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"Internal and External Factors
That Hinder or Help Effective Ministry
to Divorced Lutherans:
Why They Stay Away/
What We Can Do to Bring Them In"

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December 1, 1994

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the factors that hinder or help ministry to divorced people.

Questionnaires to divorced members *and* pastors, addressing attitudes and perceptions, were the chief tools. Suggestions were solicited to ascertain what promotes meaningful ministry.

Perceptions of pastors and divorced members are often different. The divorced have more intense feelings about the issues and are more lenient in their understanding of grounds for divorce than pastors. Pastors are more inclined to credit internal factors, the divorced external, for what hinders effective ministry.

Pastors need to be more understanding of the dynamics of the divorce process. There are many positive steps--before, during, and after divorce occurs--that pastors can take to remove roadblocks and build bridges.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF DIVORCE	11
3. CHRIST'S EXAMPLE FOR THE CHURCH	32
4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	48
5. RESULTS	55
6. IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY	77
7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE	95

Appendix

1. SURVEY OF LCMS MEMBERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DIVORCE	124
2. PASTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE ON DIVORCE ISSUES	139
3. CROSS-TABULATION OF RESULTS	149
4. QUESTIONNAIRE ON MARRIAGE/DIVORCE ISSUES "Pilgrim Survey"	165
5. PRELIMINARY SURVEY	167
6. SAMPLE NEWSLETTER ARTICLE	169
7. SAMPLE SERMON ON DIVORCE	170
8. SAMPLE PRAYER FOR FAMILIES/MARRIAGES	177
9. SUGGESTED USE OF CHURCH YEAR PERICOPES	178
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	187

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Problem for Study

More and more, churches today are actively seeking ways to meet the needs of members experiencing the struggles and challenges of divorce and its aftermath. Many of these churches are developing specialized ministries to this segment of the population once ostracized and looked down upon. Support groups have proliferated; workshops and seminars have been developed on such widely ranging topics as grief recovery, self-esteem, single-parenting skills, and financial management.

A survey of Doctor of Ministry studies which have attempted to address some of these issues indicates that most have focused on an analysis of a particular divorce recovery ministry in existence or the creation of a such a ministry or a one-time event. These are then followed up with a critique of their success, usefulness, and application to the wider church (Hagemeyer 1991; Dent 1991; Sheats 1991; Roorda 1990; Ross 1981). Many of these include a discussion of the emotional, social, and practical aspects of the divorce experience.

Such programs, on the whole, address the needs of people after they have divorced and are in need of support groups. They also are helpful only to those motivated enough to utilize the resources offered. They do not address the reasons why others do not make use of these programs and ministries.

One study that proved useful and a stimulus for the present paper was

Social Factors Affecting the Church Involvement of Persons During and/or Following Divorce (Schwerdt 1984). It corroborates many of the points that are made in this study. Schwerdt, however, limited himself to interviews with only 30 divorced individuals and no pastors. He makes the recommendation, though, that additional research might include studying the psychological factors connected with divorce.

Quite often only a small window of opportunity exists in which effective ministry can take place with people in troubled marriages or who have separated or divorced. The sooner they seek help or the sooner it is initiated with them, the better the chances of success will be for reconciliation, restoration, or rebuilding.

One question that previous studies have failed to address or emphasize is, "Why do those going through the divorce experience so often stay away from potential avenues of help and support--particularly their pastor(s) and congregations?" It is easy to pin the blame on the divorced. "We pastors and our churches are here. We care. We will help. . . Now, why don't they come?"

However, the issue is not so simple or one-sided. Something more than a passive or reactive approach is needed. The underlying question is, "Are there dynamics in the divorce experience that pastors need to be more aware of which hinder hurting people from seeking our counsel? Are there factors--internal or external--that create roadblocks or form barriers to meaningful ministry?"

On the other hand, can bridges toward those experiencing marital turmoil or going through divorce be erected or strengthened, making them comfortable and confident enough to discuss sensitive issues and creating an atmosphere of concern and care? Whether pastors realize it or not, divorced people already have perceptions about the kind of reception and assistance

they will receive, the attitudes they will encounter, and the acceptance they will or will not find from their pastor or church.

Similarly, pastors have perceptions, as well as mis-perceptions, of the kind of attitude the divorced have about them as care-givers (or God's henchmen!), what issues the divorced are wrestling with, and how capable they are in terms of wanting and seeking help. Pastors have their own personal biases and unique backgrounds, their own life filters, theologies, and philosophies through which and by which they address problems and issues in the lives of church members.

In many cases, unfortunately, these perceptions are inaccurate and counterproductive. In many cases, what is assumed from the view of the pulpit is not found in the pew, and vice versa.

Oftentimes, pastors lack an understanding and sensitivity to what is actually going on in the hearts, souls, minds, and lives of the divorced. Such a deficiency may be due to a lack of exposure to dysfunctional family situations in their past, insufficient prior training in seminary, inexperience, or simply the failure to gain a knowledge base in this area from a theological, pastoral, as well as psychological, viewpoint.

The present project, then, was intended to address this problem by identifying internal and external factors which hinder and inhibit church members who have gone through the divorce experience from utilizing the spiritual support, biblical counsel, and personal guidance of their pastor(s)--thus precluding effective ministry to them. At the same time, those factors that foster, encourage, and promote such ministry and break down barriers and open up bridges to the divorced are also identified.

So, what's the problem? How significant is it? The following paragraphs outline the extent of the problem with which the church--and society--must deal.

The Problem Divorce Poses for Society and the Church

No one who makes their vows of marriage at the altar--promising fidelity, commitment and undying love--does so with the thought that this marriage will end up as a casualty of the "divorce wars" that rage unabated in our society. The statistics are sobering.

Wynn reports that in the United States "we are witnessing 1.2 million divorces per year now, a number that appears to have peaked and to be in slight decline" (Wynn 1991, 3). Approximately half of all first marriages entered into today will end in divorce. Quoting the Bureau of the Census statistics (Northeast region has highest percent of single adults 1991, 1), Single Adult Ministry Journal [hereafter, SAM] reports that one out of every nine persons in the United States is either divorced (8.3%) or separated (2.6%).

The divorce rate in America has soared over the last few decades, even as the make-up of the American family has undergone significant changes. Quoting again data from the 1990 Census, SAM states that between 1970 and 1990, "married couple families" declined from 71% to 56% of the total. "In 1970, single parent families were only 13 percent of all parent-child relationships. Today, they are almost 30 percent. Single parent families grew by 32 percent during the 1980s" (What does 'traditional family' mean? 1992, 4).

