

## **1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The author was born on a farm, 20km from Oudtshoorn, on the route to the world renowned Cango Caves found in the Southern Cape, South Africa. In this area, farming communities are closely knit. The author was raised within a family which believed that married life is sacred and ordained by God. The author was also taught that whoever is married in our community should be highly respected because he/she is regarded as the custodians of marriage life. Mace observes that “Marriage is an age-old institution. Christianity has from the beginning seen marriage as divinely ordained for good and a necessary purpose. One of the purposes of marriage is to provide a man and woman with an intimately shared life; in which they can develop deep love and companionship” (1983: 23). The author concurs with the above quotation because in our search to develop a meaningful relationship and to experience a sense of love and intimacy in our lives, most of us turn to marriage. However, a successful marriage does not come spontaneously or by chance. Instead, the author believes that a happy marriage involves two people working out their small differences; as well as their major ones.

However, in 1972 the author and his family relocated to an urban town in search for a better life, but the morals instilled from the author’s childhood

remained with him. It was in this urban town that the author learnt of husbands and wives who end their married life in the divorce court. What shocked the author the most was the fact that people of the cloth, ministers of the sacred word of God and leaders of their respected Parishes also end their marriage in divorce. The author could not understand this unnatural phenomenon. Clergy are supposed to be the reflection of God and should live by example. The author was brought up with these values and this is how the author understands the sacredness of matrimony. Furthermore, the author believes that the primary task of the Christian Minister is to help proclaim the message of divine love and to help those in marriage life to respond to that love and to grow in love for one another.

It is precisely for this reason that Mace argues that “the married minister with an unhappy marriage is, therefore, crippled in the performance of his task. He (sic) knows that the message he is proclaiming isn’t working for him in his own inner personal life. He is not getting the healing and support he needs in his home for him to address the burdens of human need and the tragedies that are brought to him, daily. He suffers from disappointment, guilt, and a sense of failure that leaves him inwardly tortured and emotionally drained. His wife also is in trouble. She must either put on an act before the outside world or risk ruining her husband’s career by letting the sad truth be known. They both face

a grim choice of choosing between hypocrisy and public humiliation”(1983: 24).

The above quotation clearly emphasizes the point that no one is immune to the tragedy of marital distress which eventually leads to divorce and that not even men and women who devote their lives to serving God are spared. The same minister who is dependent upon by his flock to provide God’s loving grace during a crisis has no place to turn to when his family experiences the disaster which pertains to his own marriage. However, what affected the author further and haunted him ever since, is the fact that this phenomenon also affected the Denomination of the Volkskerk van Afrika (People’s Church of Africa), to which the author belongs; with devastated consequences for the minister as well as the family during the aftermath of the divorce. What struck the author’s mum is the fact that our Denomination has formulated a “policy” to deal with this particular minister without realizing what sort of trauma this minister and his family have endured due to the divorce. The church also approached the subject with little knowledge and concern for the conditions which result in divorce. What is actually sad is that the church in which the author belongs has no pastoral manual guide to handle divorce, especially for divorce within the clergy. The author has for a long time observed the pain and humiliation this minister has endured at the hands of many of the congregants.

The author's observation regarding trauma and divorce has led to the following conclusion: the subsequent divorce and the inadequacies of the church pertaining to pastoral care for clergy couples, whose marriages ends in divorce, has finally damaged this minister, and eventually the whole pastoral family. The question thus is who then cares for the pastor and the family when they are going through this process? Let alone caring for the minister? The author researched on this issue because he has observed the painful struggle and trauma of a colleague and friend. This issue made the congregation not to deem the said minister fit to serve the church. Several questions arise in the authors mind. Why does this phenomenon occur in God's family? What do we really know about church's pastoral family marriages? Has any Denomination developed policies or programmes to help pastoral families whose marriages are in trouble? The author believes that divorce in a pastoral family is problematic; particularly in our Denomination; and thus researching on the subject is important.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The events of the clergy or church pastoral family divorce (I will use them synonymously) are major causes of deep trauma and suffering a pastoral family. The breakdown of church pastoral families' marriages is a tragedy for all concerned and this includes the pastor, his wife, their children, the congregation, and the denomination and the community. Church pastoral family marriages today are breaking down in large numbers than ever before and the rate is likely to increase. The author wants to highlight prominent news paper headlines, which highlighted this phenomenon. Let me share a few examples:

