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## **Mentoring Families for Spiritual Growth in the University Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Midlands East Zambia Conference to Curb Marital Separations, Divorces and Spouse Killings**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement and evaluate a mentoring program for families for spiritual growth in the University Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings among church members and the community at large. The study used qualitative method of data collection. Library materials were analyzed, personal interviews were carried out and a focus group was selected for training.

According to the findings of the study, there is erosion of cultural norms that needs to be attended to in families, churches, communities and the country at large. Spiritual degeneration among church members was felt and members who participated in the study felt that urgent attention was needed by all concerned parties. It was further observed that media has really changed so many things leading to some challenges in families, churches and communities at large that need constant attention.

Due to large number of people's migration from rural communities to live in cities, also formal education, as well as religion, an erosion of traditional ceremonies has been experienced in the rural communities where they used to take place. The traditional ceremonies helped to maintain cultural norms which are no longer practiced by church members but without proper or fitting replacement.

From this study, it has been concluded that mentoring families for spiritual growth is one of the ways certain cultural norms may be kept by different generations. Though the earth is in its last phase of its history, if people are mentored for spiritual growth at different stages of their lives to be Christ-like, issues of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings may be reduced if not completely stopped.

Spiritual character development must be emphasized in families, churches, communities and country at large. Everyone should be involved in the checks and balances of day-to-day's happenings in the society. Even if media has changed so many things, it can still be used for good. Due to busy schedules and other restrictions such as what happened during Covid-19, the church can still use the media to mentor families for spiritual growth. There is need to flood the media with materials that are spiritual, attractive and helpful to all age groups. Evil vices need to be condemned constantly as spiritual character is being promoted.

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**Key Words:** Family, Marital Separation, Divorce, Spouse Killing, Spiritual Growth, Mentor, Mentoring, Mentoring families for spiritual growth.

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### **1.1 Introduction**

Zambia is in the southern part of Africa. The records of 2010 census shows a population of 13,092,666. Out of this population, 6,756,049 persons aged 15 years and above were married. The average age at first marriage was 20.7 years. Males had a higher average age at first marriage than females at 24.2 years and 18.8 years, respectively. There were 2,513,768 households during the same period. The average household size was 5.2 persons. Male-headed households recorded a larger average household size at 5.4 compared to female-headed households of 4.4 persons (Lusaka: Central Statistical Office, 2012). In 2012, life expectancy in the country was at 43 years (Zambia Daily Mail, January 5, 2012) As of 2017, when I started this study, the population was estimated to be above 17 million. According to 2022 census, the population was at 19,610,769 of which 9,603,056 are males while 10,007,713 are females (<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/social-statistics/>, accessed: January 3, 2024)).

Among the ten provinces of Zambia, the largest population in 2010 census was in Lusaka, the capital city with 2,191,225 people (Lusaka: Central Statistical Office, 2013). According to 2022 census, Lusaka province still had the largest population of 3,079,964 (<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/social-statistics/>,

accessed: January 3, 2024)). Lusaka province is divided into four districts: Chongwe, Kafue, Luangwa and Lusaka (Zambia, ed., 2010 Census of Population and Housing, accessed: 2017).

Media has reported an increase in marital separations, divorces and spouse killings in the country. Over 28,000 divorce cases were recorded in 2016 countrywide. In the same year, the country recorded “18,540 cases of gender-based violence (Zulu, accessed: December 7, 2017). Between January and September 2016, the police received 41 murder cases while in 2017, there were 55 cases of murder reported countrywide (Mwitwa, accessed: June 7, 2021). Lusaka reported the highest number of divorce cases. Between January and September 2016, local courts in Lusaka province handled 8,552 cases. An average of 17 divorce cases were disposed daily and 340 monthly over the same period. Media reported more than five people who were killed by their spouses in the province between January 2016 and July 2017. In 2022, courts received 31,452 applications for divorce cases (<https://zambianobserver.com/>, accessed: January 4, 2024). By the third quarter of 2023, “over 10,000 gender-based violence cases were noted countrywide” (Kandimba, accessed: December 14, 2023).

