

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

**The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict  
A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County**

By

Winfred Kanini Mueni

**Abstract**

This study sought to find out the initiatives and programs set up by the African Inland Church in Makueni County to help couples resolve marital conflicts that are inevitable in any marriage. This study was necessitated by the increasing rates of separation and divorce even among those professing to be Christians, a practice that was thought to decrease the authenticity of the Church of Jesus Christ. Twenty trained pastors and ten focus discussion groups were interviewed. The causes of marital conflicts from the point of view of the pastors were unfaithfulness, financial constraints, and childlessness among others. They also cited many measures they put in place to curb these causes such as lady's and men's fellowships, conferences and couple seminars, which were also reiterated by the focus discussion group members. Some members of the focus discussion groups also recommended mentoring programs and young couple's seminars as other ways that could help them deal with marital conflicts. From the findings, conclusions were made and recommendations suggested to help pastors improve on what they were doing.

**Key terms:** Kenya, Church, Marital Conflict, Africa Inland Church, Makueni County

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

**The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict  
A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County**

By

Winfred Kanini Mueni

**Introduction**

Marriage is an institution ordained by God Himself to provide human kind with companionship that no other arrangement can offer. However, it has been bedecked by many challenges such that people, especially the youths, are questioning its usefulness as well as wondering whether it is worthwhile. Jacques Levy, based on what was being witnessed in marriages, rather prophetically commented that “a time would come when there would be fewer deep stable relationships among people and the civilization that the world was moving into was one that could not sustain two people in a bedroom all by themselves for forty years (Time Magazine, 1989).

We are now in the midst of the civilization Levy saw forty-six years ago, because separation and divorce cases are on the upswing. Daily newspapers today are full of cases of marital fights and even murders. Days are gone when a married couple assumed they would remain so “until death parted them.” Adei aptly reckons that “when one looks at the rising rates of separation and divorce, one wonders whether there is any reason to get married at all.” He adds that “it is ironic that even when the rates of divorce and separation rise, most men and women marry at some point in their lives and even, surprisingly, most divorcees remarry.” He correctly concludes that this should convince us that there is something significant about marriage: “It meets an adult’s deepest need for companionship, love, security, and significance in a way that no other human relationship can” ((Stephen and Georgina, 1984, p.63). Statistics concerning divorce rates in Kenya are not easily available. However, the Government of Kenya carried out a Population Situation Analysis survey in 2009 which gives a clue to the status of family life in the nation. The results of the analysis are summarized in the table below, which gives the percentage distribution of men and women aged twelve years and above by marital status in Kenya.

Analysts took the proportion of the married in age group 45-49 to define the universality of marriage, in that near universal marriage “occurs when the proportion of persons aged 45-49 years who are married is above 95%.” They claim that it has remained stable at around 90% over the last two decades. This means that the marriage institution in Kenya is ailing because 90% is far below 95% when actual numbers of persons are considered. The figures in the table also demonstrate that marriage in Kenya is not stable. The total population divorced and separated stand out at over 0.5 million and this figure could be double or even triple because those once separated and divorced, especially the males, remarry and they are counted as married. Furthermore, the number of people separated and divorced within the age bracket of 25-59 years is quite high. All these families have many children who are adversely affected by the disintegration of their families. These effects include “poverty, emotional pain, rebellion,

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

difficulty in school, as well as lack of guidance and love (Daystar University, 2013, p.27). It is sad to realize that children as young as 12-14 years are also rendered separated and their “child husbands” remarry. The church needs to stand up and proactively deal with this problem. Separation and divorce cases can be reduced if the couple can resolve the conflicts which are inevitable in their marriages.

Table 1

Age group	Widowed		Separated		Divorced		Number	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
12-14	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	1532395	1458927
15-19	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.2	2116516	2044206
20-24	0.1	0.5	0.4	1.6	0.2	0.8	1733980	2013675
25-29	0.2	1.2	1.2	2.6	0.5	1.3	1506622	1666223
30-34	0.4	3.2	1.8	3.2	0.8	1.8	1238688	1258795
35-39	0.7	5.3	2.1	3.3	1.0	2.0	990582	1001419
40-44	1.2	8.2	2.1	3.2	1.1	2.3	735356	731572
45-49	1.6	10.9	2.1	2.9	1.1	2.2	628803	636856
50-54	2.3	15.9	1.9	2.3	1.2	2.1	474225	477469
55-59	2.9	20.0	1.8	2.0	1.2	1.9	357186	352405
60-64	3.9	27.0	1.6	1.5	1.1	1.8	293614	298501
65+	7.5	40.0	1.3	0.9	1.0	1.4	600661	728725

Source: Kenya Population Situation Analysis published by the government of Kenya. July 2013.

