage counselling, marriages not contracted in line with acceptable standards, she expresses the conviction that marriage is better off when it is done in harmony with the will of God. She suggests that an Adventist Christian who receives a marriage proposal from a non-Adventist should humbly turn down giving appropriate reasons for that action.<sup>44</sup>

As earlier noted Adventist Pastors are urged not to join a member of the church and a spouse of another faith in marriage.<sup>45</sup> While this may not be viewed as a conjugal credo of the church, it could serve as a logical basis for the formation of appropriate marriage alliances. The inspired writer believes that it is better to please God in marriage than surrender to the pressures of personal desire and lose one's connection with heaven.

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<sup>42</sup> Joel R, Beeke et al., *Sola Scriptura* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2009), 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Nampa-Idaho, USA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2015), 7.

<sup>44</sup> White, *Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 67.

<sup>45</sup> J. David Newman, "Marrying Non-Adventists" *Ministry* (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994), 5.

Further to her position on endogamy or marrying within one's own group, SDA Church believes that the need to obey God's instructions should be foremost of any motivation to act as far as marital interests are concerned.<sup>46</sup> Following this, the consciousness of differentiation in "factors such as age, education, class or culture"<sup>47</sup> are key considerations in conjugal decision making.

Another understanding which supports the church's position on intra-faith marriage is the incidence of contradictory opinions on worship and social life. These pose a great challenge to unity of principle and purpose. Often, the incompatibility of a couple resulting from religious disharmony is strengthened by issues which revolve around the role of a significant other in the areas of "courtship, engagement patterns, family finances, diet, dress, recreation and even beliefs concerning death, burial and the afterlife."<sup>48</sup>

Though, it is becoming a trend not to investigate too deeply into the profile of a prospective spouse, or be too particular about religious differences. Conventionally, mutual agreement; and on a secondary level, love are the basic requirements for a marital union. However, trends in dysfunctional family life indicate that due consideration are not take the place of numerous variables by couples who are victims of that situation.

Because many families understand the risk factors in exogamous marriage, they are giving it very serious thought. As the value-based lifestyle continues to be imbibed by many across the world, people are increasingly avoiding situations that

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<sup>46</sup> Fagal, Tuesday, December 20, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin B. Rock, "Marriage and Family" *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 728.

<sup>48</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 46-48.

would not guarantee their future happiness. It is believed that the increase of divorce among some people groups mostly results from their hesitant attitude towards intra-faith marital union. Ellen White as one the most outstanding figures among SDAs was careful to fulfil divine will in her choice of a spouse of the same faith and remains a model in this regard.<sup>49</sup> The next section examines some of her declarations about the issue under consideration.

### **Ellen G. White**

Ellen White makes very strong points regarding the emergencies that arise from interfaith marriage against the conveniences found in intra-faith marriage as God's ideal for His people. She submits that marriage and the Sabbath are institutions whose values complement each other. The institution of the family and Sabbath at creation speaks volumes about the requirements of marriage within the faith circle. The various covenantal landmarks with which God conditioned human existence from creation are all critical to the success of marriage. These include, time (Gen 1:14), procreation (Gen 1:28<sup>a</sup>), dominion (Gen 1:28<sup>b</sup>), and the Sabbath (Gen 2:2,3). Effective matrimony may never be practiced to the exclusion of these ordinances.

Through Israel's experience at Baal Peor, White shows that interfaith marriage was the most effective way by which Satan through the apostate prophet Balaam could pitch God against them and bring about their destruction.<sup>50</sup>

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual Immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to Their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor (Num 25:1-3).

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<sup>49</sup> Gerald Wheeler, *James White, Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003), 40.

<sup>50</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing unAssociation, 1958), 451.

Even in this generation, too many Adventists have placed themselves at spiritual risk through affinities similar to the Baal Peor situation. Unfortunately, many those involved do not care about the consequences of their action. White posits that this is an outworking of the will of the devil upon the heart of the un-consecrated:

There is in the Christian circle a surprising, almost alarming lack of regard towards the teaching of God's word in regard to the marriage of Christians with unbelievers. Many who profess to love and fear God choose to follow the bent of their own minds rather than take counsel of Infinite understanding. In a matter which vitally concerns the happiness and well-being of both parties for this world and the next, reason, judgment, and the fear of God are set aside; and blind impulse, obstinate resolution are allowed to control.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, white declares that submitting to the will of God in every aspect of marriage and home building assures a condition of endless unity and joy between a couple.<sup>52</sup> Many a couple who thought they could experiment it otherwise ended up with an experience they never bargained for. Based on this reality, White suggests that the best way to plant one's marriage on the firm principles of the Bible is to exclude from the thoughts "everything which would divert the mind from God."<sup>53</sup>

### **Summary**

The various shades of opinion evaluated in the literature review have shed light on certain points of emphasis in the main topic of the research which were

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<sup>51</sup> White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 61.

<sup>52</sup> White, *Messages to Young People*, 498.

<sup>53</sup> White, *Appeal to the Youth* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), 95.

hitherto elusive. An outstanding reality emanating from the study is that unacceptable polemics on marriage and home-building may hold sway for a while, perhaps as a result of the self-assertiveness of their proponents, but they fizzle out with time as they are confronted by superior reason.

As evidenced by the references, the body of written works reviewed in this chapter spans an extensive field of scholarly study. Basically, the effort was aimed at creating the necessary platform for the field research, data analysis and evaluation. Moreover, the essence of following this process was to allow for enough time to gather reliable information that could help in developing an intervention plan to enhance membership retention in SDA Church Omoku. It cannot be overemphasized that the composite elements of religion, culture and societal values compel a review of professional issues such as research developments.

Ultimately, the intentional application of interdisciplinary perspectives effectively encompasses trends in the formation of family structures, gender studies, family psychology and family philosophy. These became a veritable tool in ensuring that the basic goals of this aspect of the study were achieved.

Through the process of this literature review the author has established a broad-based understanding of the issues involved in the debate. Amidst the strong points on both sides of the divide, the researcher is able to draw the needed conclusion. This paves the way for next chapter which will deal with the project design and survey activities within the context of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### AN INTRA-FAITH MARRIAGE MODEL

This chapter covers the field survey of the research. It features data which authenticates the fact that interfaith marriage is causal of membership loss in SDA Church Omoku. The chapter further highlights the history and demography of Nigeria, and Ogbaland in Rivers State as the host umbrella governmental structure and clan of the research context. A subsection takes a glance at the cosmology of the Church and prospects for mission expansion in Omoku town. The chapter ends with the contextualization of intra-faith marriage within the church.

#### **Demography**

Nigeria is the most populated country south of the Sahara. It has over 500 ethnic nationalities. According to the 2015 census, the population of the country stands at 181,562,056.<sup>1</sup> The politically dominant tribes are Hausa and Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri and Tiv. The population is mostly depleted by emigration, exogamy and death. However, the size, density, and distribution of the population indicate steady growth. The tribes denoted constitute 29%, 21%, 18%, 10%, 4% and 2.5% respectively of the national population.<sup>2</sup> Aside from various verbal

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Birdsall et al., *Population Matters* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

communication systems of the numerous people groups of Nigeria, the four official languages are English, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.

### **Presentation of the Context**

According to legend, Omoku was founded some time after B. C. 1460.<sup>3</sup> The town descended from Ogba, the second son of Akalaka, the progenitor of Ekpeye and Ogba peoples in the present Rivers State of Nigeria. It is believed that the name, Omoku was derived from the term, *Umuoknu* which means “The fish farmers.”<sup>4</sup> Originally, the town was a farm settlement near a river discovered by Agburu, a descendant of Ogba and his family. In the process of time, the settlement developed into a centre of trade and commerce which attracted people from neighbouring clans. Subsequently, Omoku became a community in which the children and grand children of Agburu established themselves as the aborigines and bonafide owners of the land. As the decades passed by, the population of the community experienced remarkable growth because of the richness of the town in various resources. Many of the strangers who came to trade naturalized there and even intermarried with the natives. Even in present times, strangers and indigenes are still intermarrying making the town a heterogenous society. Following the example of Agburu, other members of the Ogba tribe left Obigwe, their ancestral home and started to migrate in small numbers to different locations where they could find arable land for farming and security. This was how the Ogba nation came into existence.

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<sup>3</sup> Francis J. Ellah , *Ali-Ogba: A History of Ogba People* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1995), p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> Chief, Elder, Dr. Philip Usutu Ajie, Interview by the author, Omoku, Rivers State Nigeria, 12:35 p.m., Wednesday, 3 August 2016.

## **Landscape and Climate**

Omoku is a fairly large coastal municipality in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It has a rapidly growing population as strangers see the place as a haven of opportunities. The town is situated approximately 5.34° North latitude, 6.65° East longitude and 139 meters' elevation above the sea level. While the Coordinates of this sprawling urban area is 5.342°N 6.656°E, its total land space is 52 km<sup>2</sup> (20 sq mi).<sup>5</sup> The town is bounded on the west by the Orashi river and on the other cardinal points by tropical rains forests and table arable lands.<sup>6</sup>

## **Economy**

Omoku town is the administrative headquarters of the present ONELGA. It is also the business nerve center of Ogbaland. The town is fondly called 'Oil City' due to immense crude oil and natural gas mining around it. Omoku is located along the boundary line between Rivers State, Delta State and Imo State.

Oil companies operating in the area include Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), TOTALFINA ELF, and Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC). The infrastructure of Omoku metropolis has been improved with the construction of a dual carriageway, banks and other financial institutions as well as a gas power generating plant. The local market attracts hundreds of people daily who come to buy or sell farm products and other utilities.

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<sup>5</sup> Ellah, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Fred Ohia et al., *The Ogba Nation 1460-2003, Vol. 1* (Nigeria, Charlesworth Printers and Publishers, 2003), 34.

The population of Omoku town is approximately 32,197.<sup>7</sup> The people are largely composed of Ogba and Ibo-speaking people of the South-South and South-East geo-political zones of Nigeria. However, a community of Hausa-speaking settlers from Northern Nigeria and a sprinkling of Yoruba and Edo-speaking people from Western Nigeria are additional subsets of the population outlay of the town.

Notwithstanding the socio-cultural diversity of Omoku, the question of being human, sharing the same physical features such as skin colour and communal life, to some extent unifies the reaction of the residents to some issues of life such as marriage. Therefore, cross-cultural and interfaith marriages are entered into by most people in the area without reference to the Scriptures.

For an Adventist, this research may serve to: (a) draw the attention of church members to the need to uphold the marital principles of the church, and (b) satisfy the deep longing of some individuals that church membership in the research context be stabilized through endogamy as to keep the mission of the church on course.

### **Cultural Information**

The basic cultural ethos and practices of Omoku town derives from the Igburu ethnography. The people's value system also embodies an affective cultural prowess imbibed from cross-border people groups of various traditional and social orientations. Key aspects of the culture include continuity of the family connection and promotion of communal life. Safe-guarding the close-knit family relationship is a determining factor of the people's cultural worldview.<sup>8</sup> Though, the people's culture

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<sup>7</sup> *The Worldfact Book* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2016), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ohia, 201.

is undergoing modification through modernization; yet, its strong influence is generally felt.

The Ogba ethnic nationality uphold a culture of exogamous marriage. Hence, ethnographically, the populace of this kingdom is divided along extended ancestral family groups called “Obudo.” These groups which number over fifty are spread across the towns and villages of Ogbaland. Among the most popular Obudos from the Egi dialectical context are Edihuru, Agwolo, Imagi, Umuohali and Isikloko. No community is made up of only one Obudo; and no Obudo has an exclusive system of interrelationship except for their manner of greeting. Another way they identify with one another is by the family name. In modern times, most Obudo have developed global connectivity as a result of migration of people in search of greener pastures. But, deeply etched into the consciousness of members of each group is the understanding that they are brothers and sisters and therefore, cannot intermarry. Such a consciousness has remained for the people a perpetual binding tie setting the pace for interfaith relationships.

At the stage of acquaintance, every prospective couple is expected to investigate and ensure that they do not trace the same ancestry. Where circumstances cannot allow them to do so, their relatives assume that responsibility. Individuals from two different Obudo may be united in marriage, but not members of the same group. While the first point of orientation to exogamy for an average Ogban is the nuclear family and the second is the Obudo. Hence, a native of Ogbaland is socio-culturally predisposed to inter-group marriage right from birth.

### **Religious Belief and Affiliation**

Mainline religions in Omoku town are Christianity and traditional worship. Other religious groups exist within the community that are quite insignificant. These

include atheists, Muslims, grail message and Hare Krishna adherents. However, for a better understanding of the development of SDA Church in Omoku it is needful to trace the growth and expansion of the church from the national, regional to the local levels.

### **Historical Skectch of Seventh-day Adventists in Nigeria**

SDA Church was among the protestant churches established in Nigeria at the early part of the twentieth century by Elder D.C. Babcock. He began his ministry at Erunmu in present day Oyo state. Babcock and his family came to Nigeria from Freetown in Sierra Leone in 1914. Other missionaries who accompanied Babcock and his family on this trip were R. P. Dauphin and S. Morgue. Soon after they arrived in Nigeria, Babcock decided to do some inland tour while his family stayed back in Lagos. His journey through river Niger brought him to the distant town of Jebba in the middle belt of the country. On his return to Western Nigeria, he settled for Lalupon as his mission station. This town was 16 miles north of Ibadan.

Babcock established a school at Erunmu as a strategy for his outreach. To enhance the effort of the missionary team, R. P. Dauphin learned the Yoruba Language so quickly that within five months he opened another school near Lalupon. Hence, by the end of 1914 they were operating three elementary schools simultaneously and converted seven people.

However, in 1917 D.C. Babcock took ill and was unable to continue with his missionary work in Nigeria. Following this development, he returned to England with his family while E. Ashton came from England to replace him. Years later,

McClements succeeded Ashton and remained in charge of the Adventist missionary work in Nigeria until he was transferred to Accra, Ghana, in 1946.<sup>9</sup>

### **Seventh-day Adventist Church in Eastern Nigeria**

Whereas official documents place the beginning of SDA work in eastern Nigeria in the year 1923, oral tradition indicate that the actual year of inception for the church's missionary endeavours in the area is 1915 as noted in chapter one. This came about through the effort of Mr. Lovinggood from Otari village in present day ABOLGA, Rivers State, Nigeria. Mr. Lovinggood received the Advent message in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) while serving a prison sentence there. Upon his release, he returned to Otari and established the first-ever branch Sabbath school of SDA Church in eastern Nigeria. Unfortunately, the culture of the natives which gave much room for overindulgence prevented the growth of the church, hence it remained insignificant for many decades until quite recently when the congregation suddenly experienced a resurgence in membership, finance and status through the effort of the Rivers West Conference.

However, as a result of the large following which early Adventist missionaries enjoyed in Ngwaland, Aba became the center of Adventist influence east of the Niger. It is noteworthy that from the church's small beginning, she has grown to command great influence, not only among the sisterhood of Adventist Unions in Nigeria, but also in the society of Christian denominations in the region.

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<sup>9</sup> Odiase J. O. U., *A short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Edo/Delta States of Nigeria 1948-2001* (Lagos, Nigeria: Emaphine publishers, 2001), 13.

Eastern Nigeria Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists was organized in 2004. Later, it was given a Union Conference status in 2013 with the acronym ENUC; and then full recognition at the 2015 (GC) Session in San Antonio, USA. Presently, the entity covers nine states of the federal republic of Nigeria namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers. Whereas the headquarters of the Union is located in Aba town, at the time of this research, it comprised local conferences such as Aba East, Aba North, Aba South, Abia North-Central, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Port Harcourt, Rivers East, Rivers West, Anambra Mission, Bayelsa Mission and Northern Cross River Mission Station respectively. Furthermore, the population of the nine states of Eastern Nigeria then was 38,949,914 whilst the membership strength of ENUC was 132,032. The latter figure is only 8.70 percent of the former giving a ratio of 1:295. The indication is that the church has so much in-reach and outreach to do within the country to bridge the wide gap between its membership and national population. At the time of the research, Adventists in Nigeria worshiped in 646 churches which are spread across the towns and villages of the states in question.<sup>10</sup>

In recent times SDA Church in Eastern Nigeria has broken new grounds in an effort to advance its missionary thrust. The establishment of Clifford University, strengthening of SDA Hospital Umuahia is an evidence of commitment to the church's mission mandate. Owing to their interaction with other well-to-do laity from different parts of the world at the general conference sessions, some lay members of

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<sup>10</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, "Eastern Nigeria Union Mission" (Silver Spring, MD: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2011), 467.

ENUC have also developed interest in supporting the church with their funds more than ever before.

### **Background of Seventh-day Adventist Church Omoku**

SDA Church Omoku was established in the year 1933 and organized on October 27, 1979.<sup>11</sup> It was the premier SDA worship center in the area. From there, the inhabitants of the town were reached with the Advent message. This church is located almost at the center of the town and has a great potential for evangelistic outreach. Because its location, the church is also at a disadvantage in that it is vulnerable to societal influences.