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Zambia was not spared from these cases. University Seventh-day Adventist church is located in Lusaka District and the total church membership by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017, was 2,209. This church experienced pregnancies outside wedlock, marital separations, divorces and suspected spouse killings. In December 2016, one male member of University church was murdered. His wife was arrested as first suspect. By January 2017, a girlfriend killed a male member of the church. Between December 2016 and June 2017, two couples divorced and from January to June 2017, four couples separated. Statistical reports reveal that seven members were disciplined for pregnancies outside wedlock between January and July 2017. It is likely that there were other cases that were not yet known or reported to the church by the time the research was done.

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## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The number of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings for both men and women in Lusaka is increasing. The University Seventh-day Adventist Church also has been significantly affected by this growing phenomenon as it loses its members by death and removal from church records of those found in these immoral behaviors. These trends need to be checked both in the country that is constitutionally recognized as a Christian nation and the Seventh-day Adventist church where they seem to be becoming prevalent. The increase of these evil vices is suspected to be due to eroding cultural norms, spiritual degeneration and media influence not only nationally but also in the Church.

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## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement and evaluate a mentoring program for families for spiritual growth in the University Seventh-day Adventist church in order to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings among church members and the community at large.

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## 1.4 Justification of the Study

Ministering to broken homes as a pastor is one of the hardest things to do. Due to broken/divided homes, many children drop out of school and end up being street kids. In a quest to earn a living, they resort into evil vices. It has been observed that when families are not stable, chances are high that the church family will also not be stable. A mentoring program for spiritual growth for families would help reduce pregnancies outside wedlock, marital separations, divorce cases and spouse killings, which in turn will reduce the number of single parents, street kids and prostitutes. This will help to have health families in the University Seventh-day Adventist church, in the communities, in Lusaka province and the country at large.

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## 1.5 Description of the Project Process

This study used qualitative method of data collection. Library materials were analyzed, personal interviews were carried out and a focus group was selected for training. The problems of pregnancies outside wedlock, marital separations, divorces and spouse killings in Lusaka were identified. The biblical themes and principles both in the Old and New Testaments as well as the writings of Ellen G. White about marriage and family enrichment were reviewed. Other literatures on family mentoring for spiritual growth were also looked at. Permission letters were secured from Northern Zambia Union Conference and Midlands East Zambia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists. Interviews, observations, documents and audiovisual data were used for the development of the project. Four couples were purposefully selected in University Seventh-day Adventist church who were trained to be family mentors. The project was implemented and evaluated. Conclusion and recommendations were made, and followed by the bibliography.

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## 1.6. Definition of Terms

- a. **Family:** “the basic social unit in Israel” (Achtmeier, 1985, p. 302). “Parents and their children, whether dwelling together or not” (Stein, 1988). In this article, the word family refers to a male husband, a female wife and children; it may include dependents who live together in a household.

- b. **Marital Separation:** “According to the law, ‘marital separation’ is defined as living apart either under judicial decree or by mutual understanding” (Taylor, accessed November 15, 2021).
- c. **Divorce:** According to Neufeld (1979) the word means dismissal, literally a cutting off.” Divorce is “a judicial declaration dissolving a marriage in whole or part” (Stein, 1988, p. 389). “The legal ending of a marriage while the two parties are still living” (Freedman, 2000, p.351). Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines divorce as an “action or an instance of legally dissolving a marriage.” (Accessed: July 31, 2023).
- d. **Spouse killing:** It is when a husband kills his wife or a wife kills her husband.
- e. **Spiritual growth:** A process of growth out of sin into righteousness; a process of becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ.
- f. **Mentor:** “a wise and trusted counselor” (Stein, 1988, p. 835). A mentor is an experienced and knowledgeable person who is willing to accept the responsibility of facilitating support and growth “of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship (Correia and McHenry, 2008). [Note: I reconstructed it for the purpose of this study].
- g. **Mentoring:** “Mentoring is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers (“Mentoring” accessed June 1, 2020). Mentoring is “about motivating and empowering the other person to identify their own issues and goals, and helping them to find ways of resolving or reaching them - not by doing it for them, or expecting them to ‘do it the way I did it’, but by understanding and respecting different ways of working (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>, accessed: June 1, 2020). Mentoring is “the [act](#) or [process](#) of helping and giving [advice](#) to a young or less experienced person (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>, accessed: June 1, 2020). Mentoring is a process of sharpening an individual by an experienced and knowledgeable person as iron sharpens iron with an intention of growth.
- h. **Mentoring families for spiritual growth:** A relational process of helping families to have a meaningful, growing relationship with God and one another; a process of assisting families to become true disciples of Jesus Christ.

