

SUSTAINABILITY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE IN MERU CATHOLIC DIOCESE, KENYA: A PASTORAL CHALLENGE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study aimed to examine the formation of marriage on Christian families in the Diocese of Meru so as to promote their sustainability.

Statement of the problem: Marriage is a social, cultural and religious institution and Church recognizes marriage and family life as the only acceptable means of passing on and preserving human life. However, in the current society there are signs that the marriage institution is threatened. This is true of traditional as well as Christian marriage and the latter is the concern of the study.

Research methodology: The pastoral circle method with the four moments of insertion, social pastoral analysis, theological reflection and action plan were used in this research. The analysis of these root causes led to the identification of the need for ongoing formation of the family as a sign of the time.

Findings: The need of ongoing family catechesis has been illuminated by teachings of the Church, starting with the bible, the Church fathers, Vatican council II, the Magisterium of the Church and some theologians. This illumination of the teachings of the Church on ongoing formation of Christian families, has led to the pastoral recommendations and suggestions for action in order to improve sustainability of the Christian families.

Conclusion: The family ministry provides systematic and ongoing formation on the value of marriage as a vocation and rediscovery of parenting and mothering as a gift. More consistent and structured formation ought to be biblical, theological, spiritual as well as human existential and pastoral oriented.

Recommendations: In marriage preparation, many advances should be taken into consideration such as programs in parishes, seminars and retreats for couples. Marriage preparation should be done by priests supported by married couples with extensive experience in marriage and family matters.

Keywords: *Christian Marriage, Catholic Church and Meru Diocese.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Ameru* are a Bantu speaking tribe that lives on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya. Meru people have agriculture as the major economic activity and people enjoy relatively higher standards of living due to the region's favorable climate and geographical location. Due to cultural changes and movements to urban centers, Meru people have done so through a myriad of factors, which may be social cultural, religious, political or even economical. There has been an attempt to maintain their traditional, cultural beliefs and practices, but their coming together with other cultures and Christianity has also highly influenced their understanding of the people and how they relate to each other. The study presents the *Ameru* within their culture as seen from the past to the present to examine the underlying cultural influences that affect marriage institutions. The presented facts on social context and physical milieu, religious beliefs affecting Christian family will be envisaged in the study.

The advent of modern changes in Africa and what has come upon religious societies affect their attitude, way of life, marriages and the Christian life. Hence Africa which includes, Meru is caught up in a world revolution that is so dynamic that it almost got out of control. Thus, a new and rapid rhythm is beating from drums of science, modern communication and mass media, schools, colleges, universities, cities and towns. To that effect there are immediate causes for the prevailing changes but, the scope for this consideration is based on religion. Religion has become one of the factors for cultural changes.

Among the religions introduced in Meru land are: Catholic and protestants including Methodist, P.C.E.A, Anglican, independent, Pentecostal and evangelical churches have emerged in Meru community. All the traditional religious beliefs of the *Ameru* are nearly dead. Many people have been absorbed either in Christian faiths or Islam which is found in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties. Those who did not join the mentioned faith, the unbaptized do not practice any more the traditional religion of the people. In the case of intermarriage with those in new faiths, conversion to become either Muslim or Christian becomes necessary. Hence, this has dramatically affected Christian marriage and family life in the Meru community.¹

The new religious practices are perpetuated through school curriculum from kindergarten to university level, mass media communication and churches. Many churches have started radio stations, TVs, clubs movements and associations as forums for children, youth and adults to further their faith in and out of school. Through these social interaction, many young people have known one another and become married partners. These new religious practices have affected the marriage institution and the family life. Caravash argued that the number of situations which can face marriages is almost limitless. Some are obvious that scarcely deserve attention whereas others are carefully hidden that the person at fault may not often see his/her responsibility. Some challenges are specific to particular marriages, depending on their relationship, experiences and problems they encounter¹.

¹ Cavan Ruth Shonte, "Married and Family Life in the Modern World," A book of Readings third edition, 1969, 2.

In Meru traditional set up, marriage preparation was a community interest. The whole community participated in preparing the youth for marriage life in the community. With Christianity, the Churches used schools to impart Christian teachings and secular subjects were integrated with faith. This is no longer due to the fact that in the post- independence era, the churches lost control of schools which were the main centers of educating people on Christian values. That is why the young people in the modern era have little access to religious education thus, enters to premarital relationship, without readiness to make total commitment. This lacuna account for their failure to understand the relevance of church marriage and the challenges faced in marriage life.

2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS AFFECTING CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN MERU

The section at presenting the *Ameru* within their culture as seen from the past to the present to examine the underlying cultural influences that affect marriage institution. The section briefly presents the challenges affecting marriage and family life in *Meru*.

2.1 Marriage in Meru Community

The *Ameru* hold great respect to the institution of marriage because it is a socio-religious affair which unites a man and a woman, and their extended family into a deep love of mutual support, harmonious living, betting of children and common good. Marriage becomes a means of family survival, a way of life preservation and a device for establishing social contacts and communicating in with ancestors. Its belief and process of procreation is a religious obligation through which people perpetuate themselves and lineage. The major objective of marriage is children. This value is so much adhered that if one has no children then he/she is considered not fully alive because he/she has stopped the flow of life. Barrenness and impotence is a curse from the ancestors due to ones unfaithfulness in life and especially in marriage

2.2 Marriage in the Traditional Society

In the *Ameru* traditional society, polygamy is widespread. Marital negotiations between the two sets of families were an extended process that includes bride-price of cattle. In Meru traditional marriage, the new brides were involved in cooking, farming and raising of children in the home stead. Brides have a lifelong obligation to observe the customs of respecting their fathers- in law. A substitute wife, in the case of infertility was common. In case of divorce, witchcraft accusations or even infidelity, a woman was forced to return to her natural homestead. Marital sons of the founder household would prefer to settle adjacent to the original homestead. A single household was composed of a man, his wife and children including children of unmarried daughters, wives and children of his sons and father's widow and sister. With regards to the inheritance of land and the movable and immovable household assets, there are negotiations within the homestead as a whole. Customs seem to subscribe to the customs of inheritance by the sons².

