

THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES



**DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF
BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH (BICC) BULAWAYO CENTRAL.**

BY

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DECLARATION

I Ndabezinhle Nyathi do hereby declare that the thesis *Divorce and Remarriage in Religious Institutions : A Case of Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) Bulawayo Central* is my own unaided work, and that all the sources consulted in compiling this study have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

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Date

DEDICATION

To my wife Sjabulisiwe Nyathi, my children Thabo, Thabiso, Thabisile, Thobekile and my father Cephas Nyathi and mother Heta Nyathi.

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ABSTRACT

Though marriage ideally was designed by God to last a life time, humankind has reduced it to a temporary and terminable social contract. The issue of divorce and remarriage remains a major issue in the African context. This study seeks to explore the aspect of divorce and remarriage in religious institutions. The study was carried out at Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) Bulawayo Central. It dwells on the concept of divorce and remarriage in general, bringing out the different perspectives associated with the subject. It clearly shows that remarriage and divorce are a living truth in society. This study was exploratory hence both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used to come up with this study. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data which was then presented using pie chart, bar graphs and then further enhanced with content analysis. The research data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and then data was presented in the form of bar graphs and pie charts. The study revealed congregants' awareness levels towards the Biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage. The Western world takes a more liberal position on the issue of divorce and remarriage making it socially acceptable and free from scorn or condemnation. In the African context, a significant number of its religious institutions and communities continue to take a strict stance on divorce and remarriage thus considering it shameful, unacceptable and abominable. The study showed that for the Brethren in Christ Church, there were inconsistencies in the application of the Holy Scriptures and the constitution in handling divorce and remarriage cases. Divorce and remarriage is unacceptable yet the BICC Bulawayo Central community continues to engage in it as evidenced by church records. The study showed that the consequences of such behavior were a disgruntlement amongst church members, levels of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. It was quite evident from the research that divorce and remarriage is a problem that can destabilize the religious institutions if the causes and effects are not well understood. The researcher suggests that to curb the problem there is need for proper application of the doctrine on issues of divorce and remarriage and situations surrounding the issue in order to promote harmony in the church. Congregational expectations for the leadership positions should be clearly articulated and members being sworn into posts should be informed of the constitutional aspects of divorce and remarriage as part of the induction process.

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ACRONYMS

BICC

Brethren in Christ Church

EBI

Ekuphileni Bible school Institute

SPSS

Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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Chapter one

Introducing the study

1.1 Background to the Study

Marriage is imperative to our nature as human beings in society. God himself instituted marriage by creating and bringing the first man and woman together at the dawn of human creation. Thus marriage is a sacred covenant regulated by the higher moral law of God and is witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself. Its fundamental purposes are the establishment of the home, the enjoyment of family relations and the propagation of the human race (I Timothy 5:14). The establishment of the Christian home and the rearing of children thus afford the highest and holiest of all divinely appointed human relationships. Though marriage ideally was designed by God to last a life time, mankind has reduced it to a temporary and terminable social contract. This has led to the significant occurrence of divorce and remarriage cases worldwide, the church included. The concept of divorce and remarriage is indeed a sensitive and controversial issue especially in the Christian world. This is largely due to the widespread differences in interpretation and understanding of the scriptural foundations of the institution of marriage. Various studies conducted across the world have shed light on the different views held on the issue of divorce and marriage (Adams, 1980; Bacchiocchi, 2000; Keller, 2006; Dane, 2007).

On one hand, marriage is viewed as a lifetime commitment which no man should by any means break, whilst on the other hand, marriage is viewed as a union undeniably requiring commitment but however separable and subject to termination whenever its participants desire to. Proponents of the former view use the following scriptures to substantiate the fact that divorce is unacceptable, hated by God and therefore tantamount to sin (Malachi 2:14-16 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). The scriptures according to the book of Malachi reveal divorce as highly detestable before God, treacherous against one's spouse as well detrimental to children's faith and well-being. Supporters of the latter view use scriptures such as Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Matthew

19:9 to justify divorce. However, it has to be noted that these scriptures do not necessarily justify divorce. They simply give a background understanding of where divorce emanated from. It was a result of God's permissive will rather than His perfect will for man. In the same context of Matthew 19: 6-8, Jesus explicitly states that what God has joined together, no man should separate because divorce was not a part of God's original intention for humanity.

The Western world takes a more liberal position on the issue of divorce and remarriage making it socially acceptable and free from scorn or condemnation. In the African context, a significant number of its religious institutions and communities continue to take a strict stance on divorce and remarriage thus considering it shameful, unacceptable and abominable. As African societies become more modernized, they tend to adopt a more liberal and radical stance, especially the younger generation. Other than making divorce and remarriage acceptable, modernization has also catalyzed divorce itself as is the case in a number of African countries. Studies also reveal that there are a number of factors leading to divorce and remarriage. These include childlessness, adultery, quarrelling, alcoholism, socialization and technological advancement, financial difficulties, immaturity, mixed marriage, adverse influence of in - laws, religious affiliation, and educational attainment (Goode, 1993; Reiners, 2003; Arugu, 2014).

In Zimbabwe, the harsh socioeconomic environment prevailing is one of the major reasons behind the increasing levels of divorce cases. Pastors and professional marriage counselors continue to be approached by troubled couples during times of marital challenges. Though religious institutions play a pivotal role in maintaining marital stability, locally there isn't much literature looking at divorce and remarriage from a religious perspective. The majority of the research literature is biased towards professional marriage counseling thus taking a psychological perspective. It is in light of this observation, that this study has been partly necessitated as it is hoped that its findings will significantly help expand this lacking body of knowledge (Local Sources of literature on Divorce and Remarriage).

Like many other religious institutions of the Christian community in Zimbabwe, the BICC has also been affected by the issue of divorce and remarriage. From the year 1898 when the BICC in Zimbabwe was established, the church has held at high esteem the institution of marriage as

evidenced by its inclusion within the church constitution. It is this constitution that clearly articulates the standing of the church on marriage, divorce and remarriage. The following clause from Article XVI of the constitution implies that marriage is for lifetime and therefore nothing other than death can dissolve it: “Marriage is an inseparable union between husband and wife divinely instituted by God... severed only by the death of either partner” (BICC Zimbabwe, 2013: 13). The various BICC Zimbabwe branches are therefore expected to subscribe to the above constitutional guidelines on marriage, the Bulawayo Central branch included. However, on the ground it seems some congregants at BICC Bulawayo Central have been married, divorced and remarried.

Necessitating this study was the observation that, though Holy Scriptures and the BICC constitution are explicitly against divorce, still some of the married BICC Bulawayo Central congregants are divorcing and remarrying (BICC Bulawayo Central, 2016). Furthermore, some of the very divorced and remarried individuals continue to serve in church positions of authority whilst others of a similar status are denied the opportunity to serve in the same positions. This has led to the disgruntlement and the subsequent exodus of a significant number of divorced and remarried congregants to other churches. It is these observations that then necessitated this study as the researcher sought to understand perceptions, attitudes and awareness of the congregants on the issue of divorce and remarriage. Divorce and remarriage is an issue that can destabilize the religious institutions if its causes and effects are not understood well.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the Holy Scriptures (Malachi 2:14-16 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11) and the BICC Constitution (2013), divorce and remarriage is unacceptable yet the BICC Bulawayo Central community continues to engage in it as evidenced by church records. Furthermore, some of the very divorced and remarried individuals hold positions of authority in the church whilst others of a similar status are denied the opportunity to serve in the same positions. Therefore inconsistencies exist in the application of the Holy Scriptures and the BICC Constitution with regards to divorce and remarriage.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 Aim

To find solutions to the inconsistencies in BICC – Bulawayo Central in handling divorce and remarriage cases, by tracing the history of the Brethren In Christ Church, highlighting the Brethren In Christ Church teachings on divorce and remarriage and also analyzing the Brethren In Christ Church’s current practices.

1.4 Objectives

1. To provide a history of the BICC.
2. To provide the BICC teaching on divorce and remarriage.
3. To ascertain the level of awareness of the BICC congregants concerning the Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry.
4. To look at the current BICC practices on marriage, divorce and remarriage.
5. To provide solutions on handling of divorce and remarriage cases.

1.5 Research Questions

In the study the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the awareness levels of the BICC congregants concerning the Scriptural instruction on divorce and remarriage?
2. What are the perceptions of the BICC congregants on the Scriptural instruction on divorce and remarriage?
3. What are the awareness levels of BICC congregants concerning the Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry?
4. What are the BICC congregants’ attitudes towards the Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry?

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Theoretical framework

This study is largely based on puritanism as a framework. The theoretical framework impacts on the way in which knowledge in the study will be studied and interpreted. It is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research.

The basis for the Puritan beliefs was an emphasis on the righteousness and sovereignty of God. They believed that God directed all things by exercise of his will and directed all things to an intelligent end. This differed from the Catholic point of view that priests were holier than the rest of the congregation. The Puritan Doctrines emphasized on the aspect of purity. They believed that all people are sinners because Adam sinned, every human is born a sinner and that God who is always merciful has chosen to save a few. God knows everything, he knows who will be saved and in heaven who will be thrown into hell. However, according to the puritan doctrines a person does not know for sure if he or she is saved. They believed that redemption required a preliminary consciousness of one's own sinful nature. What can simply be defined as self-examination and a conscious awareness on doing what is good all the time.

Puritans were continuously examining their lives, especially their thoughts and predispositions, to see if they indicated whether they might be saved. They believed that all were sinners. The puritans believed that everyone had to live strictly according to holy-scriptures in every aspect of their lives.

In light of the current focus on divorce and remarriage, likewise the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) congregants who can be likened to the Puritans similar to most Christian churches worldwide also strongly believe in commitment to the bible's teachings. The Word of God is very clear on the terms of marriage and divorce. Marriage is a covenant commitment which should never be broken. Has not the LORD made them one? . . . Do not break faith with the wife of thine youth (Malachi 2 v 15).

Obedience to the Word of God on the question of marriage does not lead to divorce. What God has joined together let no man put asunder (Mark 10 v 9). However, it is quite shocking to not that in reality the BICC Congregants who are likened to the puritans seek divorce and remarry. Every institution set up by God must be practised in consistency to God's word. Marriage is an

institution of God, and so all Christians who get married are supposed to be married according to the very terms of God's covenant. Why then do some of the BICC congregants seek divorce and remarry? All this suggests that couples seeking divorce may appear not living by the Christian principles of purity and adherence to the word of God.

1.6.2 Research design

A research design is a plan on how the research is to be conducted. Parahoo (1997) describes a research design as a plan that describes how, when and where data is to be collected and analyzed. Burns and Grove (2003) defined a research design as a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings. In simpler terms the research design generally provides the guidelines to heading the research in the right way.

This explorative study adopted the use of a survey because it is suitable for describing opinions, attitudes feelings and perceptions of a well-defined group and population. The descriptive research design was used in this research study because of its effectiveness in getting descriptions, opinions, emotions and feelings from the populace. The researcher designated a sample from a populace of BICC Bulawayo Central congregants.

This research study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. As Philip (1998) argues, employing a range of methodological strategies means that the researcher does not necessarily privilege a particular way of looking at the social world. Methodological multiplicity encourages different voices to be heard and facilitates the exploration of different truths (Seale, 2004).

Quantitative research presents statistical results represented by numerical or statistical data, while qualitative research presents data as descriptive narration with words and attempts to understand phenomena in the natural settings. To supplement the quantitative data analysis, qualitative methods were used. According to Cresswell (1994) a qualitative research design is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a social holistic picture formed with words, reporting and a detailed view of informants conducted in a natural setting. Berg (2004) argued that qualitative research provides a good framework to understand social and psychological phenomena of social settings of individuals which proves to

be the need in the study to understand individual opinion on divorce and remarriage in religious institutions.

1.6.3 Data Collection plan

Based on the scope of this research, which focused on making meaning the researcher selected the questionnaire as the primary data collection vehicle. The researcher also used focus group discussions and individual interviews as a data collection method. These research designs allowed the participants to expressively point out their views, feelings, beliefs, and opinions on the issue under discussion.

Purposive sampling was used to select and distribute questionnaires to 160 participants matching the sample category. The major advantage of using the purposive sampling was that it allowed for the efficient allocation and use of resources that were available as key informants were targeted. Having distributed the questionnaires, the researcher also interviewed 9 divorcees, 7 married individuals, 5 unmarried individuals, 11 remarried and fifteen individuals who represented the church. Creswell (1998) observed that the use of different sources, methods, research tools, and theories helps provide corroborating evidence.