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## 1.7 Findings and Discussions

The following findings and discussions were presented:

### 1.7.1 Presentation of Findings

*From the interviews, in response to a question: What are some of your grievances that led to your divorce, the following seven responses were recorded in order of the analysis:*

- a. **Extra Marital Affairs:** Out of the six people interviewed, all of them mentioned extra marital affairs as number one grievance that led to divorce. When a follow up question was made on what led to extra marital affairs, it was mentioned that there are many causes of extra marital affairs. One of them is having a close friendship with opposite sex (one who is not your spouse) without proper boundaries put in place. The other one is the denial of conjugal rights. Men complained that women denied them the conjugal rights which forced them to go out with other women. For women who had extra marital affairs, the main cause was financial issues; being supported financially by male friends without the knowledge of their husbands.
- b. **Family Interferences:** All the six interviewed persons talked about family interference as a grievance that contributed to their divorce. They all mentioned that families tend not to be fair when marital issues were brought to their attention. Families were seen to be “favoring their blood relatives.” Three interviewees clearly indicated that families were “not objective in handling their issues.” This frustrated the one who felt neglected and blamed while he/she still believed was the one who was innocent.
- c. **Lack of Support:** Five out six interviewed people said that lack of financial support by the spouse was a grievance that contributed to their divorce. Two groups were seen on this issue. The first group is where one spouse was an income earner while the other was not. In this case, the income earner would not support the non-income earner financially as it was expected. The second group is where by both spouses were income earners but they could not work together financially. Though married, they felt like they were alone financially. Lack of support for each other financially brought serious tension in their family affairs that led to divorce.
- d. **Married Wrongly:** Out of six interviewed people, five strongly believed that when a person is wrongly married, it usually brings grievances that can easily lead to divorce. A follow up question was made for the meaning of the phrase being *married wrongly*. The following were the responses: They talked about child marriage – for women getting married at the age below 20 years while men talked about the age below 25. They explained that a certain age must be reached before one could commit into marriage. Age difference was another answer to the follow up question – all believed that the age difference should not be more than 10 years and the man should be older than the woman. Having wrong objectives for

marriage was another reply on a follow up question on the meaning of married wrongly – issues like marrying for money, marrying due to peer pressure and family pressure were mentioned. The last reaction on the meaning of wrongly married was marrying a non-believer – a non-believer was said to be someone of different faith; one who is not a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Respondents strongly believed that marrying within the Seventh-day Adventist Church would solve many marital challenges being experienced by many families.

- e. **Issues of Identity:** Four out of the six interviewed mentioned that lack of proper identity by a spouse is one of the grievances they experienced in their marriage that contributed to their divorce. There was a case where one man felt that his wife was not of his class. According to him, her status was too low for her to mix with his friends as he looked at his status in society, which in turn made her to feel unwanted. The other case was of a woman who always wanted her husband to be like other men whom she admired in life. No matter how her husband tried to explain his position, she could not take it; she ended up calling him bad names, which kept on irritating him. All those who talked about identity somehow fought for “equality” or supremacy in their marriages.
- f. **Communication:** Lack of effective communication was cited by four persons out of the six interviewed as a grievance they encountered in their marriage before, they divorced. Two persons hinted that their spouses would not talk once they were annoyed. This led to have so many issues that were not resolved. The four mentioned that their spouses would do things that affected the entire family without consulting them.
- g. **Charms:** One woman used charms in order to have total control of her husband. This brought grievances in her marriage because the charms did not work as intended. The results were so negative that the man “became useless in life” according to her observations. He failed to perform his marital duties. The reasoning capacity according to her reduced. This led her to have boyfriends. As if it was not enough, she was tempted by a boyfriend to use charms again; this time to kill the husband so that they could marry. Fearing to kill her husband, she accused the husband of not being a man financially and sex-wise; that he was good for nothing and she opted for divorce. Due to these allegations, divorce took place.

The table below shows a summary of responses by the interviewees on the causes of their divorce:

#	Reasons for Divorce	Males	Females	Total
1.	Extra marital affairs	3	3	6
2.	Family interferences	2	4	6
3.	Luck of support	2	3	5
4.	Married wrongly	2	3	5
5.	Issues of Identity	2	2	4
6.	Communication	2	2	4
7.	Charms	0	1	1

In response to a question on the interviews instrument, which focused on reducing or preventing marital separations, divorces and killings among church members, the following were recorded:

All the interviewees referred to the olden days when both girls and boys underwent intensive trainings through initiation ceremonies as they reached puberty. The interviewees insisted that the initiation ceremonies instilled morals in the minds of the trainees that lasted for the rest of their lives.