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² Magesa Laurent, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, n.d.), 110.

support, harmonious living, betting of children and common good. Marriage becomes a means of family survival, a way of life preservation and a device for establishing social contacts and communicating with ancestors. Its a belief and process of procreation through which people perpetuate themselves and lineage. The major objective of marriage is children. This value is so much adhered to, that if one has no children then he/she is considered not fully alive because he/she has stopped the flow of life. Barrenness and impotence is a curse from the ancestors due to ones unfaithfulness in life and especially in marriage

2.4 Preparation for Wedding Ceremony

Wedding preparation is another cause of marriage stability. Among the Meru wedding was a community affair. The community took it as a duty to prepare the individual for marriage and to participate fully in the wedding preparation and the actual wedding ceremonies. With the changing circumstances, marriage has converted to be private. In many cases, formalization has caused a loss of meaning and has resulted in some of the present youth cohabiting. The advice from the parents and community is not sought for. The commercialization of dowry by parents has become a scaring phenomenon. There is a very high social expectation of a wedding day. The result of this kind of situation has been the cause of the prevailing marriage instability. [1] Preparation for a wedding today has a lot to learn from the traditional setup. The communal participation is one of the good elements that can help change prevailing privatism in affecting the marriage. The other aspect we learn from Meru culture is that advice to the bride and bridegroom will replace the present fate in the lives of couples.

2.5 Traditional Values of Marriage

2.5.1 Meaning and Practice of Marriage in Meru Culture

John Mbiti describes marriage in Africa as a drama in which all members are active participants and not spectators. According to Mbiti, all men and women are meant to marry and bear children failure to which they are with scorn and contempt. Mbiti observes that marriage is centered on the sexual relationship among the Africans, which as a value plays a religious, social and biological role [1] ³. Among the *Ameru* people, procreation is central to marriage. Through procreation the couple contributes to the continuing of the family, clan, tribe and society as a whole. If a woman is impeded in one way or another and she cannot actively participate in this noble duty there is no peace for her and the community does not owe her any respect. Secondly, she cannot inherit property from her matrimonial home. Therefore, among the children born there should be a son and not girls only. In many African communities Meru included, it is only boys that can inherit property; hence the reason why the boy child is received with great joy and ululations. Therefore, stability in marriage among the Meru people is pegged on children.

2.5.2 Purpose of Traditional Marriage.

Marriage in the *Ameru* community has the following purposes first, it has a procreative purpose. All men and women entering a marriage contract must have this at the back of their minds. Children are central to marriage among the Meru community because they are a sign of fertility. Among the Meru traditional community one is free to have as many children as the family can afford to rise. The more children a couple have the more prestigious they become in the

³ Mbiti, J, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 68.

community. Despite modern anthropological changes and challenges of high cost of living, many people living in rural areas still value numbers.

Secondly, marriage as a rite of passage is highly valued. Marriage is taken as a purpose of rite of passage in life. In particular communities, nobody was exempted from marriage. In Meru traditional marriage, after a man and a woman had undergone initiation rites, marriage was the next step. In this case, many women are married off simply because the community felt that she was ripe for the marriage rite.

The third purpose of Meru traditional marriage is to place the woman at the center of the family. In marriage, a woman remains at the center of everything taking place in the family. This is the reason why girls in Meru traditional community were seen as source of wealth. Bride wealth was the reason why most parents married off their daughters at an early age⁴. The bride wealth received from the in-laws was the same given to the boys to take to their own in-laws. Considering women as a source of cheap labour was also another purpose of marriage in Meru traditional community. In Meru community the women are expected to be hard working and share the gifts of responsible motherhood.

2.5.3 Changes in Traditional Marriage Practices and Values

Kinoti carried out a study on the Meru traditional marriage and the influences of Christianity and modernity and observed that traditional marriage of the Meru people does not exist today anywhere and to talk about it could be archaic⁵. Meru traditional marriage has been shaped and reshaped by both Christianity and modernity. Without forgetting other religions which have also played their part especially through evangelization. Today Meru traditional marriage appears disturbed and confused more than ever and has greatly affected marriages and family life.

2.5.4 Customary Marriage Practices and Values Adoptable to Christianity

In Meru traditional culture marriage was an occasion of uniting two people, but a total preparatory process from childhood was necessary. In this regard we can say that all life was marriage. A study carried out by Kinoti, to investigate the concept of marriage in Meru traditional marriage found out that courtship could contribute much to marriage and family life. Such values help in the making of choice of somebody with good qualities and who is not a relative. So the church can also adopt longer periods of courtship and preparation before marriage. Lack of enough period of courtship and marriage preparation is affecting Christian marriage and family life today in Meru community⁶. The church needs to emphasize a more active participation for the parents and the elders. These members of the family or clan can help in finding a suitable future partner with good qualities, hence leading to more stable marriages and family life.

2.6 Polygamy and Divorce

The African representative intentions at the 1980 Synod of Bishops concede that the problem of polygamy or rural marriages is certainly one of the most delicate and most severe challenges

⁴ Kinoti, *Meru Traditional Marriage and the Influence of Christianity and Modernity* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2002), 27.

⁵ Mbiti, J, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Nairobi: East Africa Publishers, 1968) 68–69.

⁶ Lochieng Collisto, *Missiology: Introduction to the Roots of the Great Commission* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, n.d.), 169.

that African church has to deal with. Polygamy is one of the most obstacles to the evangelization of Christian families. Although church doctrine in the unity of marriage recognizes that polygamy is on the decline, it still poses a serious pastoral challenge. While promoting a patient and sympathetic pastoral approach towards polygamist families in the Christian field, there should be clarity in Christian marriage doctrine. For the first time, the most striking characteristic is that there is an attempt to define the African reality of marriage and family life explicitly. This reality is marked by two dimensions that are not to be taken together, namely the personal and the communitarian aspects.

2.6.1 Separation in Marriage

2.6.1.1 Separation in Traditional Meru Culture

Separation means an arrangement that does not end a marriage but which requires married persons to no longer live together⁷. This meant that marriage debt was left intact and was conceived as limited divorce⁸. The Separation between husband and wife among *Ameru* were more common than divorces. According to Mbiti, these might have been caused by a quarrel between the husband and wife or wife and relatives of the husband; by failure of the husband to give full amount of marriage gift as agreed upon between two families; by jealous between co-wives, by the unfaithfulness of one party or by other tensions in the family⁹. In these cases the wife went back to her home for any duration ranging from a few years until their separation was reconciled. Separation among *Ameru* occurred often. Thus, Nyaga explains that the man sent away the wife for offences like failing to obey him or to care for him. The wife's personal reasons also made her run to her parents or clan to settle the prevailing dispute¹⁰.