Of those who divorce, it is estimated that 80% will eventually remarry, and, of these, 83% will be men and 75% women (Splinter 1992, 220). In fact,

in 1990, at least half of all marriages were remarriages for at least one partner (A nation in transition 1990, 1).

Most of those who remarry will do so within four years. Men in particular are inclined to remarry more quickly. Citing a study by Hultsch and Deutsch, Sell reports that "fifty percent of men under thirty-five remarry within one year after a divorce is granted. Half of divorced women under age thirty-five remarry within fourteen months of divorce" (Sell 1984, 68).

Unfortunately, "practice" doesn't "make perfect." The rate of divorce for those previously married is even higher, 60%, than for first-time marriages (Splinter 1992, 220). This is especially true when there are children involved, no doubt because of the increased stressors and added complications that go along with such unions. "Newly remarried couples face from three to 10 times the stress--including financial, relocation, the tensions of step-parenting and dealing with the former spouses--as do those in first marriages" (The realities of remarriage 1990, 2). Subsequent marriages, not surprisingly, fare even worse.

Divorce is a phenomenon that, sadly, leaves in its wake many victims and deleterious consequences. Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman, quoting a study by Bloom, White, and Asher (1978), highlight a number of areas in which divorce has a negative impact on individuals and society.

Those who are divorced or separated "have been repeatedly found to be over-represented among psychiatric patients. . . . Admission rates into psychiatric facilities are lowest among the married, intermediate among widowed and never-married adults, and highest among the divorced and separated" (Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman 1983, 120).

Statistics also support the fact that the divorced are far more vulnerable to automobile fatalities and accident rates than married or single

people. It is possible that some of the automobile fatalities are simply suicides that were covered up. (See below.)

No doubt because divorce is such a stressor for people, there is a clear link between divorce and drinking-related problems. "[Alcoholism] is more prevalent among the divorced than among the married." Furthermore, the "maritally disrupted are consistently found to be over-represented among [those whose deaths are the result of suicide, homicide, and specific diseases]" (Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman 1983, 120-21).

Divorce also has an extremely negative impact on families financially. What was accomplished in one household now must be accomplished in two. Talley cites figures from the Census Bureau which report that "family income drops 37 percent within four months of separation" (Tally 1991, 16). Child support rarely suffices.

It is no wonder that divorce's adverse impact has a ripple effect on so many different people. It touches not only those directly involved, such as spouses, children, in-laws, but even friends, neighbors, and society in general. Society, for example, must learn to deal with the reality that "60 percent of the children born in the U.S. today will spend part of their lives in a single-parent household and in one or more step relationships" (A nation in transition 1990, 1). Since the incidence of divorce is higher in families that have experienced divorce previously, this can only have a negative effect on the future of marriage and family life in America.¹

According to Edward G. Dobson, society's attitudes toward the phenomenon of divorce has experienced a gradual change over the years and this change has impacted on the church's response and role:

¹A sobering look, which counters much of the previous Pollyannaish views of divorce's "minimal" long-term effects on children, as well as adults, is found in Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After a Divorce (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989).

Divorce has come a long way in our society! From a time when it was never considered an option--even under the worst circumstances--it gradually moved into an era when it was considered a disgraceful choice. Still only the most brazen and rebellious brought this shame to their families. Over time, however, divorce became tolerable, the lesser of evils in certain situations. Finally, the stigma of divorce faded, and soon people began to encourage divorce as an easy and desirable alternative to the difficult task of solving marriage problems. (Dobson 1986, 15)

Thomas Needham offers his own analysis why the number of divorces is increasing even among Christians. It has its source in the changing view of marriage, as well as in issues that people bring into their marriages from their past. "Marital failure," he writes, "stems from three separate but interrelated factors."

First, for many in America, the nature of marriage has changed. Research confirms that most now marry primarily for companionship rather than economic security. . .

Second, the new emphasis on companionship marriage has evolved at a time when couples are more isolated from networks of family and friends than ever before. High mobility and rugged individualism leave many to struggle alone. . .

Third, many couples bear deep emotional scars from growing up in homes troubled by mental illness, divorce, sexual abuse, violence, alcoholism, negligence, harsh discipline, and legalism. Indeed, as family breakdown continues, the pathologies people bring to marriage will increase. These scars cause fears, hurts, and distrust, making companionship marriage all the more difficult (Needham 1992, 35).

David Seamands describes additional factors that have influenced that change. "Immoral lifestyles, lax divorce laws, and our amoral media have combined to create a society that sees marriage as provisional rather than permanent. We now have a pattern that sociologists call 'serial monogamy': an individual is married to one person at a time, but over a lifetime will have several consecutive marriage partners" (Seamands 1992, 27).¹

¹An examination of these factors in greater detail--from more secular viewpoints--can be found in The Second Time Around: Remarriage in America (Westoff 1977, 6-7), Divorce: The New Freedom (Fisher 1974, 6-7), and Divorce: Problems, Adaptations, and Adjustments (Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman 1983, xi-xii).

Few people describe the experience of divorce in anything other than negative and unwelcome terms. Hudson describes it this way:

Divorce is such an ugly, smelly, cold, rude, crude person. It rains on your parade, intrudes into your life-style, breaks into your schedule, poisons your pets, crashes your parties, backs over your children, leaves your parents and grandparents weeping in their tea, and creates bad odors on every holiday. Divorce leaves a trail of sorrow and puzzlement wherever it goes (Hudson 1983, 167-68).

Helen Kooiman Hosier offers an equally painful description:

Divorce is hurtful. Hurtful to many people--not just the ones involved in the divorce action. Hurtful to the cause of Christ.

Divorce is ugly. Ugly to onlookers, ugly to those who can only surmise the whys and wherefores. Ugly to children. Ugly to those affected the most--the man and the woman.

Divorce is costly. Financially. Emotionally. Physically. Spiritually. . .

Divorce is painful. It is a chaotic time. A time of sadness, struggle, anguish, anxiety, and trauma. . . (Hosier 1975, 186-87).

In terms of its negative effect and shattering impact on people, divorce, according to the National Mental Health Association, ranks only below the death of a spouse as a stress-producing transition (Wynn 1991, 101).¹ Many people, in fact, compare the divorce experience to a death.

Writes Sue Poorman Richards:

Divorce is a kind of death. It's the death of a relationship. It's the death of years of promise and promises. It's the death of years of planning. It's the death of love. It's the death of things shared. Who else remembers our son's first steps, stitches in the forehead on the Fourth of July, or walking in midnight air to help a baby with croup breathe more easily? Divorce is the death of a life together, rich with love and laughter, pain and hurt, and promises broken so completely, like Humpty Dumpty, it seems that 'all the king's horses and all the king's men' can't put that marriage together again (Richards and Hagemeyer 1986, 23).