Two men and one woman talked about intensive family life trainings which should start early in the life of an individual preferably before the age of puberty due to technology and social media. It was said that many families have lost focus on training their children. A lot of parents need to be trained on how to bring up their children in a spiritual way. An adage which says you can only give what you have applies here. If parents were not well trained, there is no way they can properly train their children.

During initiation ceremony, a lady was kept in a house for a year. During this period, elderly women were tasked to train this person. Aunts were in most cases the ones who had this responsibility. The training mainly centered on how a woman must live once married.

For young men, they used to take them, according to their ages in camps for a specified period where they were being trained by men on how a married person should live. By the end of these trainings, a person was ready to begin a family. According to the respondents, these trainings helped in maintaining families well.

The three respondents also mentioned the aspect of families playing an important role in seeing that their children were well trained by their parents. It was observed that today, many parents have no time for their children due to work culture. Children at a tender age are left under the care of maids/house helpers. A child would go through many hands of "careless" maids before becoming of age. By the time a child becomes of age, he/she has little to learn from the parents.

One interviewee insisted that no person should be allowed to be married at a tender age if marital separations, divorces and spouse killings among church members were to be prevented.

On handling marital disputes, all the interviewees insisted that families and churches must not be biased. By all means they must look at issues objectively and fairly. To achieve this, families need to constantly be trained on conflict management.

*The table below shows the response on the question which focused on reducing or preventing marital separations, divorces and spouse killings among church members:*

#	Items that need attention	Males	Females	Total
1.	Family Trainings on spiritual matters and norms of the culture	2	1	3
2.	Initiation ceremonies are still important	3	3	6
3.	Families to play an important role in child upbringing	1	2	3
4.	Marriage should only be allowed at a certain age	0	1	1

### **1.7.2 Intervention Implementation Process**

Having established the grievances divorcees encountered through the responses recorded in order of the analysis, solutions were vital to prevent or reduce marital separations, divorces and spouse killings.

#### **1.7.2a Activities for initiative Implementation**

The first step of the project implementation was to organize a focus group with University Seventh-day Adventist Church in Midlands East Zambia Conference through the office of the Church Pastor. A group of eight individuals made of four couples were used for the focus group. The focus group was used in the context of the members of the group to be family mentors with sincere commitment and prayers. Bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the issues of spouse separation, divorce and spouse killing, the church pastor played a role of a consultant; a position which was maintained up to the end of the research.

I explained to the focus group the purpose of the program. The main focus was to mentor families for spiritual growth in order to reduce or avoid spouse separations, divorces and spouse killings. I further highlighted to the group that mentorship is believed to have provided positive results in the past. The mentorship program was aimed at both behavior and outcome (results) of family members in their families, communities and church at large. The goal and objective of the focus group was to look at the spiritual growth of families that would prevent broken homes.

Having settled the approach and process, the schedule of activities commenced on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020. There were no meetings during the weekends as agreed by group members due to other commitments some members had.

*The following is the outcome of the focus group discussions that took place for eight days. Each day of the meeting took about an hour, thirty minutes on average.*

The first day of the focus group, I explained the topic of the study by highlighting key issues that needed the attention of the group. I further indicated to the group that as a church pastor, people talked to me about marital separations, divorces, spouse killings and how these vices affected their spirituality. Then I opened the discussion by asking the group members what they knew about marital separations, divorces, and spouse killings. All the members of the group were aware of these issues and talked at length citing examples of what happened in the near past among church members and in the country at large. The group members appreciated the extent of the study as the discussion progressed.

On the same day, the group looked at the common causes of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings. Members started by listing them randomly. They all spoke freely and interacted very well. After exhausting the random listing, the group decided to organize the causes of marital separations, divorce and spouse killings as follows:

1. Lack of communication
2. Being dishonest in a relationship

3. Financial differences and mismanagement
4. Loss of income
5. Rushed marriages or ill prepared couples
6. Peer pressure or interference from friends and relatives
7. In-laws syndrome
8. Infidelity
9. Age difference
10. Living apart or working in different towns which are far apart to commute daily
11. Differences in religious beliefs
12. Not having children
13. Gender based violence and abuse
14. Imbalanced roles/responsibilities
15. Jealousy/competition between husband and wife.