For the purpose of achieving set goals and aspirations, the issues raised here have been approached in a more participant-friendly manner than the preceding sections. Hence, the reader is invited to relate objectively with the information generated by the study. In this way, an observer from the other side of the spectrum will be able to reason over the author's line of argument as well as understand the proposed constructs as they apply to church missions. Though, marriage is among the most subjected to sentimental considerations and often misinterpreted, still most couples wishes to raise a successful family and would make a significant sacrifice to achieve it.

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<sup>11</sup> Minutes of SDA Church Omoku, Omoku District, October 21, 2013.

## **Description of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Omoku before the Project**

Many members of Omoku church were contented with merely being identified as Seventh-day Adventists. It was a problem of low self-consciousness. Improper self-imagining do negatively affect the attitude of some people towards spiritual growth.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, such low self-esteem results from a low understanding of the value of one's spiritual heritage. Hence, to make up for a supposed lack, some people get married outside their faith community. Over the years, Adventist Bible Scholars have drawn a clear line of demarcation between biblical spirituality and its opposites. The fact is that being a church member is good, yet it is better to be a practicing Christian.<sup>13</sup>

The focal point is that if the members of SDA Church Omoku develop and maintain the right attitude to their avowed faith, they would no longer find reasons to leave the church through marriage.

### **Baseline Data**

As at the time the survey report in this dissertation was given, the church record book which contained the minutes of the church in business were the only documents from which baseline information regarding membership status could be accessed. In this document, it was seen that two male members of SDA Church Omoku were disciplined Sunday, March 13, 2016 and Sunday, May 15, 2016 respectively as a result of offences related to mixed marriage.<sup>14</sup> While the name of

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<sup>12</sup> Julian Melgosa, *Positive Mind* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz, 2010), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Sampson M. Nwaomah, "The Christian Theologian As Agent for Spiritual Modeling," *Insight* (Ibadan, Nigeria: OSB Design Limited, 2004), 157.

<sup>14</sup> Action No. 9, Church at Business, Church Record Book, SDA Church Omoku, July 21, 2016.

one was outrightly removed from the list of baptized members, the other was suspended from membership. As a result of periodic change of record book due to exhausted blank pages, other names against which similar actions had been taken could not readily be accessed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For years, SDA Church Omoku engaged in capacity building program. But this effort has paid off marginally due to the loss of church membership through interfaith marriages. Hence, the church continued to struggle with the incidence of spending money on soul winning only to see them backslide later. At the time of this survey, there were five strong worship centers in Omoku town. These congregations were administered from two district headquarters. Presently, Omoku church (a.k.a. Obieti church) alone has a net membership of 425 under the leadership of a Pastor. The growth was the result of breaking new frontiers in evangelism. Omoku town may rightly be referred to as the melting pot of religion in ONELGA. This is because at least fifteen different Christian denominations are present there aside from other religions. All these compete for recognition and membership increase.

### **Project Design**

The type of research that was carried out is qualitative research. However, during the process, there was the need to apply some elements of the quantitative method to enhance the collection factual data and objectivity. The motif for studying membership retention and stability including its objectives has been discussed in the earlier chapters. However, more emphasis has been given to the subject further on. In the interim, it is important to note that a study of biblically appropriate marriage has been considered because (1) it is an in-ministry program and provides the needed

platform for solving the problem of membership loss through interfaith marriages in Omoku church, and (2) it is interactive enough for participants to identify with.<sup>15</sup>

Fundamentally, the number of participants require the administration to questionnaire to a discussion group of at least eight persons. The main criteria for sampling as well as procedure for selecting participants was determined by the Adventist University Africa standard for doctor of ministry program. Under the instrumentation plan, two kinds of materials were employed during the field research. These are: printed questionnaire, and as earlier noted, a template for oral discussion by a special group.

At the point of data analysis, information collected from the questionnaire and responses from the discussion group was analyzed according to the various issues they addressed. Nevertheless, in an effort to work within the framework of the project design, presentation and description of findings also considered the use of terms that are easily understood by the church members. Finally, this aspect of the writing ended with a summary of key points and observations from the implemented project.

What the both the research team and church members would not forget so easily at this point of the exercise was that prayers were always said at every event to draw the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit to assure a result that would be pleasing to God.

### **Informal Discussion Group**

Rather than use focus group to discuss the issues at stake, an informal discussion group arrangement was used. This was caused by insurgency. Most church

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<sup>15</sup> Gary A. Davies, *Psychology of Problem Solving: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 60.

members had fled Omoku town and only a few were encouraged to travel from their hiding places to church. It was even more difficult to get non-Adventists to participate because everyone feared being betrayed. Many lost their lives because of information they gave to another person. Furthermore, the insecurity virtually crippled economic activities in the area and most individuals lacked funds to travel to church in response to the researcher's invitation. Hence, only one special discussion group was organized.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the situation, the researcher led out in the discourse. The group's composition and interaction were carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment. Therefore, participants freely expressed their opinions especially on developing "faith dimensions that motivate and sustain spirituality."<sup>17</sup>

By this process, participants provided a depth of understanding that might not have been in a different arrangement. Additionally, because the informal discussion session followed this arrangement, participants were able to provide as much information as they could. Using a special group greatly contributed to the gathering of information that were mostly relevant to the subject matter. However, this does not suggest that there could not have been other ways to access needed facts

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire administered on the special discussion group was a sincere search for true answers on the possible causes of marriage-engendered apostasies in the church and solutions thereof. Individual respondents demonstrated in various

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<sup>16</sup> R. Kreuger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (London: Sage, 1988), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Lederach, J. P. *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 15.

terms that they had been affected either directly or indirectly by circumstances arising from mixed marriages.

The researcher acknowledges the position that church members should be helped to develop a “culturally critical mindset.” They should learn to evaluate the assumptions and values of the culture, rather than accepting them uncritically.<sup>18</sup> It is also important to be sensitive to the circumstances that form the environment within which the people exists in order to adapt timely to changes that occur to the advantage of the church.

### **Nature of Intervention Developed**

In a way, problem-solving involves an intentional intervention in a critical situation in order to influence events or prevent further undesirable consequences. Sometimes, such mediatory effort does not achieve the expected result. Nevertheless, because the kind of intervention offered here is Bible-based, the reader will discover that the end result was very nearly what was intended by the researcher.

Workshops and counselling sessions for singles and parents were the basic elements of the intervention process developed. These were expected to create awareness in regard to ideal marriage and also serve to produce needed materials for further orientation of the target group on the values of intra-faith marriages. Experience has shown that, no matter how far a church member has strayed from the truth, when they are given serious, indept education, a revival and reformation takes place in their lives. This creates greater opportunities for retention of members, especially in city churches. The dissertation implementation was done in SDA Church

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<sup>18</sup> Cameli, Louis J., *Homosexuality: New Paths to Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2012), 115.

in Omoku within twelve months, thereafter, an evaluation was carried out to ascertain its effectiveness.

However, it is noteworthy that the program which was developed for orientation of kids on Intra-Faith marriage was not carried out as a result of insurgency. It included a drama sketch on the benefits of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, titled: “The Blessed Marriage.” Additionally, there was a colourful skit with the theme: “The Favoured Child.” This graphically highlighted the benefits Jesus derived from being raised by Joseph and Mary who were of the same faith--growing “in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52). The children were also to be taught two choruses titled: “Walking with Jesus” and “My Home.” This was to be followed by a sermonette captioned: “Trust and Obey.” It was about the dangers of marrying a wife from another religion as in the experience of Ahab and Jezebel, and the benefits of marrying within one’s faith as seen in the marriage of Ruth to Boaz. These will be carried out later on as a follow up to the intervention by the researcher and his team.

### **Theological Foundation of the Intervention Process**

The solution proffered to the issue of interfaith marriage may find a theological basis in the verb “walk” and the adjective “blameless.” These are the key elements of the command: “walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). To those caught in the current of modern day shift from Bible standards to the more socially accepted practice, the referenced claims of God’s word resonates through the ages from Abrahamic times. Even now, the remnant are only identified by their total surrender to Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2005), 136.

## **Walk**

The word, walk in the text implies taking a decision against a lifestyle that is disagreeable with God, and intentional fulfilment of a prerequisite good life. The energy generated for such a change of disposition comes from willpower. God was prepared to support Abraham with the power of His Spirit to make that change possible.

## **Blameless**

On the other hand, blameless presupposes a way of life devoid of sin, particularly the kind of misdeed relating to marriage. The Lord's demand in the text under consideration came in the wake of Abraham's incontinence in marrying Hagar, a stranger from Egypt.

These are factors of an intervention process which is deeply theological. The crisis of membership loss through interfaith marriages in SDA Church Omoku can be checked by obedience to God.<sup>20</sup> It also involves searching and discovering the mind of God in scripture regarding the circumstances of the needy individual. For those who are willing to know the truth and live by it, every human situation in every age is given a safe landing in the Bible. Jesus said that "all things are possible with God" (Matt 19:26).

Nevertheless, liberal groups also present certain portions of the Bible as mantra for their activities, let alone non-religious organizations such as the banking industry. Therefore, it is not surprising, that various schools of thought revolve around the marriage institution. Yet, in many instances, trajectories of homemaking ideas end

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<sup>20</sup> Skip Mac Carty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2007), 60.

up at a crossroad despite the insistence of their proponents on maintaining their stance. In any case, too many inspiring insights from Christian writings support intervention along scripture lines for instance White suggests that those preparing for marriage should plan to follow Bible instructions to avoid regrets.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, other scholarly studies reveal that mutual observance of the Sabbath ordinance is very significant to the success of the marital relationship.<sup>22</sup> Reference to a day of worship here has nothing to do with dogma as some may think, or doctrinal egoism, but is rather a symbolic representation of the spiritual value of the matrimonial relationship. Marriage is a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman which requires the biblically prescribed spiritual components such as love and mutual allegiance to Jesus Christ. Playing down on this important understanding has always been detrimental to the welfare of the conjugal connection. One cannot lay claims to being spiritual without showing the necessary indicators to prove that assertion.

Social compatibility is equally a basic factor of marital success.<sup>23</sup> Any existence or relationship without the right spiritual content is hollow. The reference to the spiritual health of a marital relation is about how the creator God is worshipped or revered in a home. Scripture demonstrates in more ways than one that living together as a couple without agreement in patterns of worship is least of what any couple should desire. Many are blinded by a feeling they believe is love and go ahead

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998), 182.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Fayard, Barbara Couden Hernandez et al., eds. (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2011), 227.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Kay Kuzma, *Serious About Love* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009), 41.

to contract marriages with partners of another religious faith. Eventually, they realize when it is too late that they had done themselves injustice. The question of the prophet “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? (Amos 3:3), is a deep expression of concern for the disastrous consequences living together as a married couple without due consideration for religious harmony.

Some couples remain affiliated to different religions because at the point of marriage they could not reconcile their different religious convictions. It really makes no sense accepting to unite with someone in marriage without the resolve to unite with that individual spiritually. While such a couple is married technically, they are not in the spiritual sense. As it is said, marriage is a covenant relationship which involves the same feeling towards each other.<sup>24</sup> Some people may consider the idea of relinquishing one’s religion in order to be on the same spiritual template with one’s spouse an act of distorting personal uniqueness. However, while it not advisable to give up those qualities that attracted one’s spouse initially, it is important to develop such virtues as are indispensable in making the marital experience a rich one.<sup>25</sup>

Someone else also advanced the viewpoint that the essential motif of marriage is harmony.<sup>26</sup> The quality of unity must mirror much of the preferences of a couple for maximum fulfillment in the relationship. Some have argued that the insistence of a spouse on unity of religious interests in marriage is religious intolerance. However, such a conclusion is similar to assuming that it is unpatriotic not to allow one’s spouse

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Simpson, ed., *The Covenant and the Kingdom* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1995), 23.

<sup>25</sup> Alan and Donna, *A Pre-marriage Counselling Handbook* (Wheaton, Illinois: Oasis International Limited, 2000), 149.

<sup>26</sup> Russ Crosson, *8 Important Money Decisions for Every Couple* (Oregon, USA: Harvest House Publishers, 1989), 51.

to seek emotional satisfaction outside of the marriage intimacy. Anything that works differently from the way God originally made it is a deviation and is dangerous. One way by which a mismatched couple reveal themselves is through disunity in their system of worship.

There are instances in Scriptures where the issue of spiritual unity in nuptial commitment is a point of reference. The loci of such a record are to underscore the worth of sameness in a couple's spiritual orientation. An instance is the expression, "the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose" (Gen 6:2). Here, the Bible metaphorically shows a divinely unacceptable conjugal alliance based on spiritual inequality. Verse three of the same chapter makes this thought clearer. Another case of religio-cultural disparity in marriage and its consequences is the defilement of Jacob's daughter, Dinah by Shechem the son of Hamor king of the Hivites and the subsequent jungle justice applied on the royal family by the sons of Jacob (Gen 34:1-29). Further on, Abraham instructed his chief servant regarding the choice of a wife for his son Isaac:

"swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen 24:3-4).

In this reference the Hebrew patriarch clearly established his preference for endogamous marriage. In another instance, Ruth had converted from her Moabite paganism to Judaism (Ruth 1:16) before her marriage to Boaz. These came in the wake of God's disapproval of the marital union between "the sons of God" and the "daughters of men" (Gen 1:2,3) that is, believers in God and those who did not accept His supremacy over their lives. The clear fact is that the two groups were of different

religious orientations. The same God calls attention to His definitive stance on marital principles by the statement: "I the Lord do not change" (Mal 3:6).

### **A Review of Literature Used**

In the post-modern world, biblically appropriate marriage is an undertaking which requires a degree of modelling. Crafting such a representative pattern entails the introduction of a "mechanism of change in marital interaction."<sup>27</sup> This approach involves a demonstration of behavior which attracts the right response to existing standards and not just emotional stimulus. If the model does a good job of it, a positive psychological response will be recorded, especially for new converts who are still building a Christian ethos.

A positive marriage plan will include how a couple can harmonize their religious interests from the onset. The question of testing its workability will not arise. Adewale expresses the conviction that it is important for married couples to study the Bible together.<sup>28</sup> This presupposes that worshipping together is an indispensable communication where matrimonial success is desired. In order for a couple to effectively unite in worship, they have to share the same religious views. Evans re-emphasizes this in the words: "The marital union is a covenant created for the express purpose of uniting two beings into one."<sup>29</sup> This gives credence to the validity of religious oneness in marriage.

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<sup>27</sup> J. D. Murray, *Mathematical Biology* "Modelling the Dynamics of Marital Interaction: Divorce Prediction and Marriage Repair" (Springer New York, 2002), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Bisi Adewale, *Ten Commandments for Couples* (Lagos, Nigeria: Living Home Foundation, 2008), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Tony Evans, *Marriage Matters* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 49.

Marital values imparted by precept and example produces relationships that stabilize church membership in the long run. This is because the individuals at the receiving end of the demonstration would have deeply imbibed the value of same-faith marriage. With a profound feeling of concern for the future of the new generation, Wright suggests in his book, *The Mission of God*, that missiologists should craft a stronger theocentric theology to stem the complete liberalization of Christian principles. This, of course, includes the marriage ordinance. The consciousness of right principles especially in home-building is fast fading because of the overbearing wave of alternative family structures. Along this line, Christian church should forge a stronger connection between doctrine and practical Christianity. Clearly, the weakness of the Christian church in liberalizing the marriage ordinance has made many Christians not to understand their limits in the choice of a spouse.

On a different perspective, Steve Hoke and Bill Taylor in their book, *Global Mission Handbook* posits that adaptation of cross-cultural relationship is the basis of errors in the formation of biblical Christianity. Another outcome of this deviation is the increase of miss-matched couples. Unfortunately, some of them believe that the difficulties they experience in their marriages is part of life and should not be given a religious interpretation. Nonetheless, membership loss in SDA Church must be tackled with the intense passion of the apostolic era.<sup>30</sup> A proper approach to this issue will positively impact the perception of those affected for the purpose of retenting more church members in the foreseeable future. On a further thought, the primary focus of any marital relationship should be to develop an enduring pattern of devotion to God that spurs a couple to aspire for higher levels of spirituality. This requires

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<sup>30</sup> Brian Dais, *Retention 101: A Practical Guide for Keeping More People* (New York, NY: Davis Media, 2011), 22.

strength of character beyond the ordinary. It calls for intentional mutual adjustment of earlier interests in order to make room for new realities.

The works considered in this chapter mostly agree that unity in the marital union is vital to its enrichment process. This oneness must reflect in mutual acceptance of the basic elements of communication including worship. Being reserved to any aspect of the home-building experience on the part of a spouse, especially spiritual formation is often consequential to any matrimony. Against this background, a keen observation of the effect of religion would show that a certain complexity characterizes the lifestyle and emotional response of the parties involved. Therefore, a powerful phenomenon such as worship cannot be taken for granted by any serious home builder since it has a long term effect on the wellbeing of the family. Summarily, the authors conclude that marriage and worship must be mutually inclusive for a couple to make a success of their relationship.