In an endeavor to reach the ideal candidates for the study, different Sundays were targeted by the researcher in case the candidates were not available some of the days. Questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher for chosen participants to complete. Advantages of using the questionnaires were that the questionnaires increased the prospect of anonymity as the subjects' names were not required hence individuals did not feel exposed on sensitive issues and were free to express themselves in whatever way they wished without fear of being judged.

The researcher however completed two questionnaires for two old members who had challenges with reading and writing for themselves. Data was collected over a period of three months.

Generally it is relatively quick to collect information using a questionnaire (Milne 1999). Most of the questions in the questionnaires were closed making it easier to compare the respondent's reactions to each item. More so, the use of focus group interviews and individual interviews allowed the respondents to explicitly air out their views.

1.6.3 Significance of the Study

Numerous studies exploring the issue of divorce and marriage have been carried out, however largely predisposed to the Western world. For example a study by Glemn and Supancic (1984) study on the correlation between religious attendance and divorce, Amato (2000) study on divorce stress adjustment to name but a few. In the area of divorce and remarriage, the study is one of the few conducted in the local setup and indeed the first of its kind to be conducted at the BICC Bulawayo Central. The BICC is a large religious institution in Zimbabwe which has a long history and has members from different parts of the country with different backgrounds. It is from this perspective that the researcher believed that this research is of paramount importance to the BICC and the Christian community at large.

The BICC Bulawayo Central is the primary beneficiary of the study since the study was aimed at analyzing the congregants' awareness, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on the biblical and organizational principles on divorce and remarriage. Thus, the study would help the church to establish what the congregants think about divorce and remarriage and how these issues have affected them as well as the church. It is hoped that the research findings would provide data useful in aligning the BICC practices in a manner that best deals with the issues surrounding divorce and remarriage. It is also anticipated that the research will break the silence and offer insight into these sensitive and controversial issues.

The researcher anticipated that the study findings will prompt church leaders from the various BICC branches, especially African congregations, to endorse sound scriptural doctrines and practices that effectively address the issues surrounding divorce and remarriage. The aim of the study is to provide empirical basis for addressing the divorce and remarriage quandary in the church so as to effectively advance the kingdom of God without much hindrance, particularly in the context of the developing world. Furthermore, this study was expected to contribute to

knowledge in the field of Theology regarding divorce and remarriage, particularly within Africa where similar studies were scanty.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

1.7.1 The researcher assumes that all congregants subscribe to the Holy Scriptures as their standard instruction of faith.

1.7.2 The researcher also assumes that the research subjects would respond objectively in spite of the subject of enquiry being both controversial and sensitive.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Marriage

- Marriage is a union between a man and a woman that lasts the duration of the man's life and the woman's life (Obi 2001)
- Marriage is viewed as a lifetime commitment which no human being should by any means break, whilst on the other hand, according to the state laws marriage is viewed as a union undeniably requiring commitment but however separable and subject to termination whenever its participants desire to.

1.8.2 Divorce

- Divorce is a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved in other words, divorce is a permanent separation of married people as a result of unexpected marriage outcome (Grath 2001).

1.8.3 Remarriage

- Marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman that lasts the duration of the man's life and the woman's life, as well as a social structure that promotes an association and agreement between two families (Obi 2001). Remarriage that takes place after a previous marital union has been terminated.

1.8.4 Congregation

- A group of people joined together for religious worship (Oxford Dictionary 1911).

1.8.5 Congregants

- According to the concise oxford dictionary (1911) congregants are worshippers following a particular group or fellowship.

1.9 Justification of the study

The motivation for the study stems from the researchers' role as a minister in the BICC. The researcher observed that the church was losing quite a significant number of divorced and remarried congregants to other churches.

The main concern for the researcher is to establish if congregants are aware of the Biblical instruction and the BICC Constitutional policy on divorce and remarriage. Furthermore, some of the very divorced and remarried individuals continue to serve in church positions of authority whilst others of a similar status are denied the opportunity to serve in the same positions, leading to a disgruntlement and the subsequent exodus of a significant number of divorced and remarried congregants to other churches. It is hoped that the study will therefore prompt the church to look deeply into the issues surrounding divorce and remarriage hence come up with strategies to curb the current challenges.

Though religious institutions play a pivotal role in maintaining marital stability, locally there isn't much literature looking at divorce and remarriage from a religious perspective. The majority of the research literature is biased towards professional marriage counseling thus taking a psychological perspective. It is in light of this observation, that this study has been partly necessitated as it is hoped that its findings will significantly help expand local sources of literature on divorce and remarriage.

1.10 Literature Review

To understand the concept of divorce and remarriage one has to firstly understand the concept of marriage on its own.

There are different types of marriage. There are three types of marriage in Zimbabwe. These are civil marriage, registered customary marriage and unregistered customary marriages. Customary marriages are traditional ones (Chidavaenzi 2015). Supported by tradition and culture so much importance is attached to the institution of marriage such that unmarried men or women are considered as incomplete. In a newspaper article (Financial Gazette 2012) the importance of marriage is noted as the writer asserts that in some circles in the Shona culture when a bachelor dies a rat is buried alongside the bachelor's body while a mortar and pestle are laid beside the body of a spinster. The rationale being that practice is that the deceased died in deprivation and the rat or a mortar were meant to neutralize potential danger caused by the spirit which may come back to seek retribution and affect those who look forward to marriage (Financial gazette 2012).

Myron (1992) argues that divorce and remarriage is a significant subject which many people as well as the church face. Adams (2015) in her study on divorce argues that divorce is not God's superlative. Marriage which was instituted by God is supposed to be a life time commitment. Keller (2006) notes that divorce is non-existent and incomprehensible to creation-marriage therefore remarriage after divorce is even more non-existent and more incomprehensible. He stands up to the view that any union of the married after divorce of a living partner is adultery. There is no salvation for someone who divorces and remarries.

In another study, Mackin (1984) argues that a husband who remarries after dismissing an adulterous wife and a husband who remarries after being abandoned by his wife or a woman who marries a man in either of these two cases should never be called an adulterer. According to (ibid) these are justified to divorce.

Previous studies reported that less religious people are more likely to divorce since religious people are more likely to have stronger moral beliefs in marriage (Guerrero et al 2007).

Husbands and wives in the early periods knew that marriage was sacred, indissoluble and stable. Christ said, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6). Oforchukwu (2000) observed that no couples have the right to discontinue the Christian relationship. This appears to be a common agreement among Christians on divorce. There is the view that divorce is not God's ideal because marriage, which was instituted by God, is supposed to be a life time

commitment. That is why a woman was created by God for a man with the desire that they will both keep their vows until death.

Mbiti (2007) argued that divorce is a delicate accident in marital relationships. According to (Ibid), what constitutes a divorce must be viewed against the fact that marriage is a process. In many societies that process is complete only when the first child is born, or when all the marriage presents that is the bride price popularly referred to as lobola/ roora have been paid. Once the full contract of marriage has been executed, it becomes difficult to dissolve the marriage union. It can be argued that, perhaps the most important factor in the increase of divorce cases throughout the twentieth century has been the greater social acceptance of divorce. In particular, this increased tolerance has resulted from relaxation of negative attitudes towards divorce among various religious denominations. Simply, divorce is now viewed as normal and no one seems to bother about the biblical perception towards divorce and remarriage.

Brewer (2006) in his studies on divorce and remarriage notes that the Bible is the word of God to all generations which has to be translated from the language of ancient civilization. He argues that divorce in itself is not sinful but breaking one's marriage vows is sinful. That is the reason why only victims of broken marriages may decide to divorce and that Paul allowed remarriage if only one was divorced against one's will. However, one may argue and say this view is debatable because divorce contradicts God's commandment and anything that contradicts God's commandment is a sin therefore divorce is equally sinful.

Helvetic (1536) argues that marriage has been instituted and prescribed by God for all men who are qualified and fit for it and who have not otherwise been called by God to live a chaste life outside marriage. Ibid goes on to say that no order or state is so holy and honorable that marriage would be opposed to it and should be forbidden. Marriages should be confirmed in the presence of the Church by a public exhortation and vow in keeping with its dignity, the government should also respect it and see to it that a marriage is legally and decently entered into and given legal and honorable recognition, and is not lightly dissolved without serious and legitimate grounds (Helvetic 1536).

Burge (1999) in his studies also highlights a very crucial passage in Matthew 19 v 3-12 where some Pharisees were testing Jesus' reading of the divorce law. Ibid notes that Jesus also defended

the permanence of marriage by appealing to Genesis that the "two shall become one flesh." To answer why Moses permitted divorce, Jesus replied "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for infidelity and marries commits adultery."(Mathew 19 v 8).

Oforchukwu (2000) in his article on divorce also observed that no couples have the right to discontinue the Christian relationship. During the nuptial exchange of vows, couples promise each other to remain in marriage for better or worse until death do they apart. This therefore suggests that one cannot remarry unless the other spouse passes away.

There are numerous factors which contribute to the breakdown of marriages. Some people have been married for the wrong reasons that is, to escape from uncomfortable home situations, for financial and emotional security, premarital pregnancy, romantic notions, unrealistic expectations to name but a few. Countless individuals have been pressured by friends and family into thinking that in order to be whole they must marry and have children. Some of these individuals may not have the interest or willingness to assume the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood and thus divorce lives in societies.

1.11 Scope of the Study

The research was carried out at the BICC Bulawayo Central branch. The study population was comprised of BICC Bulawayo Central congregation. The Bulawayo Central branch is the second biggest branch in Bulawayo with approximately six hundred congregants. However, it is important to note that this figure included children hence the need to identify a population of adults which the sample would be drawn. so as to come up with a representative sample, the researcher included unmarried, married, divorced, as well as remarried people. The main objective of the study was to find empirical evidence that would be used in the addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage at BICC in Zimbabwe.

1.12 Limitations of the Study

It would have been ideal to include the entire BICC adult community in the study. However, due to time and financial constraints, not all congregants could participate in the study given the enormity of their population and the limited time frame officially allocated for this research. Questionnaires were used as a main data collecting instrument to save time and financial costs. Time constraints were a major limiting factor especially in the area of data gathering and verification of the research findings considering the fact that the researcher was a fulltime employee and a student at the same time. The researcher made use of the available spare time and leave days to maximize on the time spent on the research.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a telescopic view of the actual study and highlighted the major aspects of the research project such as the conceptual and contextual research background, rationale, research boundaries and location of the study. The chapter began with the background to the study which focused on what inspired the researcher to embark on this particular kind of study and the manifestation of the research problem. In this case the research arose from the fact that there existed inconsistencies in the application of the Holy Scripture and BICC Constitutional instruction on the issue of divorce and remarriage at the BICC Bulawayo Central. This was to be done through analyzing the awareness, perceptions and attitudes of the BICC Bulawayo Central congregants concerning the Scriptural and Constitutional instruction on the issue of divorce and remarriage. The scope, limitations and assumptions of the study were also included in this chapter to shed more light on the confines, challenges of the study and the mitigation plans thereof. It was hoped that the findings would inform the BICC Bulawayo Central administration office with the aim realigning church practices to meet the standards prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and the Church Constitution. The following chapter focuses on the history of BICC focusing on the BICC in Zimbabwe.

Chapter two

History of the BICC

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the history of the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) tracing its roots from its conception in Europe up to its inception in Zimbabwe. It reveals who they are, how they came to be, leadership style, beliefs and values. A review of pre-existing research, church documentaries and materials contributed in building the foundation for the study. The chapter starts by describing the historical background of BICC backdating from the Europeans, further highlighting its development in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Origins and birth of the Brethren in Christ Church

2.2.1 An overview

The Brethren in Christ Church is an Anabaptist Christian denomination with roots centered in the Mennonite church, Pietism and Wesleyan holiness (BICC history 2012). The Brethren in Christ have also been identified as the River Brethren and the River Mennonites. Outsiders often referred to them as the River Brethren with their Pietists' ways since they occupied space alongside the Susquehanna River for the greater part of their lives. In about a 100 years later, the Brethren in Christ adopted aspects of the Wesleyan thought, which were also incorporated into the subsequent doctrinal statements.

2.2.1 Anabaptism

The Brethren in Christ Church origins can be traced back from a group referred to as the River Brethren originating from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania around 1778.