¹It's a "7" on a "10-point" scale ("Death of spouse" = "10"). Others that at least measure a "5" ranking are (in descending order): "Separation" [6], "Jail term" [6], "Death of family member" [6], "Severe injury or illness" [5], "Marriage" [5].

Divorce is an issue so complex and convoluted at times that it defies pat answers and easy solutions. Years ago, seminary professor of practical theology, H. G. Coiner, cautioned, "When Scripture is not clear and theology is uncertain, evangelical strategy demands fluidity and flexibility in dealing with all the extenuating circumstances in each different case [of divorce]" (Coiner 1963, 549). Such counsel is wise, provided that we do not exaggerate and proliferate what is not clear and uncertain.

This calls for an ever-increasing understanding of the biblical material and the interpretative issues dealing with the subject of divorce. It also requires a sensitivity to the dynamics of the divorce experience that includes the emotional, interpersonal, practical, financial, and legal dimensions. Ministry to separated or divorced people today demands far greater discernment, understanding, and sensitivity than was required by pastors a generation or two ago when the problem was barely an issue and the community consensus was supportive of the biblical paradigm.

Addressing the issue from his perspective as a former missionary to India, where the burning issue was polygamy, not divorce, David Seamands counsels:

It is time we recognize our mission-field situation. We must become deeply involved with those whose marriages have failed: the separated, the divorced, those contemplating remarriage, and remarried couples with struggling 'blended' families. Without compromising scriptural standards, we must take the risk of asking the ultimate missionary question: How can we work with broken people and shattered marriages *in this particular setting?* How can we do it in ways that lead to repentance and forgiveness, that let people understand the sins and pathologies that destroyed their previous marriages, that help them make right choices if and when they remarry? Only then will families break the present generation's patterns of divorce, and thereby eventually cause culture to change (Seamands 1992, 28).

Helen Kooiman Hosier made a plea many years ago to the church for understanding and compassion for those who have experienced the pain of divorce. She wrote:

If God can forgive, why can't his people? Or does the Bible actually say that divorce and remarriage are unforgivable sins? When the Word declares that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness (I John 1:9), does it mean that or doesn't it? Must divorced people forever after carry a stigma enforced upon them by the Christian world? Must we remain second-class citizens of the Christian community where we would like to continue in fellowship and in work for the Lord?

Is divorce too great an evil for human Christian forgiveness? Are divorced people to be pushed to the sidelines and avoided or ignored? Are they to be denied the right to remarry and establish happy homes? Where is Christian justice for divorced people today? Where do you personally stand in regard to showing love and justice? Have we forgotten what Jesus said? "For if you forgive other people their failures [sic], your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failure" [Matthew 6:12, 14, 15 PT] (Hosier 1975, 8-9).

While some attitudes have changed for the better since those words were written almost 20 years ago, it is still imperative that the church come to grips with this problem that will be with us for a long time.

There does need to be understanding and compassion. At the same time there must also be a sincere, open, and honest commitment to biblical principles and standards, as well as a humility in recognizing that there are most often no easy answers. It will always be easier to ascertain God's ideal and will in general toward marriage than to identify what is right and wrong in specific examples and instances. "*WHAT God has joined together*" (Matthew 19:6) is easier to recognize than when we get down to "*WHOM*."

CHAPTER 2

EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF DIVORCE

Pastors and churches who want to face the challenges of ministering to the divorced people in their midst must first become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the nature and dynamics of the divorce experience. That is a basic, underlying assumption of this study.

"We need to understand," writes Bob Burns, "that divorce is a crisis experience. And we need to discern how the turmoil created by a divorce impacts every aspect and relationship of [the divorced member's] life" (Burns 1989, 18).

Without this understanding, pastors may go on assuming many things about their divorced members which are simply not true. They may expect them to be able to act in certain ways or take certain initiatives which their circumstances and condition do not allow or facilitate. They may imagine that certain realities are true when, in fact, the opposite is the case. That is why more knowledge and insight into the emotional dynamics of the divorce experience are crucial and essential for meaningful ministry.

Anyone who has experienced divorce will attest that it is a time of severe emotional stress and pain. Hosier, reflecting on her own experience, writes: "What does it feel like to be divorced? Who can explain the paralyzing impact of the sudden aloneness and uncertainty about the future? In the cauldron of our emotions, all sorts of internal feelings boil over, shocking us, tipping us off balance, and everything becomes a frightening question mark.

We feel depleted. Frantic, tense, unable to cope" (Hosier 1975, 12).

Another writer effectively paints the following devastating picture of divorce: "I think of divorce like the vicious slice of an attacker's knife. The wound is not clean; it is jagged and uneven" (Burns 1989, 19). Using a striking medical metaphor, Stanfield observes: "I've been recovering from domestic surgery--a radical husbandectomy and a partial childectomy" (Stanfield 1990, 11).

While we normally associate grief with the death of a loved one, there are also parallels to divorce. Both situations result in significant loss. The major difference is that, unlike the case of the death of a loved one, divorce has no funeral. The relationship is not really dead. It continues on, but in a different and usually difficult and unpleasant fashion.

Those who experience the loss of a loved one can normally expect "food, flowers, family, follow-up, phone calls." Not so the divorced. One divorced person ruefully admitted: "Unlike the experience of losing my first husband, I didn't receive one casserole or condolence card after the divorce" (Burns 1989, 19).

Divorce, then, requires "grief work." "Grief," as Splinter outlines, "is a normal reaction to a painful situation and is one of the most deeply disturbing emotional states a person will ever endure. It is usually an inescapable part of divorce, as two people tear apart what had once been a bonded, close, significant, intimate relationship" (Splinter 1992, 19).

Unfortunately, many people do not successfully or adequately work through their grief whether through death or divorce. The consequences of this avoidance, though, are damaging. "To ignore [grief], to pretend it doesn't hurt, to deny the pain, is usually only to postpone the day in which the individual will deal with the pain; as in dealing with physical wounds, postponement usually

means the problem will have become more difficult, more complicated, more serious" (Splinter 1987, 28).

Splinter identifies several ways that people, including those going through divorce, try to avoid the pain of grief. They include leaping into another relationship, using alcohol or drugs, denying the situation, relying on social infighting, or indulging in self-pity (Splinter 1987, 33-34). Elsewhere, he comments: "Some people use food to feel good--for a while. . . Some become compulsive workaholics, spendaholics, or sexaholics. . . Probably the most common coping mechanism is the Novocain of another intimate relationship . . ." (Splinter 1992, 70).¹

Pastoral counselors should be on the look out for unhealthy coping mechanisms. As Splinter warns: "[Coping] mechanisms are almost always counterproductive to good, healthy and lasting peace. They treat the symptoms rather than the 'disease' " (Splinter 1992, 71).