### **Introduction to Field the Research**

The field research was aimed at obtaining authentic information on the issue of membership loss and retention in SDA Church Omoku. The researcher was very conscious of following the guidelines for the field work.<sup>31</sup> One of the considerations was that the researcher had to focus attention of the geographical context of the study to show indept understanding of the situation being addressed.

In pursuance of specific objectives, a number of key issues have been considered in order to achieve a product that is representative of the overall intent of the work. For instance, the study sought to discover the original sources of the diverse

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<sup>31</sup> D. Remenyi, B. Williams, A. Money, and E. Swartz, *Doing Research in Business and Management: An Introduction to Process and Method* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1998), 115.

information used in the research. Understandably, the correctness of each piece of information employed is important to the final outcome of the work.

Moreover, foresight as to what information will remain relevant enough to motivate further study in the area of present concern is also considered. The way to achieve the needed end-product hinges on compliance with existing standards. It is an important choice the researcher had to make. A project such as this actually has the potential of being innovative. Introduction of a new dimension in a purposeful exchange of knowledge increases awareness and enlightenment. This must also be viewed as a matter of high priority. In order for the research to achieve this objective, mutual cooperation with researchers who are working on a similar subject is a key factor to be considered.

### **A Brief Description of the Research Performed**

This study began with a very close observation on the missionary context in view. Having gained clearer insights through contact with the project supervisor, it was easy to draw a road map that will lead to a desired result. As the work progressed, it is imperative to take into account some aspects of the culture and developmental trends of Omoku people. Further helpful hints arose from a comparative approach to marital culture among the people and the extent to which the target group had been influenced by the anthropological and sociological trends in the urban setting within which they exist.

Somehow, it became necessary to approach the issue from a post-modern point of view. This added an advantage to the exercise because it provided a broad-based perception about the subject matter. It is also noteworthy that SDA Church town and other religions within Omoku town have influenced one another in a number of significant ways. This has become a determining factor in the interests of

individual adherents. For instance, some members of the devotees in most of the Christian denominations have imbibed the popular Pentecostal liturgy. This has crystallized in what is called ‘praise worship.’ It is a moment in which church worshippers rise on their feet and let themselves loose to wild singing and dancing, driven by rhythmic accompaniment from a digital keyboard and led out by young male and female cantors. Most of the songs used during this period of worship are those that have a lyric of one line. This is repeated several times and in different tonal inflection unlike the solemn hymns of the orthodox churches.

Furthermore, some SDAs see nothing wrong with marriage outside their faith community. For that reason, they proceed to hold their marriage ceremonies on the Sabbath day. On the other hand, the SDA Church has positively influence the women of some Sunday-keeping churches to turn away from jewelry. Many of them now dress modestly following the injunction:

Whose (adorning) let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but (et it be) the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible (apparel) of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price (1 Peter 3:3-4 ASV).

Against this background, ideas were articulated as to the validity of the information to be gathered in the field research. The cooperation of responding church members was another factor to be carefully considered. They were required to give honest answers during the sessions. Such responses felt like reporting oneself to the church leader who was conducting the research. In view of all these, much tact was employed in approaching the various issues arising from the inquiries. However, there was a clear understanding of the fact that, learning from past experiences, missions is pivotal the growth an expansion of the church.<sup>32</sup> While some respondents appeared

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Goldsmith, *Get A Grip on Missions* (Nottingham, England: Inter-  
Varsity Press, 2011), 86.

reserved in their answers to the questions posed to them, others were quite outspoken and looked excited over the privilege of expressing their feelings on the issues arising from the research. Such respondents felt that a project of this nature was long overdue.

A study followed a carefully devised participatory approach to achieve the desired goal. This means that the researcher had to interact with the respondents closely for effective information gathering. Furthermore, to harness the major points of the findings, the researcher had to consider what matters most in the cultural context of the target group.

In recent times, community youth movements have tremendously influenced cultural values. The youths who have become a hybrid of western and African lifestyle go to all lengths to impose themselves on their elders. Hence a pseudo-youth consciousness has created a paradigm shift from what used to be common interest to the uncommon; and from the sacred to secular. This made the research process sensitive to a great extent. One had to be careful in making inquiries into trends that have become acceptable patterns of doing things, especially marriage.

The most intricate aspect of the situation is that many are on the verge of renouncing their faith for the supposedly flexible, fashionable brand of Christianity promoted by charismatic churches. Apparently, the mantra that drives this type of religion is “whatever makes you more comfortable in worship, hold on to it”. Hence, different weird forms of liturgy are witnessed in many Christian churches.

Such strange innovations are also seen in many Christian marriages. It is quite conventional these days to see people turn their wedding reception into a traditional marriage ceremony. Opinion poll reveal that limited financial resources, lack of time to hold two full-blown programmes within a short span of time, loss of interest on the

part of the celebrant's acquaintances for being invited to one marriage programme too many are some of the reasons for such a combined conjugal plan. Nevertheless, there is little theological grounds for such an arrangement. Actually, there is lack of common sense in a couple holding their traditional marriage after church wedding. The import is that the latter is more important than the former; but it should rather be the other way round.

### **Evaluation of Findings from the Research**

Admittedly the best effort at appraising the result of a good research would only be an attempt. Given the dynamic nature of the academia and the fact that humans have limited ability to make absolute statements about reality, a researcher can only draw some logical conclusions based on available facts. Though the result would be the same if the empirical process is repeated at any other time, nonetheless different scholars would draw different inspiration in the process of carrying out a close examination of the proceeds of the study in order to judge its value, quality, importance, extent or condition.

To this end, the field research under consideration was a timely response to the yearning of many hearts that the issue of membership loss through marriages in SDA Church is being addressed. The answers of the special discussion group indicate that they were satisfied with the manner in which both the oral and written questionnaires were framed. The enquiries were straight to the point and written in simple language. The questions were contained in one typed, mostly double spaced A4 page. The font size was large enough to save the respondent the problem of straining their eyes. For these reasons in a matter of twenty minutes, each individual turned in their filled out questionnaire. Furthermore, the excitement that greeted the field sessions, (questionnaire and special discussion group) and reactions from many who were not

among those chosen to partake in the sessions showed that they too, would have wished to be part of the exercise.

From the comments of members of the special discussion group and church membership at large it was evident that they were ready to implement the intervention process proposed in the research. Some of the respondents testified that they had witnessed similar solution work very well in their former churches. Hence, they were optimistic that in the present setting, the suggestions would also help to check the syndrome of membership drain from the church through interfaith marriages.

### **A Description of the Intervention Proffered**

The intervention proffered is the intra-faith marriage model. This is expected to serve as a template for the realization of stable membership in SDA Churches. The model seeks to create an atmosphere of interdependence between the church and her parishioner to enhance membership retention. As it is said, “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.”<sup>33</sup> The presupposes that the church expected to be sensitive to circumstances that significantly affect the lives of the people at any time.

### **Procedure of Recruiting Participants for the Research Sessions**

It is understandable that in order to get the best out of a research process, recruitment of persons taking part must be accomplished through formalized means. For this reason, the first three substrata of SDA Church hierarchy were involved the series of actions that were directed toward the specific aim of the study. These are local church, district and Conference.

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<sup>33</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in Joel Laurence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 36.

First, an authorization form to perform this field research was collected from the relevant department of Adventist University of Africa. The same was completed and subsequently submitted along with the proposal for the work. Furthermore, an approval had been given to proceed with the research, a letter was written by the researcher to Rivers West Conference, a local field in Eastern Nigeria Union Conference under West Central Africa Division. The letters contained basic information about the work such as title, purpose, place and duration of the research. Additionally, there was a pledge to submit a full report of the study to the local church and local Conference at the end of the project.

Upon receipt of a letter of approval from the local Conference to carry out the project, the researcher also wrote to SDA Church Omoku to seek consent. Before long, the church also replied expressing acceptance and support for the research project. Upon the fulfillment of these requirements, the project commenced fully.

### **Kind and Number of Sessions Held**

Different kinds of sessions could very well fit a research of this nature as it deals with close personal relationships. For instance, separate sessions could have been held with spinsters, bachelors, youths, church members whose spouses are not Adventists, the council of family ministry leaders and so on to gather different shades of opinions on the subject matter the research. Such sessions could be quite revealing as each of the groups would have approached the issue at stake from a different perspective.

However, for the purpose of this research, two kinds of sessions were held viz: questionnaire and focus group sessions. The first was a one-page printed which respondents were required to fill out, while the other was an oral interactive session. In each session there was a composite representation of men, women and youths.

Because quite often, academic studies are carried out in that church, the people are well acquainted with this exercise.

The printed questionnaire was served on one hundred church members. The choice of that number was based on (a) the group size was manageable (b) they were educated enough to understand the demands of a research questionnaire (c) they were involved in one way or the other with the issues at stake, i.e. they were among those who gave their children or wards to spouses outside the church, interested in doing so or condemned the act. (d) they were a fair representation of the men, women and youths of the church.

As earlier indicated, the second session was a special focus group. It was also made up of church members only. Each individual was abreast of the issues at stake and was willing to follow instructions and also articulate ideas in a timely fashion on each subtopic introduced. All two session were conducted in SDA Omoku church.

As much as members of other SDA worship centers in the area were desirous of being part of the exercise, the field work could only be conducted in the location that best served the purpose of the study. However, other worship centers of the church that are interested in being part of the research are aware that the implementation of the project will cover most of the churches within the neighborhood.

### **Content of Sessions and Objectives**

The focal point of the sessions held is to strengthen the general understanding of the research. Each factor represents a subunit of the subject matter of the research. In view of the revealing nature of the sessions, there was the tendency to go beyond articulated ideas to create opportunity for clearer insights on set goals.

Furthermore, members of the special discussion group considered the subject of the study compelling enough to enable each one discover some other realities as far as Christian marital tenets are concerned. It was more of a warrant to personally compare biblical marriage principles and the conventional forms with a view to drawing a line between the fast fading, and enduring realities. The most ardent church members are ever eager to grow in the knowledge of truth especially, as taught by the church. This is necessitated by the competitive atmosphere surrounding Christianity in Nigeria. One has to defend one's affiliation to a certain denomination.

However, there could be more objectives for a project of this nature than what is indicated here. The reason is that different researchers would have different basis for their work. Moreover, marriage is such a broad-based subject that issues arising within a given context are almost always approached from different perspectives. It is like seeing a thing through a lens or combination of lenses in an optical instrument nearest to and facing the substance being viewed. However, the following are key factors that are considered most significant to the main purpose of this research:

- a. To discover the reason for the perennial loss of church members through marriages to non-SDAs in Omoku town.
- b. To develop a seminar, workshop and counselling sessions for singles and parents to create awareness in regard to ideal marriage in order to increase membership retention.
- c. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention process through a SWOT analysis.
- d. To implement the dissertation in SDA Church Omoku within one year.
- e. To ensure that a comprehensive report is sent to the local Conference and Omoku church for the purposes of information and future reference.

## Analyses of Questionnaire Contents

Following the simple investigative method<sup>34</sup> the questions were written in an easy-to-read style. They also expressed the challenges faced by the church in regard to the marital choices of its members. Table 1 which is titled: Tabular Presentation of Statistics from Field Survey presents the outcome of the questionnaire administered on the church members.

Many Adventists are oriented to be very precise; exercising discrimination in most undertakings.<sup>35</sup> Adventists are oriented to question anything that is consistent with good judgement, not as fundamentalists but as a matter of conscience.<sup>36</sup> Hence, a member of this fold may derail ethically not on account of ignorance, but rather to fulfill a certain uncontrolled personal urge. Usually, it happens when people lend themselves to societal influences they believe may have certain benefits beyond the ordinary.

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<sup>34</sup> Nicky Hayes, *Doing Psychological Research: Gathering and Analyzing Data* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Gary E. Fraser, *Diet, Life Expectancy, and Chronic Disease: Studies of Seventh-Day Adventists and Other Vegetarians* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Peter H. Ballis, *Leaving the Adventist Ministry* (Westpoint, CT: Praeger, 1999), 9.

*Table 1. Tabular Presentation of Statistics from Field Survey*

<b>SURVEY PARTICULARS</b>	<b>NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE</b>
No. of Questionnaires	100
No. of Respondents	92%
Respondents in Favor of Intra-faith Marriage	52%
Respondents in Favor of Mixed Marriage	14%
Respondents Holding a Neutral Position	26%
Respondents Having No Opinion in the Matter	8%
Copies of Questionnaire Not Returned	8%

Against this background, it could be assumed that the responses of the interviewee to the questions posed to them were true reflections of their clear understanding of the issues at stake as well as their candid opinions on the same. The questionnaires were administered during a church session. It was a time when church members could be available for the exercise. Church Elders and Deacons assisted members of the research team to collect the questionnaires were collected on the spot. The following is a tabular analysis of the major elements of the results.

#### **Presentation of Categories of Respondents in Percentages**

Data from the questionnaires showed that 54% of the respondents were males while 46% were females. A further categorization showed that 66% of the respondents were married persons while 34% were singles. Moreover, the research revealed that respondents who were born into monogamous families were 23%

whereas those born into polygamous families were 10%. The questionnaires also revealed that respondents whose mothers were SDAs at the point of marriage were 19% while those whose fathers were currently non-SDAs were 15%.

### **Presentation of Data from Questionnaire in Charts**

As a result of the growing complexity in the marriage institution, behavioural scientists now apply the principle of meta-analysis<sup>37</sup> in crafting summaries of research data on marriage studies. Scholars are also developing new methods of handling data from surveys on home building and the family. As reflected below, Figure 1 presents Support for Endogamy Among ADAs, Figure 2. Shows Singles Marital Preference, while Figure 3. Represents Initial Choice of Spouse Among Married Church Members. There are different approaches to a qualitative research.<sup>38</sup> The author has systematically applied ideas from each of these methods to arrive at the structure of data analysis used.

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<sup>37</sup> Hunter, J. E., and Schmidt, F. L. *Methods of Meta-Analysis: Correcting Errors and Bias in Research Findings* Sage Journals, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (California, USA: Sage Publications, 2004), 1.

<sup>38</sup> W. James Potter, *An Analysis of Thinking and Research about Qualitative Methods* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 50.