2.6.1.2 Separation in Modern Culture.

The separation between man and wife today has become a very common phenomenon among the *Ameru*. The causes are similar to those found in the past and at times are more serious. Western influences have contributed to this moral decadence. Some of the present causes of separation are improper preparation for marriage, wrong partnership, unfaithfulness, and inequality of education, rights conflict in religious benefits, alcoholism, mental illness, and incurable diseases. One of the main factors causing a big rift of separation in marriage is money¹¹. Many employed couples want to do what they want with their money. Some spent it in drinking, luxuries, going for dates or assisting one side of the parents at the expense of their own family welfare. The situation is even worse when one party is employed and the other one is jobless. Separations are resulting from lack of proper preparation of marriage. Today's tendency is that when some young people meet in discos, cinemas, clubs, bars and churches, they propose marriage to each other and get themselves into a commitment without any consultation.. Some begin cohabiting or formalizing their marriage through the state. In most cases, they do not know each other well and as a result they begin differing in opinion as they continue to cohabit. Many of these cases have resulted in disagreement and separation has become a prevalent phenomenon among the youth of Meru.

⁷ A.S. Hornby, "The Advanced Learners Dictionary of English" (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 905.

⁸ W.F. Kenkel, "'Divorce' In New Catholic Encyclopedia" (Washington, DC: The catholic University of America, 1981), VOL.4 p 928.

⁹ Mbiti, J, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 28.

¹⁰ Daniel Nyaga, *Mikarire Na Miturire Ya Ameru*, n.d., 139.

¹¹ Mbiti, J, *Love and Marriage in Africa* (Singapore: Longman publishers, n.d.), 209.

2.6.1.3 Divorce in Meru Traditional Culture

Divorce means legal ending of marriage so that the husband and wife are free to marry again.¹² According to Kakokota divorce takes place when conjugal bond is broken and partners are no longer living together¹³. In other words, “it is a real break of marriage bond”¹⁴ as Alfonse Ngugi remarks. The rejected woman can be allowed to have a second marriage after dissolution by customary or legal courts and is referred to as absolute divorce¹⁵. Divorce was not an easy affair for the *Ameru* people. The most acceptable reasons that lead to divorce were adultery, barrenness, witchcraft, cruelty, sexual refusal, desertion and habitual stealing. However, similar to the Luba tradition, separation for the *Ameru* was tolerated and publicly authorized for severe reasons.¹⁶ Divorce gave a bad name to the bride family and often people feared girls from those homes. Thus the *Ameru*, like the Kikuyu rarely divorced their women because of the fact that a wife is regarded as the foundation on which a homestead is built¹⁷.

2.6.1.4 Divorce and Law

For John Mbiti: instability in marriage have increased considerably under modern strain, giving rise to a higher rate of divorce and separation than in traditional life¹⁸. This is true because in modern Meru, there are several problems which demand divorce. Evidently, getting a divorce is not easy in modern society. The court of law has to follow up the facts cleverly and scrutinize them intently.

2.6.1.5 The Factors Leading to Increase in Divorce

The cultural changes taking place in Meru is one of the factors. Numerous present problems, as were seen in the past divorce, are presented by the community. . The upbringing of the children made them fear and respect the traditional culture stopped them from marrying negligently. The negligence of family life education in the homes, schools and churches has led some young married people to uphold. Some refer the former single married life and so they divorce and go back to their single life.¹⁹

The adoption of westernization has made many of the youth individualistic, unlike in the past when things were done. They no longer observe the religious and social values. Educational diversity is another determinant of divorce in marriage. When one studies and gets a promotion at work, he/she wants a new way of life. If the other partner is not highly educated, there is temptation to divorce, in order to pick up a spouse of one’s caliber. Another cause among the Meru youth is the misuse if sex. If a girl is pregnant, sooner or later , quarrels begin and blaming one another end up with a divorce. Many of those with jobs in town far from home are becoming unfaithful. Some begin keeping particular wives and when the legal wife at home learns of it

¹² A.S. Hornby, “The Advanced Learners Dictionary of English,” 291.

¹³ Katokota, “*Re -Marriage of Divorced Persons*” *Church and Marriage in Eastern Africa* Edited by Shorter, pp 62-88.

¹⁴ Musharhanja Mulango G.C, *Traditional African Marriage and Christian Marriage* (Uganda: St. Paul Publication, 1981), 37.

¹⁵ W.F.Kenkel, “‘Divorce’ In New Catholic Encyclopedia,” p 428.

¹⁶ Mulango G.C, *Traditional African Marriage and Christian Marriage*, p 37.

¹⁷ Rimiti, *The Njuri. Ncheke of Meru*, n.d., p 51.

¹⁸ Mbiti, J, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.226.

¹⁹ Mwaniki, *Divorce among the Wa-Embu*, n.d., p.19.

she is infuriated. In fact she becomes angry and seeks divorce or the man sees the girl he has kept is better than the real wife then divorces the former.

2.7 Christian Family and the Society

In Christian teaching, the family is described as the primary vital cell of society and the first experience of living in society. The Christian family is described as the primary vital cell of evangelization. This means that if a family knows and practices the gospel, it will be a good Christian family. If all the families do the same the society will be a good Christian society which seem not to be the case in Meru. Christian families are called to influence the society. The importance and centrality of the family with regards to the persons and society is repeatedly underlined by sacred scriptures. Yahweh God said, it is not right that the man should be alone, "I shall make him a helper". The Catholic Church conserves and strengthens the traditional understanding of the family. The early Christians were strong defenders of family values and structures. The church strengthens marriage and traditional family based on natural law and her belief that the family is a particular manifestation of church herself, a domestic church.

2.8 Christian Families and Youth Vocation

The family is the basic unit of the society. It is the one social institution that brings individuals together in cooperative groups, tasks and is responsible for being and bringing up children. The family begins with two people who are committed to one another and who share intimacy decision making, resources, responsibilities and values. To understand the present situation of the families in Meru diocese, it is important to reflect on the African traditional family. Africans had social norms that safeguarded general life and family life in particular which is not the case today. In the family, children learned love, faithfulness, responsibilities and wisdom from the parents. Christian family in Meru is caught between the teaching of the church, the traditional society and modern society. Thus, there are very few Church marriages. In fact, the desire to have the marriage blessed in Church often lies with the woman. Among the key challenges bedeviling the institutions of the family include: pregnancies outside wedlock, poverty, lack of responsibility especially on the part of man and failure to share income for the common good of the family.

2.9 Emerging Challenges in Christian Families

Among the most challenged institutions of the world today are marriage and family Life. Bibian Ngundo observes that "just like any other institution in the society, the family has come face to face with the wind of anthropological- cultural change resulting from the western civilization, technological advancement and spirit of modernization²⁰. Many marriages and families today have become centers of fears, anxiety, tears, suffering and pain. In some cases, the family has been a path of suffering and bloodshed, notes Pope Francis.²¹ A study by Emmanuel Githinga came up with ten problems facing families in Kenya; communication, physical and emotional abuse, trauma due to chronic and terminal illness, conjugal infidelity, problems of finances, infertility and childlessness, relatives and sexual dysfunction.²² Other challenges are parenting

²⁰ Curu, B. Giuseppe .c, "The African Family Its State and Role in on Contemporary Church and Society" in *African Family Today*. Eds (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications, Africa, n.d.), 25.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, No.19.

