

## **4. CHAPTER FOUR: DIVORCE**

### **4.1 DIVORCE: THE PROCESS**

In this section, the author disentangles the divorce phenomenon and how it negatively impacts on family life, especially pastoral (clergy) families. Harvey and Judith Rosenstock are correct when they say, “divorce may be compared to object loss and death itself because, in a marital relationship there is not only the husband and wife but there is also the marriage. It is a tripartite arrangement. The marriage is lost. There is the death of the marriage. To some extent there are losses to each individual-plans, hopes, and dreams that will never be realized-but the main loss is of the third entity” (1988: 14). The divorce phenomenon is, thus, a traumatic occurrence, which evokes a lot of emotions; especially on those who must endure it. Therefore, this section will also look at the traumatic experience of families in the aftermath of the divorce. However, let us first analyze some definitions pertaining to divorce, in order to have a better grasp of this phenomenon.

### **4.2 DIVORCE: SOME DEFINITIONS**

4.2.1 Patricia Diedrick defines divorce “as a highly disruptive life event creating effects that range from devastation to relief” (1991: 33).

4.2.2 Stinett and Walters in Kitching sees divorce “as a way of terminating a marriage situation in which one or both partners cannot relate to each other in a satisfying manner or cannot interact together without psychological injury to one or both” (2008: 30).

4.2.3 The Heinemann English dictionary again sees divorce “as the ending of a marriage by a court decree or any complete separation (1987: 315).

4.2.4 The author of this thesis defines divorce “as a stressful occurrence which results in the annulment of the covenantal agreement of marriage which inevitably leads to psychological pain and trauma.”

It is a painful and traumatic experience when a once happy marriage falls apart. It hurts even more when the marriage ends up in the divorce court.

Harvey and Judith Rosenstock says, “divorce is a juncture in the life cycle that directly affects tens of thousands in America daily and, by extension –parents, relatives, friends and associates-hundreds of thousands” (1988: 13). The

Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, Rapport, connects with the above when it declares that, “in 2008, 186’ 522 marriages were solemnized in South Africa.”

The article, further, reveals that from the above figure, “28’924 marriages” end up in the divorce court and that in “2009, 1’150 people divorced for the third time” (December, 2009). It is thus comprehensible that divorce is not confined to one particular geographical area, but is a social ill which impacts people’s

lives on a global scale. Many marriages breakdown and end in divorce because people do not recognize the early warning signs that the marriage are in trouble. Literature review on divorce demonstrates a number of common causes that lead to divorce in many families. Craig highlights eight main causes which cause divorce in marriage. They are:

- Low commitment to marriage;
- Unrealistic expectations;
- Boredom;
- Interpersonal incompetence;
- An affair;
- A developmental or situational crisis;
- An imbalance in the relationship;
- Poor communication (2004: 194-196).

The author will explore each of the above fully in the following paragraphs.

### **4.3 COMMON CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO DIVORCE IN MARRIAGE**

#### **4.3.1 LOW COMMITMENT TO MARRIAGE**

For the reader to have a better grasp of the term commitment, let us explore how a few dictionaries define this term. According to the Heinemann English dictionary, commitment “is the act of committing, or is the state of being committed or a promise to do something” (1985: 201). The Merriam dictionary defines commitment “as a responsibility or obligation to do something” (<http://www.Merriam online>). The above sentiments clearly describe the importance of marital commitment in the covenantal relationship. Craig is correct when he says that “when couples get married, they make a commitment to three things:

- Their partner;
- The relationship;
- A belief in the permanence of marriage as a covenant relationship.”

He further says, “If they are not totally committed in all three areas, the relationship will suffer” (2004: 195). It is, thus, clear where there is lack of commitment in the marriage bond; the relationship will not only suffer but will eventually lead to divorce. It is also a known fact when couples “over commit themselves to work or church, or go after things such as sport, or friends, and are not totally invested in making the marriage their first priority, emotional distance, mistrust, and feelings of betrayal begin to emerge” (Craig 2004: 195).

Where the marriage vows are, for some couples, just a ceremony, the conditions under which such marriage was first established may also undermine a commitment to the marriage. Craig is right, and I agree with him, when he says “if couples are immature and marry too young, if they carry a lot of unresolved issues from their family origin, or if they get married for all the wrong reasons (e.g. to escape, to avoid loneliness, because of social pressures, or pregnancy), these can affect the level of bonding and commitment necessary for a stable relationship” (2004: 195).

#### **4.3.2 UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

Couples who lack a sense of realism about their marriage relationship “and hang on to romantic notions of love frequently expect unattainable standards and demand levels of intimacy and togetherness that stifles the relationship and create feelings of frustration and alienation” (Craig 2004: 193). Each couple brings to the marriage setting his/her own unique human traits (individuality) which can enhance the marriage bond. Craig is correct when he points out that, “when married couples collude to avoid facing their differences, they maintain the myth of oneness that negates a balance between connectedness and separateness (2004: 195). This process will lead to misunderstanding, communication breakdown, and finally divorce.

#### **4.3.3 BOREDOM**

It is a well known fact that a great tendency exists for marriage partners to take their mate for granted and become complacent about their relationship. Masters points out that, “Complacency is one of the deadliest enemies of love. So too, self-absorption, neglect, and condescension are insidious ways of undermining love” (1944: 15). Thus, when one partner in the marriage bond drifts along and refuses to deal with these attitudes, the other partner frequently ends up being bored and may end up losing interest in the marital relationship, and thus opts out of the marriage.

#### **4.3.4 INTERPERSONAL INCOMPETENCE**

Many couples fall in love, marry, and assume that the job is completed. They tend to feel that everything else will work out automatically. However, hardly anything can be further from the truth. Craig is right, and I agree with him, when he exclaims that, “a happy marriage depends on two people having the skill to communicate effectively with each other and negotiate their way out of difficulties.” He further says, “Partners with low self-esteem or little or no assertiveness skill cannot contribute strongly and positively to the relationship and often fail to get what they need from the marriage” (2004: 195-196). Van Pelt connects beautifully when she says, “A successful marriage does not come spontaneously or by chance. Instead, a happy marriage- the successful marriage- involves two people, working out small difficulties as well as the big

ones” (1986: 14). When married couples fail to deal with jealousy, in-laws, finances, personal issues and sexuality, it often leads to an enfeeblement of the marriage bond and rob the relationship of its energy, joy and wealth. Some marital partners, who feel inadequate or cannot face the responsibility of sustaining the relationship, resort to abusive and addictive behaviours rather than developing the personal skills necessary for marital growth. (Willemse 2008: 27-33, Craig 2004: 196). These destructive behaviours normally have a very negative effect on the marriage bond and, in the end, lead to separation and finally, divorce.