Since Kubler-Ross came out with her widely-acclaimed study On Death and Dying, the stages of grief have been well documented. Grief work involves going through a cycle that consists of shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

In listing them in that order, it does not mean that each person will go through each stage in the same way or at the same pace. One stage may last but a short time, while another may require a much longer time to work through. It is also not uncommon for people to jump backwards or forwards from one stage to another.

¹Summarizing the results of a survey of Christianity Today's readership (which would mainly be practicing Christians), Haddon Robinson reports: "Sexual sin appears to be a greater problem for those who have been divorced. They are three times as likely as those in their first marriages to have committed adultery, and they appear to have had their first involvement in premarital sex at an older age, probably after their divorce and before their remarriage" (Robinson 1992, 31-32). Christians living with this guilt would be less likely to seek out counsel from their pastors on their own.

The purpose of highlighting these stages is to raise the issues with pastoral counselors: "If you were experiencing symptoms of these stages, with the possible exception of the "final" stage--"acceptance," would you expect yourself to think clearly, act properly, respond promptly? Would these factors possibly have a numbing, blinding, disorienting effect upon you that might preclude your seeking help, proffered or otherwise? Might an understanding of all this make you adjust your approach, alter your assumptions, and modify your actions?"

Shock

The first stage is "shock." During the stage of shock the person usually feels numb. The typical reaction is: "Is this really happening to me? Am I having a bad dream? Tomorrow I'll wake up and find that I've been dreaming."

"In a state of shock, people react in many different ways," says Smoke. "Some retreat within themselves trying to block out all thoughts of what is happening. They deny it mentally and refuse to talk about it with anyone. They withdraw from friends and social contacts. They may move or change jobs. Retreating sometimes turns into running" (Smoke 1976, 14).

Trafford describes this shock as a paralysis. "You simply don't respond. You can't function. You drop out of life for a while. Like biblical prophets, you take time out in the wilderness to think things over. Your friends and family don't understand. They think you're behaving very strangely. You say you can't talk about it now. You have to put your life on hold for a while and go off by yourself" (Trafford 1982, 74).

According to Pepler, the shock of the "marriage death" occurs long before the divorce decree. When you first suspected your marriage was ending you wondered what was happening to you. You didn't feel joyous or tragic or

free or despairing--you just didn't feel! You were in a twilight zone of shock and unreality--a nightmarish suspension from which you vaguely expected to awaken" (Peppler 1974, 16).

The first step in helping such people is to get them to admit that, yes, this is really happening. It is a time to help them sort through a lot of jumbled thoughts and confused issues and refocus them on reality.

Denial

Closely connected to the stage of disbelief and shock is the stage of "denial." Burns defines denial as "a reaction to circumstances that are beyond one's control. It is an attempt to isolate oneself against reality and all of the pain that is taking place" (Burns 1989, 68). Along the same lines Fisher adds: "Pain that is too great is put into our 'denial bag' and held until we are strong enough to experience and learn from it" (Fisher 1992, 8).

"It is okay to use denial," writes Burns, "as a temporary means of escape. There are times when individuals can't deal with the intense pain of the moment. However, if denial is used as an ongoing method of coping with divorce, it can produce destructive results. People who dwell in denial can become superficial and dishonest. They often look for the easy way out instead of coming to terms with the truth" (Burns 1989, 70-71).

A frequent form of denial is "self-pity." "Self-pity" according to Bustanoby, "is an attempt to insulate oneself against reality and all the pain that reality holds. This insulation is made of the most basic material of fantasy. *This shouldn't have happened to me. What ought to be happening is . . .*" (Bustanoby 1978, 79). Splinter adds: "Self-pity can include wallowing in remorse or regret, focusing on old anniversaries, and spending (way to much)

time reminding one's self (and others) of things that meant a great deal within the marriage" (Splinter 1992, 22).

Bustanoby differentiates between "self-pity" and the legitimate developmental task of mourning:

A mourning individual *faces* the reality that his relationship has died. The individual immersed in self-pity, on the other hand, *refuses to face* that reality. A mourning individual *accepts* the death of his relationship, while the self-pitying individual *rejects* the reality that his relationship has died and lives in a fantasy world. He then uses self-pity as an excuse to avoid other relationships that might lead to future hurt (Bustanoby 1978, 79).

During this stage, people engage in actions, such as refusing to cooperate in the process of divorce, that are an attempt to prevent the divorce from taking place. Sometimes people go on talking about the other spouse or dreaming about them as if nothing had changed in the relationship.

Anger

The next stage is "anger." "Divorce anger," writes Fisher, "is an extreme rage, vindictiveness, and overpowering bitterness that is felt when a love relationship is ending" (Fisher 1992, 123). As Burns reports: "The anger of divorce can manifest itself in many ways. It can take active forms such as sarcasm, criticism, impatience, and even physical cruelty. . . [It can also] be expressed in passive, covert forms through stubbornness, restlessness, self-pity, nervousness, or withdrawal" (Burns 1989, 78).

In troubled marriages there have often been verbal or physical abuse, infidelity, rejection, or betrayal involved in the deteriorating situation. It is not surprising that anger can be found close to the surface, ready to express itself.

"It's not just the present," Trafford relates about the dynamics of anger. "Separation and divorce release a stockpile of anger between the spouses that has been repressed over the years during the marriage" (Trafford 1982, 88).

Trafford continues: "Your fury erupts suddenly, like a geyser of oil after a strike. You scream at each other now, you scratch and kick, you smash glasses on the floor. Your arguments are venomous . . . Welcome to the boxing ring of divorce; the bell goes off and you come out fighting in ways you thought you never knew" (Trafford 1982, 88).

It must be remembered that the dissolution of a marriage involves the loss of many significant and substantial things which can lead naturally, following our human nature, to anger, as well as the next stage, "depression." Stanley Hagemeyer identifies a number of these losses which create pain and result often in anger. Some of these lead up to the time of divorce and are precipitating factors, and some continue after the divorce has been granted.

For one thing, he writes, there is the "loss of dream." "The person married was expected to bring happiness, sexual fulfillment, security, personal growth, or any number of other things" (Hagemeyer 1986, 240). Now those dreams and expectations have been shattered. Something has been taken away.

Next, there is the "loss of intimacy." Marriages are built upon openness and trust. Now all of that shrivels up and disappears. The partner has been "deselected," perhaps cast off for another person. The couple may share the same house, but not the same bed (Hagemeyer 1986, 240).