Gingerich (1994) supports the fact that the founders of the Brethren in Christ Church in both Canada and the United States were unmistakably influenced by Wesleyan and Pietistic conceptions of the Christian life and ministry. According to (Ibid), even though they ate selectively at the smorgasbord of Protestant spiritual renewal, the weight gain was profound.

The Brethren in Christ infused life into the Mennonite faith by also adopting the Wesleyan doctrines (Gingerich 1994) of sanctification and experimental religion. They also embraced

Pietistic ideas of improved Bible knowledge, missionary work, institution building, and a more personal faith.

The first Brethren in Christ church members called themselves simply the Brethren. The name Brethren in Christ was adopted during the American Civil War, when the Union government of the United States made it a mandate that they register as a body that held non-resistance values. Jacob Engle is believed to be one of the first leaders and sometimes considered as the founder of the BIC Church.

By 1788, a group of the Brethren immigrated to Canada and became known there as the *Tunkers* a reference to their practice of baptism from the German word “dunkers” which meant to dip. Up to the 1930s in spite of the new name, the American denomination was continuously referred to as the River Brethren while the Canadian denomination was still referred to as the Dunkers or Tunkers.

The Anabaptists influence on the Brethren in Christ Church theological traits is evident mostly on their emphasis on the importance of a personal responsibility towards one's own faith, serving compassionately, humility and pursuing peace which are all current church practices.

For more than 200 years, the Brethren in Christ church members have expressed an understanding of living in relationship to Jesus shaped by these renewal movements. What began in the 1750's in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has since spread across North America and, through an overwhelming receptivity to our missionaries, around the world.

2.2.2 Wesleyan holiness

The Brethren in Christ Church members have also been greatly influenced by the teachings of the eighteenth-century British scholar and missionary, John Wesley. The Wesleyan movement in America also known as the Holiness movement placed emphasis on the aspect of change to show that one has accepted God. They also believed in empowerment through the Holy Spirit and a continuous growth in holiness.

2.2.3 Pietism

The Brethren in Christ also draw a portion of identity from a group of German believers who in the seventeenth century rejected the overly intellectualized expression of the Christian faith that had become popular within certain segments of the church (BICC History 2012). Pietism is a Christian theological tradition stressing on the need for a heart-felt faith.

The Brethren in Christ Church, Messiah College's founding denomination, has its roots in the Pietist tradition. According to Kreida and Shrag (1987), at around 1775 the denomination's founders who were a part of the Lancaster County Mennonites responded enthusiastically to passing by missionaries who were preaching a Pietist message. The Pietists stressed the importance of genuine conversion and a warm, personal experience of renewed life in Christ (Ibid). Pietistic ideas were centered on improved Bible knowledge, missionary work, institution building, and a more personal faith. In that way, the beginnings of the Brethren in Christ Church can be seen as a marriage of Anabaptism and Pietism (Kraider and Shrag 1987).

This awakening experience swept through Europe and into America. For the Brethren in Christ Church members, the Christian faith is a relationship with God that is to be enjoyed with the heart, even as it is affirmed with the head.

2.3 Historical background of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe

The Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe was established in 1898 by missionaries from the United States of America who had decided to launch mission work (BICC World Missions, 2012).

Ever since its commencement, the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) placed emphasis on sharing the Good News about Jesus. In 1898, the church launched foreign mission work. Kraider and Shrag (1987) note that in 1898 the church sent a party of five, led by Bishop Jesse Engle, to southern Africa and in particular to the area that was the home of the Ndebele people. The missionaries were welcomed well and Cecil Rhodes granted them 3,000 acres of land in the Matopo Hills in what is now Matabeleland South Province marking the beginning of the Brethren in Christ fellowship in Zimbabwe. Two of the first missionaries left in 1906 to begin a new work in what is now Zambia.

In addition to Matopo, similar missionary stations were established in Mtshabezi in the year 1904, Wanezi in the year 1924, and Pumula in the year 1959. In order to build a self-sustaining national church, the first African Conference was held in 1919, the first three African overseers were appointed in 1921 and the first deacons were elected in 1922.

From the commencement of the Brethren in Christ Christian work in Zimbabwe, Christ centered education was given preference (Kreider and Shrag 1987). Within three months of the missionaries' arrival, a primary school was opened at Matopo. In a little while a boy's boarding school was also built at Matopo and then a school for girls in Mtshabezi. All pupils were taught basic subjects such as language, arithmetic, health and hygiene. Practical subjects were also taught. Male pupils learnt brickmaking, gardening and carpentry while the female pupils were taught home economics, gardening to name but a few. Undisputedly, all these efforts enhanced growth of the church with more and more congregants coming in to send their children to the schools.

In addition to the Matopo training institute, in 1948 a Bible School was opened in Wanezi although it was later moved to Mtshabezi and upgraded to a Bible institute popularly known as Ekuphileni Bible Institute (EBI). The Bible school provided and up to today still provides pastoral training at the secondary and post-secondary levels. According to Kreider and Shrag (1987), pastors who could not become full-time students received further training through theological education by extension). Some of the African church leaders studied at Messiah College, Grantham and while some studied even in non-Brethren in Christ Bible colleges and seminaries.

According to the BICC History (2012) ,up to the 1960s the North American Brethren in Christ Mission Board administered the work in Northern Rhodesia currently referred to as Zambia and Southern Rhodesia what is now known as Zimbabwe as one church body. It was only after 1960 that churches in each area became independent self-governing bodies (Kreider and Shrag 1987).

Khumalo, Philemon M. was the first African elected as bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe serving in the years 1970-1979 (BICC History 2012). He was then succeeded by Ndlovu Stephen N. These two men competently guided the church in Zimbabwe throughout the period of guerrilla warfare, 1970-1980. Under their leadership, church membership increased

from 3,726 to 9,255 in 1987(Kreider and Schrag 1987). In 2003 there were 272 congregations with 29,000 members as affirmed by (Ibid).

The church exists to build the community of believers who worship God and share the Good news about Christ (Brethren in Christ, 2015). The church in Zimbabwe affiliates with the Africa Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Fellowship, the Christian Council of Zimbabwe, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, and the Mennonite World Conference.

2.4 Beliefs of the BICC

The church's current Articles of Faith and Doctrine were adopted in 1986. Just like the first Brethren in Christ Church members, all BICCs emphasize the understanding of the inspired scriptures by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the centrality of Christ in the divine revelation, the necessity of holiness, nonviolence and the importance of shared understanding. The church believes that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit reveals Himself through the divine record of scripture, and that salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is received through the response of personal faith and repentance (BICC History 2012). Baptism by triune immersion and the Lord's Supper are considered ordinances of the church. Foot washing, the dedication of children, prayer for the sick, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil are important accepted practices, but are not called ordinances (Ibid).

2.5 Core Values of the Brethren in Christ

The Brethren in Christ manual of doctrine and government together with other publications of the church explain more fully on the Brethren in Christ understanding of biblical devotion and the Christian life.

The BICC values the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build their lives on its truth, integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance (BICC history 2012).

The BICC also values whole hearted obedience to Christ Jesus through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit and they confess dependence on God for everything. The BICC also strive for a deeper our relationship with God by living prayerful lives.

Following its values on integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love and acceptance the church has in place different groups to try and ensure stable homes and relations.

2.6 Leadership and the organizational Structure

The church organizational structure shows that there are local congregations which are led by pastors who report to the local main committees. The district or regional conferences are led by overseers who report to the district committees, whereas the executive board which is chaired by the bishop reports to the general conference. The general conference is the final decision making board of the church as shown in the chart below.

Fig 2.1 BICC Organizational Structure



The structure above with local congregants at the core of it all is used to discuss issues and matters of concern arising within the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe.

The BIC church maintains some connection to its Mennonite-influenced heritage by partnering in ministry with the Mennonite Central Committee. The church organization is divided into regional conferences, each represented by a bishop who sits on the Leadership Council and one sub conference.

2.6.1 Local Congregations

Local congregations form the core of the Brethren in Christ Church. These are individual churches that carry the name of the Brethren in Christ. According to the BICC history (2012) it is the responsibility of each local congregation to encourage believers through fellowship, worship, discipleship and evangelism ministries to build God's Kingdom. Accordingly, the local congregations are expected to give loyal support to the programs of the General Church and General conferences.

2.6.2 Regional Conferences

There are several Regional conferences that have been established in both the United States and the African states. This is to facilitate a more efficient way of carrying out the work and plans of the General church throughout the far reaching geography. Boards of directors within the Regional Conferences are granted authority by the General conference which as the final decision making board have the final authority in decisions made, to recommend ministry plans for their regions, to act as trustees for conference property and to provide for inspirational and promotional activities as deemed advisable (BICC History 2012). Each regional conference hosts an annual meeting, patterned after the biennial General Conference.

2.6.3 Leadership council

This body comprises of the moderator or general secretary, bishops from the regional conferences and executive directors of ministry units of the General Conference. It is responsible for the management of the wider church, including administrative duties of the general conference, coordination of all General church boards and implementation of the policies of the General church to serve the regions and conferences.

2.6.4 General Conference Board

This board comprises of the General church leaders, the treasurer, a member from each Regional Conference, seven people that reflect the diversity of the wider church at least four of whom are

laypersons and any other person approved by the general conference. The board's major task is to guide the General Conferences.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The Brethren in Christ Church has its headquarters in Pennsylvania. Preaching and teaching in BIC Churches was largely shaped by three emphases within the wider Christian community which are Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism. The BICC in North America is the mother church. The BICC values the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build their lives on its truth, integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance. The BICC also values whole hearted obedience to Jesus Christ. Having looked at the history of the BICC and having gained a deeper understanding on who they are, how they came to be and knowing their beliefs and values, the next chapter shall reveal the BICC teachings on marriage, divorce and remarriage

Chapter Three

BICC teaching on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the historical background, beliefs and values of the Brethren in Christ Church, this chapter reviews the BICC teachings on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Though marriage ideally was designed by God to last a life time, it has been reduced to a temporary and terminable social contract. This chapter also brings to light the Biblical instruction on marriage, divorce and remarriage. It also brings to light the BICC perceptions on the Biblical instruction on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

3.2 An overview of marriage, divorce and remarriage

Ephesians 5 reveals the sacredness of marriage when the union between Christ and the Church is used to illustrate the husband-wife relationship. However, in spite of the significance of marriage, every society is faced with situations in which marriage fails and the couples cannot tolerate living together (Arugugu 2014). The consequences of this is divorce.

Divorce can simply be defined as the separation of a married couple. Grath (1981) defined divorce as a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved. It is merely a legal and formal dissolution of a marriage. On the other hand, marriage is the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship. Remarriage is being joined in marriage for the second time after a divorce.

There are different types of marriage. In Zimbabwe, there are three types of marriage namely, civil marriage, registered customary marriage and unregistered customary marriages. Customary marriages are traditional ones (Chidavaenzi 2015). Supported by tradition and culture, so much importance is attached to the institution of marriage that unmarried man or women are considered as incomplete.

Monogamy is a form of marriage in which an individual chooses and is permitted by law to have only one spouse at any given point in time. This means that a man will only have one wife, while

a woman will have one husband. Under Zimbabwean law, this marriage is provided for in the Marriages Act [Chapter 5:11].

Remarriage is a reality in our societies. Some believe that abuse, neglect childlessness, adultery, quarrels, and inadequate financial support care are a justification for divorce. Several divorcees remarry to fix themselves and to heal from the emotional stress caused by their previous marriages. This decision attracts different reactions from different religious groups within the society. Most Christians do not like the idea of remarriage based on the reasons that divorce is regarded as a sin and anyone who divorces a spouse and marries another man or woman commits adultery.

Church today must do everything in its power to encourage and maintain the institution of marriage according to the Biblical instruction as stated in the Holy Scriptures (The General Assembly 1986 statement on marriage, divorce and remarriage). It can be argued that, perhaps an increase in divorce rates throughout the twentieth century can be attributed to a greater social acceptance of divorce. In particular, this increased tolerance can be said to be a result of a relaxation of negative attitudes toward divorce amongst religious denominations.

3.3 The Biblical Instruction on marriage, divorce and remarriage

Couples in the early periods knew that marriage was sacred, indissoluble, and stable. Christ said, “What God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19v 6). Oforchukwu (2000) observed that no couples have the right to discontinue the Christian relationship. During the marriage ceremony, couples exchange vows promising each other to remain in marriage in good times and in bad times until death does them apart. According to the Biblical instruction, marriage is for life.