After the focus group listed the causes as above, I revealed to them the causes of divorce I got from the interviews. It was observed that six out of seven causes of divorce given by divorcees were included by the focus group though using different terminologies. The use of charms was the only reason not mentioned by the focus group. This gave the group confidence that they were in the right direction towards the intended goal of reducing or avoiding marital separations, divorces and spouse killings.

The second day, the group considered how marital separations, divorces and spouse killings could be reduced or prevented by the church. Based on the causes of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings discussed the previous day, the group came up with the following suggestions:

**Lack of Communication:** It was noted that one's past experiences may cause lack of communication in marriage. The other way to have lack of communication in marriage is when one decides not to open up. It was further observed that there are times when a spouse forgets to communicate or assumes that there is no need to communicate since the spouse may know what is happening. The group also agreed that loss of trust creates communication barriers. It was spotted that there are times when a spouse hopes that he/she has communicated while the other person did not get what was meant. Also, there is a tendency which is becoming common among couples of withdrawing when one is upset or angry without justifying the withdrawal. This has created communication challenges. Due to lack of effective communication, it was seen that problems keep piling up until the day when one would just burst and the situation becomes uncontrollable.

To handle communication breakdown, the following solutions were suggested by the group. Quoting Amos 3:3, it was said that effective communication is vital in any meaningful relationship. It is through open communication that people can mutually agree. Reading about the life of Jesus and his disciples, though the disciples were with their master most of their time physically and observing what he was doing, "one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'" (Luke 11:1). Since prayer is talking to God and the disciple had to learn it, when mentoring families for spiritual growth, families need to be taught how to communicate among themselves as they learn how to communicate with God. It was also suggested that parents/guardians should mentor their children on how to communicate. In order to have effective communication, husbands and wives should also make it a habit of creating time and sitting together to talk about issues affecting their lives. As husbands and wives discuss, they need to put in practice the advice found in James 1:19-20; where the Bible records, "let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." On the same day, the group dealt with the issue of dishonesty.

**Being dishonest in a relationship:** As the group discussed on this matter, it was concluded that dishonesty comes in different forms. It was said that dishonesty does not just start from nowhere. To a certain extent, it was observed that dishonesty in marriage is mainly due to the way a person was brought up. At this point, the issue of imbalanced roles/responsibilities came in. If a person is taught his/her roles and responsibilities as he/she grows up, it somehow helps that individual to be honest. When a person is nurtured to be honest as he/she grows up, chances are very high that even in marriage, this individual would remain honest. Proverbs 22:6 was used to back up child up bringing.

It was said that dishonesty is the main cause of gender-based violence and abuse. Emotional abuse is believed to be high among church members. Unfortunately, many church members decide not to talk about emotional abuse in order to protect their social status. Both physical violence and emotional abuse are talked about when the situation is already out of hand. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:1-9, the group emphasized on mentoring children in the Lord. It was further said that young people should be taught the importance of group dating that may help them to be open/transparent and respect each other. The group emphasized on

character building through mentorship as children grow up. The spirituality of the parents/guardians should be passed on to their children. This therefore demands that parents/guardians should be spiritual in order for their offspring to be spiritual.

As being dishonest was being discussed, issues of *jealousy, competition, infidelity, gender-based violence and abuse*, were said to be caused by dishonesty in most cases. The group discussed these causes of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings at length and concluded that by being honest, these vices may easily be reduced or completely avoided. The most important role of the church is to help the members to be spiritual. As members grow spiritually, they will be honest in their daily dealings, which in turn will promote peace.