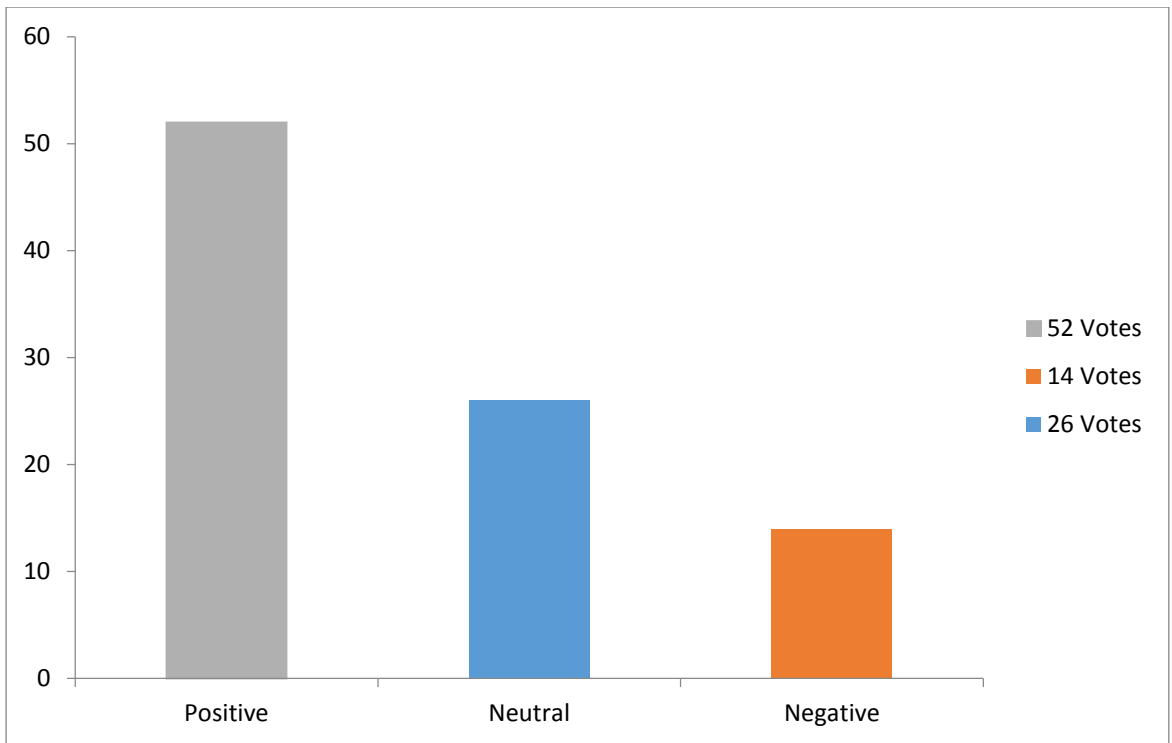


Figure 3. Support for Endogamy among SDAs

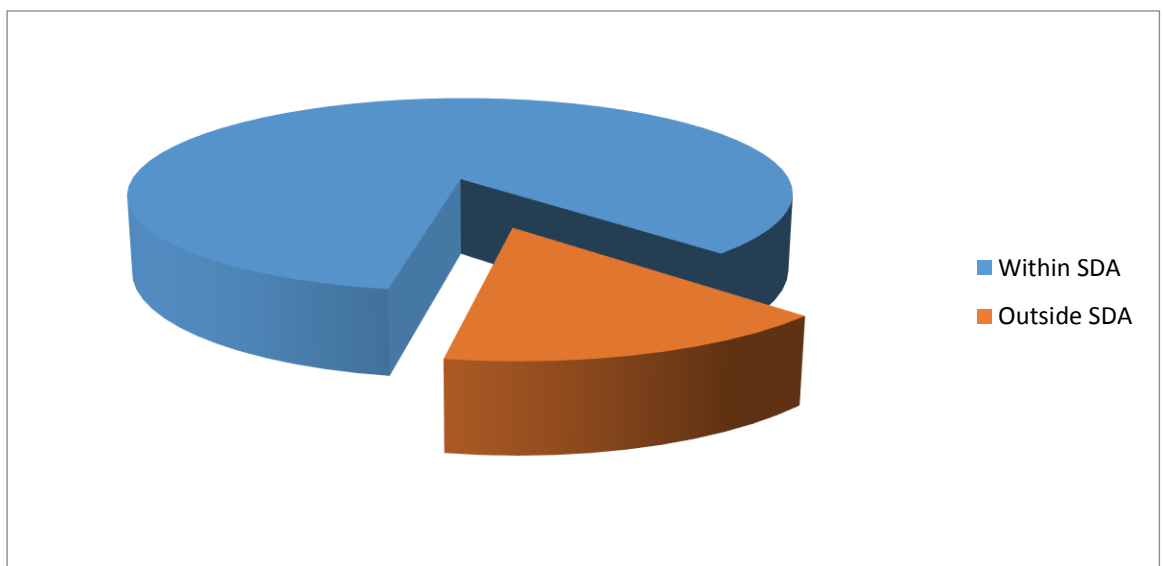


Figure 4. Singles Marital Preference

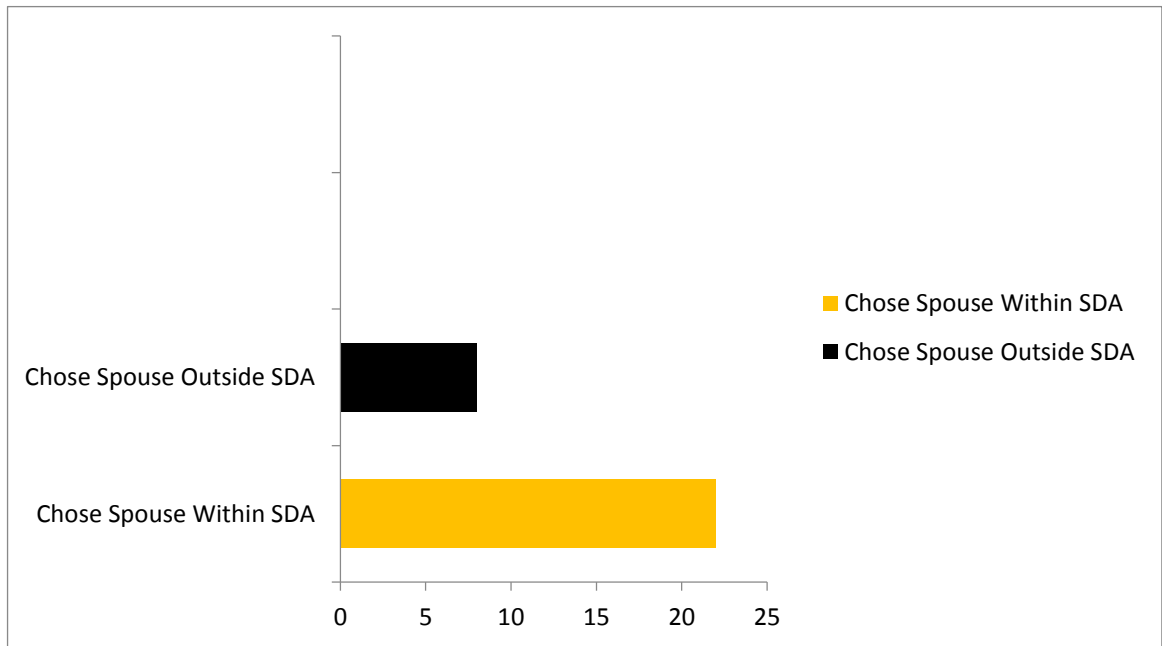


Figure 5. Initial Choice of Spouse among Married Church Member

These figures represent the level of SDA interest in intra-faith marriage. The challenge appears to be how to translate such a wonderful desire to reality.

### **Report of the Informal Discssuion Group Session**

Only one informal group session was held during the research process. The terms informal and special are used interchangeably in reference the discussion session throughout this dissertation. This is because, the event was not he conventional focus group known and used by most researchers. It took place on Wednesday, April 26, 2016, between 02:24-03:30 p.m. The group comprised 12 persons (7 men, 3 women and 2 youths). The respondents fell between ages 20-30, 31-45, and 46 and above. The Pastor of Omoku church served as the researcher's assistant during field work. He also worked with his church board to select the individuals who made up the focus group.

Issues deliberated on were similar to those in the questionnaire. However, the effect of the personal contact produced deeper and more detailed responses which

reflected the yearning of the church members to stem the tide of membership drain from the church through interfaith marriages. The respondents disclosed that between 2014 and 2016 twelve members of the church had married to people of other religious faiths. A greater number of these had left the church while the rest were operating as nominal SDAs. However, the church had not expressed despair over the situation. The general belief is that more revivals leading to biblical spirituality and education will bring about a positive change in the marital orientation of the church members.

### **Factors Affecting Interfaith Marriage**

According to members of the focus group the following are the causes and effect of interfaith marriages within the target congregation:

1. Strange doctrines introduced in the church by those who are holding intimate relationships with people of other faiths.
2. High level of poverty which drives the less-privileged within the church to lend themselves non-SDAs from whom they can get economic support.
3. Unbridled desire on the part of church members to be as fashionable as their neighbours.
4. Inadequate spiritual nurture of church members due to limited number of Pastors who provide spiritual nurture.
5. The increase of secularization and decrease of discipline in the church
6. Negative influence of family and significant others on matters affecting marriage
7. Poor church programming resulting from ineffective administration and loss of mission focus.
8. High influence of urban acculturation especially on the youths of the church

9. Inaccessibility of Adventist formal education to most youths due to high fees
10. Influence of social media network streaming.
11. Little or no emphasis on total membership involvement in evangelism
12. General orientation to formalism and less emphasis on the Holy Spirit as guide
13. Little or no interest in reading Spirit of Prophecy (SOP) writings

However, all of these anomalies can be resisted and corrected through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> As the Scriptures say, with God all things are possible (Matt 10:27). In the next subsection, the project evaluation will be done in order to ascertain the efficacy of the activities that have been carried out so far.

### **Project Evaluation**

A SWOT analysis was considered appropriate in determining the true state of the field work. It is a simple but useful framework for analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that confront the project. Moreover, as a way of minimizing attendant risk factors, the analysis is aimed at making the most of the project's potentials.

It is also noteworthy that this procedure can stimulate strategy formulation, or in a more sophisticated, way serve as a tool for development. Studies in cultural anthropology show that marriage is more competitive than most social pursuits. A situation analysis is typical window of opportunity to understanding the competitors. It equally provides insight on crafting coherent and successful machinery for specific

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<sup>39</sup> White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1955), 117.

policy development. Hence, in order for the process of analogy of this sort to be meaningful, it had to be procedurally realistic. The following paragraphs contain highlights of the SWOT analysis of the field work carried out by the researcher and his team.

The first consideration are the strengths of this research which are many. Over two hundred books and learned journals were consulted during the research. The study also demonstrates a level of sensitivity to such environmental factors as religion, economic and cultural influences. Apparently, the last factor is the most touchy as far as the Ogba people are concerned in the sense that it could easily lead to misunderstanding. The people's culture is sacred, especially that of exogamy and polygamy. The research team saw this as a great temptation to Christians in the area. However, no temptation is a sin against the tempted until that individual falls under it even though there is always an affective influence.<sup>40</sup> Another point of strength in the study is that the Scripture is its main base. Hence, the suggestions are sincere making it relevant in quality, adaptability and applicability.

On another dimension, a number of weak points exist in this study. For instance, few have been accessed which specifically deal with the subject matter of the research. Similarly, something else that may appear to be a shortfall in the survey is what could be referred to as 'lone stance.' There was hardly any literature consulted during the research process which expressly posits that SDAs should more preferably marry within their ranks. Most of the references support the idea of Christians marrying their fellow Christians, but not SDAs marrying within their faith circle.

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<sup>40</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 339.

Furthermore, this research offers three main opportunities for further research: (1) The theological basis of this research can be developed beyond its present level (2) The changing value system in marriage is another opportunity for extensive discourse, (3) Membership loss through interfaith marriage is a challenge faced by virtually all religious bodies across the world.<sup>41</sup> However, more studies can be carried out on this challenging situation, perhaps from another perspective.

However, this research was faced with a number of threats. During the field work, insurgency was at its peak in the western part of Rivers State, Nigeria; particularly, Ogba and the neighbouring clans. Between 2014 and 2016 most people had fled the area in order to save their lives. Few church members attended worship sessions in their local churches. Most churches were closed down because insurgents who were camped in the community were always killing people. The most unfortunate aspect of it was church members were reserved and could not speak freely because some youths in the church were informants to insurgent groups.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Experience has shown that every local Christian congregation faces a peculiar challenge in fulfilling the mission of the Church according to the cultural context in which they operate. Reasons for exogamous marital arrangements also vary with the circumstances of the church members. A research conducted on two dissimilar cultural settings may reveal a little more about the exigencies of interfaith marriage.

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<sup>41</sup> Harvey J. Locke, et al, "Interfaith Marriages" *Social Problems*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 333 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1957), 239.

## **Project Report**

The concluding activities of this project will include, a report to SDA Church Omoku and Rivers West Conference. The intervention proffered will be test-run for a period of six months in these entities to ascertain its efficacy in increasing the prospect of membership retention through endogamous marriages within the church. The recipients of these reports have been intimated in advance with these plans, and they are eager to receive the reports whose positive effect they believe will be far reaching.

### **Relationship of the Review and Stability of Church Membership**

The books reviewed are relevant in scope and content to the central focus of this chapter. They are a select few among a vast collection of literature which significantly relate to the issues herein examined. Though, none of the materials directly deal with the question of membership stability in SDA Church Omoku. Nevertheless, the general direction of their discourse and the authors' force of thought favor the overall theme of the research.

It is noteworthy that no book on membership stability in SDA Church Omoku is readily available. Perhaps, this work may be the very first specifically done on the congregation in question. However, it may be reasoned that, as far as experience in missions can prove, the challenges of parishioners in one local church are usually similar to those of many others in different geographical areas. Hence, the issue of membership stability in Omoku church cannot be treated in isolation. The research draws from experiences on church membership management in different situations and different Christian denominations.

At the time of this research cultism and insurgency have been on the increase within Omoku metropolis. The loss of lives and property which characterised the crisis to some extent negatively impacted the worldview of many Christians, not least, the Adventists in the area.

Since Omoku is a center of civilization for the Ogbas, the people's willingness to adjust their dwelling arrangement in response to the need to accommodate strangers is remarkable. Some of the aforementioned people groups who migrated to Omoku have lived among the natives for centuries.

In many societies around the world, strangers are the main agents of development. Omoku town is not an exception to this rule. Growth in population, trade and commerce, infrastructural development and governance, to mention but a few are some of the ways Omoku has benefitted from migrants. Little wonder why the arms of the town are still wide open to accommodate more tribal settlers.

However, most of the people groups in Omoku came with their cultures and religions. This makes the town a complex society. The recurrent loss of members by SDA Church through mixed marriages is largely traceable to the influence of the 'mixed multitude' among whom the church operates. The changing trends of societal life often encourage the promotion of traditional cultures. Sometimes, when Christians are caught between culture clash, in order not to appear odd, they succumb to community influence. Nevertheless, it has been noted that at such a critical moment when traditional culture conflict with, for instance, the Christian principle on marriage, the Christians should make a difference and not compromise the standards of their faith.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 133.

Furthermore, a considerable change of interest is observed among postmodern church membership. Many Christian churches have what may be termed 'mobile membership'. Worshippers tend to gravitate towards a different Christian denomination which appears to be trendier in worship style. This is mostly the case with Pentecostal Sunday-keeping churches. The driving force for itinerant membership is either the miracle manifestation syndrome or connectivity for economic wellbeing.

Nevertheless, membership retention is critical to the life of the church. Marrying right is a major factor in the control of church membership movement. It is more probable that a couple who belong to the same faith community would raise children who would also maintain the family spiritual heritage. The outcome is mostly different with a couple affiliated to different religions. Against this background, it is expected that Adventist would find it a rare privilege to use this study as a resources for the effective fulfillment of the church's mission in Omoku town.

### **Reflections**

Exogamous marriage among The Seventh-day Adventists is causal to membership drain from the church. It may seem insignificant that twelve members have married outside Omoku church in three years. But when this figure is multiplied by two every three years the colossal damage wrought by this syndrome appears in a clearer light.

### **Summary**

An overview of the work done reveals that the main points of the field research are: (a) interfaith marriage among SDAs is a present reality, (b) the church is experiencing membership loss through interfaith marriages, (c) church members are

desirous to check the menace of membership loss through interfaith marriage, and (d) it is possible to increase endogamous marriages among SDAs to foster membership retention.

The following section will focus on the implementation of an integrated intervention plan for marital adjustment and membership retention in The Seventh-day Adventist Omoku. This is consequent upon the result of the quantitative information, and qualitative data emanating from the field survey reported in this chapter, and intervention module proposed thereto.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

A comprehensive report of the implementation carried out by the researcher and his team has been presented in this chapter. The implementation exercise began from August 6, 2016 and ended on October 15, 2016. This programme was short-lived because the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in which Omoku town is located was ravaged by insurgency. This unrest which started from the end of 2014 has carried through 2016. It adversely affected the progress of this research because of the massive migration of church members from the troubled area in an effort to save their lives. Hence, there was no opportunity for a long drawn out implementation and intervention programme since the writing of the dissertation was to end in December 2016. However, the little opportunity available for the implementation was effectively used by the researcher to ensure the success of the programme.

The intervention planning and implementation exercise came from inspiration drawn from a collection of relevant books including the Scriptures and Ellen White's writings. To a great extent, the reflection of the latter on Christ's strategy of training his disciples who were the resource persons<sup>1</sup> sent to work with the people was insightful. Following this example, participants who have been trained during this program are expected to enlighten others in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 18.

### **Pre-Implementation Consultations**

There were preliminary activities such as private meetings between the researcher and his team to develop strategies for the intervention programme. The researcher also consulted the leadership of SDA Church Omoku for authorisation to carry out the first and second evaluation activities through questionnaires. From those early endeavours came the inspiration for the procedure that was adopted for the intervention. Thereafter, the research team collated reports from the seminars as presented in this chapter.

### **Presentations during the Implementation**

The titles of presentations made during the implementation are: (a) Family Ministries Leaders Training Workshop, (b) Role of the Pastor and Intra-faith Marriage Modelling, (c) Marrying God's Way: A Parental Guidance Module, (d) Marrying God's Way: Insights for Singles, and (e) Effective Family Empowerment Through Wealth Creation. A concise description of each seminar has been made in the succeeding portions of this chapter. The last subdivisions of the chapter contain information about the final evaluation and the project report.

### **Programme Implementation Narratives**

The activities carried out during the implementation were entirely a reorientation towards biblical spirituality and marital relationship for members of SDA Church Omoku. There were pre-intervention programmes such as planning sessions between the researcher and his research assistants.

Areas considered during this planning session were: (a) Timing of the program in relation to the church's calendar of events to avoid clashes. However, during the consultation of the team with the church, there was assurance that the implementation

program would be accommodated. (b) Translation. It was also considered that there would be need for translation of the presentations to the local language since majority of the participants were Igburu speaking people of Ogba ethnic nationality. To this end, two elders were selected to handle speech translation at each session to enhance the flow of communication between the presenter and the audience. (c) Method of presentation. The research team agreed that power point presentation would be the most effective way of presenting the lectures to the audience because of its visual aid. For this reason, all the presentations were prepared in power point.

Against this background, the intervention programme was implemented in a considerably church member-friendly manner. Because the events were adapted for the research context, the participants could easily identify with the process. However, the researcher was cautious to ensure that the focus of the study which is to effectively address the issue of membership stability through intra-faith marriage was not lost in the effort to make the programme participant-friendly.

Among the pre-implementation activities carried out by the researcher and his team to prepare the ground for the implementation was the preparation of a written schedule of events as shown in Appendix C. Thereafter interactive sessions were held on July 22 and 30, 2016 respectively in SDA Church Omoku to prime the congregation for the intervention programme proper. During this meeting, the researcher gave an overview of the implementation programme and allowed for relevant suggestions from the audience to enrich the program. This event was aimed at testing the efficacy of the proposed solution to the issue of interfaith marriage among the members. The high points of the event were an interactive meeting to discuss matters arising from the project.