In the Christian world, marriage is supposed to be a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman to live their life together till death does them apart. It is the uniting of two people one male and one female into one flesh as affirmed by the biblical scripture (Genesis 2 v 24) “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.”

Every institution set up by God must be practiced in consistency to God's word. Marriage is an institution of God and so all Christians who get married are supposed to be married according to the very terms of God's covenant. Oforchukwu (2000) observed that no couples have the right to discontinue the Christian relationship. This appears to be a common agreement among Christians on divorce. There is the view that divorce is not God's ideal because marriage, which was instituted by God, is supposed to be a life time promise. That is why a woman was created by God for a man with the desire that they will both keep their vows until death.

Individuals who remarry after being divorced other than on scriptural grounds are guilty before God of adultery as reflected in Matthew 5v 32 (NIV) "But I tell you anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness causes her to become an adulteress and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." This scripture therefore suggests that when an adulterous relationship has brought about a divorce, the party who is innocent of adultery has a right to remarry however, divorce is not stipulated under the scriptural exemptions in a sin in God's eyes.

3.4 BICC teachings on marriage

Marriage is imperative to our nature as human beings in society. God himself established the act of marriage by creating and bringing the first man and woman together at the dawn of human creation. Thus marriage is a sacred covenant regulated by the higher moral law of God and is witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself. According to Obi (1990) marriage is a union between a man and a woman that lasts the duration of the man's life and the woman's life, as well as a social structure that promotes an association and agreement between two families.

The subject of marriage is of immense importance to the Brethren in Christ Church. Marriage is viewed as divinely instituted and regulated by the authority of God's word contained in the Holy Bible. "...from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female... and for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be united to his wife and the two shall be one flesh" (Mark chapter 10 verses 6- 8).

Every institution set up by God must be practiced in consistency to God's word. Marriage is an institution of God, and so all Christians who get married are supposed to be married according to the very terms of God's covenant. Couples seeking divorce appear not to be living by the Christian principles of purity and adherence to the word of God.

According to the BICC constitution (2014) marriage is an inseparable union between husband and wife divinely instituted by God. Based on the Holy Scriptures, the church teaches that a woman is bound to her husband for as long as he lives. The church emphasizes on the proper application of the doctrine in all aspects of the people's lives therefore, according to the church practices obedience to the word of God on the question of marriage does not lead to divorce. This is further emphasized in the scripture (Mark 10 v 9) stating that what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

The BICC emphasizes on the aspect of love to build a strong lasting home. There are several essential ingredients for a healthy Christian marriage. These include trust, support, respect, inclusive decision-making, commitment, dedication and allegiance. In a sense, these are the conditions within which it is possible for two people to easily grow and remain together for eternity. Within these conditions, each partner is free to talk about the problems that infringe the marriage relationship. Be it over finances, role expectations, differing value systems, and the impingement of external personnel and happenings upon their lives. Sprinkle (1997) also affirms this view by noting that marriage is a covenant. A covenant is intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman (Sprinkle 1997).

Based on the biblical scriptures Genesis 2 v 24 and Malachi 2 v 14, the Brethren in Christ Church believes that marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman. It is holy and monogamous and it involves a lifelong commitment, a sincere, focused, willful, binding promise made before God, a man, and a woman (BICC Constitution 2014). When we view marriage as a covenantal relationship, the legal implications of a divorce are ultimately of lesser consequence. If a couple determines that divorce is the only solution to their marital stress, the civil law provides the means for this for the church is merely there to offer a certificate.

Furthermore, the state governs laws concerning divorce and remarriage. The Christian community needs to understand that this law can deal only with the civil contract and not with

the implications of a broken covenant. We must realize that there are binding aspects of the covenant that will always be with those who entered into the relationship. There is no way to withdraw the effect one person has had and continues to have upon another and in this sense there is no such thing as divorce.

Marriage vows are affirmed and the marriage is celebrated in the context of the congregation which is called to support the couple in their life together. We believe that husband and wife are to follow Christ's covenantal self-sacrificing love for the church and the church's' loving response to build a strong family (BICC constitution 2014). "Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5 v 25)."

The BICC encourages congregants to marry believers as stated in the Biblical scriptures (Romans 7v 2 and 2 Corinthians 6 V 14).

"Do not be held together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness."

3.5 Divorce

In spite of the importance of marriage ideally designed by God to be a lifetime commitment, it has been reduced to a temporary and terminable social contract. Society is faced with situations in which marriage fails and the couples cannot put up with each other. Divorce is viewed as the best if not only option. As defined in the earlier chapters divorce is a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved. In other words, divorce is a permanent separation of married people as a result of unexpected marriage outcome (Grath 2001).

The Brethren in Christ Church discourages divorce with a strong teaching on the holiness and permanence of marriage. This viewpoint is clearly more stringent than the permissive attitude of society in general and the judicial system's views on divorce and remarriage. This strong sensation of the church against divorce is taken from the scriptural guideline that "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2v 16) and that no one should separate two people joined together in holy matrimony (Matthew 19v 6). The covenant of marriage between a man and a woman is intended by God to be life long and is not to be lightly broken.

According to the BICC teachings, marriage is an inseparable union between husband and wife divinely instituted by God. However, the Brethren In Christ Church acknowledges the fact that the state is governed by laws that allow for divorce and remarriage. The Ministry of Justice allows divorce if there are genuine reasons from the parties. The Marriages Courts grants such people with divorce certificates, and they are allowed to remarry and continue with life. Never can the church assume that couples will remain married because of the expectations of the society, family and the church. Married couples are most likely to stay together simply because the relationship is pleasing to them as a couple and as individuals.

Open communication is encouraged between that person experiencing a divorce and the appropriate congregational and or district committees. A faithful spouse is given permission to divorce a mate for marital unfaithfulness. Sexual infidelity is an act that automatically breaks the marriage covenant (BICC Policy 2014). Jesus said in Matthew 5v 32 and again in Matthew 19 v 9 that a person is not to divorce his mate except for the cause of fornication. The Greek word used for fornication refers to routine sexual immorality which violates the marriage relationship.

In the event that a couple divorces, how the church handle's those who have divorced and demonstrate repentance will be in the church's statements of practice BICC Statement of practice (2014). Taken from the Holy Scriptures (1 Timothy 5 V 14), "I counsel young widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slender" young widows are encouraged to remarry if they so wish.

3.6 Remarriage

Marriage is designed to be permanent until the death of one of the partners. By law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage (Romans 7v 2). Nowadays, more and more marriages are falling apart, hence divorce and remarriage are becoming increasingly common. If couples who live together without the formality of a registered marriage contract and then separate are counted, half the marriages that take place today in North America fail.

Remarriage is not a right granted even by Scripture except in the case of a person whose spouse has committed adultery. According to (Matt 19 v 6) so they are no longer two but one flesh.

What God has joined together let no man separate. This view suggests that marriage is generally designed to be permanent between two people.

However, remarriage is granted in the biblical scripture (1 Corinthians 7v 39) “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord.”

The Brethren in Christ Church also teaches that persons who remarry after being divorced on other than scriptural grounds are guilty before God of adultery based on Jesus teaching, in Matthew 5v 32. “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.”

A believer who knowingly secures a divorce on other than scriptural grounds, or a believer who knowingly marries someone who was divorced on other than scriptural grounds, or a believer whose divorce was granted on other than scriptural grounds and who remarries, should step down from church activities

3.7 Treatment of the divorced and remarried congregants

According to the BICC constitution, divorce is not allowed. A woman is bound to her husband for as long as he lives. But if her husband dies she is free to marry anyone she wishes but he must believe in the Lord. From this view point therefore, anyone who remarries while their former spouse is still alive goes against the church constitution. Anyone who goes against the constitution loses their full church membership. They are not treated as full BICC members.

Offenders are expected to step down from any leadership positions if they are serving in any posts. Depending on cases sometimes the offenders are also suspended from church activities and treated like non church members until death. There is lack of understanding & discrimination of divorcees and those who have remarried resulting in disunity, some members leaving the church, while some remain to be a wounded community within the church. allowed participation in church services such as leading in songs, praying, and teaching, preaching and serving in church committees. phenomenal

Occasions occur when those who are in leadership positions go against the church policy and must be confronted regarding their responsibilities to the church.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Marriage is seen as an epitome of a Christian couple and is meant to last a lifetime. Though marriage was designed by God to last a life time, humankind has reduced it to a temporary and terminable social contract. BICC teachings on marriage divorce and remarriage are in accordance with the Biblical Instruction on the subject. The Brethren in Christ Church discourages divorce with a strong teaching on the holiness and permanence of marriage. The church emphasizes on the proper application of the doctrine in all aspects of the people's lives therefore, according to the church practices obedience to the word of God on the question of marriage does not lead to divorce. However, the church also accepts that the state is governed by laws no longer can the church assume that couples will remain married because of the expectations of the family, church, and community. Current state laws allow for divorce and remarriage. Married couples are most likely to stay together simply because the relationship is pleasing to them as a couple and as individuals.

Chapter Four

Current Practises of the Brethren In Christ Church

4.1 Introduction

This chapter forms an integral part of the study as it brings out practices of the Brethren in Christ Church prevailing on the issue of divorce and remarriage as depicted from the sample obtained. It presents analyses and discusses the data collected. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The study covers response rate, general information and demographics before dwelling on research objectives. The data addresses the responses of pastors, singles, married, divorced and remarried BICC Bulawayo Central congregants who served as respondents for the case study. The presentation of results and discussion was done in line with the earlier specified objectives. The chapter shall be concluded by a chapter summary.

4.2.0 An overview

The study was conducted in one of the Brethren In Christ Church branches in Zimbabwe known as BICC Bulawayo Central as indicated in the earlier chapters. Response rate was highly amazing therefore making it easy to generalise the results to the whole population.

4.2.1 Current practises of the Brethren In Christ Church

In a bid to gain a deeper and actual understanding of the church's current practises when it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage, the researcher from a population of 500 people purposively administered 150 questionnaires to selected unmarried, married, divorced and remarried subjects.

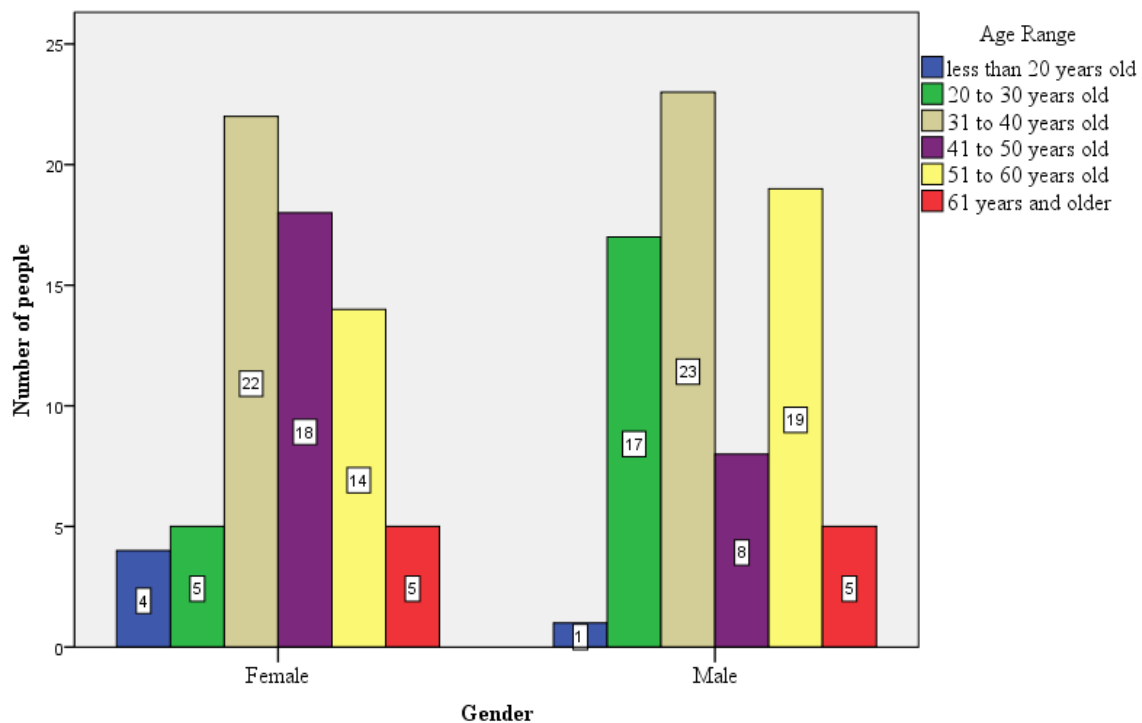
To supplement data from the questionnaires, focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted with a few selected unmarried, married, divorced and remarried BICC Bulawayo Central congregants at the church premises. These were highly a success as they gave an in depth insight into the subject of divorce and remarriage. It reflected on the congregant's feelings towards the issue of divorce and remarriage and the constitutional treatment of the BICC divorced and remarried congregants.