#### **4.3.5 AN AFFAIR**

Craig reports that: “up to 25 percent of marriages end because of an affair by one of the partners” (2004: 196). Infidelity statistics connects with the above and says that: “up to 53 percent of marriages in the United States end because of an affair by one or both of the partners” (<http://www.Infidelity.com> 2006). Today, in our post-modern era, there are many factors which set in motion or pull individuals towards marital infidelity. These factors are:

- Attraction;
- Novelty;
- Excitement;

- Risk;
- Challenge;
- Curiosity;
- Enhancing self-esteem;
- A desire to escape or find relief from a painful relationship;
- Boredom;
- Feeling neglected;
- A desire to prove one's worth of attraction;
- A desire for attention;
- A desire to punish a partner (Craig 2004: 196).

Researchers are of the opinion that, “working couples are at greater risk of having affairs than any other group” (Andrews 2000: 8). It is, thus, vital for marital partners (pastoral families as well) to strike a balance between their work life and their marriage lives in order to keep their marriages as healthy as possible to avoid divorce and its consequences.

#### **4.3.6 A DEVELOPMENTAL OR SITUATIONAL CRISIS**

It is common knowledge that many marriages, especially those in our post-modern age, do not survive the emotional onslaught that occurs when crisis situations demolish the marital setting. Craig reports that, “situational crisis such as illness, death, or serious accidents to a partner or family member, depression, unemployment, or bankruptcy are difficult events to survive for many couples” (2004: 196). Such difficulties have the potential to destabilize a marriage and cause it to dissolve into divorce. Wimberley is correct, and I agree with him, when he says “as clergy families we are not immune to the ravages and trauma of unseen events and the difficult task of managing our lives in their aftermath” (2007: 135). There are also other causes that can destabilize a marriage and cause it to crumble and break up during the normal developmental stages of the family cycle. According to Craig, these include “having children, parenting teenagers, dealing with mid-life” (2004: 196). All of the above can have a huge impact on the marriage bond.

#### **4.3.7 AN IMBALANCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP**

It is a known fact that as a marriage relationship grows, deepens and changes, there is a change in the balance of power and these cause marital partners to realign their roles and responsibilities. Craig is correct when he observed that “marriages can see-saw out of control when issues arise such as educational inequality, personal dominance and control, differences in earning capacity, a

wife turning to the workforce and becoming more economically independent, or an imbalance in the power and decision-making process within the couple's relationship" (2004: 196). All of the above can have a severe effect on the marriage bond which can lead to marital distress and in the end divorce.

#### **4.3.8 POOR COMMUNICATION**

Nancy van Pelt says "the heart of marriage is in its communication system."

She further says: "it can be said that the success and happiness of any married pair is measurable in terms of the deepening dialogue which characterizes their union" (1986: 75). It is, thus, obvious that the success and wholeness of any marriage is vested in its communication. Researchers are of the view that one of the most serious problems in marriage and a prime cause of divorce lies in the inability or reluctance of marriage partners to communicate. Craig is, thus, correct when he observes that: "couples who indulge in using vague and unclear ways of communicating and who speak indirectly to each other as a way of avoiding closeness and conflict set the stage to misunderstanding, frustration, and hurt." He further cites a survey by The Institute of family Studies, which in 1993 found that "70 percent of people surveyed whose marriage had fallen apart nominated lack of communication and the resultant lack of companionship, love and affection, as the main cause of their relationship failure" (2004: 197). The researcher believes that for marriage to

survive, marital partners need to be able not only to love each other and negotiate a resolution of their personal differences, but they must be willing to adapt to the many demands and challenges that impact on their relationship in our post-modern age both from within and from the society at large.

#### **4.4 DIVORCE: A COMPREHENSIVE LOSS**

It is important to bear in mind that no matter what the state the marriage you are leaving or being forced to leave, every person confronted with the traumatic occurrence of the divorce phenomenon is experiencing a major loss. Thus, divorce represents a loss for almost everyone it touches. De Klerk describes the divorce phenomenon as the end of a long term relationship that leads to a range of losses (2004: 35-40). The following needs our attention:

- There is the loss of a good past, “unless reconstructed and re-interpreted to be viewed as a new past” (Kitching 2008: 31);
- There is the loss of the present. The loss caused by the divorced phenomenon is to be found in the crisis of the marital partner’s identity. It is common knowledge that divorced couples are viewed by society as a failure; especially the pastor as pastoral caregiver and leader of a

congregation. Many women fear to be socially stigmatized as divorcees.

Thus, a new outlook on your current situation is required to explain yourself as person. De Klerk and Kitching are correct, and I agree with them, when they observed that “the challenge to create a new present in which divorcees can blossom provides hope to find a new worth of the self” (2004: 37-40, 2008: 31);

- There is the loss of the future. The dream of unity and a good quality future as husband and wife is lost. Divorce destroys plans, hopes, and dreams that will never be realized. In the end, it leads to feelings of helplessness, fear, emptiness and worthlessness; which leave deep psychological effects on divorced couples. These psychological effects, further, negatively influence the parental ability of divorced couples. Parental stress, anxiety, and depression, in turn, inhibit effective parenthood as well as shepherd hood; especially concerning the pastor as shepherd of his/her flock;
- There is the loss of self-esteem and confidence. Rosenstock is of the opinion that “divorce always usher in winters, regardless of the season” (1988: 13). Thus, divorce can have a devastating effect on the self-esteem and confidence of divorced persons. De Klerk reports that “people who went through divorce question their decision making about

the past and tend to lose confidence in future decision making” (2004: 39);

- There is the loss of sense. It is common knowledge that people who entered the covenantal arrangement of matrimony do so with the prime objective that this arrangement is reciprocal, supportive, enriching, and a lifelong journey. However, when divorce strikes and dreams are shattered, life becomes a painful experience and everything becomes meaningless. In the end, it enhances a feeling of personal failure;
- There is a loss of support. Divorce by its very definition, tears families apart and inevitably destroys the support base which once existed between mutual partners. The knowledge of being suddenly on your own, may lead to feelings of rejection and failure. De Klerk is correct when he points out that, “where there is no support mechanism, feelings of anxiety about decision making, tension to adapt to new circumstances, guilt feelings about the decision to divorce, can cause that the impact of the loss of support will further shove the divorced person into a state of helplessness” (2004: 33). Loss of a once intimate and loving partner and possible loss of contact with children can be a devastating experience. The role of “wife” or “husband” becomes one of “former wife” or “former husband”, and thus one’s social status changes

(Smith et al 1991: 34). The above sentiments clearly demonstrate the fact that divorce is a stressful event and inevitably has a negative effect on those who must endure it. In the next section, the researcher discussed the different stages in the divorce process and how it impacts the life of the divorced person. The above prepares one to deeply understand the trauma and pain brought about by divorce.