A nationwide survey on the status of the marriage institution in Kenya by Infotrak revealed that “given a second chance, three in every ten people would not marry their current spouse again” (*Daily Nation*, 2010, June 10). Wright’s research sheds light on this observation:

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

Differences between the spouses become such a source of conflicts because they do not match up to the expectations the spouses have when they enter marriage. The unfulfilled expectations generate frustration which leads to anger, demands, defensiveness and non-compliance. The spouses become “weary wranglers” who are too eager to jump out from that marriage boat given a second chance (Wright, 1988, P.52).

The survey also reveals that only 40% of Kenyans are happily married, the rest being either unhappy or not sure how to describe their unions. This is evidenced by the increasing number of divorce cases filed in Kenya in just one court (Milimani court) since 2001, as given by Kenya Nation Bureau of Statistics secured from Kenya Population and Housing Census of 2009 as below:

Table 2

Year	Divorce cases	Year	Divorce cases
2001	101	2008	396
2002	115	2009	460
2003	206	2011	196
2004	296	2012	244
2005	295	2013	279
2006	357	2014	245
2007	369	2015	123

From 2011 to 2015, the divorce cases seem to be on the downswing. However, this is because out of the divorce cases filed, FIDA (International Federation of Women Lawyers) handled 417 cases in 2011, 389 cases in 2012, 332 in 2013, 406 in 2014 and 189 by June 2015. The same trend is expected in other courts of law, not forgetting that many are the divorce cases that go unfilled in any court. Little wonder then that Gichinga observes that “marital issues rank second in the list of problems that bring people for counseling in Kenya” (Gichinga, 2003, P.22).

Furthermore, the evangelical churches are feeling the disaster of infidelity and divorce. Congregations are being forced to adjust to the leadership of divorced and adulterous pastors as being reported by the mass media so often. A pastor of a church in Nairobi was reportedly caught red-handed in bed with a lady, as reported by one of the dailies (Daily Nation, 2015, Feb 8).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is in the light of this sorry state of marriage in Kenya that this study will be done in order to find out what the Church is doing to ensure sanity is restored in the marriage institution. This is because, in my opinion, the Church is ideally placed to teach her members what God intended marriage to be. It is the only institution that can teach her members by example to call upon God to give them the power and wisdom to overcome the causes and effects of marital conflicts. Stott correctly observes that “marriage is in all societies as it is God’s idea instituted by God Himself, in the time of man’s innocence, to serve three main purposes, namely companionship, recreation

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

and sexual expression” (Stott, 1999, P.319). Brewer rightly explains the root cause of marital conflicts:

Marriages started to fail with Adam and Eve. When they were thrown out of paradise because of their disobedience, they soon encountered difficulties because they had changed for the worse. They had both discovered the difference between good and evil and at its heart the desire to do what they wanted, which was not necessarily what God or the other person wanted. This immediately led to conflict. Like many couples, they found that having children did not bring them close together as the more the number of people in a family, the more difficult for them all to agree especially when the children start growing into independent adults (Brewer, 2003, P.24).

Wink concurs and attempts to offer a spiritual remedy to counteract this effect of knowledge of evil and good, which leads to one desiring to do as he/she wishes (evil spirituality) thus:

Behind every systemic problem in the society are evil spiritualities (Eph. 6: 12-13) and that the Church is the only institution mandated to receive and use the Holy Spirit to counter the world’s domination system of separation and divorce. The Church members are taught how to disarm and bind these spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, demolish the structures rooted in them and release the Holy Spirit to set up new structures based on love, joy, wisdom, peace and holiness of God (Wink, 1992, P.96).

Jesus Christ, being God, foresaw the appalling immorality and marital problems of our days when He predicted that “the love of most will wax cold because of increase in evil.” But thank God, He added what we desperately need to hear today, “He that shall endure to the end will be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then the end will come” (Mat. 24:12-14). Hence if the Holy Spirit continues to work in this dark world, there will still be happy, faithful, and successful marriages. This is the hope with which the Church should take up the challenge and be on the forefront to overcome the rulers, authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the world’s domination system, which is wreaking havoc in our families today. It is because of this sorry state of the family that this study is done.

The central research issue is to find out the kind of initiatives the pastors in Africa Inland Church in Makueni County were undertaking in their efforts to help their church members to resolve marital conflicts that are inevitable in any marriage, so that the couple’s marriage does not end up in separation or divorce. The research questions answered in this research stem from the central question: what was the A.I.C in Makueni County doing to resolve marital conflicts? Subsequent research questions answered included the following: In the opinion of the pastors and church members surveyed, what are the causes of marital conflicts among married couples? What specific services, programs and training initiatives can be identified by means of which the Church seeks to help her members to resolve these conflicts?