²² Emmanuel Gichunga, *Marriage Counselling a Counselling Guide*: (Nairobi: Gem counselling services, 2008), 83.88,98.

and poverty explained in terms of lack of basic family needs such as decent housing, food and clothing and the twin issues of separation and divorce.

Whether in America or Africa, the challenges that face families have a negative impact each in its unique cultural way. The two pre-synodal consultations referred to in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis revealed further challenges facing families which causes severe suffering to families, alcoholism and gambling. In several African families, drunkenness has been one of the leading causes of separation, divorce, poverty, emotional and psychological suffering, violence and even death. Another challenge pointed out in Pope Francis apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* concerns gender identity. Identity is here posted as a challenge whereby some members of the human society have been taken to by an ideology of gender identity that denies the reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman envisage a society without sexual differences, merely eliminating anthropological basis of the family²³.

2.10 Preparation for Engaged People

In Africa generally there are no uniform steps followed before marriage. However, all Africans know that marriage is not a business of one day. Marriage preparation is seen as a step by step progressive development, undertaken in a community frame work.²⁴ Thus Arch Bishop John Njenga of Kenya sums up the stages to be followed before marriage in five steps²⁵. The first step consists of meeting the candidates for marriage so that they get to know each other and decide to marry. The second depends on the first; if they like each other, the girl is presented to the parents of the boy. If there is no objection from the parents, they move to the third step where the contract is made with the girl's parents and the other relatives are involved. For the fourth step, both parents discuss the payment of the dowry.

The last one is the celebration of marriage, where the girl generally leaves her parents' house to move to the boy's house. The wedding preparations also consist of the advice given by the family members to the candidates to marriage.. The aunt and the mother teach the future bride how she will behave in her new life. Due to the importance of maternity, the uncle and the father of the future husband teach him how he will behave as the protector and the master of his new family. Khoofi Phiri states that the introduction helps the future husband and wife to grow with a very sharing sense of distinction between feminine and masculine roles, and thus between the fatherly and motherly responsibilities in the family.²⁶

3.0 CHURCH TEACHING ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

3.1 The Old Testament

Marriage is a divine institution. It is an essential aspect of social life. God created male and female and ordained marriage as the indispensable condition for a continuance of the human race²⁷ (Gen 1:27-28). God made marriage an enabling influence powerfully giving the

²³ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, No.40.

²⁴Nyamiti, A, *African Christianity Today*, in Mugambi J N K & Magesa L (Eds), *Jesus in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 1998), 118.

²⁵ John Njenga, "marriage in Successive Stages" in *African Ecclesiastical Review (AFTER)* 28- 1986 p 201, n.d.

²⁶Phiri khofia, *African Traditional Marriage. Christian Theological Appraisal I* (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, 2011), 36.

²⁷ Henry Synyder Gehman Ed., *The new Westminster Dictionary of the bible* (Philadelphia:The Westminster press,1970) p 590

development of a full life in man and woman. God said that man should not live alone hence made him a helpmate (Gen 2:18). Christian marriage is the ideal which is marriage between man and woman in the Church. The Old Testament gives regulations and teachings on marriage, especially what is required of Gods people regarding relationships, attitudes towards people, and their sexual life [2](Lev 18:1-5).

3.1.1 The Nature of the Israelites Marriage and Family.

The sociological nature of marriage and family life finds its place in the sacred writing of the Bible. The book of Genesis presents an account of marriage as the basic human institution. The ideal expressed in monogamy; the two became one flesh²⁸ (Gen 2:22-25). The significance we notice is that people do not experience their lives as individuals but as members of a community. They define themselves by traditions and values of groups they belong. These relationships especially marriage and family, can also be bearers of higher meaning when they see a type of bond that ties us to God and of love and faithfulness that ties him to us. This sense of familial relationship can be seen between the Hebrews and their God.

3.1.2 The Nature of Israelite Institution of Marriage and Family.

The institution of marriage and family was fundamental in Israelite society. . Through marriage, various families came to know each other and thereby established a lasting relationship. Apart from the perpetuity and continuity of the lineage, there was also the desire to absorb family's numerical significance. Such practice was not uncommon among the Israelite people, further; the arrangement of marriage fell within the category of the family law in Israel. The exceptions would have been marriages as a result of prior rape (Ex 22:16) amended in (Duet 22:28) and the taking of a wife from captives of war, (Duet 21:10-14) marriage with foreigners was tolerated because of socio-economic necessity and political expediency²⁹ (1kings 11:17, 16:31).The Israelite law permitted divorce in some cases (Duet 24:1-4). However, it was not taken lightly in the Old Testament faith. Malachi denounces divorce as something Yahweh "hates" (Mal 2:13-16) as a form of self- inflated violence as surpassed only by Jesus himself. In the Old Testament, teaching fundamentally taught about the permanence of marriage and family. The marital institution was founded on Yahweh, the Israelite God, and the Mosaic Law, the Decalogue, the prophetic teaching, Hebrew worship and Sabbath. Families had to imitate the love and fidelity which exists between God and the people of Israel. Thus, it has a covenantal relationship.³⁰

3.1.3 The Family as a Covenantal Relationship

The concept of covenant mostly refers to marriage relationship between two parties. Therefore, the basis of family and marriage is understood as a covenant between a husband and wife³¹ (Pr 2:17, Mc 2:14). The family provided one of the most commonly used analogies for the relationship between Israel and God as father (Ex 4:22, PS 130:13, Pr 3:13 Jer 31:19, Hos 11:1-4) and also as mother.³² This is interpreted in terms of psychological theory (implying balance between punishing and loving) that portrays a balanced picture of God to the people of Israel

²⁸ William Dryness, Themes in Old Testament Carlisle. U.K: the paternoster Press,1977, P 81

²⁹ Freeman, "Family" By C.J. Wright 766

³⁰ Clement Majawa, Inculturation of the Doctrine of Fidelity in Sacramental Marriage: A Dogmatic Study, Doctoral Dissertation (Unpublished) Rome: Urbaniana 1994: 47-48

³¹ Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coggan (eds) (oxford companion to the Bible, p 223)

³² Ibid

having father mother characteristic. Within the family, the covenant faithfulness of God to his people is to be mirrored in the conjugal fidelity of husband and wife (Pr 5:77). God is seen as the father (husband) who provides leadership, protection and sustenance for his children. In the Old Testament it was of central importance in the experience and preservation of the covenant relationship with Yahweh.³³

3.2 New Testament

3.2.1 The New Testament Teaching on Marriage and Family Life.

God constituted marriage as a union between man and woman (Mat 19:5, 1Cor 6:16), bestowing upon them their free choice of consecration which goes beyond them. They are one flesh in Gods eyes. Marriage is a permanent relationship (Mat 19:6) and affirmed by Christ as indissoluble. Paul continues Christ teaching on indissolubility and divorce. He gives allowance to divorce when ones' faith is at stake (1Cor 7:12-16). He also emphasizes the value of love as an important foundation of marriage stability (Eph 5:31).