- *Minister and wife of prominent church in Johannesburg (South Africa) announced their separation. (Sunday Times, 4 April 2007);*
- *Anglican cleric does not want divorce in the news. (Daily Dispatch, 2 September 2009);*
- *Wife of prominent church leader in Gauteng Province file for divorce. (Rapport, 31 January 2010);*
- *Popular world Evangelists wife file for divorce after thirty (30) years of marriage. (<http://www.Yahoo news>. 2010);*

These are just a few examples pertaining to divorce among church pastoral families. The question thus is, why do ministers of the cloth divorce? What

causes church pastoral families to break down into divorce? How can pastoral care, as a science, help traumatized individuals and family members during the traumatic event of divorce? Has the church developed a ministry of caring pertaining to this issue? What is the role of congregants when the church's pastoral family marriages are in trouble or when there is divorce? Are they capable of caring for their pastor during this traumatic time of divorce? The author realizes that these questions need to be explored properly with the exclusive aim of developing a therapeutic pastoral care method pertaining to the effected minister, family and congregation. These questions will be researched in order to create a model of care for the church. Trauma has become a way of life in our daily lives and this has infiltrated the parsonage with devastating consequences. Pearlman is correct when he cites the following idea pertaining to trauma: "trauma is sudden, unexpected and non-normative. It exceeds the individual's perceived ability to meet demands and disrupts the individual's frame of reference and other central psychological needs and related schemas" (2005: 10). Family breakdown is a traumatic event which causes severe emotional damage to the pastor, his/her family and to the church as a whole.

### **1.3 RESEARCH GAP**

The author has established that this research on traumatic experience of divorce in the denomination of the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa) is necessary because church pastoral family marriages, in our post-modern age are breaking down at an alarming rate; and that they are likely to increase in South Africa and other parts of the globe. More and more church pastoral families are traumatized by the devastating effects of divorce. Families as well as congregations are torn apart by this phenomenon. Literature on church pastoral family divorce is actually non-existent. Inquiries by the author, which pertain to this topic have failed to locate any meaning full information. Most of the literature reviewed is mostly in the pastoral psychological field. Mace says: "there were scores of books about ministry. Seldom, however, did we find anything significant about the minister's marriage. The idea that a minister's marriage can be in serious trouble, let alone breakdown, was hardly even hinted at"(1983: 26). There is a gap that the author wants to fill with this research. Thus, the author is of the view that this topic which has its place in the Practical Theology field certainly needs to be fully explored. The gap that the author needs to fill with this research is to establish a pastoral care method which addresses church pastoral family divorce within the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A).Up to now, there has not been any research done on church pastoral family divorce in our denomination. Thus, the intention of the author

is to empower our denomination in order to deal with this trauma resulting from divorce experiences by pastoral families, long before the divorce happens. Furthermore, the author seeks to find ways of how to reduce pastoral family divorce within the church. The pastoral care method of Gerkin is most striking here. He says: “the ministry of care seeks to promote a creative modification of the power arrangements in the existing structure of things. It attempts to reorder the values that are contributing to symptomatic behaviors and It identifies destructive outcomes” (1997: 143). He further says “for the pastoral caretaker, symptomatic crises are an invitation to be participant in changing the fundamental fabric of personal and social reality and to reconstruct the environment” (Ibid: 143).