4.2.2 Demographic Information

Demographics were important to ensure that there was a fair representation of subjects according to gender, age and sex.

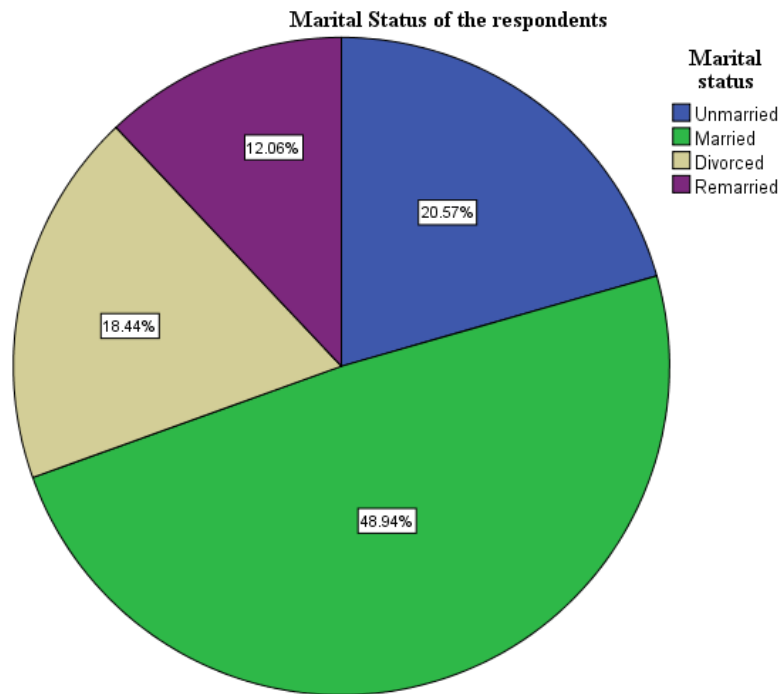
Fig 4.1 Gender of respondents

The bar graph below shows age range and gender of the respondents.



The graph shows that 68 of the participants who returned questionnaires are female while 73 were male this ensured a fair representation for the study. Having distributed 150 questionnaires only 141 were attended to as shown in the graph above. Therefore the study participants were 141 in total as shown in the bar graph above.

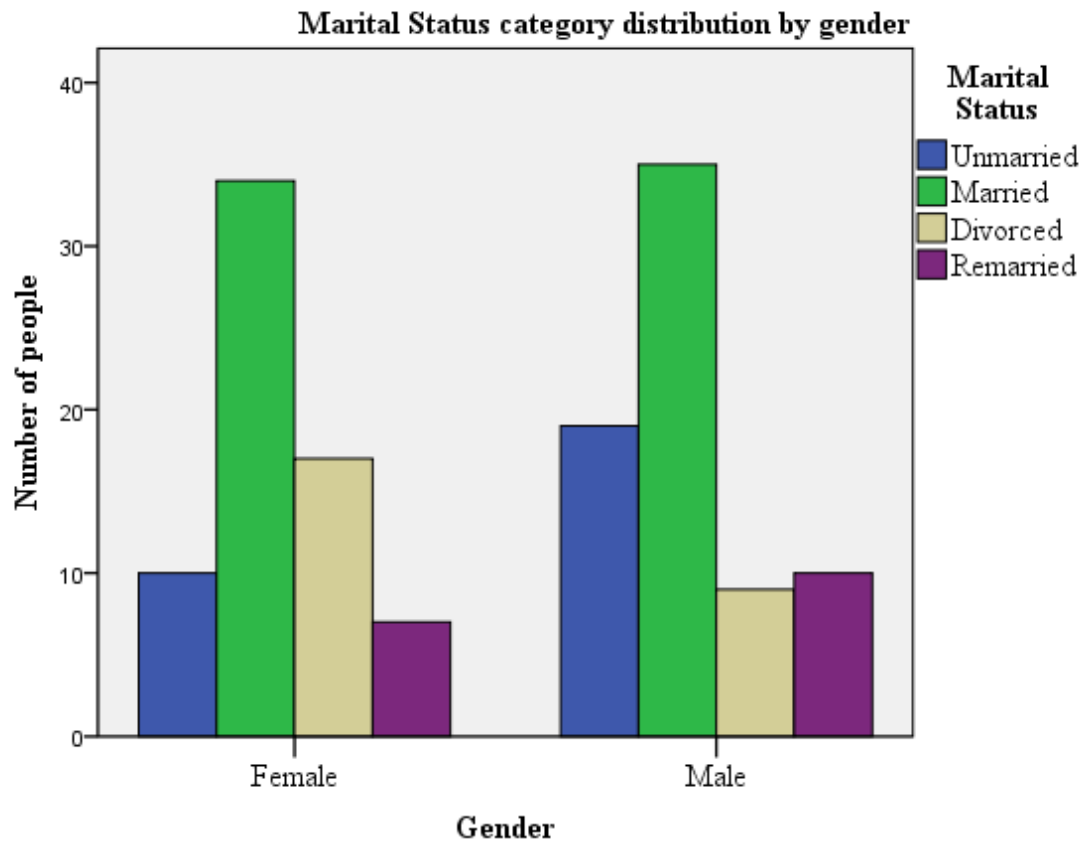
Fig 4.2 Marital Status of respondents



The pie chart shows that 21% of the respondents were unmarried while 49% were married, 19% divorced and 13% remarried what can be attributed as a fair representation of different categories. Data was thus gathered from almost every age group. This is significant in the sense that each age group might have different perceptions probably based on circumstances, experiences and or different kinds of exposure in life. This difference in social aspects will help the researcher to gain an even much broader understanding of the concept of divorce and remarriage.

Fig 4.3 Marital Status Category distribution by gender

The bar graph below shows the marital status category distribution of the respondents according to gender.



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Data Source: SPSS sample data file, Demo dat.sav

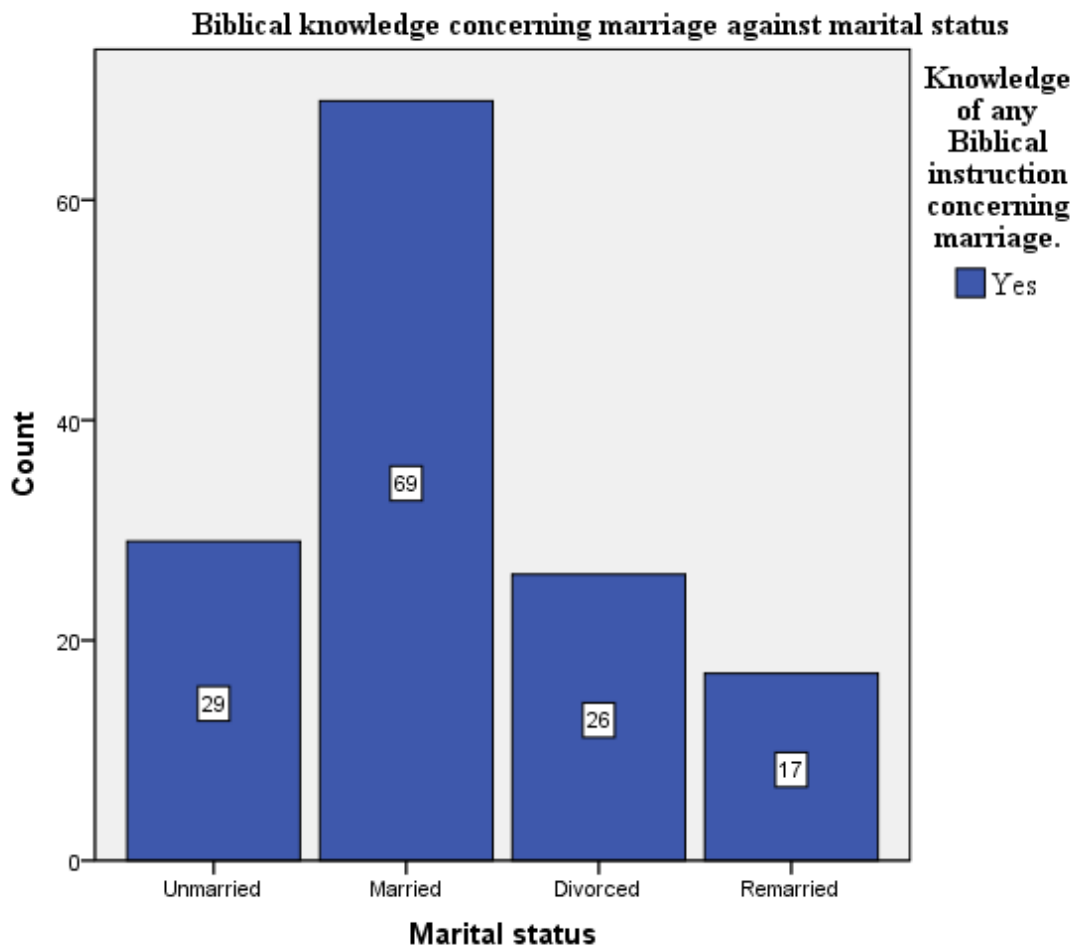
The bar graph above shows that there was a fair representation of both males and females in all four categories, that is married, divorced, unmarried and remarried. This is significant in the sense that each group might have different perceptions probably based on personal experiences.

4.3 Biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage

The study used SPSS to analyze the respondent's levels of awareness on the Biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage.

Respondents were asked to tick one factor which was either "Yes" to acknowledge an awareness of the biblical instruction on married or "No" to admit a lack of knowledge on the subject. The results are shown by the bar chart below (Fig 4.4). Each bar thus represents the total number of respondents in category admitting to a particular response.

Fig 4.4 Biblical awareness on marriage



All the participants demonstrated knowledge that God is against divorce. If divorced one should not remarry unless and until the other spouse passes away. According to the participants, divorce

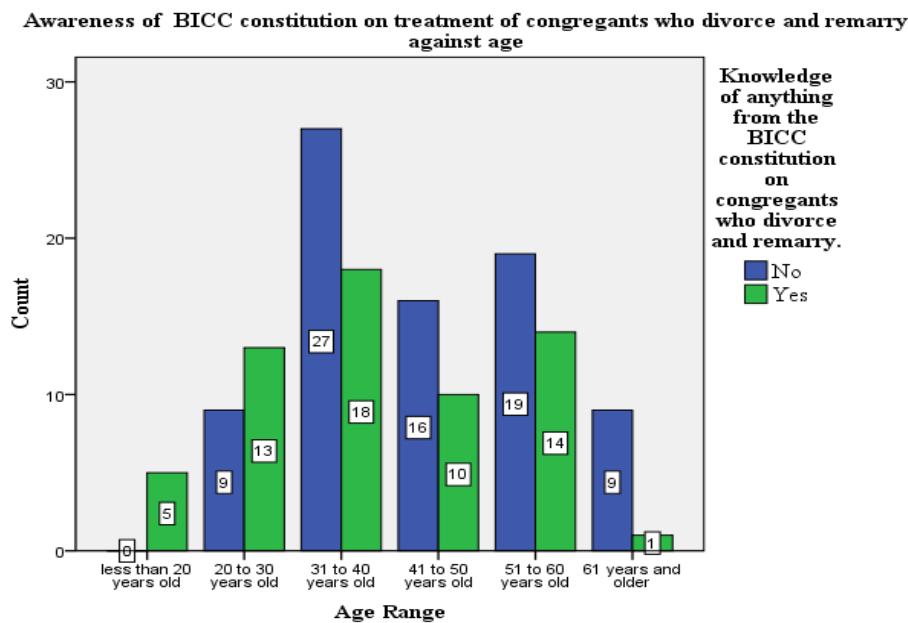
is sinful as affirmed by the Biblical Scripture God hates divorce and what God has joined together let not man separate (Mark 10 v 9).