3.2.2 New Testament Understanding of Christian Marriage

The creator constituted marriage as union between man and woman (Mat 19:5, 1Cor 6:16), bestowing upon them their free choice of creation which goes beyond them. They are one flesh in Gods eyes. Marriage is a permanent relationship (Mat 19:6) and affirmed by Christ as indissoluble. Paul continues Christ teaching on indissolubility and divorce. He gives allowance to divorce when one; faith is at shake (1Cor 7:12-16). He also emphasizes the value of love as an important foundation of marriage stability ³⁴(Eph5:13)

3.2.3 The Synoptic Gospels Teaching on Christian Family

(Acts 3:25) expresses that one has a grave obligation to his family yet in the teaching of Jesus, his followers must give no more than second place to even the closest family ties (Mat 19:27, Lk 14:26). The true family of Jesus is those who do his fathers will (Mat 12:46-50, Lk 2:48-49). This exposition of attachment to one's own family in the teaching of Jesus can be distracted from the most important homage that God serves. The New Testament theology teaching of a family has a new significance belonging to the family of Christ in listening and doing the will of Christ, which is the same will of his father in heaven.

3.3 The Tradition of the church teaching on Christian marriage

Here we discuss selected fathers of the Church and a few of the church magisterial documents Christian marriage and how to go about it in pastoral ministry.

³³ Joseph Ruymer. The Covenant and the kingdom: A way through the Old Testament, Dayton, Ohio Flaum press, 1968. 127-136.

³⁴ Xavier Leon- DuFour, Dictionary of Biblical Theology (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973) P.336

3.3.1 Augustine Teaching on Marriage

When Augustine wrote his doctrine on marriage he pointed out two notions, namely marriage founded on the biological difference of the sexes and marriage founded on the social nature of man. Marriage is an institution whose purpose of procreation and sexual act was only a biological function, and its exercise must be limited according to the demand of his function alone. In so far as marriage stems from the social nature of man, marriage in a spiritual society and conjugal love is conceived as a purely spiritual communion, a union of soul and of heart in friendship³⁵. Augustine holds that in marriage; faithfulness and indissolubility to conceive high splendor if the spiritual communion of spouses is lived in total confidence.

3.3.2. St. Thomas Aquinas Understanding Marriage and Family Life.

In the times of St. Thomas Aquinas, the teaching on marriage and family life was not developed as it is today. He thought it in reference to the institution of marriage and its goods, procreation, conjugal love and companionship between married men and women. According to the readers of St. Thomas Aquinas he is said to have considered parents as generative agents of the vital principle of human life. This generative act, is given to man by God as something divine ordered to give life³⁶ which happens in marriage in contents of family life. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the activity of generation within matrimony is diversely adhered and directed. He affirms and asserts that the biblical foundation of marriage, thus its partnership is to last long since it is written: man leaves his father and mother “for the sake of his wife (Gen 2:24). However, it is necessary that matrimony to be indissoluble. In matrimonial union, generation is the only natural act that is ordered to the common good, as it pertains to the preservation of species within the family life. This generative act is geared towards the procreation of offspring since it agrees with good behaviour regarding to man as a member of a family and the civil society³⁷

3.4 Church Magisterial Documents

3.4.1 The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the family is a community of persons which is the first human society. A society built on a family scale is the best guarantee against dignity into individualism or collectivism, because within the family the person is always at the center of attention as end and more as a means³⁸. Furthermore, the catechism states that the family is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solitary and communal responsibilities. . Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten Christian families and the human societies³⁹. In the family, one learns responsibility and solidarity. The family is the sanctuary of life. Conjugal love is by its nature open to the acceptance of life. By its very nature the institution of marriage and Christian life is ordered to the procreation and education of offspring. The Church states that married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit life and to educate their children. They should realize that they are cooperating with the love of god and the creator are in a certain

³⁵ Wanjohi, . ‘foundation of Sexual and conjugal Morality” (Nairobi CUEA Press, 1989) 27

³⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contragentiles, Book Two: Creations, Translated by James F. Anderson London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975 9.289

³⁷ Ibid , 149

³⁸ Can No 2210

³⁹ Can No 2224

sense, its interpreters. They will fulfil this duty with a sense of human and Christian responsibility⁴⁰.

3.4.2 Lumen Gentium

The dogmatic constitution on the Church (LG) presents Christian marriage as a long union between two people who are already united with Christ by baptism and anointed with the Holy Spirit, the substantial love of father and son. Hence every Christian marriage is a sign of and a participation in the love which Christ shows to his Church. The council fathers articulated the relationship that there is between a human family and the Church. It says that, each family is a community within the universal Church joined together by natural and supernatural bonds in the light of the triune God. Thus the holiness of the Christian family is a particular dimension of the holiness of the Church, revealing, expressing and realizing it in the domain of family life. Therefore, married people's life must be one of mutual love, each supporting the other by God's grace.⁴¹ Their married love has its root in the divine love and has its model in Christ's love for the Church. The family is portrayed as the conjugal "fellowship" of love and the intimate union between husband and wife, and the mutual self-giving of two persons which constitutes this union. Husband and wife cooperate with God in the increase of the human family through their conjugal love.⁴² This mission proves the divine orientation of human family based on Christian family life. The human family is the arena or the meeting point between the genuine human values and divine will. In addition, it also provides for the physical, intellectual and cultural well-being of the members.⁴³ Therefore, the primary obligation of parents is to maintain their mutual love and to attend to the Christian formation of their children.⁴⁴ A family that is firmly founded on true human values and Christian principles will certainly be an authentic family of God's true church.