#### **4.4.1 STAGES IN THE DIVORCE PROCESS**

It is a known fact that the psychological impact of divorce on those who must endure it, is as severe as that of death in the immediate family. Emery says that, “Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a pioneer in the hospice movement, first described the stages of grieving about and recovering from a major trauma such as death or divorce.” The word “grief” itself comes from a Latin root meaning “weighed down” or afflicted by heavy wrong” (Taylor 1983: 222).

Thus, a person who grieves is one who feels deep sorrow, distress, or misery.

These stages, according to Kübler-Ross are:

- Denial;
- Anger and resentment;
- Bargaining;

- Depression;
- Acceptance (2004: 26-27).

The above stages are helpful, therapeutically, when dealing with people who are traumatized by events of death or divorce.

Rosenstock in her book: *Journey through Divorce* connects with the above and is of the opinion that “people who experience divorce also experience grief, and go through a series of stages in the process.” These stages each come with their own characteristics and challenges. The stages in the divorce process are:

- Denial;
- Depression;
- Anger;
- Resolution;
- Recovery (1988: 13-107).

Understanding these stages can be very helpful when it comes to talking about divorce and decision making in the countenance of this painful event. The author will explore these stages fully in the following paragraphs.

#### **4.4.1.1 DENIAL**

It is well documented that everyone who grieves goes through some amount of denial, even those whose loved ones die. Rosenstock points out that “denial of the dissolution of a marriage is a natural response.” She further says that: “it forms a protective armor, allowing the self-designated victim an opportunity to be shielded from the searing reality of the marriage’s termination and the resumption of a single life” (1988: 28). However, when denial is protracted, the process of dealing with the loss and moving forward is critically delayed.

Rosenstock is, thus, correct when she says that, “for those who perfect the stage of denial, the necessity to journey forward becomes more threatening than the initial loss” (1988: 25). Thus, the yearning to avoid further pain, unintentionally delays the intensity of the torment rather than to lessen it.

#### **4.4.1.2 DEPRESSION**

The consciousness of being alone plunges one into a state of depression. Craig says that, “depression is one of the common psychiatric illnesses in our world today, and it impinges heavily on the marriage relationship” (2004: 174). With divorce, the pain of loss is usually more severe than with the death of a loved one because the person you have lost is still around. Rosenstock says that, “the

stage of depression after divorce is a time of morning-a time for tears.” She further says that, “so often in a divorce the loss is seen as a failure rather than the death of a commitment and partnership” (1988: 34). Depression describes both an affective state characterized by feelings of sadness, futility, hopelessness and discouragement and by a change in motoric characterized by lassitude and energy. Thus, even the most routine task can seem monumental for the depressed person”(Ibid 1988: 35). It is a known fact that individuals who suffer from depression are usually pessimistic in thought and that decision making is burdensome. Rosenstock says that, “tension and anxiety can mount to the point that the felt depression feelings appear secondary. This stage may even manifest in the form of querulousness and fractiousness where virtually anything is perceived as adversarial” (1988: 36). The author agrees with Craig when he says that, “while being emotional, depression is not a single emotion but a complex emotional state that consists of a mixture of anxiety, anger, guilt, and shame. These are the emotions of struggle that fight against accepting the finality of the loss. The anxiety is about loss of identity, the anger is about resentment that nothing was done to save the situation, the guilt results from feeling that we may be responsible for the failure and loss, and the shame arises from the sense that the loss reflects badly on our character”

(2004: 175). Thus, depression carries with it a variety of emotions which are destructive on the good health of the individual who is trapped in it.

#### **4.4.1.3 ANGER**

Just as the denial of divorce is often a longer process, anger in divorce is usually far stronger than the death of a partner. Rosenstock points out that, “anger as an emotion, serves to catalyze other feelings and work through the pain of abandonment and rejection.” She further says that, “it provides the avenue to safely inspect the remnants of feelings so brutalized in the divorce process- buffering the zone of depression, yet still knowing all of the sadness” (1988: 48). However, there are many positive aspects to anger. Just the fact that one recognizes its existence, means that anger is no longer too threatening to be permitted into conscious awareness (Rosenstock 1988: 48). Emery says that, “anger is perhaps the most complicated emotion for former partners to understand and harness in a divorce; it is undoubtedly the most destructive for children.” He further says, “there are obvious, real-life reasons for the reign of anger: the betrayal of an affair; the threat of losing the children, the loss of a life dreamed about and work hard for” (2004: 30). Researchers agree that there are in fact many emotional reasons why anger keeps working its way to the forefront of the relationship between former

partners; who, in fact, should find a way to parent. Anger is part of four more complicated processes. These processes are:

- Grieving;
- Dealing with hurt;
- Responding to threat;
- And paradoxically, hanging onto loved ones (Ibid 2004: 31).

Rosenstock is correct when she says, “being afraid to display anger and aggression is in fact a denial of the whole divorce process” (1988: 49).

Therefore, with the anger appropriately focused, divorced couples no longer need to bend under the heavy weight of repressed feelings. In agreeing with Rosenstock, I realize that, “the recognition and expression of anger allows for the release of many pent up emotions, including jealousy, bitterness, hurt, and qualified happiness” (1988: 50). Thus, when the source of anger is identified and catharsis (release of strong feelings such as anger) is in progress, there is new energy available for understanding the consequences of the divorce phenomenon on those who must endure it.