Marriage is God’s plan. It is a union between two individuals of different sexes, individuals who love each other. Marriage is designed to be permanent until death of one of the partners. During the nuptial exchange of vows, couples promise each other to remain in marriage for better or worse, until death does them apart. Sprinkle (1997) also affirms this view by noting that marriage is a covenant. A covenant is intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman (Sprinkle 1997). Marriage as a covenant involved certain everyday responsibilities for both husband and wife (Ibid).

4.4 Policy of the church on divorce and remarriage

Policy plays an important role to guide organizations and companies to achieve goals and objectives. As shown in the bar graph below, the majority of the respondents noted that they were aware of the church constitution and the policy on divorce and remarriage.

Fig 4.5 Knowledge on BICC policy on divorce and marriage



According to the respondents, the BICC policy states that all those involved in ministry today, as in the past, are expected to be an example of perfection for others. Corporately, the church looks up to them to represent the ideal standard or model of life in thought and in action. Subsequently, their marriages are influential on other marriages in the community.

Church discourages divorce and remarriage. Restrictive attitudes towards divorce and remarriage were noted were therefore noted. The majority of the participants acknowledged that they were of the view that the church did not encourage remarriage especially when the former spouse is alive. According to the respondents the church teaches that marriage is an inseparable union between husband and wife divinely instituted by God (BICC Constitution 2014). The phrase “*except for marital unfaithfulness*” is the only thing in Scripture that possibly warrants God’s permission for divorce and remarriage. Couples are supposed to live together for eternity. The Bible does not allow remarriage.

Those who divorce or remarry cannot hold positions in the church. They are just treated as the “other” segregated, considered as sinners and failures. One respondent asked on the BICC constitutional notion concerning divorce and remarriage said,

“..divorce and remarriage are not appreciated although the church of late is becoming silent on it and the BICC congregants are behaving in whatever way they so wish.” The researcher established that that people who divorce and remarry are treated as the non-members, not being allowed to partake in church activities such as leading prayer, or holding positions of authority in the church. This has caused a strain in relations amongst congregants, with some showing elements of bitterness towards the church’s stance on divorce and remarriage and some going to the extent of changing denominational affiliation.

Results of the study also show that in addition to the constitution, the church also has in place focus groups such as home and family, single parents, young couples, women’s ministry popularly known as “Omama bosizo”, young ladies, youth ministry and man’s fellowship. Groups intended to oversee marital issues and provide relevant services to members. Some of these groups also organize pre-marital counseling and marriage seminars. Pastors also offer premarital counseling sessions in a bid to maintain stable homes. The programs try to equip young couples and the various age groups on how to live together as families and thus avoiding

conflict in marriages. One of the respondents noted that these programs when well followed are of great help and was quoted saying,

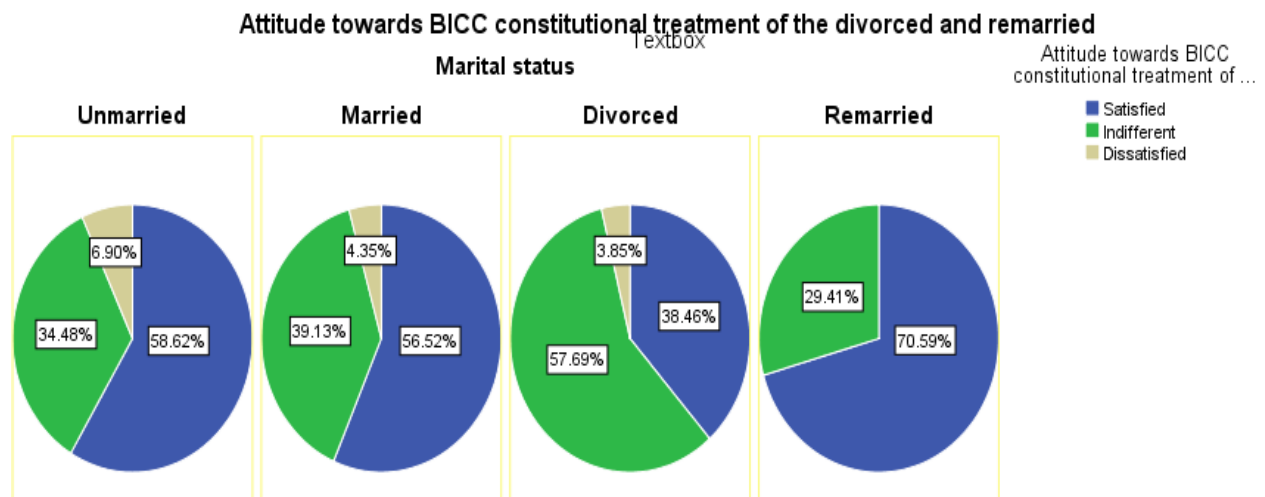
“These programs are very rich and many families are empowered during these times.”

4.5 Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry

Findings generally revealed the issue of divorce and remarriage as a sensitive issue, with some viewing divorce as necessary and remarriage as a good step to avoid cases of adultery while some viewed divorce and remarriage with contempt and the Biblical Scriptures suggest that divorce was never a part of God’s plan.

The pie chart below shows the different attitudes of the respondents concerning the BICC constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry.

Fig 4.6 Attitudes towards the BICC constitutional treatment of respondents



The respondents who were satisfied noted that the church’s stance on divorce and remarriage was in line with the Biblical standpoint. Husband and wife are to follow Christ’s covenantal, self-sacrificing love for the church and the church’s’ loving response to build a strong family. Most of the respondents noted that the issue of divorced and remarried congregants who hold positions in church committees was of great concern and should further be looked at.

One of the participants said the following words, *“If they cannot manage their home affairs, how can they be expected to manage the congregation?”* This emotion filled statement from one of the respondents giving the impression that they were highly against the notion of divorce. According to three of the respondents, divorcees and the remarried should not be given leadership positions. One of the respondents was quoted saying “if they still want to partake in the works of God, they can change churches and then serve in lesser positions.”

Divorce was described as a form of brokenness which may hinder effective leadership within the congregation, or be it district and/or any other church denominations. According to the respondents, a leader is supposed to be a role model capable of leading an exemplary life. Leadership positions in the church are to be filled by those of high moral and spiritual qualifications, whose pattern of exemplary Christian living is so established that it may be followed.

It was evident that some of the participants were bitter concerning the inconsistencies in treatment of church members who divorce and remarry. One of the respondents was even quote saying some of the very divorced and remarried individuals continue to serve in church positions of authority whilst others of a similar status are denied to serve in the same positions. This has led to the disgruntlement and the subsequent exodus of a significant number of divorced and remarried congregants to other churches.

Another study participant made the following comment, *“People at BICC Central are mostly related to each other one way or the other hence the failure of the church to implement laws or provide a clear cut of stance so as to avoid offending relatives.”* A clear emotion filled statement that suggests levels of satisfaction towards treatment of the divorced and remarried congregants.

Further analysis showed that the BICC Constitution was silent in handling divorce and remarriage cases such that variations between what is on paper and in reality could hardly be overlooked. The church has not publicly addressed the issue clearly. One of the respondents actually said;

“I feel that not everybody is being reached in programs designed to teach congregants on the concept of divorce and remarriage.

The Ministry of Justice allows divorce if there are genuine reasons from the parties. Notably, Marriages Courts grant such people with divorce certificates, and they are allowed to remarry and continue with life. This may mean that the church maybe contradicting with government procedures.

The ministry also gives the denominational leadership powers to revoke the license of the marriage officers if they act against the policies of the denomination. This means that the individual marriage officer may understand the reasons faced by the couples and the laws about marriage and divorce from the government point of view, but at the same time he or she cannot solemnize such a marriage because the church policy does not allow to officiate such a marriage least his/her marriage license will be annulled.

Some of the participants advocated for a change on the constitutional policy on divorce and remarriage saying it is too harsh and it stigmatizes affected individuals. It was suggested that BICC leaders and congregants should collectively brainstorm some ideas of dealing with the situation of divorcee and then they can change the negative behaviors of stigmatizing the affected individuals.

One of the respondents who has served the church for a number of years as a deacon notes that

“If you divorce or remarry the church does not accept you, in fact you are stigmatized like those who have been imprisoned until you die or leave the church.” (Ibid) goes on to suggest that some of the divorced and remarried congregants behave better than those who are still in marriages. According to the respondent, congregants who divorce and remarry should avail themselves to ministry and work for God wherever they are able to.

Some of the participants were of the view that members who divorce and remarry should be given offices in the church as they are also gifted and are still loved by God the same way. He loves those who are married, who are we to judge. They should be allowed to fulfill those positions if they have a calling. “They are also people, being married does not make one a saint.” When they have given themselves to God and to work for the Lord they should be given the chance. To apply the biblical texts on divorce legalistically is to deny the spirit and tone of Christ’s teaching. We all fall short of the expectations of God for us, but the gospel provides a

way to confess our failure and find forgiveness. The church does have a word beyond judgment to announce to those caught in divorce . . .” (Roop 1976).

Some of the respondents felt that in terms of divorce or remarriage, there was less clarity on when and why one can remarry. One of the respondents noted that there was need to clearly define or articulate how the church was supposed to treat congregants who divorce and remarry. A number of the respondents also noted that the current church constitution was no longer relevant to their current lives while a few of the respondents were indifferent on the treatment of the divorcees who remarry. They noted that divorce is a sin that can be forgiven.

The issue of divorce and remarriage is dividing the church as church members spend most of the time discussing which is more evil between polygamy and remarriage as some congregants think that polygamy could be the product of adultery. To make matters worse, there are no formal meetings that have been organized for dialogue on such issues. Five of the respondents argued that in America where the BICC started this has been challenged and people divorce and remarry but still their membership status is held with respect.

The church is condemning those who have considered remarriage after divorce, but the pastors are in a dilemma as some of their congregants believe that the duty of the church is to restore back those who committed evil acts to the right fellowship with God, and the same God who hates divorce is the same God who loves and forgives. It is suggested that there is need for church leadership to create an atmosphere where we objectively discuss about such issues and bring answers to the community.

4.6 Attitude towards the biblical stance on remarriage

Most of the respondents were very satisfied concerning the biblical instruction on divorce. As a Christian and being bound to God by His stance, I am obliged not to object to its stance because his plans are to prosper me. More so, we are subject to His word. His word says if the husband dies she can marry whom she wishes but must believe in the Lord.

The majority of the participants were satisfied with the Biblical stance on divorce and remarriage. Most of the respondents were against divorce. One of the respondents argued that

allowing divorce in religious institutions discourages the point of marriage. Divorce depletes the plan of God which is keeping marriage as a covenant and permanent institution.

One of the participants was of the view that the Biblical stance on divorce and remarriage puts difficult conditions for marriage. He suggested that in waiting for the other spouse to die, the innocent partner is punished by not being allowed to remarry. The respondent suggested that the BICC constitution should include those who are victims of divorce. They should be allowed to remarry and the constitution should have a clause that looks at divorce circumstances case by case rather than having a blanket statement on divorce and remarriage. Some reasons are genuine because some people left their spouses and migrated to other countries in search of greener pastures. Unfortunately some have married out there, and have officially divorced their spouse, but the church is punishing its members who wish to get married after having been divorced. The church has to seriously consider talking about this issue and come up with alternatives that are healing to the affected members and community at large.

Unlike other denominations that allow their marriage officers to solemnize weddings involving divorcees, the researcher found out that the Brethren in Christ Church does not allow remarriage. One of the pastors was even quoted saying he nearly lost his job after reporting to the church board that he solemnized a marriage that involved a divorcee. However, according to him the reasons were genuine since the couple had legal documents from the government. The respondents argued that the church has to seriously consider revisiting the constitution on divorce and remarriage to avoid losing fellow congregants to other Christian denominations.

Findings also revealed that the victims of divorce and remarriage are a wounded community within the BICC. Some of the respondents felt that some reasons are genuine because some people left their spouses and migrated to other countries in search of greener pastures and unfortunately remarried out there. Even when they have officially divorced their spouse the spouse in the church is bound by the church norms that one cannot remarry after a divorce as long as if the former spouse is still alive. The respondents argued that the church is punishing its members who wish to get married after having been divorced.

The research found that the church was silent on addressing the dissatisfaction surrounding the constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry. No programs have been put in

place to allow congregants to air out their views and suggestions on such issues. The divorced and remarried remain a wounded community with little or no support from the church as they are segregated.