3.4.3 Gaudium et Spes

The (GS) teaches that marriage is the foundation of the family. Gaudium et Spes states "God is the author of marriage and has endowed it with benefits and with various ends in view of a bearing the continuation of human value. All these benefits include the personal development and external destiny of every member of the family on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity, of the family and of the whole human race."⁴⁵ In this way marriage gives witness to the genuine nature of the church. The pastoral constitution describes the family as, in a sense, a school for enrichment and deeper humanity. The family is the place where different generations come together and help one another to grow and harmonize the rights of individuals with other demands of social life; as such it constitutes the basis of society. The civil authority should consider it as sacred duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and to promote domestic prosperity.⁴⁶ The councils' pastoral constitution gives more spiritual, biblical, and based understanding of the

⁴⁰ Can No 2367

⁴¹ Kelvin mc Namare (eds), Vatican II: Constitution on the Church: a Theological and Pastoral Commentary. Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan herald press, 1998 p,255

⁴² Christopher Butter, The Theology of Vatican II, Revised and Enlarged edition, London: Dorton, Longman and Todd 1989, p 142

⁴³ Ibid, 273

⁴⁴ Raymond B. Fullen, Exploring Vatican II; Christian Living Today and Tomorrow, New York, Alba house, 1997, 153

⁴⁵ Gaundium et spes No 48

⁴⁶ Gaundium at spes No 52.

spouse of the family as a domestic Church. Ephesians 5, as a basis, suggests that the family participates in the covenant uniting Christ and church. It manifests Christ's living presence to the world, employing love, faithfulness and fruitfulness.

3.5 Local Magisterium

3.5.1 The AMECEA Bishops Concern for the Christian Family.

The synod fathers frequently spoke upon in favor of the family, which is rightly called a domestic church; a space open to the presence of the lord on the sacrament of matrimony. The family is seen to be community of primary importance, since in the family, both the spouse and their children live out proper vocation and are perfected in charity. The Christian family as was emphasized in the synod-is, an apostolic community open to vision⁴⁷. It is the Bishops particular task to ensure that within civil society, the values of marriage are supported and defended by means of correct political and economic decisions. Within the Christian community he will not fail to encourage the preparation of engaged couple for marriage, the pastoral accompaniment of young couples and the formation of groups of families who can support the family apostolate and at least be in a position to assist families in trouble. The care of the bishops to married couples and their children, expressed also by various initiatives on the Diocesan level, will prove a source of encouragement to them

4.0 TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN MERU DIOCESE

We shall propose measures, duties and responsibilities of the couples, the Church and other people so that we can have successful and happy marriages. Measures like the necessity of premarital preparations, accompanying couples who are already married and marital counseling for couples are highly recommended.

4.1 Promoting Christian Marriage and Family Ministry

4.1.1 Promoting Greater Knowledge of Christian Marriage

Many responses voiced a need to find new ways to communicate the Churches teaching on marriage and family life, which depends greatly on the vitality of the particular Church, its traditions and the effective resources at its disposal. Above all, some recognized the need of forming pastoral workers to communicate the Christian message in a culturally appropriate manner. Clear responses from particular respondents revealed that, there is burden in certain situations where there is lack of economic and human resources in organizing an ongoing family catechesis. There is need for highlighting areas of the Church, in promoting qualified formative experts on marriage and family life. Finally, the observation that catechesis on marriage and family cannot be limited exclusively to the preparation of couples for marriage. Instead, a dynamic catechetical program is needed, experiential in character, which through personal testimony shows that the teaching on the marriage and family life is transmitted by the gospel values and supported by the documents of the church.

4.1.2 Family Apostolate in the Pariah

Vatican Council II clearly speaks about the importance of apostolate of the family for the church and the society at large. It says that the family is the vital cell of the society⁴⁸. African Synod

⁴⁷ John Paul II Bishops Shepherds of the Lords' flock Post-synodal. Apostolic Exhortation "Pastore Gregis". Pauline's Publications Africa, Nairobi. 2003.P 84

⁴⁸ Apostolicum Acuatatem No 11

fathers also considered the evangelization of the African family as a major priority not only because the Christian family is the first cell of the living ecclesial community but also because the family is the fundamental cell of the society and the foundation in which the social edifice is built⁴⁹. As regards the role of the parents in the formation of youth in sexual matters, Pope John Paul II asserts that proper sex education for the youth should go side by side with the general formation of chastity, preparation for the marriage, possible choice of the parenthood or religious life and general human formation⁵⁰. In this way the Christian family as the domestic church⁵¹ becomes the fundamental school of formation in all the aspect of life.⁵² To succeed in family apostolate there is a need that the particular churches employ good customary family values in the formation of the youth for marriage. The apostolate group comprising of the parents and elders could help in the preparation of young people for marriage.

4.1.3. The Role of SCCs in Marriage Preparation

The Meru traditional community played a major role in marriage preparation. Since marriage has been both union between the spouses and their respective families. The selection of partners and the investigation of the family background took place before marriage. The community looked after the sponsorship of the young people and continued to offer them a support in their marriage life. SCCs would build up a spirit of community that can replace the local community on the traditional village. They can offer a new experience of community life which substitutes for the elder lineage or family community. They will make one feel at home in the urban Church and find a greater personal fulfilment and relate with others in a deep and more human level. Hence there is a great need to involve the members of SCCs in marriage preparation and celebration.

4.1.3.1 The Purpose of involving SCCs in Sacrament of Marriage

The reason for involving the SCCs in marital affairs of their members is based on the fact that the sacrament of marriage creates families which are the basic foundation of SCCs. More still the participation of the community in every stage of preparation for the celebration of marriage guarantees respect for the institution of marriage. Indeed, the involvement of the SCCs in marriage preparation and celebration in line with the teaching of the second Vatican council in community contemplated in Can: 1063. The Canon places a serious obligation on the pastors of souls to see to it that the local Christian community gives proper and adequate support to preserving and developing the Christian character of marriage. The same Canon also points to four principle ways in which all concerned in which both clergy and laity are obliged to cooperate in this noble apostolate.

4. 1.3.2 Stages of Marriage Preparation Involving SCCs

In the first place, there is remote preparation from marriage with a particular focus on the meaning of Christian marriage and the role of Christian spouse and parents. Next comes the approximate preparation of individuals who are about to be married. This preparation should focus on the holiness and obligation of their new marriage life. The third level of preparation concentrates on the community aspect of marriage in ensuring a fruitful celebration of the

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No 80

⁵⁰ John Paul, *Familiaris Consortio* No 37

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium*, VII, *Apostolicum Actuositatem*. No 11

⁵² John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici* (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, 1984) No 62.

marriage liturgy. The couple to be married and those close to them should be involved in the preparation of the liturgy. Lastly, the Can: 1063 speaks for the support to be given to those who have married, as support which must focus on the wholeness of family life as a sign of god's grace and as a witness to the whole community. To achieve this end, we would like to suggest as far as possible the promotion of marriage encounter and the establishment of marriage counseling committee. In each SCCs, parish and Dioceses it is our hope that the assistance of the community and to help those who are not married in the church to solemnize their marriage. Great effort should be made to develop, strengthen and sustain Christian families. Pastoral care of the families which should be treated as a priority, as future evangelization depends mainly on the domestic church.