The interactive session held on Saturday, July 22, 2016 began at 2:00 p.m. It was more of a briefing, but participants had time to ask questions which were answered satisfactorily to place both participants and presenter on the same page. Knowing that other sessions were going to follow subsequently, the audience made effort to know as much as they could in order to lend their support to the research team where necessary.

A total number of 193 persons who came for worship that day participated in the session. The event gave many individuals who did not participate in the special group discussions an opportunity to fully understand what the series of meetings in their church were all about. Towards the end of this meeting, attendees were informed of the next pre-intervention meeting would come up the following Sabbath.

Following the schedule, the next pre-intervention meeting was held on Saturday, July 30, 2016. It was a three-hour session beginning at 2:00 p.m. Altogether, 233 persons were in attendance during this meeting. The increase in attendance showed that more persons had been sensitized by those who attended the previous session. The basic point of discussion at this session was the need to offer not only a spiritually and socially oriented solution to the problem of interfaith marriage in the church, but also the people's willingness to adapt the plan to their interests and also have an effective mechanism for project monitoring and evaluation. During this session, individual speakers were given opportunity to make observations to clarify issues. Each session was an exciting moment in which discussions centred on marriage and family welfare.

In keeping with procedures, a key aspect of the plan developed has a work schedule showing details of the tasks and activities to be performed. To that end, the roles and responsibilities of team members as well as deadlines to be met are

contained in each subsection. In a more practical way, the plan highlighted the roles of the research assistants who were also family ministries leaders of the church. Their knowledge and skills including the extent to which they could contribute to the success of the project was considered.

Planning is one task while its implementation is another. Therefore, this chapter also includes a preliminary study undertaken to assess whether this plan will be effective as a spiritual and social remedy to the issue of membership loss through interfaith marriage. The entire proposal is based on the three-pronged philosophy of objectivity, growth in knowledge and rational for the project being carried out. These will be made more manifest in three phases: Planning phase, implementation phase and evaluation phase.

The objectives of the session include: (a) creating awareness among the family ministries leaders that the incidence of membership loss through interfaith marriages not only exists in Omoku church, but was assuming a higher dimension, (b) a critical examination of the issue vis-à-vis the facts and extent of negative impact on the church. These were done with a view to determining the immediate and remote causes of the problem, (c) equipping the family ministries leaders with relevant tools to effectively tackle the subsisting problem membership loss through interfaith marriage. This may not be an exhaustive list of expected result yet, to a large extent, it captures the basic envisioned outcomes of the program.

### **Strengths of Intra-faith over Interfaith Marriage**

The basic mechanism developed for checking membership loss in SDA Church Omoku was the series of five seminars indicated earlier. This was because the people mostly needed education to change their former inclination to interfaith marriage. It was also expected that this approach would help in stabilizing the

membership. The concept behind these presentations was: move from the least important to the more complex information. This had been done in such a manner as to make it participant--friendly.

All the presentations were compliant with modern information communication technology (ICT) for easy understanding. Other reasons for using these delivery methods was that the target group was already acquainted with the process and instrumentation. The church Pastor who was a member of the research team arranged to make hard copies for his parishioners. While the PowerPoint presentations made the researcher's demonstration easy and enhanced the audience's cognitive balance of hearing and seeing, the hard copies served as a follow up reading material. The following are representations of the lectures given.

### **Family Ministries Leaders Training Workshop**

This was the first training workshop conducted by the researcher. It was held on Sunday, July 17, 2016 at SDA Omoku. It was a training session for family ministries leaders only. By the office and orientation, family ministries leaders are responsible for ministering to all families in the local church. They are to follow up the implementation and ensure that the legacies from the intervention program were not lost on the church members in a short time. A total number of 17 family ministries leaders attended and participated in the program. Since there is a proviso in the SDA Church manual that officers may be re-elected if their services are needed for another year, the church was counselled to allow these leaders who have been specially trained to uphold the values of intra-faith marriage to serve a second tenure in order for their activity of reorienting the members to be more effective.

The lecture related that a family is the primary setting for learning and exchange of values and capacity building towards a closer relationship with God and

other members of the society. Hence, a healthy family is vital to the Church's disciple-making and membership retention efforts. Giving proper orientation and guidance to families in every aspect of family existence is one of the duties of the family ministries department. A reflection of the duties of the family ministries can be seen in the declaration: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal 4:5,6). Other Scriptural references related to the office in question include: Gen. 2:18-25; Exod 20:12; Deut 6:5-9; Prov 22:6; Mal 4:5,6; Matt 5:31,32; 19:3-9,12; Mark 10:11,12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor 7:7,10,11; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:21-33; 6:1-4).

Furthermore, marriage and family was established by God in the garden of Eden. Christ in His teachings also affirm that it is a lifetime union between a man and a woman, and is underscored by love and intimacy. Marriage commitment involves a relationship with God and humanity. Hence an offence against one's spouse is also offense against God. Such considerations are usually possible where a marital union has been established between a man and a woman who share a common faith.

Participants also learnt that sharing love, honor, respect, and concern are the bedrock of the conjugal relationship. Additionally, the relationship is to reflect the sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Although some family connection may be lacking in these qualities, a couple who fully devote themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. That end product is very crucial because the family is expected to influence the society positively. The family cannot impart what it does not have.

Hence, in a deeper sense, God favours the family and is delighted to see its members help each other grow to maturity. A stronger family tie is the best promotion of Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Parents for that matter, can effectively bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. Through precept and example, they are able to teach the young ones that Jesus is a loving, tender, caring and compassionate shepherd who wants them to become part of His sheepfold which embraces every individual, especially singles and married persons.

To function efficiently, the family ministries leader has to be a person with keen insight on the dynamics of home building and interest in marriage and family generally. An individual or married couple may be elected to serve in this capacity. Most preferably, though, it should be somebody who is known to “manage his own family well and see to it that his children obey him with proper respect.” (1Tim 3:4). In this way, he or she can give proper orientation and guidance to other families in every aspect of family life.

In addition to modelling strong and growing family relationships, showing a sincere interest in supporting the well-being of all families in the church, the family ministries leader(s) needs to have an understanding of God's redemptive plan to deal with the imperfection in marriage that sin has caused. The leader(s) also needs to maintain appropriate privacy and know when and how to encourage individuals in critical situations to seek professional counselling. Church members whose confidential discussion with a leader is made public without authorization recoils inward.

The responsibilities of a family ministries leader include, but are not limited to (a) upholding the biblical teaching that are related to the family and uplifting God's ideals for family living; (b) bringing to bear on their ministry, an understanding of the

brokenness experienced by individuals and families in a fallen world; (c) developing unity and love between the couples and in the family of God; (d) fostering reconciliation between the generations promised in Elijah's message in Malachi 4:5, 6; (e) extending hope and support to those who have been hurt by abuse, family dysfunction, and broken relationships; (f) providing relational growth opportunities through family life education and enrichment; (g) helping individuals, married couples, and families to avail themselves of professional counselling when necessary; (h) focusing ministry to families in the local church on premarital guidance for parents, bachelors and spinsters. Other responsibilities are (i) giving attention to the special needs of single parents and stepfamilies and providing instruction on family-to-family evangelism; (j) creating an enabling environment for synergy between the family ministries department and other departments of the church in order to enhance follow up activities on families that have received education through this program.

At this point there was a breakout session and participants met in groups of eight for a 30-minute workshop. During this time out, discussions were centred on the procedure of affirming intra-faith marriage from the individual to the local church levels. Table 2 below shows the discussion and summary of reactions by the discussants.

*Table 2. Affirmation of Intra-Faith Marriage in a Local Church and Summary of Discussion Group Understanding*

S/N How To Affirm Intra-faith Marriage	In A Local Church Summary of Discussion Group Understanding
1. Establish a functional marriage committee	The chairman of this body will be the family ministries leader. Role is to help church members plan and do their marriages in line with church principles.
2. Organize a marriage seminar every six months	This will be arranged by the family ministries department and financed by the local church. The aim is to enrich the marriages of church members.
3. Quarterly marriage counselling Session	Facilitated by the Pastor and family ministries leader, it is a way of giving special attention to the needs of church members who are preparing for marriage.
4. Maintain a current directory of families in the church	By this means, the family ministries leader can keep track of families in the church.
5. Embark on quarterly visitation of all families in the church	Facilitated by the family ministries leader, this will give families of the church a sense of belonging and bring about membership stability.
6. Share inspirational Scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy marriage tips with singles through social media networks	Powered by the family ministries department, this will keep the singles spiritually focused in all marital interests
7. Organize recreational activities for singles occasionally.	In this way singles in the church will socialize with one another, and more importantly develop marital relationships among themselves.

Attendees at this training session also learnt that affirming intra-faith marriage is key to being a co-worker of Christ. The family circle for that matter is a powerful machinery for co-working with Christ. The home is missionary field second to none in importance. Aside from the nurture provided by the home, it is a more

effective agency for reaching neighbours. Unfortunately, the home front has been neglected for too long. Therefore, this seminar is presented as a remedial resource for the battered home front. Furthermore, "God designs that the families of earth shall be a symbol of the family in heaven. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are among His most effective agencies for the formation of Christian character and for the advancement of His work."<sup>2</sup> Also, "The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. . . . Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives."<sup>3</sup>

Revelation 21:2 uses marital word pictures to describe the New Jerusalem. In the same way the vision of Isaiah 65:20-23 gives an impression of a family setting in the new world. This background indicates that family life will be relevant to human existence in the new earth. Since the church is God's agency for promoting God's kingdom, she owes every family the duty of equipping them to enjoy the graces of God's kingdom here, and also preparing them for a fulfilled family life in the new earth.

This event which began at 9:00 a.m. ended at 4:00 p.m. It was such a long session because it was interspersed with congregational songs and seasons of prayers. The last part of the session question and answer. It all turned out to be an exciting exercise.

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<sup>2</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 430.

<sup>3</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1942), 352.

### **Intra-faith Marriage Model: Role of the Pastor**

As part of the intervention implementation, on Tuesday, August 30, 2016, between 2-4 p.m. the researcher held a seminar for Pastors on intra-faith marriage. The presentation which was done in PowerPoint had thirteen slides in all. In order to make room for post-seminar studies, hard copies of the presentation were also given to all participants. The researcher and his team agree with the scholarly concept that the Pastor's role is indispensable in mission fulfilment.<sup>4</sup> The team also perceived much earlier in the project that the Pastor should be factored into the intervention process. The effectiveness of any initiative directed at addressing the issue of membership stability in SDA Church Omoku begins with the church Pastor. Once the leader understands the seriousness of the problem, and shares the vision behind the intervention plan, that leader becomes a driving force behind it.

It is for this reason that the church Pastor was also trained. This subheading was the title of the seminar material used in that training. The seminar cites a number of examples on Pastoral involvement in the marriage of church members as follows: (a) Abraham demonstrated both fatherly and priestly concern in the choice of a wife for his son, Isaac (Gen 24:2,4), (b) Jesus intervened to resolve the crisis of finished wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:7,8), (c) Jesus posits that a good shepherd stands to defend the flock against predators (John 10:12), and (d) Paul counsels that the honour of the marriage ordinance must be maintained (Heb. 13:4).

Through this training, the Pastor of SDA Church Omoku understood the missional motif for the entire project which is: 1. to strengthen faith in the seventh-day Sabbath through the family lineage, 2. to sustain the biological growth of church

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<sup>4</sup> S. Joseph Kidder, "Biblical Role of the Pastor" *Ministry Magazine* (Nampa, Id: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2009), 19.

membership through the nuclear family, and 3. to establish the value of mission focus from the platform of marital relationship. As a result of this, the church Pastor set up a marriage committee to oversee all marriage plans in the church. Furthermore, he announced a monthly schedule for family counselling to which all families in the church were expected to be part of.

### **Marrying God's Way: Parental Guidance**

This lecture was borne of the need to create an awareness in parents who worship in SDA Church Omoku that the problem of membership drain through interfaith marriage exist in their congregation. On the other hand, through the lecture, the researcher sought to expose the values of intra-faith marriage to parents as a possible solution to the aforementioned problem. There was little room for disbelief on the part of the parents because many of them had participated in the survey earlier carried out which established fact that the church was losing membership through interfaith marriage. Hence, parental responsibility of guiding young ones on marital choice-making is will to a great extent, affect the membership of the church positively.

Against this background, the lecture shared some insights on effective actions to be taken to check interfaith marriage, and encourage intra-faith marriage instead with a view to stabilize the church's membership. This presentation was centred on parental responsibility of guiding young ones in their marital choice-making. The lecture shared some key insights on the principles of effective action designed to counter the trend of interfaith marriage in order to stabilize the membership of SDA Church Omoku.

Some foundational passages in Scripture for parental guidance in a child's marital choice-making considered during the presentation includes Genesis 1:27,28

which indicates that the Bible narrative began with marriage; and Revelation 21:2 which shows that the Bible narrative ends with marriage. This is an important indication that family relationship is integral to God's overall plan for human welfare in this life and in the next world.

The lecture also highlighted the fact that in order for God's blessings to be upon a marital union, parental guidance is indispensable. Parental guidance to a child is as crucial as that of the church in marriage planning. Hence, the Bible pays much attention to it. Marriage and family counsellors equally devote much of their studies and writings to issues arising from parenting, because it is fundamental to the future of the child, and generally to the welfare of a budding family.

Among other issues considered in the lecture is the contemporary attitudes of parents towards the marital choices of their children. From an opinion poll by participants at the seminar in regard to the issue being discussed, the researcher recorded that some parents believe their: (a) child is of age to choose whoever he or she wishes to marry, (b) children should be allowed to follow the rhythm of their heart, (c) child's marriage to a spouse of choice can bring financial and social benefit to the family, (d) marrying from another religion can lead to the conversion of a soul, (e) religion does not matter so long as love exist between a prospective couple, (f) God will understand that why a person had to marry outside the faith, (g) children get offended when their marital interests are controlled against their will. Therefore, parents should avoidance such a conflict in the family. However, regardless of these opinions, the researcher referred the audience to the Scriptural passage: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Pro 13:24).

Furthermore, the presenter examined some exemplary parenting in the Bible to show that it is possible for parents to guide the marital interests of their children without hurting them. Typical examples are as follows: Terah guided the marriage of Abram to Sarai (Gen 11:28-30), Abraham guided the marriage of his son Isaac to Rebecca (Gen 24), Isaac and Rebecca guided the marriage of their son Jacob to Rachael (Gen 27:46-28:1-3), Naomi guided the marriage of her daughter-in-law, Ruth to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-4).

Again, the lecture related some biblical insights on parental guidance that facilitate intra-faith marriage. These include: waiting on the Lord through prayers (Gen 24:7), creating opportunity for parental involvement (Gen 24:6-9), choosing a spouse within the faith circle (Gen 24:3,4), avoidance of premarital sex (Gen 24:65-67), recognition of extended family (Gen 24:4), making Jesus the central figure in the marriage (John 2:1), factoring into the marital relationship the plan of salvation (Rev 21:2), recognising the role of the church in the marriage plans (John 2:2), and realizing the expectation of the public in the marriage (Matt 1:19).

The presenter also emphasized the need to contextualize parental guidance in the process of marital choice-making. Three factors were considered in this regard. These are timing, culture and religion. Under timing, parents are expected to ensure that their children and wards time their marriages aright irrespective of present benefits. This is mainly to avoid underage marriage. Similarly, culture plays a vital role in Christian marriage. Some cultures discourage sustenance and maturity of faith. A typical African family is a centre of cultural. Hence, parents are expected to lead their children to exercise caution in regard to the culture to which they affiliate themselves through marriage. A third consideration is religion which embodies worship. Perhaps, reverence is the most influential aspect of humanity. It changes

perceptions and attitudes to reflect the interests of the one to who such a difference is shown.

This lecture also reflected on the vital role of education in marital choice-making. It noted that those who are not properly educated in regard to the intricacies of marriage often make grievous mistakes in their marital choices and suffer in the end. Under such enlightenment, passion is better controlled, divine will for an individual as revealed in Scriptures come into sharper focus, and achievements are sustainable. This is why the marital union is best for like minds.

Parental guidance in marital choice-making paves way for multiple benefits. Some examples are: respect for nuclear and extended families, generational culture of obeying God, serving as living example to others, maintenance of family unity, reciprocal goodwill, divine favour and ultimately, eternal life.

Summarily, parents were reminded of the divine command: “From now on you are to obey me and teach your children and your descendants to obey me for all time to come” Isaiah 59:21(Good News Translation), because parents would be required to give account of their children on the day of judgement as reflected in the passage: “Where is the flock that as entrusted to you, the sheep of which you boasted?” (Jer 13:20-21, NIV).