The third day, the group continued looking at ways of reducing or preventing marital separations, divorces and spouse killings. The first thing the group looked at on this day was *infidelity/extra marital affairs*. Here culture was seen to play a key role. If not all cultures in Zambia, most of them allow men to marry more than one wife. It was observed that church members secretly have dual religions. When it comes to family issues, tradition takes primacy. As the group dealt with this issue, members could recall that in the past, there were very few instances where by married women were involved in extra marital affairs. Today the number of married women who are involved in extra marital affairs is increasing. The focus group likened the church to the Israelites on their way from Egypt to Canaan. Citing Numbers 24:1-9, it was said that the church is growing in membership at a fast rate that it seems nothing can stop it from numerical growth. Like Balaam who could not curse Israel, the church seems to be powerful even when it comes to politics it is gaining a steady grip. It is when the people of Israel began to whore with the daughters of Moab and yoked themselves to Baal of Peor, that the anger of Lord was kindled against them (Numbers 25:1-9). There is need for the church to have people like Phinehas when it comes to dealing with infidelity in the church. People who at all cost will stand for thus says the Bible. Families should be taught on how to set boundaries when it comes to issues of opposite sex. Family Life Department should play a key role in this area. People are to be encouraged not to live apart more especially young couples since one of the reasons for marriage is companionship. If a person cannot find companionship in his/her spouse, he/she may find it in someone else. Men are to be taught on how to support their wives and families to protect their wives from finding support from other men, which usually leads into unfaithfulness. Couples are to be encouraged to work together instead of feeling jealousy for each other that leads to competition.

On this same day, *not having children* was also seen as a contributing factor towards infidelity. It was said that failure to have children in marriage is viewed as abnormal by the society as well as by some church members. It was mentioned that culturally, when a couple has no child, the woman is the first one to be blamed by the family of a man. When in this situation, men are usually encouraged to try having children with other women who are not their legal spouses. Once a man gives in to the pressure of the society and goes out for other women, usually tension between the wife and the husband is experienced, which in most cases leads to marital separation and in most cases divorce. This lesson could be learned from the stories of Abram, Sarai and Hagar in Genesis 16:1-15 which led into bitterness and breakdown of the family.

The ideal way of dealing with lack of children is to learn from Isaac who when his wife, Rebekah was barren, he prayed "and the Lord granted his prayer" (Genesis 25:21). As people grow up, before they get married, they need to be taught biblical stories of this nature to prepare them for such occasions. Families should not wait until couples find themselves not having children that is when they start looking for solutions. Though not fully accepted by some Zambian families, adoption of children should be taught to church members so that it becomes a known and acceptable option. This day ended on a high note. Group members opted for more time to exhaust their points. They looked forward to the following day's meeting.

On the fourth day, the first issue that was looked at was *age difference*. The group looked at how age difference poses some challenges in marriage. Issues of likes and dislikes, investment, sexual satisfaction, respect and culture were dealt with under this item. Although Adam and Eve were created on the same day (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:18-23), it was observed that according to our society, it is better for a husband to be slightly older than the wife. A group member brought in a story where she heard a woman who said that she would only respect a man who was seven years older than herself. Nevertheless, the group suggested an age difference of not more than five years to be the best. The group felt that since there is a family life component under Youth Ministries department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this issue of age difference between husbands and wives should be included in the syllabus for the youths.

The group then looked at *rushed/ill prepared marriages*. Some reasons for rushed marriages were cited as: to cover up a pregnancy, fear that the man may leave the lady for another woman, and men who want to marry before going out of the country for studies. The group felt that as a church, there is need to be proactive in this area if the church is to help its members grow spiritually. Having a good number of students at University Seventh-day Adventist Church, the group suggested that students be attached to families so that they can have mentors who will be there for them most of the time when they are in school.

The group then moved on to look at *differences in religious beliefs, faith, and values*. Women were cited to be the ones at high risk on this issue. Once they reach the age of 30 years, women start worrying that they may never get married. At this stage in life, they are ready to get married to anyone who comes their way, regardless of their beliefs, faith or values. They start valuing marriage more than their beliefs, faith and values. In many cases, this is due to peer pressure and pressure from relatives. Issues of identity, self-esteem, self-worth were suggested to be taught regularly to young people so that they would be in a position to handle peer pressure. The admonition found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 were discussed at length. The group suggested that dangers of being unequally yoked with unbelievers should be taught in families regularly.

The discussion for this day ended with the in-laws. *The Mother-in-law Daughter-in-law Syndrome* took center stage here. This occurs when the two ladies of the house (this is in a situation where a mother stays with her son who is married) do not get along, resulting in tension, affecting the overall atmosphere at home. Though these issues have always been there, it was observed that they are becoming even more noticeable in today's changing times. During the

discussion, it came out so clearly that most of the ladies believe that mothers-in-law are just problems. One focus group member stated that during her counseling sessions, it has been said by young ladies that they prefer marrying a man without a mother. It was also said that fathers-in-law usually have less problems with their sons-in-law and daughters-in-law compared to mothers-in-law. The story of Naomi and Ruth in the Bible was cited to be a good example for both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The group suggested that the book of Ruth in the Bible should be used as one of the text books for mentoring young ladies.