4.2 Ongoing Marriage and Family Catechesis

4.2.1 Ongoing Family Catechesis

Instability of Christian marriages, polygamous union, trial marriages, separation and divorce are rampant in many parishes. It is ironical that Christian families that are supposed to foster vocations as a kind of introductory seminary⁵³ has become an antithesis to the same. To address these problems the Meru Diocese should launch a systematic and pastoral ongoing family catechesis, that is, one that not just improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal.⁵⁴ Again the missionary legacy of house to house visit must be re-emphasized and resumed.

4.2.2 Ongoing Forms of Family Catechesis

The training and the ongoing forms of catechesis rooted in family ecclesiology in the Church should be maintained and promoted for the increasing demand in the pastoral field especially for Christian families⁵⁵. There is need to integrate traditional values in the catechesis based on the family ecclesiology. Given their vocation as Christian community animators and mediators, the catechists, parents and religious need for support from the Christian family and the entire Christian community in the developing and actualizing family catechesis and all stake holders in the family. This contempt of self-support is not new, but it is deep in the church and in the traditional Meru families whereby formation of the families is ongoing and is carried out the whole of one's life. Evangelizing these families is a big challenge because some of them have recently joined the Christian community. Therefore, the local church or Meru Diocese needs to have a special pastoral caring approach towards polygamous Christians in the light of family ecclesiology. On a further formative note, Pope Paul VI reiterated the formative role of and by the Christian family. He thus emphasized that the family is like the church, ought to be like a place where the gospel is transmitted and from which it radiates. Definitely, such formative role and vision is equally binding the imperative both in Catholic and united Christian families.⁵⁶

4.3 Catechesis on Christian Family.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic catechesis today teaches the family; catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. Education in the faith by parents, which

⁵³ John Paul II, *Catechesis Trandendae* (Catechesis in our time), 1979 No 21

⁵⁴ *Optatam Totiuos* No 2

⁵⁵ Flannery A, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St. Paul Publication, 1975), No 11.

⁵⁶ Flannery A, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St. Paul Publication, 1975), No 11.

should begin from children; tender age, is already being given to members of a family to help each other grow in faith through the witness of their Christian life. A witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout the day today life lived in accordance with the gospel. Care should be taken in the home to be able to explain the Christian and religious context of sacraments, liturgical feasts, birth of a child or bereavement. Christian parents must strive to follow and respect within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching they have received. This will influence the children in a decisive way for Christian life. Family catechesis therefore proceeds, accompanies and enriches all the other forms of catechesis that can help reduce divorce and separation cases in the Christian families. The Christian family is the place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis that entails Christian values. Christian parents should be our children's catechesis. The service they do to catechize is beyond price.

4.3.1 Ongoing Formation of Christian Families

The church in Meru needs to provide sufficient sources to support Christian family catechesis. Many troubled marriages could be saved by competent intervention before the relationship has disintegrated. This intervention can be offered by counseling agencies, support groups and referral services. A Support group should not have a perpetual family crisis, but should be exemplary. In fact Christian values and love should be strengthened through solidarity. Although the responsibility officially falls on the pastors, the community has a vital role to play in this regard. Both individuals such as parents, teachers, catechists or members of formation team and other relevant catholic associations are helpful in family catechesis which needs to be supported to Christian families in Meru Diocese. The ongoing formation help to focus consistently on reminding and deepening the understanding of marriage as the holy sacrament, holy with sacrifice efforts. In that understanding special attention is paid on the holiness and obligation of marital status and family life as a sign of God's grace endowed in the couples by the virtue of the sacramental nature of marriage.

4.3.2 The Role of Schools in Marriage Catechesis

Schools which are becoming ever more widespread and they are also an important place for the formation of young people into marriage life. The Catholic Diocese of Meru is greatly gifted for having many secondary schools under its supervision. Thanks to the diocesan catechetical department for its efforts to impart religious education in such schools through the joint provision of teachers, pastors and religious. Taking into account the urgent pastoral need to attend to the challenges affecting marriage and family life, we would like to call upon the teachers and the pastors' collaboration and cooperation with the catechetical department in imparting marriage catechesis in schools. This will help the youth to understand the theology of marriage at its initial stage with such a fundamental knowledge on marriage, they could be grounded in faith so as to overcome challenges in marriage.

4.3.3 Marriage, Workshop and Seminars

We are indeed to acknowledge the efforts of Meru Diocese pastoral Department for organizing seminars and workshops on marriage and family life. These have been very effective especially in conscious testing, those in marriage and not married to undergo Christian marriage. We would like to suggest more seminars, workshops to be organized at the diocesan and parish levels. We should involve different experts namely; theologians, medical doctors, teachers, traditional male elders and councilors. All these should be given a chance to give talks

according to the areas of specialization, talents and capabilities. There is hope that with such organization and collaboration of different groups of people, the response will be to have integral formation of young people for marriage.

4.3.4 Evangelization through Mass Media.

Today mass media is undergoing a rapid innovative development, as an extensive worldwide influence on the formation of people's mentality and their customs. Its influence is clearly evident in the propagation of a general spirit of passiveness. This fact calls for urgent need of evangelization and utilization of mass media in order to ensure that the teaching propagate their goal, the time and the beauty of marriage⁵⁷. The evangelization through utilization of mass media will help us to counteract what is wrongly betrayed by the modern media. Furthermore, evangelization and education through mass media also imply the utilization of various occasions and gathering mainly wedding ceremonies, advent and lent seasons, retreat and lay associations. All these can be used to impart religious values. Therefore, we once call upon all agents of evangelization to take seriously the importance of using various means of social communication and education of people especially the youth on marriage and family life

4.4 The Role of Couples in Marriage

The couple has to work hard so as to ensure that their marriage succeeds. They are the main players and the success of the marriage largely depends on how much they invest in the relationship and how much they handle issues that come on the way. They must invest all their time and everything including the resources in the relationship. We shall therefore discuss some of the roles the couples has to play in the following session.

4.4.1 Proper Preparation

Proper and prior preparation is of great importance for any success in any endeavor. Failing to prepare is like planning to fail from the word go. The couple are supposed to prepare well so that their marriage last forever. Lack of proper preparation before marriage has been sighted as a major challenge in marriage and family life. The time for marriage preparation is called courtship. It may range from six months to five years depending on the readiness and maturity of the couple. Along duration of courtship allows for growth in maturity on both partners. It has been observed that teenage marriages tend to break easier than the marriage of mature people. During the time of courtship, there should be openness, in the discussions and deliberations. All issues that exactly affects the couples must be ironed out before commitment to marriage life.