#### **1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH**

The aim of this research was to help the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A) to deal more effectively, sensitively and honestly with divorce among the church’s pastoral families. This issue is problematic; and thus researching on the subject is important. The intention of the author was to help the denomination deal with this trauma long before it happens, and to afford pastoral care to the minister and the family involved. Thus, the author sought to develop a pastoral care method that will empower the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A) in order to offer care to the pastoral family, therapeutically. The

aim was to make appropriate recommendations to the V.V.A (P.C.A) concerning the church's pastoral family divorce. Then this aim was to offer clergy and their families insight and resources to help them make their marriage as happy and as healthy as possible.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

This research focused on the traumatic experience of divorce by a pastoral family within the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A) because this phenomenon is not only a South African problem, which challenges the Christian community, but is also a global problem. Divorce within a pastoral family is traumatic because it traumatizes not only the pastor involved, but also the family, and the congregation and community at large. This research study sought to create awareness on the tragedy that is caused by divorce within a pastoral family; especially in the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A). This research on divorce was not confined to South Africa alone but to the entire world, since this phenomenon is a global problem. Rosenstock (et.al) is correct when they cite the following statistics pertaining to divorce across the board: "divorce is a juncture in the cycle that directly affects tens of thousands in America daily and, by extension-parents, relatives, friends and associates- hundreds of thousands" (1988: 13). In other words, the impact is felt globally.

## **1.6 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher introduced the reader to the background of the study. The pinnacle point of this study was about the traumatic experience of divorce in a pastoral family in the Volkskerk van Afrika (PCA). The author sought to find ways of understanding why this phenomenon is growing in God's family. In this research, the author sought to understand why ministers of the cloth divorce. What is it that causes pastoral families to break down into divorce? How can pastoral care, as a science, help the traumatized individuals and family members during the traumatic event of divorce? Has the church a ministry of caring, pertaining to this issue? What is the role of the particular local congregation when pastoral family marriages are in trouble or when there is divorce? Are they capable of caring for its pastor during this traumatic time of divorce? The author realized that these questions need to be explored properly with the exclusive aim to develop a therapeutic pastoral care method pertaining to the affected minister, family and congregation.

In Practical Theology, there is a gap pertaining to this topic, as discussed in the section on research gap; and thus, the author's research on it. In the next chapter, I will focus on the methodology which will help when we do therapy with the affected family members, the congregation and the whole community at large. The pastoral care method which is going to be developed in this research will empower the denomination of the V.V.A (PCA) with caring for the

pastoral family, therapeutically. The aim is to make appropriate recommendations to the V.V.A (PCA) concerning church pastoral family divorce. The aim is then to offer the clergy and their families insight and resources to make their marriages as happy and as healthy as possible.

## **2. CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 SHEPHERDING AS A METHOD OF CARE**

The Bible is full of rich imagery to help its readers better understand deep spiritual truths. One of the repeated images of God is that of a shepherd with his sheep. In Psalm 23 God is referred to as our shepherd. The Gospel writers such as John (10: 14) and the Apostle Peter (1 Pet 2: 21-25) as disciples of

Jesus, places Jesus in the same role. Most dictionaries define the term pastor as a minister, clergyman/woman, or one having spiritual care of a number of persons. The Heinemann English dictionary defines the adjective, pastoral: “as something having to do with a pastor; it involves a minister, or clergyman, or his/her duties.” (1979: 782)

In this section, the author provides the methodology of this research study.

The author will make use of Gerkin’s method of shepherding and caring for the individual; as well as the community. In his book, *An introduction to pastoral care*, Gerkin (1997: 27) refers explicitly to the pastor as a caring shepherd of the flock of Christ. The method of caring is understood “as the central metaphor” of life in the Christian community. Thus, the pastor is regarded as the shepherd and the flock of Christ which needs care and nurture all the time. Gerkin goes further and reminds the Christian community (Church) that “although the shepherding motif originates as a metaphor for the role of the king during the monarchical period of Israel’s history, it was never institutionalized as a designated role within the religious community, as were the prophetic, priestly, and wisdom roles. It was first appropriated within the religious life of Israel as a metaphor with which to speak of the care of Yahweh for Yahweh’s people. With the coming of Jesus, who, according to John’s

Gospel identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd, the shepherding image takes its place as a primary grounding image for ministry” (1997: 27).