### **Effective Family Empowerment through Wealth Creation**

As shown by the survey data in chapter 4, SDAs, especially ladies, practice interfaith marriage partly for economic benefits. Some believe that most suitors from the church live below the poverty line and cannot afford the comfort desired by an average 21<sup>st</sup> century girl. Hence, when a more promising suitor appears on the marital horizon, he becomes the best choice. It is to check marital choice-making based on

feelings such as this that this seminar was developed. Furthermore, the seminar aims at empowering families economically as a way of stabilizing church membership. In accordance with the implementation plan of this project, this is one in the series of seminars presented at SDA Church Omoku on Sunday, August 7, 2016 between 01:20 p.m.- 02:45 p.m. and the audience was made up of mostly couples and singles.

The lecture underscored the fact that from the beginning God endowed creation with the power of increase. It is a privilege for humans to share in this divine attribute. However, many people do not tap into this wonderful opportunity due to causes ranging from lack of awareness to inability of government to create a conducive atmosphere for sustainable development in the country. Hence, they do not have enough money to acquire the things they need.

It is God's intention that His children live comfortably and also be able to support His work with their resources. Healthcare, food, clothing, accommodation are essential to human wellbeing. Therefore, it is important for every individual to learn how to create wealth and enjoy proper existence. The Scriptures declare that God "is the one who gives...power to get wealth," (Deut 8:18).

Furthermore, participants learnt that wealth creation is the amassing of assets and property which is more than is required for survival. Such excess may be invested to generate further resources. Wealth may also refer to the value of everything a person or family owns. This includes tangible items such as cars, housing and other personal property, and non-tangible assets such as education and good health. Wealth can also be seen in light of financial assets such as stock and bonds which can be traded for cash.

The researcher and his team taught the audience that there are important factors in wealth creation. For a Christian, these may include prayers for divine

guidance, good planning, tithing of income, control of expenses, investment, insuring of investment, saving of extra income, building of multiple streams of income and maintenance of health/sizeable family. The Scriptures contain many tidbits on wealth creation. They are time-tested and reliable principles. For instance, the Bible promotes the idea of investing generously in God's work in order to be blessed bountifully in return: "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6). Similarly, one-tenth of all earning belongs to God (Mal 3:10). Obedience to this rule opens a pathway for greatness and wealth.

Nevertheless, one of the challenges one may encounter in the process of building wealth is spending less than one earns. Controlling one's expenditure is based the simple but difficult culture of spending less than one earns. Budgeting of income and expenses is a basic factor resource control. This requires scaling of financial preferences. The audience was taught that the need to consider what is necessary and discretionary expenses is important in checking the outflow of funds.

After cutting down on expenses, it is easy to know how much of the income one can live without. That portion is what one may invest. Investment may include 1. keeping money in a savings account to accrue interest. 2. investing in stock or property. 3. investing in personal daily business, or a combination of the above depending on prevailing circumstances. Wealth multiplies at a faster rate when one takes advantage of the opportunities available to grow and expand resources. The wise man counsels: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Pro 6:6, KJV).

It cannot be overemphasized that it is importance to make preparation for a suitable income against the future when one is no longer able to support the family.

Other ways to assuring future income includes: (a) Making a retirement plan (b) Writing a will (c) Investing in long term assets.

Nevertheless, continual education and self-improvement in other areas of life are essentials to gaining greater opportunities for employment or business. Some essential personality attribute in wealth creation include: (a) developing personal skills and acting with self-respect. (b) Avoid being shamed to start small where the resources are scarce; and be focused on the goal. (c) Wisely apply the skills acquired and make conscious effort to translate vision into material value.

It cannot be overemphasized that one needs an income first in order to start saving. If one is already in debt, it can be quiet difficult to save. Nevertheless, it is important to start saving little amounts. Wealth creation requires proper debt management culture which increasingly reduces liability and increases assets. A person without a savings does not have much to hope for in future. A good reserve for the future relaxes the mind and generates a feeling wellbeing.

The lecture ended by drawing the mind of the participants to the fact that sustainable income must not be viewed only in terms of salaried jobs as most people do. Wealth creation requires moving from dependence to independence level. This can be achieved by creating values that can be recaptured through a high level of financial compensation. Some of the ways to realize this to provide services, knowledge or experience. One who is not creating values does not have much to build wealth with. The process of creating wealth includes a conscious effort to monetize every talent or skill and leaving nothing to chance.

Similarly, creating wealth requires being healthy because good health is an aspect of wealth. An individual who is not in health is not wealthy and cannot create wealth. 3 John 2 expresses the divine wish for Christians to be in health in order to

prosper in other areas of life. At this point the lecture also reflected on the health rules in the Bible with particular reference to the study on clean and unclean foods as found in Deuteronomy 14 and Leviticus 11. Furthermore, observing temperance in food and drink is essential to good health. Other realities highlighted in the lecture on how to build a solid foundation for wealth include raising just a suitable family size, engaging in regular physical exercise, taking adequate rest, think aright and trusting in God.

“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Pro 22:29, KJV). The principles of wealth creation are so simple and practicable. Creating wealth is a function of being consistent as well as maintaining high level of discipline and self-control in handling finance.

During the interactive session that followed the presentation, participants expressed their satisfaction with the level of knowledge gained through the lecture. They also expressed the awareness that it is never late for anyone to create wealth no matter what present circumstances may be. It only requires making a good use of one’s potentials, available opportunities and trusting in God who owns all wealth and makes wealth creation possible. The participants unanimously agreed that there was no need to lend oneself to interfaith marriage for economic reasons because everyone has opportunity to make wealth early or later in life.

### **Marrying God’s Way: Insights for Singles**

This is another lecture that was presented on Saturday, August 6, 2016 at SDA Church Omoku between 02:35 p.m.-03:40 p.m. the lecture emphasized the fact that singles occupy a very important position in the church family. They play a major role in church growth and leadership. Since majority of the singles are of intermediate age, they are a channel for the transmission of values from the older generation to children. Unfortunately, as a group that transiting from the unmarried to the married state, they

often have issues with marriage. Some are misguided in their quest Hence, the researcher saw the need to guide them towards a balanced worldview and practice of Christian marriage.

This lecture drew attention to the statement of the wise man: “Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Pro. 1:8-9). This presupposes that applying the principles of the word of God to marriage situations will make the singles succeed in their marital endeavours. The reactions of the singles during interactive sessions revealed that, with proper enlightenment, most of them will go about their marital choice-making more intelligently and in obedience to God. Therefore, suggestions have been made in this seminar to help those who were present at this event understand and embrace the biblical perspective of intra-faith marriage which is the focal point of the program.

As an introduction to the presentation, the researcher explained that singles are a category of people who are mature enough for marriage but are either unmarried, or hold a post-nuptial status. They are further subdivided into three distinct groups namely: Spinsters and Bachelors, the Affianced, and Single Parents. A closer examination of these groups revealed that spinsters and bachelors are women and men who are eligible for marriage but have never been married. They are mostly independent, and are at the stage of exploring opportunities for acquaintance with a prospective fiancé or fiancée, and subsequent engagement. Meanwhile, the affianced are a set of men and women who are engaged to be married and are preparing to tie the nuptial knot sooner or later. The third group is made up of single parents. Generally, these are individuals who were once married, but are now living on their own or with children and wards from their former marriages.

Singles are individuals from various families who exist within a psychological situation. A single man or woman can be hurt through abuse, family dysfunction, and broken relationship(s). Emotional imbalance resulting from such a situation usually lead to a number of complications in the lives of the single person. Most unmarried people have the tendency of being proud, satisfied, and self-assertive. The mood of others shows sadness, inferiority complex, worry, over-sensitivity, loneliness, insecurity, pessimism, or uncertainty about their future and families. Other forms of reaction include, withdrawal from others, interpersonal difficulties, aggression, and escape mechanisms.<sup>5</sup>

More often than not these behaviours are brought about by the manner in which society and family treat the singles. In some situations, people exercise little tolerance for singles. For instance, a single lady testified during the interactive session that her family often cast aspersions on her for not being married up till the time of this program when she was 31 year of age. Similarly, a 36-year lady related that a number of times she had been mocked in their village for being unmarried while all her mates were married and had children. A middle aged man in the audience also said that he had been branded “chronic bachelor” by his neighbours because he was still searching for a good wife. Unhappy moods are more serious among singles who are both uneducated and unemployed. Such individuals often feel that they have failed in life and deserve the insult of the public on their person. These kinds of personality conflicts can effectively be resolved by reconnection to society through Bible-based marriage.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles A. Waehler, *Bachelors: The Psychology of Men Who Haven't Married* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 27.

Furthermore, the singles were taught that marriage must not be an ad hoc union. Rather, it should be a well-planned, legally recognized relationship which is established by a civil or religious ceremony, between a man and a woman who intend to live together permanently as sexual and domestic partners. It is to remove any misunderstanding about this reality that the Bible presents marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman for companionship (Gen 2:18), and procreation (Gen 1:28).

Reasoning from cause to effect, the participants confirmed the result of the survey reported in chapter 4 that the following are the factors behind interfaith marriages within the context of the study: (a) Strange doctrines introduced in the church by those who are holding intimate relationships with people of other faiths, (b) High level of poverty which drives the less-privileged within the church to surrender themselves non-SDAs because of economic support. (c) Uncontrolled desire on the part of church members to be as fashionable as their neighbours and acquaintances. (d) Inadequate spiritual nurture of church members due to limited number of Pastors who are to provide care. (e) influence of Pentecostalism on church members. (f) Negative influence of family and significant others on matters affecting marriage. (g) Poor church programming resulting from ineffective administration and loss of mission focus. (h) High influence of urban acculturation especially on the youths of the church. (i) Inaccessibility of Adventist formal education to a typical Adventist youth due to high fees, and (j) Influence of social media network streaming.

Interestingly, the attendees of the course generally accepted that all the anomalies listed herein can be corrected by the power of God. To this possible, during the 30-minute interactive session that took place after the presentation, participants wished to know what can stand as a marriage model in the Bible. The presenter

responded to this by referring to the marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:18, 20-24), and that of Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24). These constitute a model of espousal even for present day Christians. The account of Adam and Isaac's marriage reveals that they followed certain principles. They married at maturity, prayed for divine guidance, planned well, shared the same faith with their spouses and also had divine approval. Furthermore, Isaac had parental consent, and fulfilled rites of passage from singlehood to married life such as payment of bride price.

Other important factors to be considered in the choice of a spouse include age, complexion, physical size and medical compatibility. The essence of satisfying these requirements is that marriage is for permanence. Entering such a lifetime covenant demands a careful consideration of whatever may hinder the expected unity, do not cons and love. Against this background, elopement cannot be considered as a solution to parental disapproval of one's choice of a spouse. The apostle Paul counsels that marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure (Heb 13:4 NIV). This may pass for the theme of every conjugal arrangement.

Though the companion of your choice were in all other respects worthy (which He is not), yet he has not accepted the truth for this time; he is an unbeliever, and you are forbidden of heaven to unite yourself with him. You cannot, without peril to your soul, disregard this divine injunction.<sup>6</sup>

Realizing the dire consequences of marrying against will of God as revealed in Scripture, White further encourages a careful consideration of one's marital interest through the following statement:

Examine carefully to see if your married life would be happy, or inharmoonious and wretched. Let the questions be raised, will this union help me heavenward? Will it increase my love for God? and will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> White, *Testimonies*, vol.5, 364.

<sup>7</sup> White, *Messages to Young People*, 449.

Very often individuals make the wrong choice of a marriage partner with good intentions. For instance, some individuals get affianced to people of a different faith for the sake of converting them and increasing the membership of the church. But White also declares that such a good intention is not even enough reason for the practice of interfaith marriage.

The happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of the parties; but between the believer and the unbeliever there is a radical difference of tastes, inclinations, and purposes...however pure and correct one's principles may be, the influence of an unbelieving companion will have a tendency to lead away from God.<sup>8</sup>

As a way to make the presentation more result-oriented, some solutions to interfaith marriage were offered. These included (a) availing oneself of follow-up seminars from the family ministries department of the church, (b) holding a symposium on policy regulation about espousal procedures within the church, with particular reference to the demand for unpleasant traditional marriage rites from suitors, (c) availing oneself of available Pastoral service, (d) availing oneself of all the structures put in place by the church to induct youths into SDA religious culture, (e) emphasize ideal interpersonal relationship/mutual support. Avail oneself of Adventist formal education, and finally, (f) encourage the effort of church leadership to maintain biblical marital ideals.

The policy statement of the church on marriage helped to drive home all that had been said to the audience: “for the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and woman who share a common faith”<sup>9</sup> Beyond this, there are other words of caution against marital

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<sup>8</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th edition, 2015, 170.

union between “the believer and unbeliever.” The latter has been described as a fellow Christian who has “not accepted the truth for this time.”<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of the fact that some Adventist Churches and ministers heedlessly gloss over interfaith marriage connections among in their parishioners, specific official statements exist that prohibit a The Seventh-day Adventist Pastors to wed a mismatched couple.

Marriages are more likely to endure, and family life to fulfil the divine plan, If husband and wife are united and are bound together by common spiritual Values and lifestyles. For these reasons the Church strongly discourages Marriage between Seventh-day Adventist and a member of another religion and strongly urges its Pastors not to perform such marriages.<sup>11</sup>

The Bible indicates that the purity and unity of the marital relationship in this world is symbolic of the marriage of the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) to His church at the second coming: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev 21:2). Similarly, the voices of a multitude of angels is heard heralding from heaven the coming of the marriage of the Lamb of God (Rev 19:7-9).

Towards the end of the session, the presenter recapped what the research team saw as the seven benefits of intra-faith marriage. These include: (1) steadfastness in Christian faith, (2) harmonious family life, (3) positive legacy for descendants, (4) exemplary lifestyle to other Adventists, (5) promotion of Adventist values to non-SDAs, (6) divine favour, and (7) eternal life. Whereas these benefits are not exhaustive, they significantly cover a wide range of the basic values of intra-faith marriage.

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<sup>10</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 364.

<sup>11</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th edition, 2015, 154.

Table 3. First Evaluation of Data from the Implementation

S/N	ITEMIZATION	NUMERIC DATA				
1.	No. of Evaluation Forms Administered	100				
2.	Male Respondents	37				
3.	Female Respondents	46				
4.	Total No. of Respondents	83				
5.	Ages of Respondents	18-25 (25)	26-49 (47)	50-above (11)		
6.	Marital Status of Respondents	Single (26)	Engaged (17)	Married (40)		
7.	Respondents worshipping with SDA Church Omoku	83				
8.	Respondents' Knowledge of Intra-faith Marriage in Connection with Salvation	Good (62)	Fair (10)	Unsure (4)	None (1)	Uninterested (2)
9.	Respondents who Participated in all the Seminars	54				
10.	Respondents Convinced of the Validity of Intra-faith Marriage	68				
11.	Respondents who Married During this Study	27				
12.	Respondents who Married Within the Church During this Study	17				
13.	Singles Currently Affianced to a Non-SDAs	24				
14.	Singles Proceeding with Interfaith Marriage Despite this Study	18				
15.	Singles Currently Affianced to Fellow SDAs	23				
16.	Singles who may consider intra-faith marriage in future	52				
17.	Respondents Willing to Mentor Youths on Intra-faith Marriage	45				

On another dimension, God declares in Scriptures: “Those who honour me I will honour,” (1 Samuel 2:30). This means that those follow biblical standards in their marital pursuits will be blessed by God. There may not be any direct command from God in the NT, unlike the OT, that His people should marry only within the fold. Nonetheless, there is harmony between the nuptial principle of both dispensations. Marrying God’s way is an open door to unlimited favour. “The Lord bestows favour

and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Ps 4:11). However, it was noted that the motivating factor for intra-faith marriage must not be the expectation of visible rewards, but rather, the satisfaction that the supreme will of God has been followed in humility.

The table above clearly indicates that the seminars had a positive impact on the membership of SDA Church Omoku. Pastors, Parents, family ministries leaders and singles alike gained a deeper insight on the specific roles of their groups in fostering intra-faith marriage. Perhaps what is more significant is the willingness of many to mentor the youths on intra-faith marriage. This is likely to have a long term positive effect on the church in the area of marriage and home building.

It is noteworthy that a number of non-Adventists attended the program. Initially, these men and women, perceived the presentations as religious segregation. During a presentation, one of them even asked: “Are we not worshipping the same God?” A young lady also inquired: “suppose I find a spouse in SDA Church and decide to become a member as a result, is it bad?” In response to these questions, the researcher said that the lectures had nothing to do with promoting the superiority of one religion or Christian denomination over another. Rather, it was concerned with the differentiation of understanding in Bible teaching, worship patterns and cultures which often have serious consequences on marriage. In the absence of such challenges, two Christians of opposite sex may be united in marriage.

Looking at the data from the evaluation conducted, the researcher and his team were satisfied with the extent of awareness created among the church members. Knowing the extent to which members of SDA Church Omoku had been involved with interfaith marriage, it was expected that there would be a high level of resistance.

Instead, the people reacted differently. Clearly, a revival has begun in the said congregation that will be followed by reformation of former interests on marriage.

### **Report of the Outcome**

On Monday, December 26, 2016 and Friday, December 30, 2016 the researcher and his team presented a report of the implementation to RWC and SDA Church Omoku respectively. The leadership of both entities who received the reports were pleased over the insightful and practicable program and promised to continue promoting its ideals.