4.4.2 Proper Communication

Many married councilors have pointed out that the major challenges in marriage today is lack of proper communication between the couples. Heinzman observes that dialogue solidify almost all the marriage difficulties⁵⁸. At times the couple stops talking to each other and so they fill the empty space with television, the newspaper, the radio programs and talks about trivial matters that as nothing to do with their partnership⁵⁹. We therefore propose that the line of communication must be kept open and each person should be acceptable by the other. The two

⁵⁷ John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa No 124

⁵⁸ Heinzman, Love in Your Calling p.10

⁵⁹ Ibid

must understand each other to avoid unnecessary tension. Through communication and dialogue, one can be open to each other and share with others so as to enter into the others' world of thoughts and feelings. Communication in marriage implies the sacrifice of time and other resources. Moreover, it implies having time for one another so that the love between the two might grow and develop.

4.5 The Church's Role in Marriage

The Church has got a very important role to play in the success of marriage. The role played by the elders and relatives in traditional society now has been left to the church. In some parishes, the parents send their children to Church, along with their daily work, especially when the schools are closed.

4.5.1 Customary Marriage Practices and Values Adoptable to Christianity

In Meru traditional culture marriage was an occasion of uniting two people, but a total preparatory process from childhood was necessary. In this regard we can say that whole life was marriage. A study carried out by Kinoti, to investigate the concept of marriage in Meru traditional marriage found out that courtship could contribute much to marriage stability. Such values help in the making of choice of somebody with good qualities and who is not a relative. So the church can also adopt longer periods of courtship and preparation before marriage. The church needs to emphasize a more active participation for the parents and the elders. These members of the family or clan can help in finding a suitable future partner with good qualities, hence leading to more stable marriages and family life.

4.5.2 Being faithful in Marriage

We have found out that one of the challenges in marriage and family life is infidelity. In this area we call upon all couples to remain faithful to their partners until death do them apart.⁶⁰ In many instances infidelity begins not in marriage infidelity but at times through flirting with other persons. Flirting is not good and should be avoided⁶¹. Karina talks of emotional infidelity when we say that energy, time; money can be spending on someone else whom you see often rather than the one you have married.⁶² Moreover the couple should be wise enough and stop friendships especially when one feels attracted to the other. However, if infidelity unfortunately occurs journey of healing from it must be fully committed. It involves team work. The two must be fully committed to the hard work of putting their marriage back on track. The unfaithful partner must end the affair and do whatever it takes to win back the trust of the other spouse. The betrayed spouse must find way of overcoming the overwhelming emotion.⁶³

4.6 Forming Experts in Accompanying Family Apostolate

4.6.1 Formation of Experts

To deal with marriage issues in some areas the Church has not invested a lot in its resources in training of personnel to deal with marriage and family challenges. In this study we propose that each diocese spends out some amount of money of its budget in training experts in marital issues. These experts may include the marriage counselors, family ministers; priests specialized

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Proverb 6;13

⁶² Jenifer Karina P. 80

⁶³ Ibid

in family ministry, catechists, and lay people to study marriage and family catechesis. One may claim that educating the experts is an expensive affair but it is worth noting that a failed marriage may be more expensive in the long run than training a few experts in order to sustain existing marriages.

4.6.2 Organizing Ongoing Formation

We know the importance of follow up after a couple has wedded. In this study we propose that all parishes organize different programs for marriage couples. The programs should follow the duration of marriage for instance those who have been married for five years, twenty years, and forty years in marriage in that order. This is wise because some unforeseen challenge may arise as the couples continue to live together. These programs should take the form of conferences, retreats, get together and seminars. In these programs the married couples can share their joy, difficulties, desperation and listen from the experiences of the others. By doing so, bad feeling or challenges in marriage will be reduced as some couples undergo through family difficulties.

4.6.3 Marriage Councilors

Counseling is explained by John Cavanagh as process that comes about when one individual seeks out another to assist them in “research of reason” in an attempt to find the means to the solution of a problem.⁶⁴ At this point in time we shall dwell more on marriage counseling. A counselor is a profession person trained on how to help in those in crisis in life, it is unwise to assume that theological, philosophical and social studies are enough to make one marriage counselor. Marriage counseling result when an individual seeks out another more skilled than him/herself in the effort to work out the means to a successful and happy marriage life⁶⁵. All the above efforts are geared towards sustaining marriages that could be undergoing challenges. Marriage counseling can take the following dimensions; premarital, marital counseling and marriage problem intervention.

4.7 Ongoing Pastoral Care for the Married Couples

The pastoral care for married couples should not end with solemnization of their marriage in the church. There is need for ongoing pastoral care for the married couples in the church through continues education and catechesis. Christian’s families should be supportive to the newly married couples and we suggest the following.

4.7.1 Renewal of Marriage Promises

There is nothing very special about this programme except it is an occasion organized by priests in parishes in which couples come to the Church to renew their commitment to each other. This can be done every year on their anniversary or other times they deem it necessary. The Church should encourage the renewal of marriage promises as an effort to strengthen the present marital relationship “the occasion is prepared for in various ways: including a day of prayer, and the renewal takes place during mass in prayerful thanksgiving and mutual encouragement”⁶⁶. Souvenir certificates and medals can be devised to mark the occasion. Each couple can be presented with a souvenir to carry home for future encouragement and remembrance.

⁶⁴ John Cavanagh p.4

⁶⁵ George Menabel, Pastoral counselling (Kerela: Pauline’s publications 1999) P.42

⁶⁶ Ibid P.16

4.7.2 Marriage and Family Workshops

The couples can be introduced to marriage and family workshop which are geared towards deepening their communication. The approach can employ the pastoral method or pastoral cycle in helping the couples to face courageously the issues affecting their marriage. Through communal sharing, their interpersonal relationship is improved. This can be taken up from time to time so as to deepen their commitment to one another. It has helped many families to live their Christian life.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The responses stressed the need for a family ministry which provides systematic and ongoing formation on the value of marriage as a vocation and rediscovery of parenting and mothering as a gift. The church pastoral activity on behalf of the couple not to be limited to preparation for marriage, which thus requires reevaluation. More consistent and structured formation ought to be biblical, theological, spiritual as well as human existential and pastoral oriented.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In marriage preparation, many advances should be taken into consideration such as programs in parishes, seminars and retreats for couples. Marriage preparation should be done by priests supported by married couples with extensive experience in marriage and family matters.

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