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

### **Background Information**

Marriage was God's original idea and the fact that it is plagued by so many conflicts, some of which lead to separation and divorce, is a cause of worry to the Church. Observing the breakdown of marriages in the researcher's context awakened a desire in her to want to find out the practical measures taken by the Church in trying to resolve these conflicts. The background to this doctoral research was laid because of doctoral seminars in conflict resolution and transformation in which key dynamics of conflict management and transformation were thoroughly discussed. Earlier on before this module, the increasing frequency of marriage breakdowns and the increasing number of colorful wedding ceremonies in our nation, Kenya, had continued to baffle the researcher. In addition, the researcher's own sister as well as many friends and neighbors were divorced. This prompted the researcher to devote her first learning contract in her doctoral program to articulating a biblical foundation of marriage in which an exegetical study of some biblical passages on marriage was done. Hence the doctoral seminars on conflict management and resolution, the increasing cases of marital problems and divorce rates reported in Kenyan media, as well as the knowledge gained from the Biblical teachings on marriage gave the researcher the desire to devote her dissertation to finding out what the pastors in the African Inland Church were doing to help the members of their congregations to manage and to be transformed by their marital conflicts. Armed with the empirical evidence of what is presently taking place in this region of Kenya, the researcher's desire was to offer research-based recommendations to pastors and churches to enhance their effectiveness in intervention in these marital crises.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Church in Kenya needs to be on the forefront in curbing the escalating rates of marriage conflicts that lead to separation, divorce and remarriage. Many books and articles on highly effective marriages, building a long-lasting marriage, secrets of a happy marriage, and many more practical books and articles have been written concerning this problem. Many conferences and couple seminars have been held where beautiful teachings on this problem have been given to the participants. Pre-marital counseling has continued to be offered in many instances to those anticipating marrying. Despite all these, marriages continue to break. It is my opinion that because the church is widespread in Kenya, she is ideally placed to reach the masses of people with the gospel of resolution of marital conflicts for her married members. More so, the Church is the institution ideally placed to study the Bible and dig out for the people what the initiator of marriage laid down as guidelines for a long-lasting marriage. The Church is well situated to educate her members and encourage them to put the biblical teachings into practice.

### **Sampling and Data Collection**

Empirical Field research was conducted to obtain crucial information as follows: Selected pastors from the Africa Inland Church in Makueni County were interviewed. The objective was to establish the types of interventions employed by various churches about resolving marital conflicts among the married members of this Church. Anecdotal experiences and how the pastors dealt with them were also highlighted. Several couples who had experienced marital conflicts

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

were engaged in Focus Group discussions to find out what the church had done, and could do to help them to resolve their conflicts. The findings are given in chapter six.

The central research issue being studied through the empirical was to find out what the pastors in Africa Inland Church in Mukaa Sub-County were doing to help their church members resolve marital conflicts that are inevitable in any marriage, so that the couple's marriage does not end up in separation and/or divorce. The research questions answered in this research stem from the central question: what is the A.I.C doing to resolve marital conflicts? Subsequent research questions answered included the following: In the opinion of the interviewee, what are the causes of marital conflicts among married couples? and how does the Church help her members to resolve these conflicts according to the pastors and members interviewed?

### **Research Design**

To achieve the objective of the study, a descriptive qualitative research design was used. Since the main subject of investigation was the AIC churches of Makueni, selected churches in Mukaa Sub-County were sampled. An interview schedule was used to derive the relevant data from the pastors. In addition, various groups comprising of married men and women were engaged in focus group discussion. The purpose of the group discussion was to explore as well as analyze opinions, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of married people toward marital conflicts and what the church was doing to help them sail through.

### **Population and Sample**

The population studied was all Africa Inland Churches in Mukaa Sub-County of Makueni County. Twenty Africa Inland Churches in Mukaa Sub-County, whose leaders were trained pastors from the various Bible training institutions in Kenya, were carefully sampled. The pastors were purposively selected in order to have rural and urban settings well represented. In addition, the researcher had focus group discussions with married church members. Ten groups were interviewed and their responses recorded. The groups were made up of husbands and wives separately and were composed of five to seven members. The researcher attempted to select the group members to represent different marital age groups of 0-5yrs. 6-10yrs. 11-20 yrs. and over 20 years.