### **Summary**

It is interesting to note that fulfilment of the gospel commission in some settings begins with crisis for the gospel worker as Jesus declares in Matthew 10:35-38. But, quite often, it ends in excitement for both the missionary and the adherent. This situation also applies individuals switching from interfaith marriage to intra-faith marriage. Initially, there is an attempt to resist the call to change from what they were used to, but as the truth is made clearer and more understandable, many embrace it, and sometimes wonder why they had delayed in changing their earlier perceptions and practices.

Prior to the second advent of Christ, His earthly church is expected to have fulfilled its mission mandate to a dying world. He declares that all abilities needed to accomplish this task have been put at the disposal of the church (Matt 28:19-20). Such resources include knowledge and choice-making of which the various subsets of the church such as the individual church member and the family are privileged to have. In effect, a person, a family and the church at large have specific roles to play as reflected in this chapter. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, resources such as this research work and others have been inspired and made available through the power of the Holy Spirit in

order for Christians who are desirous of playing active roles in the gospel commission to be guided in their efforts. Towards the end of earth's history, the Spirit of God will work with families to project the character of the gospel as it happened in Acts of the Apostles. This is reflected in the following prophetic forecast on the final evangelization of the world:

And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain (Zech 14:17, NKJV).

Similarly, marriages that deviate from the biblical ideal suffer losses in the spiritual, psychological and social dimensions of life. Such a situation misrepresents Christianity and is a limiting factor in the speedy accomplishment of the missionary task of the church.

The presentations outlined in this chapter proposes a new feature in comparing intra-faith marriage with interfaith marriage. This distinctive element is a study of the implications of interfaith marriage on children, singles, married, family ministries, the church and the larger society which are the media for transmitting the gospel. There was that indication that participants at the presentations clearly understood the concept of intra-faith marriage and will align their interests with it. However, follow up orientations by the family ministries department who have been trained will eventually produce a better result in terms of members of SDA Church Omoku who will practice intra-faith marriage in future.

All of these were witnessed by the researcher and his team in the course of the implementation. However, the program was quite rewarding in the sense that it approached the subject in an all-inclusive manner. The various categories of participants who were trained including parents, singles, family ministry leaders and

Pastors were satisfied that the presentations addressed issues that were relevant to them. This was the basis of its effectiveness.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, FINAL EVALUATION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

As a research which followed the methodology of proposal, program design, implementation, evaluation and summary, chances are that it will be an effective tool for membership stability in SDA Church Omoku. Presently, this congregation is the beneficiary of this study, however, at the long run, the project will be of greater good to the masses of SDAs in Rivers West Conference.

#### **Summary of the Dissertation**

SDA Church Omoku had struggled with the issue of membership loss through interfaith marriage for years. In response to this challenge, the leadership of the church had organised series of prayer meetings and interactive sessions at camp meetings, youth programs, and also held family ministries retreats in an effort to proffer a lasting solution to the problem, but all were to little avail. Hence the need arose to develop a more effective mechanism for membership stability. To that end, membership stability in SDA Omoku is the focal point of this study.

The research approaches the issue of membership retention from the biblical standpoint of marriage between a heterosexual couple who share the same religious faith. The marriages of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:22,23), and Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24:67) are the basic biblical models of intra-faith marriage that the research promotes. In support of this Oti, among other authors opines that the mental, physical, social and

spiritual<sup>1</sup> dimensions of life must be considered in any marital plan. This is what informed the four-pronged approach of this research to membership stability in SDA Church Omoku.

As the study progressed, it became clear to most members of the church in question that one could not build a successful marital relationship without factoring the worship of God into it. The research clarifies the fact that religion is about a couple's relationship with God. Since the marriage institution originates from God, relationship with Him generally produces an ideal marriage. The immediate subheadings form part of what members of SDA Church Omoku learned from the research:

### **Marriage As a Fusion of Two Different Human Lives**

Marital bonding requires a high degree of guidance from the Spirit of God. This is not an exclusive experience because there are Scriptural examples of couples who shared similar spiritual and social values in their conjugal adventure. A case in point is the union of Solomon and the Shulammitte. That story in the Song of Songs captures the very heartthrob of covenantal love between a couple who share common Bible-based marital values. Unlike plants and animals whose association is not always mutually beneficial; a married couple is expected to enjoy a symbiotic relationship in all respects as the Song of Song depicts in its metaphoric lines. Too many broken marriages in the society testify to the fact that the principles expressed in this work cannot be taken for granted. They are visible warning signs to others who are treading the same dangerous path in their matrimonial lives. A wise choice makes all the difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Fidelia Chioma Oti, *A Message to the Youth* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Glory-Land Publishing Company, 2013), 71.

## **Influence of Religion on Culture**

Members of SDA Church Omoku also understood that the influence of culture is very strong, and has often neutralised religion. The Bible records instances where people's lives changed for the worse as a result of the religion they imbibed through marriage. A case in point is Ahab King of Israel, "he took for a wife Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and served Baal and worshiped him," (1 Kings 16:31). A person's perception about a certain deity, and the kind of covenant entered into with it usually determines that person's mode of worship. In other words, the kind of reverence accorded a particular supernatural being is a reflection of one's understanding of, and the influence of such an essence on the devotee. The following reference to some extent support this assertion:

Worship is an acknowledgement of transcendence; that is to say, of a reality independent of the worshipper, which is more or less coloured by mystery.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of religious understanding, some people worship quietly, while some worship noisily with high-sounding musical instruments. Others use images. Sometimes the mantra that keeps many connected to the deity they worship is a weird chant or oration that produces unnatural atmosphere around them. Furthermore, each religion approves certain foods for its adherents, while others induct their members into extreme sectarianism. Sometimes it is difficult for two religions to coexist side by side in a home, especially where a married couple is involved. It is for this reason that White declares, "Never should God's people venture upon forbidden ground. Marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 3.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 56.

Following the foregoing realities, many members of SDA Church Omoku have now resolved to make marriage only with fellow Adventists and no other. This can be seen in the result of the final evaluation shown in chapter 5. The family ministries leader and his marriage council members also became proactive in guiding the youths of the church to imbibe the culture of intra-faith marriage. This came in the wake of their awareness that the benefits of doing so was spiritual revival and transformation into ardent practicing Adventist Christian. A further advantage is the steady growth and stability of church membership which at the long run will create a stronger platform for mission fulfilment.

### **Final Evaluation of the Intervention**

The entire research was a thrilling experience. Though marriage is a broad-based study as the bedrock of all human endeavour, it draws much interest. Every church member who had the privilege of participating in the series of seminars was excited and are thankful for being part of the programme. Many have so much to think about and say due to their personal impressions about the project.

Of particular reference is the demand of participants that the seminars be held in a larger forum where the entire membership of River West Conference, not just SDA Omoku, will benefit. In response to this request, the researcher and his team repeated the seminars in the three zones of the Conference namely: Ogba, Ndoni, Egbema zone (Saturday, October 8, 2016); Abua/Odual Zone and Saturday (Saturday, October 15, 2016), and Epkeye zone (Saturday, October 29, 2016).

The evaluation of the project was carried out on Sunday, December 11, 2016. The family ministries leader of the church and his wife were the only two respondents who participated in this exercise because the researcher planned to know the effect of the intervention from the perspective of the family ministries leadership who have

been trained to coordinate follow up activities on the effort of the research team.

Thereafter, the researcher and his team met on Monday, December 12, 2016 to assess the data collected. Below is a summary of the data from the final evaluation of the intervention program:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Singles assisted by the church in their marriage plans in 2016   | 2 |
| 2. Singles engaged but not interested in involving the church's family ministries Department in their marriage plans  | 0 |
| 3. Marriages in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> quarters of 2016 in which the family ministries department played active role   | 1 |
| 4. Singles who are now positive about intra-faith marriage  | 2 |
| 5. Apostasy recorded in 2016 relative to interfaith marriage  | 0 |
| 6. Members who apostatized through interfaith marriage and have been reclaimed by the church in 2016  | 0 |
| 7. Marriage enrichment seminars to be conducted quarterly from 2017   | 1 |
| 8. Titles of family books by E. G. White such as <i>The Adventist Home</i> , <i>Messages to Young People</i> and <i>Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students</i> among others to be distributed quarterly from 2017 | 3 |

This result indicates that awareness has grown considerably among the membership of SDA Church Omoku regarding the value of intra-faith marriage and the willingness to practice same. It can also be seen from the report that the leadership of the family ministries department of the church is being proactive towards stabilizing the church's membership by following up on the intervention program.

## Observations

At the beginning, the researcher observed that some members of SDA Church Omoku were not comfortable with the choice of their church as the context for this study. The reason was that the church Pastor and the family ministries leader had issues with the marriages of some of the members to non-Adventists shortly before the beginning of this project. Hence, these members felt that the researcher had been invited to witch-hunt them. Hence they reluctantly participated in the initial activities of the study.

However, this impression gradually changed for a more receptive attitude as the study progressed. When the data gathered from the survey conducted were analysed, it became clear that the church was actually losing members annually through interfaith marriage. Hence, the church members realized that there was nothing subjective about the programme. It was a factual, Bible-based academic exercise. Eventually, feeling of the people changed from that of suspicion to passion for the stability of the church's membership.

The felt need to stem membership loss in the church actually inspired the intervention structure that has been adopted. Some of the seminars highlighted the challenges of a mixed marriage, explained the basic reasons why they occur and also gave possible ideas on how to remedy the situation. The disruption of family happiness caused by mixed marriage were shown to be either in the short term or long term. As the programme unfolded, many of the participants readily identified in their marital circumstances, the ills of mixed marriage from the available facts of the seminars. Hence, they began to warm up to the researcher and his team. This program has made, even those who said they could not but go ahead to consummate their mixed marriage, to carry on halfheartedly.

## Informal Group Discussions

Following the guidelines for the formation of a focus group,<sup>4</sup> just one focus group was raised. This was deemed to have served the purpose of the field work because the issue at stake was not a complex one. For this reason, the group was composed of men, women and youths who represented all strata of the church membership. The ultimate concern of the group was developing awareness towards intra-faith marriage for the purpose of mission fulfilment. This is what has been referred to as “faith dimensions that motivate and sustain.”<sup>5</sup>

The focus group comprised twelve persons. Because the researcher personally led out in the discussions, there was little diversion from the main objective of the interactive session as can be seen in chapter 4. The group's composition and discussion were carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment in which participants felt free to talk openly and express honest opinions. Since participants were encouraged not only to air their views, but also to respond to the thoughts of other members as well as questions posed by the leader, the group provided a depth, nuance, and variety of information that would perhaps not have been accessed through a different kind of survey.

Additionally, because the focus group's session was structured they were able to provide much information in a very short time. During the sessions, it was clear that the use of a focus group is a good way to gather in-depth information about the thoughts and ideas of a people on a subject matter. This has also been expressed in the reports of the focus group's activities in chapter 5. However, this does not suggest that

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<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Krueger, *Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews* (St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Lederach, J. P. *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 15.

there could not have been another effective way to access needed facts. The twelve-man focus group believed that, to a large extent the menace of membership loss in the church which has been occasioned by interfaith marriages can be checked. Towards the end of the intervention process, positive reactions were recorded in the attitude of the participants as follows:

1. Many of the church members who were involved in mixed marriage confessed that marrying with the Adventist faith is best for every Adventist. They believed that they acted either impatiently or ignorantly at the point of their marriages.
2. Those who were already practicing mixed marriage wished to know the remedy for their situation. However, the researcher referred them to the counsel of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, they should not be divorced but may prayerfully bring holiness to their relationship by working towards harmonizing their religious differences.
3. Many parents who participated in the project requested the assistance of the researcher to persuade their children who were engaged to be married to non-SDAs to reconsider their decisions.
4. All the participants declared that the lectures given to them were long overdue, and appealed that the same awareness and intervention program be conducted in other SDA Churches since interfaith marriage is practiced by SDAs in other places.
5. Some singles in SDA Church Omoku who were contemplating marriage boldly declared that they would no longer get married to a non-SDA.

6. During the last few activities of the intervention, some church members invited their friends from other Christian denominations to share in the deeply biblical and inspiring seminars.
7. A deepening spiritual experience was noticed in many of the church members during the intervention period as the church recorded more attendance at its weekly activities.

In all, the focus group members believed that, to a large extent, the menace of membership loss in SDA Church Omoku which has been occasioned by interfaith marriages can be checked.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the excitement aroused by this dissertation project among the members of SDA Church Omoku, it could be said that the exercise was timely. The question of working on church membership stability by encouraging intra-faith marriage vague seemed at the onset. Nonetheless, the researcher was sure that following the procedure of project design, implementation, evaluation and writing would eventually produce a useful tool for mission fulfilment in SDA Church Omoku.

Accordingly, both clergy and laity within the research context are already applying the methodology suggested by the dissertation to the marriage and home building interests of church members their worship centers. Though the church had struggled with the issue of membership loss for decades, but now, both leaders and members believe that they have a reliable tool to check the problem.

Intra-faith marriage which was viewed as a limiting factor to freedom of association by many members of SDA Church Omoku was now appearing in its true light as a sign of hope of a meaningful family life. Before this time, the idea had been quite unconvincing to many Adventists in the area. Because many, especially ladies in

the church, could not understand the rationale behind waiting as it seemed, for scarce suitors who are church members, or marrying a church member who did not meet a woman's fancy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, this background, the focus group agreed that beyond being an instrument for encouraging "formalism"<sup>6</sup> as some may be tempted to think of this research, powered by the Holy Spirit through the church's on-going programme of revival and reformation, intra-faith marriages would help in stabilizing the membership of the church.

Furthermore, it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between what constitutes an insight and what is not in this segment of the work. This is because, virtually, every statement reveals something important about the ground reason of the study. The baseline survey is as informative as the field project and the evaluation report in chapter 5. However, the succeeding concepts may be considered as key insights to the study:

1. Marriage and home building is central to God's plan for humanity. The conjugal bond is an agency for perfecting God's will in human life.
2. There is a positive but modest connection between religiousness and marital wellbeing.
3. At some points, when a conjugal relationship gets complicated, a couple requires a higher capacity of affective and effective reaction to restore singleness of purpose.
4. A couple would make the most of their wide-ranging home-building opportunities when they identify with each other emotionally and spiritually.

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur G. Daniels, *Christ Our Righteousness* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 30.

5. The mathematical principle that all is wrong with a calculation that began with a wrong formula is equally applicable to marital processes. Therefore, it is advisable to start one's marriage right.
6. The Bible promotes intra-faith marriage through typical examples.<sup>1</sup> Disregard of that ideal is remains the basis for membership loss in many Christian churches.
7. As a way of maintaining the largely conservative outlook of SDA Church on biblical standards, members of the church needs to marry within their fold.
8. The sustainability of the marital bond depends on love whose foundation is mutual understanding, even in matters of religion.
9. The Bible begins with the account of the first marriage (Gen 2:22-24) and closes with a forecast of the marriage of the lamb (Rev 21:2). Each of these events reflects an atmosphere of religious unity between the couple. This implies that intra-faith marriage has a bearing on final restoration of humanity to their lost estate.

### **Recommendations**

The church members who participated in this exercised benefitted in many ways. The achievements span the mental, physical, social and spiritual dimensions of a human being. On the mental aspect, the researcher read and consulted hundreds of books, academic journals and magazines. On the physical aspect, the study gave the researcher opportunities to practice certain graces which are essential to human existence such as honouring invitation, time-consciousness, moving in a smooth, relaxed and attractive way as well as being pleasantly polite. This is in addition to knowledge gained through adventure. On the social side, the research paved way for extensive social interactions with high and low persons in the community, while on

the spiritual side, the study strengthened the faith of both the research team and church members by creating a platform for revival of biblical spirituality through the study of the Scriptures on areas dealing with marriage, including fasting and prayers.