The above quotation points to the fact that the pastor, as a shepherd and a caring leader, is set aside to care, nurture and to protect the flock of Christ. However, when the tragedy of marital distress and divorce strikes the parsonage, who then cares for the pastor and his/her family? This is where Gerkin’s shepherding method is helpful because its focus is on the individual, the family, which includes the pastoral family, as well as the wider community. For Gerkin “It means placing alongside the image of the wise and caring pastor providing care and concern for the individual and families another image of the pastor as caring leader of a community of worship – a community of care. It also places alongside that image one of the pastor as prophetic leader who cares both for the people and for the tradition that gives the community its identity” (1997: 25). Thus, to care for the family and the community involves care that confronts issues which lead to trauma, especially divorce within a church pastoral family. In this research study, the researcher used Gerkin’s methodology as a way of applying pastoral care to families, especially pastoral families within the Denomination of the Volkskerk van Afrika (People’s Church of Africa); who are traumatized by the tragedy of marital breakdown which ends in divorce. Gerkin further explores the role of the pastor and reminds us

of our earliest pastoral ancestors; who are to be found among the leaders of the ancient people of Israel. He submits that “the priest, a hereditary class that had particular responsibility for worship and ceremonial life; the prophets; who spoke for Yahweh in relation to moral issues, sometimes rebuking the community and its stated political leaders; and the wise men and women, who offered council of all sorts concerning issues of the good life and personal conduct” (1997: 23). Thus, the pastor of our post-modern and post-Christian era holds various responsibilities pertaining to shepherding. However, as mentioned earlier on in this study, when a pastor is unhappy in his/her marriage, he/she are crippled in his/her performance of the task at hand and; thus needs care and nurture. The author also explored other methods pertaining to shepherding God’s flock. Here, the books: *Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling for Peoples Helpers* by Collins (1993), and *Tend My Sheep, Applied Theology 2* by Taylor (1994), were useful. The author explored the above methods because this helped the researcher to reflect a little deeper on the shepherding method which Gerkin was not able to apply. For Taylor to be a shepherd, means to “guide the flock to good pastures and safe resting places. He leads the sheep and provides for all their needs, seeing that they have water to drink and keeping the shepherd fold in good repair. He guides his flock and protect it from wild animals, or thieves, or other danger, even when

this involves danger to the shepherd self. He searches for any sheep that strays or gets lost, until it is found, even if it means going into difficult and dangerous places. He carefully tends any sheep that are sick or weak, and takes special care of nurturing ewes and young lambs”(1995: 9)

Thus, for Taylor, being a shepherd means taking a deep and personal interest in the welfare of the flock, and of each individual in the sheepfold. It calls on the shepherd/pastor’s deep strength, courage, patience and self sacrifice. The shepherd will always protect the sheep, a role the author expects from the church which is indeed the custodian of care, especially within the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A); to which the author belongs. The church as the custodian of pastoral care should have tender compassion for those in their fold. The Pastor, family, together with congregants, should be regarded as of priceless worth within the sheepfold and; thus, should be unwearied in their effort to keep them in a wealthy and flourishing condition. The church is supposed to be the custodian of care and, therefore, must constantly work for the welfare of all families.

This method of Taylor focuses on how pastors, as shepherds and leaders, care for God’s people, and it also includes pastoral therapy and counseling which is important to shepherding and leadership in God’s vineyard. This method by Taylor will not only help the church to do therapy with those who are affected

by the trauma of marital breakdown and divorce, but it will also help to prevent such traumatic events long before they happen or occur. It is, therefore, important that the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A) establishes a pastoral care committee that will therapeutically care for the church's pastoral family, especially when divorce and marital distress strikes the parsonage. Collins, on the other hand, sees the Church and its Christian life as "not as a solo experience, marked by rugged individualism and make it on your own mentality, but as the central nerve of care" (1993: 197). Thus, when one member suffers in the sheepfold; all members carry the suffering together with the member. Gerkin and Collin's approach is therapeutic because it puts emphasis on care for those who are traumatized by marital distress and divorce, especially the clergy and their families.