The table below summarizes the sampling procedure:

Table 3

SETTING	RURAL	URBAN	TOTAL
NO. OF PASTORS	17	3	20
<b>FOCUS GROUPS</b>			
MALE	2	2	4
FEMALE	4	2	6
TOTAL	6	4	10

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

## **Research Instruments**

### **Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule was administered to twenty pastors from selected twenty Africa Inland Churches in Mukaa Sub-County of Makueni County. The questions were framed with a view to obtain information on the church's position on dealing with marital conflicts. The interview was preferred to a questionnaire because it allowed for deeper interaction with the respondents and clarification could be sought where necessary as it was a face-to-face encounter.

### **Focus Group Discussion Guide**

This was designed to suit church members. The guide was made in such a way as to elicit deep information about the causes and effects of marital conflicts that wives and husbands experience as well as the measures that their churches took to help them resolve the conflicts. Although it was not possible to get the opinion of each individual member on the issue of marital conflicts experienced, it was nevertheless used because it is less threatening than one-to-one interview. It is a useful tool for understanding public opinion on marital conflicts and the respondents felt valued and expressed their views with confidence. It also enabled interaction with more people within a given time.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

## Results

The results of the Pastors and Focus Discussion Groups interviewed are as follows:

### Causes of marital conflicts

<b>Cited Cause</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Early marriage	4
Wife committed to church activities	2
Separation by distance	3
Negligence of one's responsibility	2
Conflicting interests and hobbies	1
Drunkenness	7
Joblessness	3
Violation of conjugal rights	5
Lack of trust	4
External influence from in-laws	3
Childlessness/children of the same gender	8
Financial constraints	10
Unfaithfulness	18
Wife not desiring children	1
Peer pressure	5
Pre-marital sex	2

**N.B:** Some pastors cited more than one cause. As such, the total frequency is more than twenty.

It was noted that majority of the pastors interviewed cited unfaithfulness and financial issues as causes of marital conflicts that they had handled. In the light of this, infidelity is therefore a very common problem that needs to be adequately addressed by the pastors. Brewer aptly reckons that “when marriage is going wrong, the role of the minister is to encourage the couple to rescue the marriage. His role is to suggest ways to heal the marriage and to encourage repentance and forgiveness” (Brewer, p.311).

### Handling Marital Conflicts

All the pastors that cited unfaithfulness as a cause of marital conflict admitted that it is the most difficult issue to handle because establishing the truth is difficult unless one spouse is caught red-handed. This is because the first reaction of the accused was denial and it took a lot of time before the pastor and the couple could sit together to talk about the issue. The pastors agreed that it required lots of humility and prayer for them to establish the truth from the couple. Sometimes

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

one partner just suspects the other of infidelity. In such a case the pastor's role is to frequently talk to them, giving them biblical instructions and advising them to mature up so that they do not fuss when one sees the other talking to the opposite sex. The pastor also advised them to cultivate trust for each other, highlighting the dangers of going about life mistrusting one's partner such as developing high blood pressure, ulcers and other anxiety related disorders. In cases where it is established that one or both spouses are unfaithful, the pastors used the weapons of earnest prayer, God's Word and humility when talking with the couple.

The pastor then took turns to talk to each spouse separately to gather information from each one of them, assuring them of confidentiality. He then called both of them to discuss the issue with them. He played the role of an arbitrator between the spouses, offering them a non-threatening environment in which they would freely air their grievances. The pastor humbly and gently showed them the dangers of infidelity in marriage such as diseases, disrespect and emptiness. He identified the root cause of infidelity as conjugal rights violation, mistrust and lust, and dealt with each one of them. He also established whether or not they were born again. He would then deal with bitterness by persuading the wronged partner to accept and forgive the other. Some pastors said that they would advise the couple to visit VCT clinics to know their HIV/AIDS status so that they would live responsibly.

Concerning conflicts caused by finances, the pastors advised couples to jointly set goals for the projects that they wanted to undertake and have a common budget in order for each to know how and where the money was being used. One pastor advised that where both husband and wife were working, they should pool their salaries and budget together because everything is theirs. The money for daily expenses was to be placed in a drawer. If and when it was depleted, they should sit down and agree on what they should do. He proposed that husband and wife should be able to exchange their ATMs and expose their pay slips as there is no need to hide their salaries from each other.