#### **4.4.1.4 RESOLUTION**

The stage of resolution in the divorce process is accompanied by a sense of acceptance of the reality of the loss. Thus, there is a natural sense of letting go.

When the above takes place, Rosenstock exclaims that, “the stage of resolution is now in full force.” She further says, “denial is past history.

Depression is only a remnant. Anger is no longer an enemy but rather a recurrent emotion with readily recognizable triggers. Coping skills are sufficiently well honed to deal with the challenges extant” (1988: 63). This stage of resolution is often mistaken for recovery by those in its throes (Ibid: 83). However, what is actually true is that the resolution stage allows the divorced person with opportunities to express self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-fulfillment in the midst of the traumatic onslaught of divorce.

Rosenstock is correct when she says that, “this penultimate stage of the journey through divorce focuses on gaining something substantive out of momentary bursts of depression and angry feelings (1988: 82). Thus, the divorced person feels that there is greater consciousness and acceptance of what it means to live independently in the face of the destruction of the divorce phenomenon.

#### **4.4.1.5 RECOVERY**

The stage of recovery is the final stage in the divorce process and it carries the work of resolution through to triumph. Rosenstock says that, “a triumph presents a full person in full control of senses and faculties, equipped and ready to any challenge: My destiny is mine.” She further says, “Survival is no longer an issue. The divorce is no longer the vector of absolute adversity (1988: 87). Thus, there is a renewed sense of energy and positivity on the side the divorced person, despite the anguish of the divorce. The recovery stage tells of a person who is at peace with him/herself, despite the loss of the marriage bond. The renascence of the self in the stage of recovery includes self-affirmation as a social and sexual being (Rosenstock 1988: 107). Recovery, therefore, inevitably leads to the realization that one is a complete and capable human being with a long-lasting and unshakable faith in yourself and the future.

The researcher has helped in guiding the reader through the different stages that occur during the divorce process. Understanding these stages can be very helpful, especially for the clergy (pastoral families) when they are confronted by the devastating onslaught of the divorce phenomenon. Each of the above stages brings its own characteristics and challenges to the fore. By identifying with these stages in your own divorce and the feelings contained within each,

the divorced person may find consolation, meaning, reassurance, hope and direction what may otherwise seem entangled by fear and failure.

#### **4.5 THE EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON PASTORAL FAMILIES**

Of all the stressful events in life, divorce is one of the most painful occurrences; not only to the couple involved but to each member of the family unit. It is, therefore, a known fact that pastoral (clergy) divorce causes a severe emotional damage to the pastor and his/her family, as well as congregants. In addition to the agonizing personal pain of a marital break-up, there is also the public humiliation of having the pastor's leadership abilities challenged before the church (denomination and local parish) and the community. Mace reports that "a pastor who develops problems in his (sic) family life is significantly downgraded." He further says that, "a pastor involved in separation or divorce, apart from a few very atypical exceptions, plummets to the lowest level of public esteem" (1980: 53). In addition, divorce as a stressful event may also lead to feelings of rejection and failure within the pastoral family. Thus, the impact of divorce on pastoral (clergy) families becomes a dual tragedy personally and professionally, causing severe emotional damage to the pastor and his/her family. Wimberley is correct when he says that, "clergy families are not immune to the ravage and trauma of unforeseen events (such as divorce) and the difficult task of managing our lives in their aftermath" (2007: 135).

Diedrick is right when she says that, “divorce causes pain through the loss of intimacy; it shatters one’s daily routine, and causes one to emphasize one’s loneliness” (1991: 34). Thus, the loss of a one intimate and loving partner, and possible loss of contact with children, can be devastating. It is also a known fact that one party, in many instances the non-initiator of the divorce, is likely to feel rejected and doomed. Albrecht is, thus, correct when he says that, “the most common cause of stress after divorce was a feeling of personal failure” (1980: 59-58). It is, thus, comprehensible that such feelings of failure inevitably lead to low self-esteem in the pastoral family and affect them negatively. Along with the loss of a one’s intimate partner, as mentioned earlier, and possibly of self-esteem, divorce involves the creation of a new life-style, new roles, and thus, changes in self-concept. Diedrick is correct when she says that, “adjustment to a new life is more difficult than the loss of the marriage” (1991: 35). Divorce has a negative and devastating effect on the normal function of the pastoral family. It is apparent that clergy and their families are not immune to the human tragedies that infect us all. Divorce is one of those catastrophic happenings which brings, “deep anguish, long-lasting emotional trauma, and memory flash backs” to the pastoral family in the aftermath of the divorce (Wimberley 2007: 136). Divorce, as a traumatic occurrence, leaves deep

psychological effects on those who must endure it; especially to the pastoral family.

#### **4.5.1 THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN**

Children caught in the divorce process undergo a lot of trauma. It is, thus, obvious that the divorce phenomenon manifest itself as a major crisis in the lives of children. Emery reports that, “experts on divorce tend to fall into one of two camps.” He further says, “There are those who contend that divorce inevitably and invariably devastates children and sets the stage for a life time of emotional problems, period. In the other camp are those experts who assert that divorce is one of life’s challenges that ultimately has little substantial emotional impact on most children” (2004: 62). However, “the truth is much more complex and subtly shaded than either extreme” (Ibid 2004: 62). The fact is that many children are pained greatly by the onslaught of the divorce phenomenon on their family life. When divorce enters a family a constellation of emotions surface. Feelings of abandonment rage, psychological pain, and enormous anger are but a few of the overwhelming feelings children experience. Thus, divorce has the potential to damage children badly and the parsonage is no exception. Emery points out four painful divorce stresses which impact negatively on children’s daily routine. The following needs our attention:

- Divorce introduces huge changes into the lives of most children: direct involvement in parental conflict, economic hardship, changes in residence and school, and damaged parent-child relationships, because of lost contact, lost love, and lost parental authority;
- Divorce is a great loss for most children. The centre of their world is shattered through their family been torn apart. As a result, children must not only grieve, but they must also search for a new foothold as they battle to come to grasp with the loss of security, they once had in their lives;
- Divorce increases the risk for psychological, social, and academic problems among children. This increased risk is a legitimate concern for children, parents and the community;
- Divorce is painful. Despite one's fervent desire to protect one's children, one cannot prevent them from feeling the pain of divorce. No matter how hard one tries, no matter how much one sacrifices, no matter what one may want, no matter what one is willing to do, this is going to hurt one's children (2004: 63-64).