The author will now turn the lens of care in the direction of the term – shepherd; and analyze it. Taylor submits that "the shepherd is a well-known figure among many agricultural people, and in ancient Israel everyone understood what the work of a shepherd was. Flocks of sheep and goats were important possessions, just as they are in many countries today" (1995: 70). Gerkin concurs with the above when he says: "this image originated in a time and place in which the shepherd was a common figure" (1997: 80). The rational of these two theologians pertaining to shepherding is invaluable to

pastoral care. However, as the two theologians are educated and grounded in the U. S. A, they write from a western perspective.

The author grew up on a farm on the African Continent. The image of the shepherd is far more personal and carries deep personal value for him. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the author grew up with this image. Sheep and goats are invaluable and important to African people. The author was brought up on a farm as a shepherd boy where he understood the importance of looking after the flock. Thus, he understands the important role of a pastor as shepherd and leader of God's people. Let me concur with London (et al) when they say: "Every calling, including the ministry, has some compelling force and defining relationship. Health brings physician and patients together. Justice brings lawyer and clients together. Learning brings teacher and students together. Love is the life-giving force that brings pastor and parishioner together" (2000: 12).

Our Lord, Jesus Christ established the church as His society of love on earth. Thus, pastors have the opportunity to give love, to be loved and to lead others (the church) to express Christ's love in the world. The Church of Christ has been purchased with His blood, and everyone in the sheepfold, including the pastor and the family traumatized by marital breakdown and divorce, makes an infinite sacrifice. Each one in the sheepfold should be regarded as of

priceless worth. Thus, it is imperative that the denomination, to which the author belongs, should be unwearied in her effort to keep the members in a healthy and flourishing condition. Thus, the church that understands the important role of pastoral care, which is constantly labour for the welfare for those in her charge.

According to the prophets, “the shepherd feeds his (sic) flock, leads, and guides, bring back the strayed, bring the shattered in one place to watch over them” (Isaiah 40: 1, Ezekiel 34: 11-15). It is clear according to the above scripture that shepherding is a Biblical method of offering pastoral care and is aimed at helping those who suffer and survive; based on the word of God, which is the basic source of Christian living. The shepherding method is what victims of marital distress and divorce seek, especially those traumatized by it. It seeks to empower families affected, as well as the community, on how to deal with marital breakdown and divorce. This method does not only assist the pastor involved, but also helps the church to enter into a dialogue with the community, as well as the congregation, long before the traumatic event happens. A dialogue that centre’s on discussions, nurturing and guided therapy. The author is deeply aware of the fact that the pastor/shepherd of our post-modern and post-Christian era is holding different and huge responsibilities in helping families on moral issues. However, as mentioned

earlier, when the pastor and his/her family are damaged, who cares for them?

The author of this research study believes that the New Testament helps us with this question. The New Testament depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and who is also known by them. Jesus says: “I am the Good Shepherd. I am the door of the sheep” (John 19: 1-16). Thus, the church as the custodian of moral values and care is called to do the same as the Master did with this world.

Gerkin explores the role of the pastor as shepherd of God’s people in a striking manner. He says: “Reflection on the action and words of Jesus as He relates to people at all levels of social life, give us the model *sine qua non* for pastoral relationships with those immediate within our care and those strangers we meet along the way” (1997: 80). This method of Gerkin, provides the church guidance on how to do therapy with a church pastoral family traumatized by marital breakdown and divorce. Shepherding from whatever sphere is, indeed, a demanding task which is an effective method that leads to healing, spiritual wellbeing, wholeness and stability. This research on the traumatic experience of divorce on the church’s pastoral family within the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A), does not only seek to empower the above mentioned church, in which the author belongs, but it also seeks to empower the effected pastoral family, the local church and the community who are affected by this phenomenon,

and assist those who deal with traumatic experiences. The shepherding method challenges the denomination on how to be an effective agent of care to those in their fold. Thus, to afford care is not a simple task; it demands fulltime commitment from the side of the church, in order for healing to be achieved; especially when one is working with families and individuals who are traumatized by marital breakdown and divorce. Gerkins, Taylor and Collin's method of shepherding connects with the ministry of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Jesus felt a deep compassion for all people; especially the outcasts, the down trodden, and the lonely (Matt 9: 35-36). Jesus also felt great pity for those in need (Matt 15: 32, 34). Jesus also cared for people and is evident in the parable of the lost sheep in (Luke 15: 4-7). The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15: 8-10) and the parable of the lost son in (Luke 15: 11-31) are pinnacles of Jesus' ministry. Thus, it is clear from the above examples that Jesus cares for the marginalized, broken and traumatized individuals.