As far as the other causes are concerned, there is no single bracket way of helping couples to sail through because each cause was unique to a particular couple and each pastor handled it in a particular way. The summary of what the pastors did for each cause of marital conflict is given below:

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

Cause of marital conflict	Way of resolving the conflict
Conflicting interests	Identifying common interests and hobbies to participate together
Drunkenness	Affects husbands mostly. Those affected do not come to church. Pastor advised the wife on how to deal with the drunk husband: - respect him and prayerfully exercise a lot of patience. -take all the money and give him only what he needs.
Joblessness due to husband losing his job or retiring.	Wife and husband advised to engage in other ways of generating income like chicken keeping or looking for casual jobs.
Pre-marital sex before marriage which causes mistrust to brew in the marriage.	Couple advised to forgive self and each other and to develop close relationship with each other.
Conjugal rights violation	Pastor explained to the couple their responsibilities to one another from scriptures that sex is an important aspect of marriage for both enjoyment (physical pleasure) and procreation, and that it is ordained by God (Gen.1: 28 and 1 cor. 7:5).
External influence	If the influence is from the in-laws, the couple was advised to move away from the in-laws if possible. -If not possible, the husband was shown the importance of defending his wife from them at all times. -where either of them was still attached to his/her parents, the pastor advised them to leave their families and cleave to each other.
Children issues	-For childlessness, the couple was advised to seek medical help. -Where medical help was sought to no avail, the couple was advised to consider adopting children. -In case where the couple had same sex children (girls), the pastor explained to the husband that the wife has no problem because it is the father who determined the sex of children. More so, he was told that children are gifts from God and therefore one does not choose what gift to be given.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

Early marriage	The couple got married when they were below twenty years of age and the marriage was occasioned by a lot of disrespect. The pastor was sorry that they separated despite his talking to them.
Wife's over-commitment to church activities	The wife was counseled against having too many responsibilities in the church which led to neglecting her family duties. She was reminded that the church begins at home.
Neglecting one's responsibilities to provide for the family	Husband was taught his responsibilities in the family as a father and provider.
Separation by distance.	The wife was encouraged to do some farming to supplement the husband's income. The wife is encouraged to visit the husband regularly at his place of work if it is not possible for them to stay together.

Each cause here seems to have a solution. However, the pastors were giving suggestions of how each cause could be resolved, suggestions that they gave their clients.

**Programs/ Structures assisting couples to resolve Marital Conflicts**

<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
	3
Praying with affected couples	
Couple's seminar	5
Visiting affected families by pastoral team	1
Family Sunday	6
Christian Women Fellowship and Christian Men Fellowship	14
Monthly messages on family life	2
Annual women and men	7
Conferences	
Young couples' fellowship	5
Senior Youth seminars	2
Bible Study	1

All the pastors admitted that they had set up some structural programs in their churches that aided couples to sort out their issues without necessarily taking them to their pastors. It was noted that couple seminars were not common in the rural churches but common in the urban churches. During these seminars, couples were reminded or/and taught God's plan for marriage

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

as well as the roles of each partner in marriage. Couple seminars were not popular in the rural churches probably because most husbands in the rural areas were not attending church services for they are employed in urban centers. Their wives attend these couple seminars when they visit their husbands.

### **Challenges faced in handling marital conflicts**

The pastors cited many challenges that they experienced in the course of helping their members resolve their marital conflicts. The table below gives the challenges.

<b>CHALLENGE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Lack of openness on the part of the spouses	6
Time consuming	16
Costly	12
Mental strain	6
Uncooperative spouses	10
Conflict in the pastor's family	1
Influence from other pastors	3
Discouragement by lack of success	3
Ignorance of current affairs	9

The challenges of the exercise being costly, tedious and mentally straining were reported by most pastors. The cost implication came about when the pastors were required to move to where the clients were. Uncooperative spouses and failure to open up increased the mental strain and tediousness.

### **Focus Discussion Group Results**

The discussion groups were aimed at providing information on causes of marital conflicts as experienced by the participants and to establish whether or not the Church assisted them in any way to resolve them. Wives and husbands of different marital ages were engaged in the discussion separately in order to enhance their freedom while speaking. All the groups composed of the wives participated actively and freely and were thankful for being offered an opportunity and space to air their views. But the groups composed of the husbands were not as free and so they needed slightly more tactfulness as well as incentives to participate in the discussion. The assurance of confidentiality and some monetary tokens of appreciation helped to motivate them to participate in the discussion. Some groups were composed of members from different churches for the purpose of good representation of the twenty churches whose pastors were interviewed. Below are the results of the focus discussion groups.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

**Causes of marital conflicts**

All the groups interviewed confirmed the fact that marital conflicts are inevitable in any marriage. GWR/U and GMR/U were used to denote focus discussion groups for women and for men from rural/urban set-ups respectively. The table below gives their responses concerning the causes of the conflicts, the programs the church set up to help them resolve their conflicts and what else they felt the church could do to assist them resolve their marital conflicts.