The following statistic, pertaining to the impact of divorce on children, needs our attention. Emery compared children who are in stable marriages with those whose parents are divorcing. The outcome was that they are:

- Twice as likely to see a mental health professional;
- Up to twice as likely to have problems managing their behavior;
- Perhaps 1.25 to 1.5 times as likely to have problems with depressed moods;
- Twice as likely to drop out of high school before graduation;
- Up to 1.25 to 1.5 times more likely to get divorced (2004: 64).

Thus, from the above, we can clearly deduce that for most children, divorce is bad news in itself and impacts negatively on them.

#### **4.5.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN**

Trauma, which masquerade as stress and anguish, is in many instances the first to manifest in a child, causing them to feel despair, hopeless, and lost. Emery is correct when he says that, “divorce is correlated with more psychological problems among children” (2004: 65). When the child suffers such devastating personal loss resulting from the divorce of his/her parents, depression and the erosion of self-esteem, is usually the first to occur. Van Wyk is quite correct

when he says that, “in many instances the child blames him/herself for the demise of the family union and is overwhelmed with grief” (1984: 33-34). It is a well known fact that the traumatic experience of divorce for children can produce oppressive feelings such as:

- Sadness;
- Recurring anger;
- Self-blame;
- And, even violence (2007: 41-70, Willemse 2008: 43-45).

The above clearly indicates the negative effect that the divorce phenomenon has on the personhood of children. Children exposed to the painful occurrence of divorce are inevitably deeply affected in their inner being. It is also worth sharing with the reader a national study conducted by the department of Health and Human Services in the United States of America in the late 1990’s, which has concluded that:

- Children under the age of 18 suffer 40% more anxiety as a result of their parents’ divorce, and the rate is doubled if the parents divorce multiple times;

- After a child is diagnosed with depression, there is a fifty percent chance of recurrence if the problem is not ameliorated; and,
- Three quarters of children under the age of 18 who were polled stated they would rather live with a relative than endure the stress and trauma or another divorce or combative parents (<http://www.Divorce Source, Inc, 2007>).

Many children who are exposed to divorce grapple alone with related overpowering thoughts and feelings. Pastoral counseling as a therapeutic means is an effective way of affording assistance and help to children who are traumatized by divorce; especially those within a pastoral marital setting. Here, the role of the local parish and; especially the denomination of the Volkskerk van Afrika (Peoples Church of Africa), as custodian of pastoral care, is critical. Taylor's shepherding method is therapeutic, here. He admonishes the church when he says, "a shepherd guide his (sic) flock to good pastures and save resting places. He leads the sheep and provide for all their needs, seeing that they have water to drink and keep the shepherd fold in good repair. He guides his flock and protects 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, however, dark the night or bad the weather. He knows and

names each sheep individually, so that they too know his voice and follow when he calls. He carefully tends any sheep that are sick or weak, and takes special care of nurturing ewes and young lambs” (1995: 9). Thus, being a shepherd means taking a deep personal interest in the welfare of the flock, as a whole, and looking after each individual in the sheepfold. Here, the denomination of the V.V.A (P.C.A) is the shepherd and the children of the pastoral family is the flock that needs care and nurture all the time. They are the young lambs which needs special care; especially during the stressful occurrence of divorce. In the next section, the author analyzes scriptural passages about divorce.

#### **4.6 THE STANCE OF THE BIBLE ON DIVORCE**

The Bible is full of scriptures referring to divorce. In the book of Matthew, we see how Jesus holds matrimony and the sacredness thereof in the highest regard (19: 5). However, despite this high regard on marriage, the bill of divorcement exist (Matt 19: 7). According to the New Testament, it was never God’s intention for marriage. However, it is written, “Because your hearts were hard” (Matt 9: 8a). Thus, this law was brought in because of the stubbornness of the human heart. The following scriptures refer to divorce and need our attention:

- Deuteronomy 24: 1-4;

- Matthew 19: 2-9, 5: 31-32;
- Mark 10: 2-9;
- 1 Corinthians: 7: 10-17;

Kitching is correct when he says that, “it is important to understand, despite certain pronouncements about divorce, that divorce must not be seen as part of creation.” Thielicke in Kitching is of the opinion that, “divorce is not in line with God’s will for marriage.” He, further, says: “Here it is clear that the legal ordinance of divorce is a mark of ‘this *aeon*’; it is definitely not an order of creation, but rather-like all law-a regulation of necessity for the fallen world in the sense of the Noachic Covenant” (2008: 34). In the next paragraphs, the author will discuss the above Biblical statements, pertaining to divorce, in order for the reader to have a better grasp of the issue at hand.

#### **4.6.1 Deuteronomy 24: 1-4**

“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her

again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

This part of scripture allows for the discourse on divorce. However, this portion of scripture creates the impression that Moses permitted, instituted and instructed the principle of divorce. According to Deuteronomy 24 such practices did exist within the Jewish society. The Bible Dictionary is correct when it says that, “Moses did not command divorce, but regulated an existing practice) (1975: 790). Möller is of the opinion that “Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 specific deals with the whole question of divorce, although it is not the pinnacle point of verse 1-4” (1990: 1). Botha connects when he says that, “ons het hier met ‘n voorwaarde sin te doen met die protasis verse 1-3 en die apodosis (actual regulation) verse 4” (2004: 59-60). Möller is of the opinion that, “The stipulation pertaining to divorce as set out by Moses in Deuteronomium 24: 1-4 was only a civil regulation to promote respect and justness among people, and that divorce was never the intention of God for marriage” (2000: 147). Up to today, it is still the intention of the Old Testament to protect and honour the marital bond as an exclusive lifelong and covenantal agreement between husband and wife.

#### **4.6.1.2 THE DIVORCE LETTER**

A man was permitted to divorce his wife and to give her a divorce letter, if he found that she had committed an indecent act. However, this letter would indemnify her if she wishes to remarry someone else. What is true of Deuteronomy 24, however, is that divorce was not permissible? However, for the reader to have a good grasp of the above, the author wants to clarify the preconditions which pertain to the divorce letter.