Another loss that occurs follows from this: the "loss of physical accessibility." Before the separation or divorce, the couple spends less and less time together, finding other people or activities to occupy their time. A clear break occurs when separate living quarters are obtained, finally making explicit what may have only been implicit (Hagemeyer 1986, 241).

When the couple lives apart it means that there will have to be a new arrangement of taking care of the children. Usually this means the "loss of

parenting role" by one of the partners, most often the father. The one without custody must give up the daily control of their children, while the other one must experience periodic losses, as the child visits the other parent, sometimes under circumstances that create distrust or friction (Hagemeyer 1986, 241-42).¹

After the divorce has been finalized, a person suffers the "loss of legal standing." Now the person is officially "divorced" and "single," not just separated or experiencing marital difficulties. Sometimes that change results in the loss of social standing with friends and associates (Hagemeyer 1986, 242).

One loss that is almost always felt, more commonly by women than men, is the "loss of money and property" (Hagemeyer 1986, 242). Two households must be accommodated rather than one. Items of sentimental value must be divided up. Oftentimes the husband, the usual case, fails to pay child support. In fact, according to the 1990 Census Bureau Survey data, only 44% of single parents received full child-support, while 56% received some or no support (Talley 1991, 44). Statistics also show that "some 46 percent of families headed by single mothers live below the poverty line, compared with 8 percent of those with two parents" (Shapiro and Schrof 1995, 39).

In addition, if the husband remarries, he may be paying alimony to his first wife, while depriving his new family of wanted or needed things. A woman who has devoted herself to the home rather than a career might have to enter the job market. However, she finds herself without marketable skills, current job experience, or references. As a result, even if she finds work that suits her circumstances, she usually must start at the lowest rung.

¹Additional insights into the special needs of children of divorce and the special care required is covered in chapter 5 of Growing Through Divorce (Smoke 1976, 57-67), as well as chapters 5 and 6 in But I Didn't Want a Divorce (Bustanoby 1978, 51-71).

Another loss that is felt throughout the process of divorce is the "loss of community" (Hagemeyer 1986, 243). Some people, including those once considered friends, may now exclude you from their circles--consciously or unconsciously.

As a new "single" the person no longer fits into the couple world out of which he/she came. Commonly, the person doesn't feel single and yet isn't married either. They are "neither fish nor fowl."

Finally, there is the "loss of attachment." This simply reflects the fact that despite the legal separation of identities, you may still feel a sense of belonging to the other person even after the marriage is over. It takes time to build a separate identity (Hagemeyer 1986, 243).

All of these factors can result in anger being expressed or repressed--often in unexpected, even startling, ways. "Divorced people," Bustanoby says, "often surprise themselves with the anger they express over the death of the marriage relationship. Normally placid, religiously committed people even find themselves swearing violently at the divorcing spouse" (Bustanoby 1978, 79).

This point was brought home to me quite surprisingly and strikingly in a telephone conversation with one of the respondents to the survey sent to divorced members. He had included written comments, as well as a telephone number, on the survey, which led to a follow-up. Quite matter-of-factly he admitted that the anger he felt inside over his wife leaving him frequently made him fantasize doing bodily harm to otherwise innocent parties.

The man remarked that, sometimes, when he is stopped next to someone at a stoplight, he imagines getting out of his car and jumping on the hood of the neighboring car and smashing its window and hurting the occupant. What surprised me even further is that this individual, "dumped" by his wife,

still admitted that, on occasion, he helps her out with household repair duties and sometimes follows up with sex.¹

Anger that is not constructively dealt with, that is repressed and not properly expressed, can often lead to depression or psychosomatic illnesses. Problems that are not dealt with head-on usually are only postponed and not resolved. "Anger is similar in some ways to a pressure cooker or a volcano. If it is given enough time to build pressure, it will finally erupt" (Splinter 1987, 38).²

From the spiritual viewpoint, anger is fed by an unforgiving spirit. Bitterness is allowed to fester and grow which causes psychic and spiritual harm, restraining and hindering the prospect of real healing (cf. Hebrews 12:15). Unresolved anger is one of the items of unfinished business that often delays the healing process in divorce, keeping the divorced from moving on to the next stage of their lives.

Perhaps it goes without saying that angry people will not be in the proper frame of mind for receiving spiritual counsel or correction. Much of their anger may be directed, consciously or unconsciously, at God or transferred to God's representatives, such as a pastor.

Bargaining

A fourth stage in the grief cycle is "bargaining." "It is the stage within which a person may try to solve the dilemma of divorce by making trades or promises. It is still a stage of non-acceptance of the divorce; a stage in which

¹"A number of studies show," writes Trafford, "that no matter how bad the relationship, most people feel a persistent attachment to the former spouse and the past marriage. . . All in all, researchers find that three-fourths of divorcing spouses experience some lingering attachment to their former mates after the separation" (Trafford 1982, 101).

²A valuable discussion of the handling of anger in a Christian manner is found in Chapter 8 ("Anger") of Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide (Collins 1980, 100-115).

one may try to win back some of the lost self-esteem, or perhaps win back a spouse" (Splinter 1987, 39).

In this stage a person may take on a new persona, acting and dressing in ways that are a total switch from their previous personality, with the hope that the other partner might notice the difference and change and return to the "new" person. Splinter describes such individuals as "wrestling with damaged self-esteem, attempting to prove to themselves that they are still appealing, still of value . . . 'You didn't know I could be like *this*, did you? Now what do you think of me? Could you love me again? Do you want the new me?" (Splinter 1992, 27-28)

Depression

According to Splinter, the stage of "depression" is "the first time that the divorce is seen as a definite reality, rather than a bullet which may yet be dodged," and yet, "interestingly, this is also the first stage of actual rebuilding! It is a busy time internally as the individual deals emotionally with the fact that he is now alone and will be a 'single.' Life will not be shared with a loving partner. Facing that fact is the challenge of this stage, and facing it may require all the energy that one has" (Splinter 1987, 39-40).

Trafford adds: "Depression doesn't make you feel good, but it plays a key role in the divorce process. It forces you to look at yourself and not lay all the blame--and anger--on your spouse" (Trafford 1982, 110).

Depressed people typically withdraw, at least temporarily, from familiar activities and friends. They do not take as much interest in their personal appearance. A cloud of gloom hangs over their head.

People who want to help those going through this stage need to be sensitive to the person's need for "space." Listening and not talking, doing

simple acts of kindness, and "being there" are the most important ingredients to a helping posture.