GROUP	CAUSES CITED	PROGRAM IN PLACE	EXTRA MEASURES
GW1R Over 30yrs.of marriage	Financial problems Discipline of children	Timely messages from the pulpit Weekly prayer meetings Christian women fellowship ( CWF)	Couple seminars Celebrating marriage by honoring model couples
GW2R 15-20 yrs. of marriage	in-laws interference bad influence from friends financial problems	timely messages from the pulpit weekly prayer meetings CWF annual conferences for women and men	couple seminars invitation of guest speakers to speak on family life
GW3R 5-10 yrs.	mis-trust in-laws interference disagreements on financial constraints mobile phones sexual issues	CWF weekly prayer meetings	Young couples fellowship invitation of guest speakers
GW4U 10-15 yrs.	financial problems in-laws interference mobile phones	CWF prayer meetings	mentoring programs praying with those undergoing conflicts
GW5R 1-5yrs.	arguments interference from in-laws frustrations from unfulfilled expectations interference from friends sexual related problems	CWF timely pulpit messages annual conferences for women and men local church monthly fellowship	pre-marital counseling couple seminars young couple’s fellowship mentoring by older mature couples
GW6U Over 30 yrs.	disagreements involving their roles in the family	CWF family Sundays annual conferences ladies fellowships	mentoring programs couple seminars
GM1R 25-40 yrs.	financial constraints drunkenness unfaithfulness	Timely pulpit messages weekly prayer meetings	strengthening men’s fellowships post-marital counseling for husbands

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

GM2R	Unfaithfulness	prayer meetings	couple seminars
10-20 yrs.	drunkenness	timely messages	couple seminars
	financial constraints		setting up and strengthening
GM2U	unfaithfulness	pulpit messages	men’s fellowships
10-20 yrs.	financial constraints	prayer meetings	couple seminars
		Christian Men Fellowship (CMF)	
		family Sundays	
GM3U	unfaithfulness	CMF	mentoring programs
5-10 yrs.	mobile phones	Prayer meetings and timely	couple seminars
	childlessness	messages	
		family Sundays	

From these results, mentoring programs and couple seminars are not common in rural churches. Those interviewed felt that the church needs to incorporate them in their programs in order to help those facing marital conflicts. Pre-marital counseling was not hailed as a crucial method of curbing marital conflicts. The participants seemed to prefer mass kind of counseling rather than the one-onto-one kind of counseling.

None of the women groups interviewed cited unfaithfulness as one of the causes of marital conflicts but all the groups of men mentioned it as one of the causes. It is as if the women did not want to mention it, for reasons that require further research. The groups of men concurred with the pastors interviewed on this cause of marital conflicts. Young couples (0-5 yrs.) are in the process of adjusting to each other hence they need to be assisted to smoothly sail through these turbulent years.

### **Resolution of marital conflicts**

All admitted that their first reaction when any of the above happens is anger followed by silence of the wronged partner especially the wife. She does not talk to the husband for some time, the length of time depending on the cause of the conflict. Finally, husband and wife talk about the issue and they decide to resolve the conflict by themselves. In cases of unfaithfulness, drunkenness, in-law interference and financial problems, both husband and wife admitted that they involved a third party to help them resolve marital conflicts. The third party involved is their pastor, parents or a mature couple. All admitted that they involved the third party when the relationship was already quite bad.

### **Role of the Church**

The wives cited the Christian Women Fellowship group in the church as of being of great help to them in resolving their marital conflicts as therein are taught biblical lessons on how to be good wives and good mothers among other things like cookery and needlework. The husbands in the rural churches admitted that their Christian Men Fellowship had not picked up. Where it was

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makeni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

present, in the urban churches, they hailed it as being useful in helping them to resolve marital conflicts.

The participants said that timely messages on family life from the pulpit helped melt the hostilities between them and their spouses and after Sunday service they often went home healed and renewed. They gave suggestions on what more they thought the church would do to assist them to resolve their conflicts as shown in the table and explained as follows: organizing annual couple seminars where experts in marital therapy would teach and train couples on various issues, mentoring young couples by mature couples in the church, setting up prayer teams in the church to pray for families and organizing weekly prayer meetings for families.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The findings of these interviews showed that the church is not dormant as far as assisting their members in the area of marital conflicts. All of them agreed that at least they were doing something to assist their members to cope up with inevitable marital conflicts. On the causes of marital conflicts, it was worrying that unfaithfulness drunkenness and separation rated highly, which were more of the husband's problem. This is made worse by the observation that CMF was not coming strong in most of the churches whose pastors were interviewed. The general conclusion is that the husbands need to be targeted more in these programs as they are the heads of the family, if we want to have solid marriages. In addition, prayer meetings and Bible studies rated low and yet these are the backbone of every other program to be put in place.