4.7 Chapter summary

The chapter described practises of the Brethren in Christ church prevalent on the issue of divorce and remarriage. It brought out different perceptions on divorce and remarriage. The research found that marriage was designed by God to be permanent. However, divorce and remarriage are a reality in society. Unlike other denominations that allow their marriage officers to solemnize weddings involving divorcees, the researcher found out that the Brethren In Christ Church does not allow remarriage. The BICC discourages divorce and remarriage. Some argued that allowing divorce depletes the very point of marriage. The BICC statements of practice concerning divorce and remarriage are in line with Biblical instruction which condemns divorce. Individuals can only remarry upon the death of their former spouses or when there is adultery. The next chapter will suggest solutions to the problem.

Chapter Five

Possible solutions to the problem of divorce and remarriage

5.1 Introduction

This study has looked at divorce and remarriage at religious institutions concentrating mostly on the BICC Bulawayo Central congregation. In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the prevailing BICC practices on the issue at hand. This chapter gives solutions to the problem based on the research findings, conclusions and recommendations for the BICC Bulawayo Central are also brought out. The chapter also presents possible areas for further research and conclusions marking the end of the research study.

5.2 Suggested solutions to the problem

Possible solutions to the problem are explained below under the following concepts.

5.2.1 Proper application of the doctrine

The research established that most of the respondents were aware of the Biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage yet some congregants still divorce and remarry in spite of the common knowledge. Based on the research, it is clear that God hates divorce and condemns remarriage. Marriage entails of clinging to each other as asserted in Genesis 2 v 24 and Mark 10 v 7-8. Remarriage is allowed on the grounds of unfaithfulness as affirmed by the Holy Scripture (Matthew 19v9). However, some of the congregants continue to divorce and remarry. To curb the problem, one would suggest that the church must spend more time teaching congregants on what the bible says about divorce and remarriage to lessen chances of such happening.

Married couples who wish to sustain their marriage covenant should therefore be encouraged to have a positive mentality that marriage is for life. According to the research findings, congregants were aware that God is the initiator of marriage as noted in Gen 2V 20 -23 and Mathew 19v 4-5. Most of the participants accept the fact that marriage was designed by God to be a lifelong covenant and thus they have tried not to break the covenant but keep it to express their acceptance and also serve as role models for others to emulate. The various responses given by the unmarried, married, divorced and remarried participants from the study justified an awareness of the biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage. It is therefore suggested that the church may perhaps conduct workshops and or structured educational programs to enhance

congregants understanding on the implications of divorce and remarriage. Educational programs can also assist the already affected individuals to move on with their lives with less stigma and with a guilty conscience.

According to the research, largely it was never the intention of God for a man to divorce his wife but if there could be good reason just as stated in Matthew 19v 9. Except on the grounds of unfaithfulness and death of one's partner, remarriage is a sin. No divorce in the bible is allowed. Jesus teachings did not allow remarriage. The research study therefore suggests that Christians should be encouraged to follow Jesus teachings on divorce correctly.

In conclusion, Christians should follow Jesus' teachings on divorce correctly to avoid problems in the house of God and maintain the aspect of purity. Churches should facilitate training programs and extensive teachings on divorce and remarriage to avoid such from happening.

5.2.2 Change of attitudes towards the Biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage

The study revealed that the respondents' perceptions on the scriptural instruction on divorce and remarriage are in accordance with the BICC teachings. The church condemns remarriage after divorce. Findings suggested that Christian spouses should imitate Christ. Marriage must mirror the relationship between Christ and the Church. A husband and wife should love one another just as Christ loves the church. Beyond that condition and based on the position that God hates divorce, couples should make an effort to live together until death separates them.

However, the study revealed that in spite of the common law that God hates divorce, the pastors find themselves in a dilemma as some of the congregants argue that the same God who hates divorce is the same God who loves and forgives therefore, it is the duty of the church to restore those who committed evil acts to the right fellowship with God. It is therefore suggested that there is absolute need for church leadership to create an atmosphere where congregants can objectively discuss and come up with solutions to their concerns.

More so, according to the research findings some marriage officers have been put under discipline for solemnizing marriages that involved divorces. It is evident from the research findings that the church teaches that marriage is a vow to God, to one another, to the families and the community by individuals in the marriage relationship to remain steadfast in unconditional

love, reconciliation and sexual purity. This was in line with Stott's (1973) findings as he notes that the marriage covenant would have characteristics such as marital love, togetherness, faithfulness, provision for the wife by the husband, and obedience to the husband by the wife. However, simply because some of the congregants do not live up to this vow, pastors have been put in compromising positions as some of these congregants go back to them seeking remarriage. The researcher therefore suggests that the church should stick to the constitution and stipulated way of action and make congregants aware that they will only stick to church laws and customs as stated in the BICC statements of practice.

Participants who responded in the positive stated that the church's position on divorce was that God hates divorce as it is spelt out clearly in the book of Malachi 2 v 16 and in Matthew 19 v 9, Jesus Christ said under extreme conditions divorce may be allowed. Beyond that condition and based on the position that God hates divorce, couples should make an effort to live together until death separates them.

5.2.3 Correct interpretation of the BICC constitution

The study revealed that some of the congregants were unaware while an almost equal number of congregants were aware of the church policy concerning divorce and remarriage. These differences in understanding can therefore be the reason why there are inconsistencies noted in the church's treatment of congregants who divorce and congregants who remarry. A summary of the responses given suggests that the church is silent on the constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry. Based on these findings therefore, the researcher suggests that the church should ensure that all congregants are aware of the constitutional notion towards the issue of divorce and remarriage to avoid bitter feelings when action is taken against congregants who do not live up to constitutional expectations.

The study also suggested levels of misinterpretation of the constitution by some of the congregants. Some of the respondents who were indifferent concerning the constitutional treatment of congregants who are divorced and remarried when further prompted to reveal their knowledge on the constitutional sentiments on divorce and remarriage seemed unaware of the actual sentiments brought forth by the constitution. Some of the respondents argued that divorce was normal in other religious institutions therefore assumed that the BICC constitution was also

in favor of such practices. It is therefore suggested that there be a clearer way of explaining factors from the constitution to all congregants to avoid misinterpretation of the constitution by congregants.

5.2.4 Educate congregants on both outside world and church practices

The study established feelings of disgruntlement pertaining issues on divorce and remarriage amongst the church members. There was less clarity on when and why one could remarry. According to the respondents, the church did not clearly articulate how the church was supposed to treat congregants who divorce and remarry. The researcher therefore suggests that to curb these elements of dissatisfaction among congregants the church should make available a clear and comprehensive statement of practice on divorce and remarriage to all congregants. The church should also clarify circumstances on when and how one can remarry after a divorce.

A number of the respondents also noted that the current church constitution was no longer relevant to their current lives. According to the BICC policies members who go against the church practices, beliefs and norms are to be suspended or regarded as non-members. Membership shall consist of those who have confessed their sins and professed Christ as Savior, congregants who accept the creeds and practices of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe. This has led to a loss of some of the BICC members to other denominations. In light of this, it is therefore suggested that the current church constitution be revisited. The congregants and church leadership through organized structures can brainstorm the way forward of and then choose the best alternative to accommodate the affected members. Asking the right questions during awareness workshops will help people to open up and start discussing the challenges being faced by individual members.

More so, the BICC in North America as the mother church can be consulted as they have already discussed such issues and came up with statements that bring healing to already affected members. In one of their statements they note that; “If a couple determines that divorce is the only solution to the marital stress, referral can be made so that divorce may take place (Brethren in Christ, 2002). Evidently this statement shows that remarriage is a reality in our communities because of some of the members who are involved in divorce are young people who may need to

get married after divorce therefore the church may have to adjust the constitutional voice on divorce and remarriage to suit circumstances and the current needs.

The research also found that in spite of the church polices, the Ministry of Justice allows annulment of the marriage covenant if there are genuine reasons for dissociation from the parties. The Marriages Courts grant such people with divorce certificates, and they are allowed to remarry and continue with life. This may mean that the church maybe contradicting with government procedures. It is therefore suggested that there is need to also educate congregants on the governmental policies when it comes to divorce and remarriage. An honest and outward explanation on the government's stance and the church's own perspectives will help congregants make informed decisions and lessen levels of disgruntlement as congregants compare the BICC way of practice with other religious institutions.

The study also revealed that people who divorce and remarry are treated as the non-members, not being allowed to partake in church activities such as leading prayer, or holding positions of authority in the church. This has caused a strain in relations amongst congregants, with some showing elements of bitterness towards the church's stance on divorce and remarriage and some going to the extent of changing denominations. This study therefore suggests that it is important that the couples who have divorced and or remarried be given opportunities to affirm the positive aspects of their broken marriages, make confessions, ask for forgiveness, and recognize their continuing responsibility to society or their children in case they have any. The church needs to find ways to relate to the couple meaningfully in the context of their communal life and Christian lives.

Congregations are encouraged to discover ways in which the church can support, sustain, and redeem the brokenness of the people involved. The church is responsible for those persons who remarry after divorce in all the ways it is responsible for those who marry for the first time. The church's responsibilities may include support and counselling for the affected couples. The circle process can be adopted by the Brethren in Christ Church as a way of to give safe space to victims of divorce to share their stories, their feelings and their needs. Such time will help the church to realize the need to have some ways of accommodating them in all church services rather than stigmatizing them. From the circle process, there could result many programs such as support groups that will be held on a weekly basis.

More so, the research found that the church was losing some of its congregants to other denominations. It is therefore suggested that if the local congregations can allow the affected people to establish some support groups, and share their stories in open spaces through circle processes, and be empowered by trained people then there would be healing and better understanding as they will also gain their identity. Discussing the issues faced by the divorcees and offering support to affected individuals will help foster unity and promote healthy numerical and spiritual growth of the church.

Further analysis also revealed that there were inconsistencies in the BICC Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry. With some congregants being given posts in committees a clear deviation from the constitutional sentiments that members who go against the church practices, beliefs and norms are to be suspended or regarded as non-members. From this it is suggested that responsible authorities or leaders in the church be fair enough and treat congregants equally. Leaders should not handle situations in a biased manner but should exercise fairness and deal with situations according to the church's stipulated regulations.

Furthermore, the study further revealed elements of victimization of some of the congregant's parts who are divorced as they are bound by the rule that one cannot remarry unless and until their former spouse is dead. Undisputable some of those former spouses will be enjoying life with other individuals while the innocent spouse is still bound by the church doctrines. The study therefore suggests that divorce incidents in the church should be handled case by case to accommodate spouses who fall victim to circumstances.

More so, the issue of divorce and remarriage is dividing the church as church members spend most of the time discussing which is more evil between polygamy and remarriage as some congregants think that polygamy could be the product of adultery. To make matters worse, no formal measures have been put in place for congregants to air out their views and concerns surrounding the issue. The church does not offer any support for members who divorce because of their position. Families and individual couples are affected with children suffering the most. It has been observed that youth from broken homes develop weaker Christian convictions and they are not motivated to attend church activities. They tend to be failures and some become abusive because of the emotional trauma associated with their back grounds. This study therefore

highlights the importance of revisiting the BICC Bulawayo Centrals' notion on divorce and remarriage.

The organizational structure for dealing with congregants concerns as shown in chapter two is too long such that it takes time for views to be put into practice and at times they can be rejected along the way. The study therefore suggests that local congregations through their pastors should open some formal discussions on such issues. They can also invite some organizations and individuals with knowledge to empower congregants on the issues at hand. The mother church board can also be consulted or invited to meet with the BICC Bulawayo Central leadership to discuss some ways of treating the affected people within the church. If more people can be empowered to listen to the stories of the divorcees and understand their genuine reasons, then they can forward the issue for further discussion at the general conference. This may result in establishing a board of ministers that will be responsible for theological training and other issues to address stigma within the church and the community at large.

It is hoped that the BICC Bulawayo Central Church will open dialogue in meetings to strategize on how to end stigmatization of the divorced and remarried congregants. If the key people within the BICC Bulawayo Central dialogue together and discover the current challenges faced by divorcees, then they can construct a shared vision of allowing the affected people to share their stories which will help to create a platform to fully accept them in the church. The key people can engage more people through some discussion in district councils and eventually inviting the ideas of all people in the annual general conference.

5.3 Overall Conclusion

To sum it all up, the study was aimed at gaining an insight on the issues surrounding divorce and remarriage at the BICC Bulawayo Central. Divorce and remarriage are a living truth in societies. They both bring with them elements of uncertainty, instability and new problems for the society and the persons involved. The issue of divorce and remarriage is dividing the church with some members leaving BICC to worship in other denominations.