Depression is oftentimes the result of repressed, unresolved anger—anger turned in on the person. People in depression also have a heightened sense of guilt, shame, and a feeling of failure. For people with strict moral compasses or who possess a streak of perfectionism, these feelings are often heightened or exaggerated.

There may be many reasons, real and imagined, why people might feel guilty. Splinter suggests the following:

They did not spend enough time trying to work out the problems of the marriage and now feel the opportunity is forever gone.

They feel relief that an abusive situation has ended, but feel guilty that they are relieved.

They became sexually or emotionally involved with someone other than their mate, and this precipitated the divorce. Now they carry a load of guilt.

The divorce has emotionally impacted their children far beyond what they thought would happen, and they feel guilty as the cause of their children's pain.

They may have hated their ex-spouse and now feel guilty for the hatred and the consequent acts of anger.

They breached their Christian standard when they became divorced.

They feel they have made a shambles out of their lives (Splinter 1987, 79-80).

It must be recognized that people going through the emotional, physical and legal separation of divorce are often not able to think clearly and examine what is taking place objectively. Because a spouse may have been manipulative or domineering, it is possible that they have succeeded in shifting the blame for the marriage problems and dissolution on the party who is least culpable. This creates "false guilt," which to the person is as real as any other guilt and sometimes harder with which to deal.

Closely connected to guilt feelings is the feeling of "shame." Shame is often more insidious and a more difficult problem with which to cope. We feel guilty for doing wrong things, whether breaking the rules or the law, whether God's, society's, our own. We feel shame for being wrong.

Along these lines Binau comments: "Shame and guilt can be distinguished as transgression versus failure. At the core, guilt suggests that we have *gone beyond what was allowed* while shame points to the fact that we have *fallen short of what was expected*. . . The distinction, then, is along the lines of doing and being, with guilt focusing on actions and shame focusing on identity" (Binau 1989, 129, 132).

People in that predicament feel inadequate, and, as a result, they feel that others see them in the same way. For the divorced, they imagine that everyone sees the "Scarlet Letter," the "Big D," emblazoned on their clothing.

Sheldon Kopp writes (Kopp 1980, 88): "There is a vast difference between feeling guilty about what I do and feeling ashamed of who I am. I can change what I do, but how am I going to change who I am?" We can pay the fine, recompense the offended party, "do time" for our guilty transgression, but how can you change who you are?

An analogy from football can clarify the distinction that exists between these two. When an offensive player steps across the line before the snap of the ball, he has broken one of the rules of the game and the action stops as the penalty is stepped off. Play can then resume.

However, if an offensive player should drop an easy pass in the end zone that would have won the game, he is overcome by an acute sense of inadequacy and shame. "I lost the game. I let my team down. I am a failure." This occurs despite the fact that other players had dropped passes or missed assignments throughout the entire contest.

People experiencing shame need a large dose of non-judgmental acceptance and patient help in restoring their self-image and self-esteem. It is important to help them understand that God loves us despite ourselves and not because of ourselves. He loves us because He created us and redeemed us and has a plan for us that includes a future and a hope.

It should be obvious that most people who are burdened or obsessed with either shame or guilt will probably not be running to the pastor. He may be the last person they want to see.

Yet divorced people need to deal honestly and openly with their guilt and shame. Not to do so can impede and restrict personal growth and jeopardize future happiness and adjustment.

A number of suggestions for helping the divorced resolve guilt feelings are offered by Splinter and could be utilized by pastors in their counseling. He urges:

"Understand the cause of guilt. What are the the expectations or standards which have been breached? What specific thing was done to breach those standards? . . . Be completely honest with yourself about your role and responsibility.

Allow for guilt on both sides. Avoid assuming that you alone would have been able to solve the marital problems which led to divorce. There is guilt on both sides. There always is. Be as honest about your ex-spouse's breaches as you are about your own. . .

Re-examine your standards. Are the standards you set for yourself realistic? Are they your own standards? . . . Were the standards so high that you could probably never have reached them? . . .

Be willing to apologize. Pride can be an overwhelming burden. Many times it is possible to lift some of the guilt feelings by being willing to say, "I was wrong. I made a mistake. I ask your forgiveness. I am sorry."

Make recompense. There are situations in which it is possible to do something to make up for the breach of an objective standard. . . . Recompense should always be preceded by apology, or at least accompanied by apology. . .

Offer forgiveness. Forgiveness can be healthy. It can help reduce the emotional and angry tie to a difficult situation. . .

Establish a game plan. . . Rather than remaining stuck with guilt feelings, formulate a game plan to do whatever is in your power to resolve the cause of guilt/ feelings and to avoid future situations with similar potential for causing guilt feelings. Take some action.

Ask for God's forgiveness and strength. . . During the pain of divorce it can be helpful to learn how to talk with God; to spend time with him every day, sharing the pain and asking for help in facing the guilt, fear, anger, sadness, and other experiences of divorce (Splinter 1987, 84-86).

Acceptance

The last stage people will, hopefully, reach in the grief cycle is "acceptance." It is also the second stage, along with "depression," of rebuilding.

Commenting on acceptance Splinter writes: "It is not necessarily a happy stage. It is the stage in which living alone has been faced squarely, the struggle against the divorce has ceased, the black despair of depression has been faced, and now the individual is beginning, ever so slightly, to consider what it may take to make tomorrow just a little better than today was" (Splinter 1987, 40).¹

Ideally, the pastor has had opportunity to facilitate the arriving at this stage and will be able to minister to the on-going needs--spiritual, emotional, physical, personal--of the divorced Christian and their family.

Stages of Divorce

Another way to get a grasp of the divorce experience is to recognize that marriages which dissolve and disintegrate usually do so in stages. No one who is normal enters a marriage with the intent and desire to see the relationship ended. It generally begins with high hopes and daring dreams for mutual

¹A very informative diagram summary of all of these phases and the various questions and issues they raise is found in (Splinter 1987, 43).

happiness and satisfaction. Unfortunately, in too many instances it goes downhill from there.

Splinter identifies seven stages: Marital unity, emotional distance, physical separation, "crazy time," divorce, "wobbly time," and new wholeness (Splinter 1987, 14-21). The duration, intensity, stability of these stages are never the same for any two relationships that break apart, but they do follow a pattern.

The first stage is marital unity, "the time when both partners believed that nothing could shake their love for one another, . . . a time of some naivete, a time of youthful energy expended toward nurturing the relationship, and a time of less complicated stressors on the relationship" (Splinter 1987, 14). These are the halcyon days of marriage.

Hopefully, couples would have been prepared through adequate premarital counseling to understand what their commitment to each other and the Lord is all about, as well as their need to have realistic expectations and to develop skills in growing together. The more this happens before marriage, the less likely that couples will depart from this stage of unity.