The author employs Gerkins, Taylor and Collins' methods in order to address the traumatic phenomenon of marital breakdown and divorce on a pastoral family within the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A). The Bible as the Christian source shares ways of how pastoral therapy was done by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in His ministry on earth, and how He commanded His disciples to continue His work throughout the ages. Thus, to care for the people of God, is

a command straight from the heart of God. Gerkin states that, “pastoral care of the people became a process of facilitating the individual’s personal relationship with God. Reconciliation of the individual soul to God and guidance in the spiritual life of members of the community of faith became the central pastoral task” (1997: 42). Shepherding means taking a deep personal interest in the welfare of the flock of God, and of each individual in the sheepfold.

The pastor and his/her family is part of the flock of Christ. Marital breakdown and divorce in a church pastoral family leaves the whole church and community in great shock. This phenomenon has a crippling effect on the family involved, the church and the community at large. In this research, the author sought to understand why ministers of the cloth divorce. What is it that causes the family of pastors to divorce? How can pastoral care, as a science, help traumatized individuals and family members during the traumatic events resulting from divorce? Has the church, a ministry of caring, looked at solutions pertaining to this issue? What is the role of the particular local congregation when clergy couples’ marriages are in trouble or when there is divorce? Is the congregation capable of caring for its pastor during this traumatic time of divorce? The author realized that these questions need to be explored properly with the exclusive aim of developing a therapeutic pastoral care

method pertaining to the effected minister, his/her family and the congregation. These questions were researched in order to create a model of care for the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa).

## **2.2 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the author helped the reader understand the science of methodology and how it functions in pastoral care. The Heinemann English dictionary defines the term methodology: "As the study of the methods used in a particular subject" (1987: 675). The Merriam Webster' dictionary, on the other hand, defines methodology: "As the analysis of the procedures of inquiry in a particular field" (Merriam Webster online, 2011). In this chapter, the method of Gerkin, Taylor and Collins were used to emphasize the High Calling of the shepherding model. The author has guided the reader into the art of the pastoral care model, and how the shepherd/ pastor can apply this model therapeutically; especially on those individuals, pastoral families, the church and the community who were traumatized by the phenomenon of divorce. Furthermore, this chapter has emphasized the important role of the shepherd/ pastor and brings to the fore it's self-denying nature. Taylor is correct when he says: "The good shepherd must always put the welfare of the flock before his/her own comfort, even when this means losing sleep, and personal danger or even death." In this chapter, the reader came face to face with the fact that

Jesus Christ, our Greatest Shepherd/Pastor, is the example we must model after; especially in our dealings with the brokenness of our post modern era, particularly divorce in a pastoral setting. Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, has entrusted the care of His flock to His Church as a steward shepherd in His vineyard, and he bids the body of Christ (the Church) to have the same interest that He has manifested. God the Chief Shepherd has commanded His Church to be faithful, to feed the flock, to strengthen the weak, to revive the fainting, and to shield them from devouring wolves. This chapter also highlighted the researchers own understanding of the shepherding model because the researcher himself was a shepherd boy. Therefore, the researcher has an appreciation for the work of a pastor/shepherd and how to care, therapeutically, for the flock of Christ.

In the next chapter, the author explores and discussed his understanding of marriage in the Christian tradition. The author will also share some definitions pertaining to marriage. He will then explore different marriage customs in some selected nationalities. The author will also share insights on traditional views on marriage. In the next chapter, he will share some sociological ideas about marriage and family life. The author will also analyze some critical opinions on marriage and factors which give rise to conflict and tension in the minister's family.