To an extent, the intervention programmes carried out formed the basis of a shift in perspective from the conventional interfaith marriage to the Bible-based intra-faith marriage model. The incidence of membership loss through exogamous marriage by some members of SDA Church Omoku is now seen by a convinced few as the bane of the church. Therefore, they passionately lend themselves to whatever measure that is possible in stabilizing the faith of the hard-won members, especially as it has to do with marriage. requesting

However, the researcher does not claim to have achieved all-round success in the project. This is because, in the course of the research, a few members of SDA Omoku were absent from the series of intervention programmes conducted. When the research team discovered that this was done on purpose they decided to conduct an interview in order to ascertain the reason for their action. The men among them expressed a negative opinion about the research. Their contention was that not all SDA girls are good for marriage. They believed that some girls who were married from other Christian faiths by Adventist men have proved to be very good wives and even strengthened the faith of their husbands. On the other hand, some ladies among the dissenters said that they were not prepared to wait endlessly Adventist suitors that would not come. They argued that some Adventist men preferred taking a wife from other Christian denominations. For these reasons, the problem of interfaith marriage may not be immediately eradicated from SDA Church Omoku. However, the following are recommendations for a long-term resolution of the problem:

1. There should be a periodic review of the seminars held during this project for parents and singles in SDA Church Omoku.
2. A yearly training of family ministries leaders should be held to equip succeeding leaders of the department to remain functional in their duty of guiding marital interests aright in SDA Church Omoku.
3. In order to orientate the non-Adventist friends of the youths and singles on the marital values of the church, an annual family empowerment programme should be held in SDA Church Omoku and the former be made special guests.
4. Such books as *The Adventist Home* and *Messages to Young People* by E. G. White should be mass-produced in liaison with the General Conference and distributed among the young people in SDA Church Omoku as tools for continuing education on the values of SDA marital values.
5. SDA Church Omoku should come up with plans to specially honour every newly married couple who are both SDAs as a way of motivating others to follow their example.
6. Biblical marriage and home building should be introduced as a subject in the curriculum of all the divisions of SDA Church Omoku youth department. It is a way of getting the children grounded on acceptable marriage standards.
7. The singles ministries department of SDA Church Omoku should be strengthened and its programmes expanded to include social activities like excursions and picnics. Under the watch of the church Pastor and family ministries leader, this should be a platform for match-making between opposite sexes who are prospecting for marriage.
8. There should be policy regulation on espousal procedures, especially as it affects SDA families and their demand for traditional marriage rites from

suitors.

9. Pastoral service should be made more accessible to church members through the Increase of Pastoral workforce among the increasing membership of the target congregation.
10. There should be more emphasis on acculturation and discipling of youths.
11. A welfare committee should be raised to manage ideal interpersonal relationship/mutual support within SDA Church Omoku family.
12. Formal Adventist Education should be made more accessible to church members through intensive promotion that will include an effective scholarship scheme.
13. The church leadership to strictly follow the biblical principle of leadership by example.

## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
CORRESPONDENCES



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH

Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference



Monday, September 21, 2015.

**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
Abarikpo Town, Ahoada East,  
P. O. Box 3, Ahoada,  
Rivers State, Nigeria.  
Tel: 08034835038, 07051922027,  
084895310  
E-mail: ulahiamadu@yahoo.com

The Conference Administration,  
Seventh-day Adventists,  
Rivers West Conference,  
P. O. Box 222,  
Abarikpo-Ahoada.

Sir,

**APPLICATION TO CONDUCT DOCTOR OF MINISTRY (D.MIN) RESEARCH WORK IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN OMOKU**

May I seek the permission of the Rivers West Conference Administration to conduct Doctor of Ministry (D. Min) research in Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku Town.

This is an in-ministry research dealing with loss of Church membership through marriages and to proffer possible remedies to secure retention of Church members. This research work will run from October 1<sup>st</sup> through 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

At the end of the research work, Report will be dully sent to the Conference Administration as well as the Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku town. May the good Lord bless you for approval.

Yours in His Vineyard,

**Pastor Ugochukwu L. Ahiamadu**  
President

xc: Executive Secretary  
Treasurer



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH

Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference



**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

Abarikpo Town, Ahoada East,  
P. O. Box 3, Ahoada,  
Rivers State, Nigeria.  
Tel: 08063338968, 07055624878,  
08191820664  
E-mail: davidjonathan2009@yahoo.com

Tuesday, September 22, 2015

Pastor Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu,  
Seventh-day Adventists,  
Rivers West Conference,  
P. O. Box 222,  
Abarikpo-Ahoada.

Sir,

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT DOCTOR OF MINISTRY (D. MIN) RESEARCH WORK  
IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN OMOKU**

During the Administrative Committee Meeting of the Conference on Tuesday, September 22, 2015, it was voted to approve your application to conduct Doctor of Ministry (D. Min) research work in Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku from October 1 – 31, 2015.

The Conference Administration has also written to Omoku and Obakata Districts to permit you to carry out the research work in their Churches. May the good Lord guide you in this assignment.

Yours in the blessed hope,

PASTOR DAVID O JONATHAN  
Executive Secretary

xc: Treasurer



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH

Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference



**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

Abarikpo Town, Ahoada East,  
P. O. Box 3, Ahoada,  
Rivers State, Nigeria.  
Tel: 08063338968, 07055624878,  
08191820664  
E-mail: davidjonathan2009@yahoo.com

Tuesday, September 22, 2015.

The District Board,  
Through the District Leader,  
Seventh-day Adventist Church Obieti,  
Omoku District.

Sir,

**PERMISSION FOR THE CONFERENCE PRESIDENT TO CONDUCT DOCTOR OF MINISTRY (D.MIN) RESEARCH WORK IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN OMOKU DISTRICT**

Following the application to the Conference Administration by the Conference President Pastor Ugochukwu L. Ahiamadu to conduct Doctor of Ministry (D. Min) research in Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku District, the Conference Administration craves your indulgence to permit him to carry out the research as stated above.

The research is an in-ministry work dealing with loss of Church membership through marriages and to proffer possible remedies to secure retention of Church members. This research work will run from October 1<sup>st</sup> through 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

Kindly accord him all necessary support he may require from you to facilitate the research work. Report will be dully sent to all the Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku District at the end of the research. May the good Lord bless you for your co-operation.

Yours in the Blessed Hope,

**Pastor David O. Jonathan**  
Executive Secretary

xc: ~~President~~  
Treasurer



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH

Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference



**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
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Rivers State, Nigeria.  
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E-mail: davidjonathan2009@yahoo.com

Tuesday, September 22, 2015

Pastor Ugochukwu Lucky Ahiamadu,  
Seventh-day Adventists,  
Rivers West Conference,  
P. O. Box 222,  
Abarikpo-Ahoada.

Sir,

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT DOCTOR OF MINISTRY (D. MIN) RESEARCH WORK  
IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN OMOKU**

During the Administrative Committee Meeting of the Conference on Tuesday, September 22, 2015, it was voted to approve your application to conduct Doctor of Ministry (D. Min) research work in Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Omoku from October 1 – 31, 2015.

The Conference Administration has also written to Omoku and Obakata Districts to permit you to carry out the research work in their Churches. May the good Lord guide you in this assignment.

Yours in the blessed hope,

PASTOR DAVID O JONATHAN  
Executive Secretary

xc: Treasurer

APPENDIX B  
PROJECT DESIGN

**1. Introduction**

There will be a brief introduction of the project to be carried out and its key elements.

**2. Type of Research**

The type of research to be carried out is qualitative research. This will be explained briefly.

**3. Rational for Selection**

This subsection, will discuss the motif for the choice of study on membership retention and stability, and its objective.

**4. Appropriateness of the Study**

A study of biblically appropriate marriage has been considered because (1) it is an in-ministry program and provides the needed platform for solving the problem of membership loss through interfaith marriages in the local church (2) it is interactive enough for participants to identify with.

**5. Population and Sample of Participants**

The questionnaire will be administered to one hundred members of SDA Church Yo Omoku, and the oral survey will be conducted at least among eight persons in the same church.

**6. Criteria for Sampling, Procedure and Selection**

The main criteria for sampling and procedure for selecting participants will be as directed in the AUA standard for DMin. Dissertation.

**7. Instrumentation**

At this level of the study, two instruments will be used during the field research. These are: printed questionnaire and template for oral discussion by one focus group.

**8. Data Analysis**

Information collected from the questionnaire and responses from the focus group will be analyzed according to the various issues they address.

**a. Data Collection Procedures**

Collection of data from the survey will follow the guidelines in AUA standard.

**b. Presentation and Description of Findings**

In an effort to function within the framework of the project design, presentation and description of findings will follow the quantitative research guidelines in the AUA Standard.

**9. Summary**

This segment will end with a summary of key points and observations from the implemented project.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE/INFORMAL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Kindly tick the boxes and fill in the blank spaces provided with responses that best represent your opinion on the points of inquiry below:

1. Sex: Male  Female
2. Age: 18-25  26-49  50 and above
3. Baptized SDA  Not a Baptized SDA
4. Marital Status: Single  Married  Widowed
5. Family structure of birth? Polygamous  Monogamous
6. Is your mother a Seventh-day Adventist? Yes  No
7. Is your father a Seventh-day Adventist? Yes  No
8. If you are married, what Christian Denomination did you choose your spouse from?  
Seventh-day Adventist  Non-Seventh-day Adventist
9. If presently engaged to be married, what Christian denomination does your prospective spouse belong to? Seventh-day Adventist Church  other religious faith
10. If you chose a marriage partner outside SDA Church, kindly state the reasons:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. If you had another opportunity to choose a spouse, who would you prefer?  
A Seventh-day Adventist  A non-Seventh-day Adventist
12. If you are a single Seventh-day Adventist male, do you wish to marry within the church?  Yes  No Briefly state your reasons:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. If you are a single Seventh-day Adventist female, do you wish to marry within the

church? Yes  No  Briefly state your reasons:

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14. How many Seventh-day Adventists from your local congregation do you know to have backslidden as a result of being married to people of other religious faiths?

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Table C1. Details of the Informal Group Discussions

S/N	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES OF DIFFERENT SPEAKERS
1.	No. of males in the group?	The were seven men in the group.
2.	No. of females in group?	There were three women in the group.
3.	No. of Youths in the group?	There were two youths in the group.
4.	Age brackets of participants?	The respondents fell between ages 20-30, 31-45, and 46 and above
5.	Marital Status of participants?	The married ones among the group members were ten in number.
6.	Family structure of birth? Polygamous? Monogamous?	“We are ffrom both monogamous and polygamous family structures”
7.	Participants’ choice of spouse at the point of marriage-SDA? Non-SDA?	“We didn’t all marry Adventists from the onset.”
8.	Participants whose fathers are not currently Adventists?	“We are four here whose fathers are yet to convert to Adventism.”
9.	Participants whose mothers are not currently Adventists?	Only one elderly woman fell in this category. Her mother was Anglican.
11.	Religious groups from which participants chose their spouses?	Majorly SDA. Then Anglican, Church of God and Pentecostal churches.
12.	Compatibility level of participants married to non-SDAs?	“I don’t know about other, but it is a sweet-bitter experience for me.”
13.	Compatibility level of participants married to Adventists?	“It is more tolerable to live with an Adventist spouse than otherwise.”
14.	If participants had another chance to marry would they they go intra-faith?	“There’ll be no question about a SDA spouse should that chance be.”
15.	Male participants who wish to marry within SDA Church and their reasons?	“Not all Adventists are good, but a good Adventist is second to none.”
16.	Female participants who wish to marry within SDA Church and their reasons?	“SDA suitors are hard to come by, but they are my first choice,” one said.
17.	Adventists known by participant to have married non-SDA spouses?	“They are many, but the church has not captured the number on record.”
18.	SDAs from Omoku who have backslidden due to interfaith marriage?	Church records shows two names. But members say they are more than that.
19.	Why members of SDA Church Omoku lend themselves to interfaith marriage?	Main reasons are spiritual weakness and lack of education in Adventism.
20.	Remedies to loss of church membership through interfaith marriage?	“One main remedy is strong revival and reformation program,” one said.

APPENDIX D  
INTERVENTION PLAN

*Table D1.* Intervention Plan

S/N	DAY	MONTH	DATE	YEAR	VENUE	TIME	TOPIC	ATTENDANCE
1	Sunday	July	17	2016	SDA Church Omoku	09:00 a.m. 04:00 p.m.	Family Min. Leaders Train. Workshop	31
2	Saturday	August	6	2016	SDA Church Omoku	01:00 p.m. 02:35 p.m.	Marrying God's Way: Parental Guidance	211
3	Saturday	August	6	2016	SDA Church Omoku	02:35 p.m. 03:40 p.m.	Marrying God's Way: Insights for Singles	205
4	Sunday	August	7	2016	SDA Church Omoku	01:20 p.m. 02:45 p.m.	Effective Family Emp't Through Wealth Creation	54
5	Tuesday	August	30	2016	SDA Church Omoku	02:00 p.m. 04:00 p.m.	Intra-faith Marr. Model: Pastor's Role	29
6	Saturday	October	29	2016	SDA Church Omoku	10:45 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	First Evaluation	83
7	Sunday	December	11	2016	SDA Church Omoku	10:00 a.m.	Final Evaluation	2

APPENDIX E

EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

**First Evaluation**

1. Sex: Male  Female
2. Age bracket: 18-25  26-49  50 and above
3. Marital Status: Single  Engaged  Married
4. Are you a member of SDA Church in Omoku town? Yes  No
5. To what extent do you believe that marriage has something to do with salvation in Christ? Strongly  Fairly  Not sure  No idea  Not interested
6. Did you participate in or hear about the family enrichment seminars that were run at SDA Church Obieti in the month of July, 2016? Yes  No
7. From the family enrichment seminars held in July 2016 at SDA Church Obieti, are you convinced that it is biblical to marry within the church? Yes  No
8. From the month of July, 2016 how many marriages altogether do you know to have been contracted by Adventists in Omoku town? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Out of the marriages contracted by Adventists in Omoku town since July 2016, how many of them happened between two Adventists? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Out of the marriages contracted by Adventists in Omoku town since July 2016, how many of them happened between an Adventist and a non Adventist? \_\_\_\_\_
11. If you are presently single, are you willing to choose a spouse within The Seventh-day Adventist Church? Yes  No
12. If you are currently engaged to be married, is your fiancé/fiancée a The Seventh-day Adventist?

13. If your fiancé/fiancée is not currently a Seventh-day Adventist, what plans do you have to bring about the conversion of that individual before the marriage? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
14. Knowing that the Bible and SDA Church does not approve of interfaith marriage, should your prospective spouse insist on maintaining his/her religion after all, would you still proceed with the marriage plan?
15. Any other comment on your personal understanding of intra-faith marriage, i.e. marriage within the church family: \_\_\_\_\_

### Second Evaluation

1. Currently how many singles are the family ministries department of your local church assisting in their marriage plans? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Currently how many of those engaged to be married in your local church are not interested in involving the family ministries department in their marriage plans? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. In the second and last quarters of 2016, how many family enrichment seminars were conducted by the family ministries department of your church? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Of the marriages contracted by members of your church during the second and last quarters of 2016, how many of them did the family ministries department play an active role in? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Under the mentorship of the church's family ministries department, how many singles now have a positive view of intra-faith (marriage within the church) and are willing to uphold its values? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Between August and December 2016, how many apostasies have been recorded in your church in connection with interfaith marriage (marriage to non-Adventists) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Between August and December 2016, how many of the members who dropped from the faith as a result interfaith marriage have the family ministries department made effort to reclaim? \_\_\_\_\_

8. From next quarter, how often does the family ministries department of your local church plan to conduct marriage seminars to strengthen church families?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. How many books by Ellen G. White can the family ministries department of your local church distribute next year to strengthen families in your local church? Example, The Adventist Home ( ), Counsels to Parents and Teachers ( ) and Messages to Young People ( ).

10. How many divisions are there in the youth department of your local church? \_\_\_\_\_ How many counsellors work with each unit and mentoring them on intra-faith marriage among other principles of Seventh-day Adventist Church?

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## VITA

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- Nativity:** Born on November 13, 1964 to late Elder J. N. Ahiamadu and late Mrs. Bernice Ahiamadu of Ogbogu town in Ogba, Ndoni, Egbema Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.
- Religious Affiliation:** Seventh-day Adventist Church, Baptized on Saturday, September 5, 1987.
- Family:** Married to Mrs. Goodness Mgbechi Ahiamadu, an accountant by profession on December 28, 1997. Father of three sons: Alvin (May 20, 1998), Allen (March 28, 2000) and Alex (April 28, 2012).
- Education:**
- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 2013-Present | Adventist University, Kenya (Doctor of Ministry Candidate)   |
| 2004-2007    | Andrews University, Michigan (MA, Pastoral Ministry)         |
| 1991-1996    | Andrews University, Michigan (BA, Religion/English)          |
| 1978-1983    | Government Secondary School Akabuka (School Certificate)     |
| 1972-1977    | Sacred Heart State School (First School Leaving Certificate) |
- Ordination:** Saturday, March 28, 2003 ordained into the gospel ministry of Seventh-day Adventist Church and holds a current ministerial credential from Rivers West Conference
- Work Experience:**
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|-----------|--|
| 2014-2017 | President, Rivers West Conference  |
| 2013-2014 | President, Rivers West-Bayelsa Conference  |
| 2012-2012 | President, Rivers West-Bayelsa Administrative Unit   |
| 2011-2011 | Executive Secretary, Rivers Conference   |
| 2010-2011 | Director, Communication and Family Ministries, Eastern Nigeria Union Mission                                 |
| 2005-2010 | Director, Publishing/SOP/VOP Eastern Nigeria Union Mission/Aro Ngwa District Pastor, East Nigeria Conference |
| 2002-2004 | Director, Publishing/SOP/VOP Nigeria Union Mission   |
| 2001-2002 | Umuobo-Usomini District Pastor   |
| 1998-2001 | Director, Publishing/SOP/VOP/Pastor, Rumuokwuta District, Rivers Conference                                  |
| 1996-1998 | Pastor, Elele District, Rivers Conference  |

1988-1991 Literature Evangelist, Rivers Conference  
1989 Sales Representative, Africa Alliance Insurance  
Company, Port Harcourt