According to Adams, divorce was only final when:

- There was a written bill of divorce (Dt 24:1ff, Jer 3: 8 etc). This bill of divorce (lit. of “cutting off”) had to be;
  - a) Written;
  - b) In a form that said it clearly;
- The bill must be served (Dt 24: 1). The one who divorced another had to;
  - a) Deliver the bill personally;
  - b) Put the bill in the others party hand;
- The person who is being divorced must be sent home (Dt 24: 1).

Adams sheds more light on the giving of the divorce letter when he, further, says: “if this actually approximates the Biblical bill of divorce”, then the following points may be noted:

- The bill of divorce was a formal, public document, signed by witnesses, and intended to stand as a legal record for any necessary future issues;
- The stated intention of the divorce bill was not only to effect the permanent separation of the divorce parties, and thereby relieve them from the obligations of the covenant of Companionship, but also to expressly give the divorcee the freedom to remarry;
- The bill itself – not just writings about divorce – plainly uses a variety of terms to express the concept of divorce (divorce, expel, separate) as do Greek divorces in the New Testament, and the Biblical writings themselves (1981: 28-30).

Möller in Botha explains the requirements or stipulations whereby a husband was permitted to lawfully divorce his/her spouse. He says:

- There must be an adequate reason;
- There probably should be a public official to carry out a legal function;
- A proper legal document was prepared and presented to the wife;
- The man sends his wife away (2004: 61).

From the above, it is clear that the Old Testament law does not forbid a woman to get married after being divorced. The second marriage is not seen as

some form of adultery, otherwise she would be stoned. The only restriction was that she could not return to her former husband (Möller 2001: 3).

#### **4.6.1.3 MATTHEW 5: 31-32 & MATTHEW 19: 2-9**

Matthew 5 reads: “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. ‘ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery” (31-32).

Matthew 19 reads: “Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? Haven’t you read, He replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joint together, let man (sic) not separate. Why then, they asked, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away? Jesus replied, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except, for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery” (2-9).

Möller in Botha reports as follows, concerning the above portion of scriptures. He says, “both the above verses refer to the bill of divorce in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4. A bill did not approve or recommend divorce and remarriage, but regulated it as something already practiced by the Israelites” (2004: 71).

Schweizer says that, “Jesus found Himself in conflict with the Pharisees who were trying to trap Him.” He further says, “Their question is now a typical question of how to interpret the law” (1978: 381). By the first century CE, the law of divorce based on Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 was interpreted in many ways:

- The Shammai school taught that a man could divorce his wife if she committed adultery;
- The Hillel school taught that the man could divorce the wife if he found anything disagreeable in her (Douglas (et al): 790 and Barkley W 1975: 239).

However, Jesus did not fall in the trap by choosing either side, but pointed out the sin of divorce. The model of marriage presented in Genesis 1: 27 and Genesis 2: 24 clearly outline God’s original plan and purpose for marriage (Craig 2004: 23). Divorce was never God’s idea from the beginning of the creation of human beings. Therefore, Jesus’ rejection of divorce on the basis of Gen 1: 27 and Gen 2: 24. Louw says that, “scriptures as found in Mat 5: 22,

Mat 19: 9 and Mt 5: 43-48 confirms that Jesus wants to normalize marriage” (2008: 35). What is obvious is that Jesus is against the notion of validating divorce, but He rather seeks to restore marriage to its original ideal of love and companionship.

#### **4.6.1.4 MARK 10: 1-9**

Mark reads: “He left that place and went to the region of Judea and between the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around Him; and, as was His custom, He again taught them. Some Pharisees came, and to test Him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her. “ But Jesus said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate them” (1-9).

In this portion of the scripture, Jesus again refers back to the bill of divorce as set out in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4. Barkley is correct when he says that, “this law was being laid down for a definite situation and being in no sense permanently binding.” He further says, “It was Jesus view that in the very nature of things

marriage was a permanency which indissolubly united two people in such a way that the bond could never be broken by any human laws and regulations. It was his belief that in the very constitution of the universe marriage is meant to be an absolute permanency and unity, and no Mosaic regulation dealing with temporary situation could alter that” (19 75: 240). Craig raises an interesting topic, which the author aligns with, when he says, “Jesus endorsed God’s original concept of marriage and instructed individuals and couples to embrace a proper understanding of its nature and purpose” (2004: 20). However, because of the advent of sin, many people are still divorcing today. This onslaught of the divorce phenomenon has finally entered the parsonage with devastating consequences for the pastor and his/her family.

In the next section, the author will be looking at trauma in the aftermath of divorce.

## **4.7 TRAUMA**

In this section the author is going to explore ways in which divorce can lead to traumatic experiences. However, the reader must first understand how researchers define the term trauma. Several authors articulates trauma in the following way.

### **4.7.1 SOME DEFINITIONS OF TRAUMA**

4.7.1.2 Jones in Sandhu submits that trauma, when defined diagnostically, “is when a person experience, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved or threatened death or serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of self or others” (2000: 379).

4.7.1.3 Mitchell on the other hand defines trauma, “as a wound which caused physical injury by some direct external force or psychological injury caused by some extreme emotional assault” (1983: 814).

4.7.1.4 Perlman and McCann defines trauma, “as sudden, unexpected and non-normative, 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” (1990: 10).

4.7.1.5 Krystal says, “trauma is a paralyzed, overwhelmed state, with immobilization, withdrawal, possible de-personalization, evidence of disorganization” (1987: 90).

4.7.1.6 Means reports that, “trauma can be defined as something sudden, violent, brutal or catastrophic which touches a person’s life

in some intimate way. It comes from the Greek word “wound”, which can be on physical, emotional psychological, relational and spiritual level. These levels are interconnected; therefore trauma affects one’s entire life. (2000: 3).

4.7.1.7 While Figly says that, “trauma is an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary, catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor’s sense of invulnerability to harm” (1985: 18).

#### **4.7.1.8 THE AUTHORS OWN DEFINITION OF TRAUMA**

The author defines trauma as a sudden, devastating occurrence produced violently in on a person and results in physical and psychological conditions. It is an abnormal event which can happen to any person, anywhere.