The members confessed that they got help from the programs the church had put in place especially the CWF and CMF. Hence these two programs need to be strengthened and enriched to be more useful to the couples. It was however observed that CMF was not present in most rural churches, which was a major concern. Both the wives and the husbands needed to be helped as far as resolving marital conflicts is concerned.

It was observed that the wives interviewed did not have any problem of opening up like the husbands discussion groups. The husbands need to be encouraged to voice out their marital concerns as heads of their families. Since any marriage is made strong by the couple, both the husband and the wife should be targeted for its success. Targeting the wife alone will not bear much fruit as when both of them are targeted. Hence Christian Men Fellowships need to be strengthened in our churches alongside those of the wives.

### **Recommendations**

Couples need to be encouraged to cultivate and nurture personal faith in God through Jesus Christ. This can be done by encouraging them to be active in spiritual disciplines of personal and communal Bible study, meditating on the Word, sharing it as well as praying and fasting for their families. This is because the disciplines of Bible study and prayer were seldom mentioned by the pastors as a way of curbing marital conflicts. These disciplines would help them to put off the sinful nature of self-centeredness and put on Christ-likeness through renovation of their hearts, and they would also know that their deep needs of security and significance are fully met in Christ Jesus and hence they would not look unto their spouses for their security and

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

significance. Instead, they would find their significance in ministering to the needs of their spouses with the full assurance that their security is guaranteed in Christ whether their spouses reciprocate it or not. In addition to this, the spouses would learn true and sound Biblical purpose and meaning for marriage from God's Word. God's Word teaches that: Marriage is to be glorifying to God and that it is to be characterized by oneness, permanence and openness (Gen.2:24-25), strong marriages are the foundation for family life and the raising of godly children (Mal.2:15) and there is some way in which marriage portrays the very essence of the nature of God (Gen.1:27)

These scriptural truths are very important because they provide a powerful theological basis for understanding the importance of marriage in the world. Hence the pastors of these churches need to clearly teach them to their members so that marriage is accorded the significance that it deserves.

The causes of marital conflicts highlighted in this research are the obstacles that get in the way of experiencing the biblical model of marriage upon such a theological foundation of marriage. However, these scriptural truths of marriage require an experiential dimension where the church models living examples of marriages according to God's design. This can be done by nurturing mentoring partnerships where older couples are encouraged to adopt younger couples whom they can mentor in marital issues. This can be a powerful way of appropriating the experiential dimension of marriage as it involves real people in real situations. The mentors are couples who have weathered marital storms and have mastered the art of resolving marital conflicts on the basis of the solid truth of the Word of God. They partner with younger couples to help them appropriate these truths in their marital life. It would be easy for the young couples to practice these truths because they see them in their mentors. The young couples become mentors to other younger couples. In the long run, couples will have older couples they can look up to as examples and consultants in their marital lives.

Forums where marriage is celebrated and honored can also be arranged whereby mature couples who have been good models are honored and requested to adopt young couples to help them weather through the challenges of marital life. The young couples would have people to lean on in times of marital turbulence; people who have already successfully passed through such challenges. Conferences at the church level can also be organized where the mature couples can be the speakers. The young couples mentored become mentors to others and the cycle continues. In the long run, the church would have members whose marriages mirror the Christ-church model.

The other crucial recommendation is commitment of the church to premarital counseling for those planning to get married since the field research revealed that it is rarely practiced. And where it is practiced, it is done haphazardly with no curriculum to be followed. This program would ensure that people marry when they know the duties and the obligations of marriage, as well as its purpose in the eyes of God. They need to be taught that their expectations may never be met in marriage and instead should be ready to adjust toward one another. They also need to be taught the place of romance and the place of love in marriage, in that romance comes before marriage and it cannot sustain a marriage because it is known to die off with time.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

On the contrary, love comes after marriage, and it is the key element that sustains it. They need to be advised against looking unto their spouses for fulfillment of their needs of security and significance because a spouse cannot satisfactorily fulfill them. They can only be fulfilled by Jesus Christ through establishing a personal relationship with Him. This would be successful if the pastors in the churches interviewed undergo training in pre-marital counseling.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -52.