On the fifth day, the group's concentration was on mentoring families for spiritual growth as one of the ways to reduce or prevent marital separation, divorce and spouse killing. The first thing the group looked at was *the training of the young people received before the coming of formal education and Christianity*. The group also considered the initiation ceremonies and the role they played in the upbringing of children.

The group observed that in societies, education was largely informal; parents were principally responsible for teaching their children. They inculcated good manners, norms and values into their offspring. This household training involved practical skills. It was observed that the training continued as long as the child lived with parents. The community worked as a team in child upbringing. All elderly people in the society were expected to perform the role of a mother and father in teaching, rebuking, advising, rewarding even punishing children in the community.

Unfortunately, this kind of education is almost completely not there. Majority of parents are rarely with their children due to work culture. Children are left in the hands of house maids; who in most cases are mainly there for money not the well-being of the children. It was noted that most children now grow with manners of the maids more than those of their parents. Instances were cited in which young ladies told their parents that they behaved the way they did because that is how they were taught by the maids. This touched the focus group members and they agreed that there is need for families to be mentored for spiritual growth to curb these vices.

Looking at *initiation ceremonies*, the focus group made of various cultures agreed that their cultures have initiation ceremonies for boys and girls when they reach the age of puberty. The initiation ceremonies though have slight differences from one culture to another, they prepare the girls and boys for challenges and experiences associated with manhood and womanhood in early teenage years and in adulthood. The period for these initiation ceremonies differ from one culture to another. Also, with the coming of formal education, durations keep on changing. It was observed by the focus group that many if not all church members have done away with these initiation ceremonies in the name of Christianity and formal education. To a certain extent, urban migration also uprooted families from communities where initiation ceremonies of their specific culture are conducted. The group observed that this has created a vacancy which need to be closed. The group unanimously agreed that mentoring families for spiritual growth may be one of the best alternatives.

On the sixth day, the primary question was on alternatives in an event whereby mentoring families for spiritual growth fails to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings. In response to this question, the group was quick to state that when family members are spiritual, these vices can easily be stopped. Quoting Ellen. G. White (1945) where she states, "Train the youth, mould the character, educate, educate, educate, for the future, immortal life," members felt that continued, steady mentorship would produce positive results. On this day they group agreed to develop a tentative mentorship program for families that may be adopted by the church. This work was concluded on the eighth day. Below is what the group suggested.

During initiation ceremonies, there are people who are selected to teach girls and boys. For girls in most cases the key people are the aunts and grandmothers. These are the people a girl child is free to say anything to them and they are also free to say anything to her. In most cases, boys are taken in camps for trainings by well-trained elderly trainers. The group suggested that the church should identify spiritual people (Matthew 6:16-20) who will be training these young people when they reach puberty and before they get married. These will simply supplement to the ongoing works of the parents.

The following lessons were suggested to be the core ones during intensive mentorship program when one reaches the puberty age:

1. Self-identity
2. Family relationships
3. Communication
4. Individual relationship with God
5. Family worship
6. Finances: Sources of income and expenses
7. Pre-marital sex
8. Baptism

The focus group also suggested that the following lessons be taught continually by the church and families with main emphasis on ambassadors (16 – 22 years). Young people to continue having mentorship programs up to the time they get married. The following topics to be considered during these mentorship programs:



1. Self-identity
2. Family relationships
3. Communication
4. Individual relationship with God
5. Family worship
6. Finances: Sources of income and expenses
7. Social media
8. Pre-marital sex
9. Marriage
10. Divorce
11. Christian lifestyle and behavior
12. Baptism

Couples were put in groups according to their years in marriage: 0 – 5 years in marriage, 6 – 10 years in marriage, 11 – 15 years in marriage, 16 – 20 years in marriage and 21 – above years in marriage. Youths have their group as well as single parents. These groups have WhatsApp groups on which they interact. They also have physical meetings where they discuss selected topics. At least once a year each group has an outing for a week or weekend. There have been positive testimonies from groups on how they have been helped spiritually and to maintain their family relationships. Students are being encouraged to consult elderly people whenever they are faced with life challenges.