One of the most prevalent causes of trauma, in our post-modern age, is the divorce phenomenon. Divorce not only affect the adults involved, but also the children; leaving behind seeds of issues that will, in the end, blossom into fully-fledged problems, e.g., anger, psychological pain, and feelings of abandonment. When divorce hits the family, the traumatic impact of the trauma increases on those who must endure it. The emotional and mental trauma pertaining to the divorce is bound to affect the personal lives of both

couples. Be it the family; and especially children. The divorced individuals' coping skills are never sufficient to handle their trauma. Roos is of the opinion that, "trauma causes feelings of helplessness which divorcees also experience" (2002: 1-10). The trauma of divorce can inevitably leave one or both couples, and the children in a state of depression. It is known facts that from here on, many other psychological symptoms begin to occur. This is the experience of many divorced individuals and it does not exempt the pastoral family. The word trauma, as discussed earlier, means "wound" caused by an external person and/or force, and cause injury to the body, soul and mind, and produces discomfort.

The author of this thesis believes that in order for the reader to have a better grasp of the term trauma, we must explain what physical trauma is and what psychic trauma is. These concepts will help to clarify the impact of trauma among couples.

- Physical trauma is an injury or wound produced violently, and the resulting physical and psychological condition.
- Psychic trauma is an emotional shocking experience which has lasting psychic effect, usually categorized as post traumatic stress disorder (Kaplan 1985: 25-27).

A person, who has been exposed to a traumatic event such as divorce, has in fact been traumatized. If the person does not get help in dealing with the overpowering emotions regarding the trauma, they may develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Divorce traumatizes individuals who are exposed to it. Brown and others define PTSD as follows: here PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder and consist of a constellation of symptoms associated with exposure to extraordinary traumatic events such as:

- Childhood physical and/or sexual abuse;
- Adulthood sexual assault;
- Combat;
- Natural and technical disasters (1984: 51-59).

Post traumatic stress disorder is a complex health condition that can develop in response to a traumatic experience, a life threatening episode or an extremely distressing situation that causes a person to feel intense fear, horror or a sense of helplessness. PTSD can cause severe problems at home or at work (Ibid: 58-59).

Traumatic events such as divorce produce profound (deep) and lasting changes such as psychological and emotional changes on the people who must endure the onslaught of the divorce phenomenon. Researchers agree that traumatic

events cut the normally integrated functions of the human body from one another. When this event happens, certain symptoms which traumatize survivors emerge:

- Emotions without clear memory of the event;
- Remembering everything in detail but without emotions;
- The traumatized victim may find him/herself in a constant state of vigilance;
- Irritable without knowing why (Herman 1997: 16).

Disconnection of individuals from their emotions is common in couples who endure the stressful event of divorce. Individuals exposed to the traumatic impact of divorce have, in many instances, a tendency to disconnect from their source and take on a life of their own. This reaction is a common reaction to trauma and is called “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (Barnett 1997: 217).

#### **4.7.2 SYMPTOMS OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

Today, in our post-modern age, it is a known fact that divorced couples suffer from PTSD. As a result, they are not able to relate properly to family, friends and society. They are constantly affected with stress.

Herman highlights three categories of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among trauma survivors.

The following issues emerge:

- Hyperarousal;
- Intrusion;
- Constriction (1995: 35).

The author will explore these issues fully in the following paragraphs.

#### **4.7.2.1 HYPERAROUSAL**

Hyperarousal is the persistent expectation of danger. After a traumatic event, the body goes on permanent alert as if the danger might return at any moment. Psychological arousal continues unabated. Sandhu is correct when he says that, “Hyperarousal is one of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the traumatized individual startles easily, reacts irritable to small provocations, and sleeps poorly” (2000: 379-381). This kind of observation has been made in Chapter one about the divorce of the author’s colleague and friend, and how our denomination dealt with this minister without realizing what sort of trauma the minister and his family had endured due to their divorce. It is common knowledge that traumatized individuals such as

divorcees suffer from a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms and other fears. It is for this reason that Herman points out that, “they do not have a normal “baseline” level of alert but relaxed attention. Instead, they have an elevated baseline of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert for danger” (1997: 36).

Thus, individuals who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people. Traumatic events such as divorce, “appear to recondition the human nervous system” (See Hampton 1993: 103).

The above has become a pattern of life for the clergy who got divorced in our denomination. Thus, he (and his family) needs pastoral care.

#### **4.7.2.2 INTRUSION**

Herman asserts that intrusion “reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment” (1997: 35). Thus, long after the event of danger is past, traumatized individuals re-live the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. The traumatized individual feels as if time stops at the moment of the trauma. “The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness,

both as flash backs during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep” (Ibid 1997: 37). Small, insignificant reminders can also provoke traumatic memories. Thus, the traumatized individual is re-traumatized by it.

Herman argues that, “re-living a traumatic event may offer an opportunity for mastery, but most traumatized individuals do not consciously seek or welcome the opportunity. Rather they dread and fear it. Re-living a traumatic experience, whether in the form of intrusive memories, dreams, or actions, carries with it the emotional intensity of the original event” (1997: 42).

Individuals who are exposed to the onslaught of divorce, especially within a pastoral family, have a tendency to avoid their traumatic experiences because of their prominent roles in society. This is clearly evident in the ordained life of the author’s colleague. For many years, he remains within the Church’s role but without being able to offer ministry to any congregation. Not one congregation deemed him fit to lead them. What also struck the author is that he never demonstrated the courage to confront the leadership of our denomination concerning his situation. Maybe he regards himself as inferior to the rest of the other ministers. However, it is only when one confronts ones situation that true healing is possible. Let us now analyze the next symptom, which affects individuals who are traumatized by the divorce phenomenon; especially when care is not provided.

#### **4.7.2.3      CONSTRICTION**

Constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender. When a trauma victim is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, the traumatized individual may go into a state of surrender. Herman is correct when he says that, “the system of self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from the situation not by action in the real world, but rather by altering the state of consciousness” (1997: 42). Constriction or numbing of trauma victims is the third symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Traumatic events continue to register in the conscious of the individual, but it is as though these experiences have been disconnected from ordinary meaning of life. When individuals who are traumatized by the divorce phenomenon avoid situations pertaining to trauma, or avoid any initiative that might involve future planning and risk, they deprive themselves of new opportunities for successful coping that make less intense the effect of the traumatic experience. Herman points out that, “constrictive symptoms, though they may represent an attempt to defend against overwhelming emotional states, exact a high price for whatever protection they afford. They narrow and

deplete the quality of life and ultimately perpetuate the effects of the traumatic event” (1997: 47).