However, problems often develop, perhaps minor at first. Either as a couple or as an individual, they do not work on building their relationship. Perhaps one devotes too much time, energy and interest in work and not enough in strengthening and deepening their marriage.

It might be that some negative personality traits surface or prove more serious than originally thought, or some negative behavior, such as drinking too much or being verbally or physically abusive, creates tension. It might even happen that one of the partners gets involved sexually with some one else.¹

¹A frank examination of the problem of infidelity and "extramarital affairs" that lead to marriage break-ups is found in The Myth of the Greener Grass (Petersen 1983).

When this occurs, one of the partners begins to question the "forever" in their commitment. There ensues an emotional separation that takes place, as one of the partners decides that the marriage may not be worth saving.

Sell refers to this process as "distancing" and claims that:

[Two] factors often form the springboard for emotional divorce. Discovering an alternative is one. . . A woman, for example may discover she can indeed get a job that will give her the income she will need to live alone. Or else friends will convince a person it would be better for him or her to live alone or to come live with them. An extramarital affair is often behind the decision to divorce, because the individual has found another source of sex and affection. A second element in the decision is a life crisis or event. The age thirty transition seems to inspire decisions to divorce. So does mid-life crisis. Sometimes the crisis is the death of a child, financial loss, an affair, or a major fight (Sell 1984, 62-64).

This stage of emotional separation may take weeks or even years to unfold. At least one of the partners in the marriage is moving away from the other emotionally, so the problem usually grows as they seek the filling of their ego needs elsewhere.

This leads to the next stage--physical separation. This is the time when one or both partners declares, "Enough is enough!" There is often a precipitating event, such as a major blow-up, which becomes "the straw that broke the camel's back."

According to Splinter, "Separation is usually not the end in either party's mind. Rather it is an act of deep frustration which says, 'I can't figure out how to handle this marriage anymore, and I'm leaving'" (Splinter 1987, 16).

Sadly, most marriages that arrive at this stage are irretrievably lost from the human perspective. It is also a time of great vulnerability for each individual in the relationship as they experience rejection and loneliness.

It is at this point that the pastor may finally become aware of the problem or that it has gotten out of control and that at least one of the parties

may come to him for counseling or to justify their action. A crisis has developed, and the pastoral counselor needs to know how he can help.

H. Norman Wright outlines 8 basic steps to helping a person in crisis (Wright 1985, 54-73).¹ These steps apply to any crisis, including suicide, death, depression, but also are pertinent to the crisis of marital separation. They are: 1) *immediate intervention* [arrange time to get together with them as soon as possible]; 2) *action*¹ [In this stage the pastor needs to be directive and facilitative, but his chief tools are listening and encouraging; 3) start achieving the *limited goal: to avert catastrophe and to restore the person to a state of balance*; 4) *foster hope and positive expectations*; 5) *provide support*; 6) *focused problem solving* [setting goals, looking at the resources available, brainstorming alternatives]; 7) protect and enhance their *self-concept*; and 8) *instill self-reliance* [do not do anything for the counselee that he or she can do successfully for themselves].

These steps need to be followed with much empathy, tact, and patience. Only when a strong measure of trust and confidence has been developed can a pastor be more directive, even confrontational, if the circumstances warrant it.

The next stage, according to Splinter, is called the "crazy time," borrowing a phrase from a book by that name: Crazy Time: Surviving Divorce (Trafford 1984). "At some point in the separation process," Splinter writes, "many people begin to experience a time of staggering and frightening emotional swings. Anger boils over and almost eliminates the person's ability to function. Fear is so real it can be tasted. Sadness is so deep that one wonders if he will ever feel good about anything again. . . People often think

¹Howard Clinebell suggests his own "goals of marriage crisis counseling" which complement Wright's "steps" (Clinebell 1984, 259-61).

¹In this regard, Clinebell's observation is pertinent: "People in crisis tend to flounder, and we need to move them toward meaningful, purposeful, and goal-directed behavior. They need to know that something is being done *by* the and *for* them" (Clinebell 1984, 56).

they're going crazy. They become irrational, unpredictable, emotional, and desperate" (Splinter 1987, 17).

Trafford describes this period, which she says starts with separation and can last as long as two years, this way: "[Crazy Time is] a time when your emotions take on a life of their own and you swing back and forth between wild euphoria and violent anger, ambivalence and deep depression, extreme timidity and rash actions. You are not yourself. Who are you? At times you don't want to know" (Trafford 1984, 43).

One component to this emotional upheaval taking place in the person's life can be summarized by the word "alienation." Talley quotes an unpublished article by Eugene McCreary entitled "Alienation" in which an attempt at a definition and description is found:

[Alienation] is the name for a weakening of the ties of community and family, for the loss of creative enjoyment in work, for uncertainty in all things, for dependency and the confusing and contradictory expectations of economic and social life, for weakened personal integrity, for a sense of hopelessness, meaninglessness, uselessness, and irrelevance, for conformity in culture and politics, for a loss of faith, for the separation of man from his natural roots, for the decay of love. The alienated are unable to realize or define themselves. The dimensions of alienation are a generalized anxiety, shifting from object to object, and a confused and debilitated sense of human identity and personal responsibility. The alienated stand as ready pawns for strange new faiths, for excitements strong enough to divert them, for cruel myths of polarized evil and virtue, and for a shifting of responsibility to others (Talley 1991, 20).

Talley draws his own conclusions about the impact of such alienation. "[Alienation]" he writes, "is one of the most excruciating things that can happen to a human being" (Talley 1991, 27). It dramatically effects the way people think, act and feel.

He goes on to relate its effect on the balance that is present within people's energy make-up that is available for emotional, physical, mental, and

spiritual requirements. In relating this to the divorce experience, Talley observes:

When a couple divorces, each of the spouses typically experiences such total emotional alienation that I estimate they each consume around 85% of their energy trying to deal with their emotional upheaval. This leaves only 15 percent for the other three categories: 5 percent mental energy, 5 percent physical energy, and 5 percent spiritual energy (Talley 1991, 27).

Next in Splinter's outline of the process is the divorce itself. It is a time for some to celebrate and others to mourn. "The day of divorce," according to Splinter, "does one thing, if nothing else. It begins the process of putting back together the lives of both parties, but in a new form" (Splinter 1987, 17). This is because it is only now, after the legal battle and wrangling has come to an end, that issues of alimony, child support, custody, visitation become clear or finalized.

The stage after legal divorce is called the "wobbly time" by Splinter. It is the first stage of rebuilding. "Although preparations for this time may have been made during separation, now both parties are actually out on the ocean of a new life, in their own boats, and doing their own paddling" (Splinter 1987, 18).