## References

- <http://www.sharefaith.com/blog>. (2014, 06 10). Retrieved 08 24, 2017, from great-ideas-strengthen-marriage-ministry
- (2015, February 08). *Daily Nation*.
- <http://www.nation.co.ke>. (2017, 04 17). Retrieved 10 12, 2017, from counties/nyeri/nyeri-court-charges-pastor-indecent-act-minor195190-3831370-v9c3j7/index.html
- <http://www.nation.co.ke/newsplex>. (2017, 02 27). Retrieved 08 15, 2017, from food-inflation/2718262-3836160-1-deps9z/index.html
- Adams, J. (1983). *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Adei, S. (1991). *Communication: The Secret to a Happy Marriage*. Accra: Africa Christian Press.
- Bilezikien, G. (1985). *Beyond Sex Roles*. Grand Rapids. MI: Baker Book House.
- Brewer, D.-I. (2002). *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*. Grand Rapids Michigan: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Brewer, D.-I. (2003). *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities*. USA: IVP.
- Brown, J. (1996). *Women Ministers According to Scripture*. Kearney NE: Morris Publishing.
- Bujo, B. (2009). *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage*. Nairobi: Paulines.
- Crabb, L. (1982). *The Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counselors*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Daystar, U. (n.d.). *A Synopsis of the Status of the Christian Family in Kenya*. Nairobi: Daystar University.
- Dobson, J. (1966). *Love Must be Tough*. USA: Word Publishing.
- Fisher, e. a. (2007). *Working With Conflicts: Skills and Strategies for Action*. London: Zed Books.
- Gichinga, E. (2003). *Marriage Counseling: A Counseling Guide*. Nairobi: GEM Counseling Services.
- Gitaari, S. (2003). *Resolving Conflicts in Marriage*. Nairobi.
- Group, B. (2001, August 6). <http://www.barna.org>. Retrieved February 20, 2017, from Barna org: <http://www.barna.org>
- Gushee, D. (2004). *Getting Marriage Right: Realistic Counsel for Saving and Strengthening Relationships*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Books.
- Issler, K. (1990). Nurturing Marriage and Family Life. *Christian Education Journal Volume X Issue 2. Winter*, 75-86.
- Keener, C. (1991). *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson.
- Keith, E. (2003). It takes a Village to Save a Marriage. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no.3, 188-195.
- LaHaye, T. (1989). *How to be Happy Though Married*. Wheaton Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.

**Citation:** Mueni, W. K. (2017). The Contribution of the Church toward Resolving Marital Conflict A Case Study of Africa Inland Church in Makueni County. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*: 1, 2, 33 -.52.

- Lane, W. (1976). *The Gospel of Mark: New International Commentary Series*. England: Morgan and Scott.
- Leighton, F. (1991). *Jesus' Way of Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values and Empowering Change*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Levy, J. (1989, July 11). *Time Magazine*, pp. 15-17.
- Lewis, S. (1999). *The Four Loves*. London: Fount.
- Mathew H, Mounce Roberts. (1991). *New International Biblical Commentary*. Peabody MA: Hendrickson.
- Matto, E. O. (2013). Social Dimensions of Marital Conflicts in Kenya. *Journal of Power, Politics and Governance Vol.1 No.1*, 25-46.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *Poems of Nature and Faith*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1983). *African Religions and Philosophy*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: New Edition.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1991). *Introduction to African Religion*. Nairobi Kenya: East African Educational Publishers.
- Miller, P. (1990). *Deuteronomy: Interpretation Commentary*. London: J Knox Press.
- Olive Mugenda and Abel Mugenda. (2003). *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi: ACTS.
- Richardson, R. (2010). *Couples in Conflict: A Family Systems Approach to Marriage Counseling*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Selwyn, H. (1983). *Marriage as God Intended*. Eastbourne: Kingsway.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.
- Sinclair, F. (1987). *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*. Finland: WSOY Book Printing Division.
- Stassen and Gushee. (2003). *Kingdom Ethics*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Stephene Adei and Georgina Adei. (1984). *God's Master Plan for Marriage: Foundation for successful Christian Marriage*. Chicago: Word Alive Publication.
- Stott, J. (1999). *New Issues Facing Christians Today*. Great Britain: Marshall Pickering.
- TAG. (1996). *A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa*. Kijabe: Kijabe Printing Press.
- Trobisch, W. (2003). *I Married You*. England: IVP.
- Willard, D. (2002). *Renovation of the Heart :Putting on the Character of Christ*. USA: NavPress.
- Williard, H. (1997). *His needs and Her Needs*. Crownborough: Monarch.
- Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Winkler, K. (2014, October 06). <http://www.sharefaith.com/blog>. Retrieved June 05, 2017, from great-ideas-strengthen-marriage-church-reinforce-care-marriage-ministry
- Wright, N. (1985). *Healing Conflicts in Marriage: Making Peace with your Partner*. USA: word Publishing.