Finally, the focus group planned to do a pilot project whereby each couple had to mentor randomly selected young people and some families which may seem unstable. They also agreed to encourage families that are perceived to be stable to mentor young people and befriending families that are noticed to be unstable. This should be an ongoing program. The church is encouraged to do evaluations at least once a year to see the impact of the program.

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### 1.6.3 Program Evaluation

In order to establish the validity of the intervention, I started a follow up program in 2020 and continued up to 2023. I continued getting reports from the focus group members, quarterly reports from family life departmental leaders and random reports from the church pastors on how the church was fairing based on the programs put in place to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings. I also found time to visit the church once in a while to observe, interact with members, ask, comment and advise on what could be perceived to be right or wrong in line with the study. Reports from the focus group, family ministries departmental leaders and pastors indicated that there was great improvement based on what members would comment in line with what they were being taught to improve their day by day lives through spiritual growth. Testimonies were given to the pastors on how the trainings have improved their lives in terms of family life and spiritual growth.

Using the thought in Matthew 7:16-20 which talks about knowing them by their fruits, I can testify that the church is performing well. During the period 2020 – 2023, marital separations and divorces in the church kept on fluctuating at a lower rate compared to previous years although in the country the numbers increased. On spouse killings, the church did not experience any from 2020 to 2023 but in the country, spouse killings continued. Having a good number of members who hold key positions in their work places, it is hoped that their influence will be felt by the community at large. Students who are being mentored as they mingle with the community will also help to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings. The evaluation also aimed at assisting in improving the program for future implementation.

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### 1.6.4 Summary

The following grievances led to divorce according to those who were interviewed: extra marital affairs, family interferences, lack of support, married wrongly, issues of identity, lack of effective communication and use of charms.

The above grievances were used by the focus group to come up with an intervention program to curb marital separations, divorces and spouse killings through family mentoring for spiritual growth. The focus group members appreciated the program and were eager to implement the program, which was implemented. The family life departmental leaders and the pastors equally valued the program.

The issue of developing character, which leads to spiritual growth was emphasized using the following topics: self-identity, family relationships, communication, individual relationship with God, family worship, finances: sources of income and expenses, social media, pre-marital sex, marriage, divorce, baptism and Christian lifestyle and behavior. According to the reports given by the pastors, couples appreciated the programs and confirmed that their marital life and family relationships improved.

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### 1.6.5 Conclusion

According to findings in this study, the following conclusions were made. There is erosion of cultural norms that need to be attended to in families, churches, communities and the country at large. Spiritual degeneration among church members is being felt and members who participated in the study felt that this needs urgent attention by all concerned parties. Media has really changed so many things leading to some challenges in families, churches and communities at large that need constant monitoring.

Due to large number of people's migration from rural communities to live in cities, also formal education, as well as religion, an erosion of traditional ceremonies has been experienced in the rural communities where they used to take place. The traditional ceremonies helped to maintain cultural norms which are no longer practiced by church members but without proper replacement. From this study, it has been concluded that mentoring families for spiritual growth is one of the ways certain cultural norms may be kept by different generations. Though the earth is in its last phase of its history, if people are mentored for spiritual growth at different stages of life to be Christ-like (truth disciples of Jesus), issues of marital separations, divorces and spouse killings may be reduced if not completely stopped.

Spiritual character development must be emphasized in families, churches, communities and country at large. Everyone should be involved in the checks and balances of day-to-day's happenings in the society. Even if media has changed so many things, it can still be used for good. Due to busy schedules and other restrictions such as what happened during Covid-19, the church can still use the media to mentor families for spiritual growth. There is need to flood the media with material that is spiritual, attractive and helpful to all age groups. Evil vices need to be condemned constantly as good character is being promoted.

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### 1.6.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were drawn as recommendations:

1. Parents should not completely delegate the mentoring of their children to house helpers, institutions, and churches.
2. Church members are to be encouraged constantly to quickly open up to their pastors whenever they are faced with family challenges which they may feel would divide/break their families if not attended to on time. Pastors also must take these reports seriously and urgently act on them.
3. Church leaders and family members to always strive being objective and fair when dealing with family matters that may lead to marital separation, divorce or spouse killing.
4. The church to seriously consider intensive mentoring sessions for its members according to age groups. This should be done at least twice a year.
5. The groupings which were used during this study should continue so that members may be revived or refreshed during their meetings/outings.
6. For further study, I recommend a longitudinal study on this topic. I hope a longitudinal study would give better results than what I have done.

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