The study confirmed that the issue of divorce and remarriage is a reality in our society. It does, however, carry with it different perceptions and attitudes, bringing out some levels of instability, uncertainty and new problems for both the society and the couples involved. Different attitudes ranging from elements of satisfaction, indifference and dissatisfaction from the constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry were noted.

The study revealed that couples did not go through sufficient post-marital counseling and teaching in the church on divorce and remarriage. It is therefore recommended that Pastors and church leaders should take incessant interest in married couples within their churches and fellowships and create an atmosphere that allows couples to share and discuss issues affecting their marriages.

To curb problems surrounding the issue of divorce and remarriage in religious institutions, congregational expectations for the leadership positions should be clearly articulated and members being sworn into posts should be informed of the constitutional aspects of divorce and remarriage as part of the induction process. Leaders should not handle situations in a biased manner but should exercise fairness and deal with situations according to the church's stipulated regulations, provide an honest and outward explanation on the government's stance and the church's own perspectives. This will help congregants make informed decisions and lesson levels of disgruntlement as congregants compare the BICC way of practice with other religious institutions. Furthermore, congregations should find ways to support the already affected individuals with less or no stigmatization. The church's responsibilities may include support and counselling for the affected couples.

5.4 Recommendations

The study further highlights recommendations for all religious institutions and BICC as an institute as follows.

To all religious institutions in general

- Conduct marriage enrichment programs to lessen cases of divorce.
- More time should be spent on teaching youths before they get married so that they are aware on how to handle marriages thus reducing the number of divorces.
- Divorce counseling programs must be continuously implemented for such cases.

To BICC Bulawayo Central

- Since this study identified several inconsistencies in handling of divorced and remarried congregants, it is suggested that the church relooks at the current constitution to suite the congregant's current lives.
- Each congregation should have competent and certified counsellors who are always available so that no couple goes without counselling because they do not know where to find a counsellor.
- It is also suggested that divorcees can be incorporated as ex officio members in committees but not hold offices.
- The church should implement more and effective educational programs on divorce and remarriage to make all congregants aware of the implications of divorce and remarriage. This may also assist communities in learning how to handle even the already affected individuals. Education may be in the form of workshops or other training.
- It is also suggested that divorce cases be handled case by case so that innocent spouses do not fall victim to circumstances and punishment by the church which in actual fact should be a sanctuary for the oppressed.
- Congregational expectations for the leadership positions should be clearly articulated and members being sworn into posts should be informed of the constitutional aspects of divorce and remarriage as part of the induction process.

For future studies

- It is suggested that future researchers research on divorced and remarried congregants perceptions on the biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage. This will help congregants already entangled in such situations to find strategies to cope, individuals not yet in marriage relationships understand and be aware of the implications of divorce and remarriage. Such a study will also assist the general public to understand factors leading to divorce and remarriage for congregants.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Generally, this chapter discussed solutions to the research problem. Conclusions were drawn, recommendations made. The case study on divorce and remarriage in religious institutions: a case of BICC Bulawayo Central generally revealed that divorce and remarriage is a sensitive issue in religious institutions, with some people viewing divorce and remarriage as a sin and some viewing it as a necessity for the times we are living in. Levels of disgruntlement towards the constitutional treatment of congregants and the church's current practices were noted. The study therefore suggested that there is a need for proper application of the doctrine on issues of divorce and remarriage and situations surrounding the issue in order to promote harmony in the church. Congregational expectations for the leadership positions should be clearly articulated and members being sworn into posts should be informed of the constitutional aspects of divorce and remarriage as part of the induction process. It is hoped that the BICC Bulawayo Central will channel meetings to strategize on how to end stigmatization of the divorced and remarried congregants. All these and other factors are discussed in the research above.

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APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Questionnaire on Divorce and Remarriage in Religious Institutions: A Case of Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) Bulawayo Central

My name is Rev. Ndabezinhle Nyathi, a Bachelor of Arts Honours student in Theology and Religious Studies at the above named institution doing a research focusing on divorce and remarriage at BICC, Bulawayo Central. Taking time completing this questionnaire, will contribute immensely towards gaining insight on issues surrounding divorce and remarriage at BICC, Bulawayo Central. It is also anticipated that your contributions will provide a platform for assessing the efforts the BICC Bulawayo Central has made towards addressing marital concerns of its congregants and possible improvements to these efforts. I therefore kindly ask you to spare your time to respond to the questions below.

Please take note that participation in this study is voluntary and the researcher reserves the right to maintain strict anonymity and confidentiality of all contributions made and the information will be used for academic purposes only. Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact me at Tel:- 0772 982 400/ (09) 65220 if you have any questions. Thank you for your participation.

(Please tick in the appropriate box unless advised otherwise)

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Your age range:

Less than 20 years 20 - 30 years 31 - 40 years

41 - 50 years 51 – 60 years Above 60 years

3. i) Marital status:

Unmarried Divorced

Married Remarried

ii) If 'married', please specify the number of years you have been married: -

4. Please specify the number of years you have been fellowshipping at BICC Bulawayo Central: -

SECTION B: LEVEL OF AWARENESS CONCERNING BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. i) Do you know anything from the Bible concerning marriage? YES NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -
.....
.....
.....

2. i) Do you know anything from the Bible concerning divorce? YES NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -
.....
.....
.....

3. i) Do you know anything from the Bible concerning remarriage? YES NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -
.....
.....
.....

SECTION C: PERCEPTIONS ON THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. i) What is your attitude towards the Bible's stance on divorce?
 SATISFIED INDEFFERENT DISSATISFIED

ii) Please elaborate reasons for your attitude: -
.....
.....
.....

2. i) What is your attitude towards the Bible's stance on remarriage?

SATISFIED

INDEFFERENT

DISSATISFIED

ii) Please elaborate reasons for your attitude: -

.....
.....
.....

3. i) May you please name any of BICC's instructional programs on marriage that you are aware of: -

.....
.....
.....

ii) What is your feeling towards these programs?

SATISFIED

NEUTRAL

DISSATISFIED

iii) Please elaborate reasons for your feeling: -

.....
.....
.....

SECTION D: LEVEL OF AWARENESS CONCERNING CONSTITUTIONAL TREATMENT OF CONGREGANTS WHO DIVORCE AND REMARRY

1. i) Do you know anything from the BICC Constitution concerning marriage?

YES

NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -

.....
.....
.....

2. i) Do you know anything from the BICC Constitution concerning divorce?

YES

NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. i) Do you know anything from the BICC Constitution concerning remarriage?

YES

NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -

.....
.....
.....

4. i) Do you know anything from the BICC Constitution concerning treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry?

YES

NO

ii) If 'yes', please specify: -

.....
.....
.....

SECTION E: ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CONSTITUTIONAL TREATMENT OF CONGREGANTS WHO DIVORCE AND REMARRY

1. i) What is your attitude towards the constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and

remar

SATISFIED

INDEFFERENT

DISSATISFIED

ii) Please elaborate reasons for your attitude: -

.....
.....
.....

2. i) Do you feel the BICC Constitution is exhaustive in its coverage of issues surrounding marriage, divorce and remarriage?

YES

NO

ii) If 'no', please specify which aspects you feel are lacking: -

.....
.....

.....
.....

3. i) Do you feel that divorced and remarried congregants should hold positions within church committees?

 YES NO

ii) Please elaborate: -

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. What do you think divorced and remarried congregants should do when they are interested in fulfilling their calling in church?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5. What do you think could be influencing the current practices in terms of treatment of divorced and remarried congregants at BICC Bulawayo Central?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. Any suggestions and recommendations in conclusion: -

.....
.....
.....
.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS.

APPENDIX 2: Focus Groups Interview Guide

FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking your time to join us to talk about divorce and remarriage at Brethren In Christ Church (Central). My name is Reverend Ndabezinhle Nyathi. I am studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies at the Midlands State University. You have been invited to this focus group interview as you were deemed the best respondents with regards to the present research topic.

There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that the study is interested in your views without and this has nothing to do with the perceived level of your spirituality, but rather concerned with the views of each and every member no matter how diverse they are.

You've probably noticed the phone/recorder. We're recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments upon data analysis. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. You are assured of complete confidentiality. However, if you are not comfortable with being recorded, please advise accordingly. The information gathered in this exercise will be used for academic purposes only and none of your names will be published anywhere, thus, the identity of the respondents will be protected (unless the respondent consents to disclosure of personal details in writing).

(Allow the panel to feel free and introduce themselves to one another and create a comfortable environment, most preferably, circle seating so that all respondents are seated from almost equal angles)

- 6. To ascertain the level of awareness of the BICC Bulawayo Central congregants concerning the biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage.**

- i) What do you think of marriage?
- ii) What do you understand about divorce?
- iii) What do you understand about remarriage?
- iv) What is the standpoint of the bible about divorce and remarriage?
- v) Which passages or scriptures in the bible do you know that speak on divorce and remarriage?

7. To determine the perceptions of the BICC congregants on the biblical instruction on divorce and remarriage

What are your personal views about divorce?

- i) How do you feel about remarriage?
- ii) How much efforts are being made by the church in teaching congregants about the biblical instruction on marriage and divorce?

8. To ascertain the level of awareness of the BICC congregants concerning the Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry

- i) What information do you know about the BICC constitution in relation to divorce and remarriage?
- ii) How do you feel about the adequacy of the constitution in addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage at BICC Central?
- iii) How accommodative or restrictive is the current constitution in terms of divorce and remarriage
- iv) What else could be included in the BICC constitution with regards to divorce and remarriage?

9. To determine the BICC congregants' attitudes towards the Constitutional treatment of congregants who divorce and remarry

- i) How do you feel about divorcees and remarried individuals participating in church services?
- ii) What is your opinion on divorced and remarried individuals holding positions in church committees?

- iii) What do you think divorced and remarried congregants should do when they are interested in fulfilling their calling in church?
- iv) What could be influencing the current practices in terms of treating divorcees and remarried individuals at BICC Central?

APPENDIX 3: Individual interview Guide

INTERVIEWS GUIDES

Interview guide for Divorcees

- i) What do you think of marriage?
- ii) What do you understand about divorce?
- iii) What do you understand about remarriage?
- iv) What is the standpoint of the bible about divorce and remarriage?
- v) What are your personal views about divorce?
- vi) How do you feel about the treatment you receive at church as a divorcee?
- vii) How favorable do you think the BICC church constitution is in terms of accommodating divorcees?
- viii) How do you feel about remarriage?
- ix) How much efforts are being/can be made by the church in teaching congregants about avoiding divorce?
- x) How do you feel about participating in church services and committees as a divorcee?
- xi) What information do you know about the BICC constitution in relation to divorce and remarriage?

Interview guide for Remarried Congregants

- i) What do you think of marriage?
- ii) What do you understand about divorce?
- iii) What do you understand about remarriage?
- iv) What is the standpoint of the bible about divorce and remarriage?
- v) What are your personal views about divorce and remarriage?
- vi) How do you feel about the treatment you receive at church as a remarried congregant?
- vii) How favourable do you think the BICC church constitution is in terms of accommodating remarried individuals?
- viii) How do you feel about participating in church services and committees as a remarried congregant?

Interview guide for Married Congregants

- i) What do you think of marriage?
- ii) What do you understand about divorce?
- iii) What do you understand about remarriage?
- iv) What is the standpoint of the bible about divorce and remarriage?
- v) What are your personal views about divorce and remarriage?
- vi) How do you feel about divorcees and remarried congregants participating in church services?
- vii) How do you feel about divorcees and remarried congregants holding positions in church committees?
- viii) What information do you know about the BICC constitution in relation to divorce and remarriage?
- ix) How do you feel about the position of the BICC church constitution in terms of accommodating divorcees and remarried individuals?

Interview guide for Unmarried Congregants

- i) What do you think of marriage?
- ii) What do you understand about divorce?
- iii) What do you understand about remarriage?
- iv) What is the standpoint of the bible about divorce and remarriage?
- v) What are your personal views about divorce and remarriage?
- vi) How do you feel about divorce and remarriage?
- vii) How do you feel about divorced and remarried individuals participating in church services?
- viii) How do you feel about divorced and remarried individuals holding positions in church committees?
- ix) What information do you know about the BICC constitution in relation to divorce and remarriage?
- x) What should be done in the church with regards to handling divorce and remarriage at BICC (Central)