It is, thus, important that individuals who are traumatized by divorce seek pastoral and therapeutic help in order to deal with those overwhelming traumatic experiences. This will become a challenge to pastors who are not equipped to deal with such problems. This dissertation is about divorce within a pastoral family in the Volkskerk Van Africa (PCA). Thus, when the denomination, per se, has no pastoral committee which could be of help to the pastoral family therapeutically, the only way of dealing with this issue is then to refer them to therapists.

#### **4.7.3           TRAUMATIC EVENTS CALLS INTO QUESTION BASIC HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

It is a known fact that apart from those individuals exposed to traumatic events, there are many more people such as the community, who are directly and indirectly traumatized by the divorce phenomenon, especially of the clergy who cares for them, pastorally. The people who are directly or indirectly traumatized, “are the people who care about those who have experienced violence or some type of trauma” (Sandhu 2000: 379). Herman is correct when he says that, “traumatic events breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed

and sustain in relation to others. They undermine the belief system that gives meaning to human experience.” He further says, “They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis” (1997: 51).

This section is dealing with people who are traumatized by the onslaught of the divorce phenomenon. As a result of the above, the reader will understand that when the safe foundation of human beings is shattered, such as their faith in God or their belief in the divine being, traumatized individuals feel abandoned, isolated, alone and feel lost in the very system (home) that is supposed to care and protect them. Thus, people who are traumatized by divorce, especially in a pastoral family, feel that the home which is supposed to be a safe place, is the very place that violates their dignity and their human rights. Thus, they are double traumatized. Herman is right when he says that, “when trust is lost, traumatized victims feel they belong more to the dead than to the living” (1997: 52). The effect of this process affects many divorced couples for years. The divorce has finally left deep emotional and psychological scars on them.

#### **4.7.4 TRAUMATIC EVENTS VIOLATES THE AUTONOMY OF THE SELF**

A secure sense of connection with caring others is the foundation of personality development. Thus, when this connection is shattered, the

traumatized individual loses the basic sense of self. Traumatic events, therefore, have a harmful effect on those individuals who must endure it and in the end shattered the self image of the person traumatized. Sanders is thus, correct when he says that, “traumatic experiences frequently disrupt fundamental assumptions of personal security, self worth and world order” (1993: 260-270).

Thus, when the foundation of care is shattered, the traumatized individual loses the basic worth of self. It is common knowledge that traumatic events violate and rob trauma victims from their God-given self worth. Herman is correct when he points out that, “traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity.” He further says, “The body is invaded, injured, defiled and the person’s point of view count for nothing” (1997: 53). Divorce, just as violence, destroys the belief that people can be themselves in relation to others. Individuals traumatized by divorce suffer damage on the basic structure of the self.

Divorced persons not only lose their trust in themselves but that their self-esteem is assaulted by the experience of humiliation, guilt and helplessness. The safe environment is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. Their God-given identity, as described in Genesis 1, prior to the

trauma event, is destroyed by the divorce phenomenon. The trauma of divorce has the potential to kill the value in people exposed to the traumatic event.

The above challenges the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa) to come up with a methodology of caring for its clergy. The main question to ask is: who cares for the caregiver of the Volkskerk van Afrika?

#### **4.7.5 SOCIAL SUPPORT INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE TRAUMATIC MOMENT**

Because traumatic life events invariably cause damage to relationships, people in the divorced social world have the power to influence the eventual outcome of the trauma on friends, extended family, and colleagues. Thus, the community, as a support base, plays vital role and have the power to mitigate the impact of the traumatic moment. Herman is correct when he points out that, "in the immediate aftermath of the trauma, rebuilding of some minimal form of trust is the primary task" (1997: 61). Thus, assurance of safety and protection are of great importance. The community is the sphere where traumatized individuals can feel safe because they provide a safe space and are in the forefront in challenging negative events such as the divorce phenomenon. When traumatized individuals experience support from the wider community, it help to ease the impact of the trauma event. However, what is also true, is when the support from the community is absent, the

damage can be even greater. Herman says that “in the aftermath of traumatic life events, survivors are highly vulnerable. Their sense of self has been shattered.” He further says, “That sense can be rebuilt only as it was built initially, in connection with others” (1997: 61). Researchers agree that emotional support that traumatized individuals seek from close family, their communities and close friends, takes different forms and changes during the course of the trauma. Thus, safety and protection are of the great importance to trauma victims. Herman articulates this idea by saying that, “once a sense of basic safety has been established, the survivor needs the help of others in rebuilding a positive view of the self. The regulation of intimacy and aggression disrupted by the trauma must be restored” (1997: 63). It is, therefore, important for the community, especially the church community in which the traumatized individual socialize, that there is a sense of tolerance and understanding towards the person who wants to establish a sense of self control. It is, thus, of vital importance that those individuals who are traumatized by divorce need help from others in order to mourn their losses. They need to be helped through support structures that will help them rebuild their lives.

#### **4.7.6 THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY**

People exposed to trauma can never carry the traumatic event alone. Herman says that, “sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world” (1997: 70). The community, as co-helpers, can share the traumatic experience with those traumatized by it. The community can once again help foster a sense of meaning in this world again for the trauma individual. Herman hits the nail on the head when he says that, “the response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma” (1997: 70). This is where Nick’s Pollard theory of positive deconstruction could be helpful pertaining to the role of the community. (1997: 44). According to Pollard, positive deconstruction is positive because it is done in a positive way in order to replace one thing with something better. Nick’s theory for praxis helps those in pastoral care understand that individuals exposed to trauma, are still God’s people who needs help to become whole again. Positive deconstruction helps the community to understand the impact of trauma on the lives of those who must endure it. It helps the community to enter into the lives of traumatized individuals from a positive perspective. Thus, helping those exposed to traumatic events; especially the pastoral family in a positive and constructive manner. Herman highlights two factors that are of the utmost importance in

the restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community.

- The community must first acknowledge the traumatic event;
- There must be some form of community action (1997: 70).

Once the community recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility in whatever form and repair the injury. Thus, the role of the community pertaining to traumatic events such as divorce, is of vital importance. This process challenges the Volkskerk community, which failed to care for their own clergy and family. Hence, the author is searching for ways of reconstructing a caring structure for the church.