During this stage, which lasts from six months to three years, the newly divorced will discover how solid and permanent old friendships really are. Some friendships will not survive the awkwardness and strain and will end. This is a time when "new identities begin taking shape, as the newly single person forms new values, new objectives, and new means of fulfilling needs and reaching goals" (Splinter 1987, 18).

As in the other stages, the person is vulnerable to loneliness and the concomitant danger of jumping too quickly and deeply into new relationships. Splinter comments on this danger by saying: "It has been wisely said that one is not ready for new and potentially serious relationships until one is able to live successfully and happily without them" (Splinter 1987, 19).

Many pastors are naive about the sexual involvement of their divorced members. Talley states, without giving his statistical basis, that "90 percent of all divorced people cycle in an out of the bar and bedroom scene--and that includes Christians" (Talley 1985, 73). This disturbing state of affairs is acknowledged also by Bohannan, who himself writes from a thoroughly secular, non-judging viewpoint. Quoting a study (Hunt and Hunt) he comments:

[The sexual code of the divorced is] even faster paced, less inhibited, and more experimental than that of the unmarried young. . . Today; compared by age, the divorced are sexually as active as married people, perhaps even more so (Bohannan 1985, 104).

Many separated or divorced people turn to sex as a pain killer for their emotional wounds or a mood enhancer to boost their damaged self-esteem.¹ Given this reality, pastors should recognize this as a concealed and underlying factor why some of their members stay clear of contacts and do not seek pastoral counsel. Their guilt, and perhaps shame, is too strong and inhibiting.

The final stage in the process that is hopefully achieved is designated "new wholeness." This is the time when the person begins to function successfully as a single person and has gained a sufficient measure of self-reliance to handle the challenges they face, such as a new career or single parenting or managing the finances.

Pastors and counselors, who are cognizant of these stages will be more mindful to the dynamics of what is transpiring inside the hearts and heads and lives of people in marital crisis. More importantly, they will be better prepared to offer ministry to them in a way that is meaningful and appreciated.

¹See the discussion in (Splinter 1987, 186-88).

CHAPTER 3

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST AND THE NEW TESTAMENT IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE IN NEED

If there were a motto that Jesus seemed to live by and model His ministry around, it would be the words of Isaiah 42:3: "A bruised reed [the Lord] will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." There is much that pastors and churches can learn about dealing with people in crisis and need by looking at techniques and approaches used by Jesus.

This chapter will not deal in particular with the "theological" and "hermeneutical issues" surrounding the topic of divorce, but will focus on the broader approach and attitude that the church and its pastors should demonstrate and develop if they would follow Jesus' and the New Testament's example. Many books are available to pursue those concerns.¹

H. Norman Wright (1985), in Chapter 3 of his book, Crisis Counseling: Helping People in Crisis and Stress, outlines some of the basic approaches that were characteristic in Jesus' dealing with people. His insights are worth relating in detail:

One important observation we can make about Jesus' approach to counseling is that His work with people was a *process*. He did not see them for just a few minutes during an appointment. He spent time helping them work through life's difficulties in an in-depth manner. He saw people not only with their problems, but with their potential and hopes as well.

¹ Among those that I found most helpful and worthy of keeping in the pastor's or church's library were: And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament (Keener 1991); Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views (House 1990); A Report: Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study (Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's November 1987); Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View (Luck 1987); What About Divorce? (Zodhiates 1984); May I Divorce & Remarry? (Zodhiates 1984); Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible (Adams 1980); Divorce (Murray 1953).

A basic characteristic of Jesus' approach was His compassion for others. We see His compassion expressed in Mark 8:2: "I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat." Another passage showing His compassion is Mark 6:34: "And disembarking, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." His concern was to alleviate suffering and meet the needs of the people.

When Jesus first met people, He accepted them as they were. In other words, He believed in them and what they would become. The characteristic of *acceptance* is seen in John 4, John 8, and Luke 19. When Jesus met the woman at the well, he accepted her as she was without condemning her. He accepted the woman caught in adultery and Zacchaeus, the dishonest tax collector, as well.

Individuals were Jesus' top priority. He established this priority and *gave them worth* by putting their needs before the rules and regulations the religious leaders had constructed. He involved Himself in the lives of people who were considered the worst of sinners, and he met them where they had a need. In so doing, He helped them elevate their sense of self-worth. . .

One of the ways in which Jesus gave worth to individuals was by showing them their value in God's eyes, by comparing God's care for other creatures with God's care for them: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father" (Matt. 10:29). At the heart of many people's problems is a low self-concept or feeling of lack of worth. Helping a person discover his personal worth because of who God is and what He has done for us helps to stabilize the person.

Another characteristic of Jesus' ministry was His ability to see the needs of individuals and speak directly to them, regardless of what they might have brought to His attention. We see *discernment* in the example of Nicodemus' coming to Jesus during the night. Whatever might have been his reason for wanting to talk with Jesus at that time, Jesus discerned Nicodemus' real problem and confronted him with the need to be born again. . .

Another characteristic of Jesus' approach was that He spoke with *authority*. He was not hesitant, backward, or bashful, but authoritative: "For He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29). . . (Wright 1985, 26-27, 29).

It is very clear from the examples found in the four Gospels that Jesus purposely surrounded Himself with those whom society regarded as outcasts, undesirables, or "sinners" (Luke 15:2; Mark 2:15; Matthew 9:11). He was not

ashamed to be found in the company and receive the support of people who had to overcome significant personal problems. Consider the interesting and revealing comment found in Luke 8:2: "The Twelve were with [Jesus], and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; . . . and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."

Jesus made it very clear that it is to people such as these, whose lives are confused, complicated, and complex, that His ministry was directed. In fact, only those who recognized their needs, whether spiritual, physical, or social, and admitted them, could be counted among His clientele: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor," Jesus said, "but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13).

Mercy was the prevailing attitude that Jesus Himself took toward "sinners," particularly those otherwise despised by society. The context of the passage above, for example, Matthew and his tax collector friends. The story of the "Woman Caught in Adultery" (John 8:2-11) is a similar example which offers insight into Jesus' own pattern and practice.

In that story, a woman was "caught in the act of adultery" (8:4). It was presumably an "open and shut case," deserving the Old Testament punishment of stoning (cf. Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22).

Small feels this incident has direct parallels and implications for the way the church handles the divorced in its midst. He expounds:

. . . Jesus tacitly acknowledged the correctness of the accusation and its sentence when He indicated that they should proceed to execute the sentence by stoning her. Then He added a condition that her accusers could not fulfill: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). This was Jesus' first step in preparing the way for the woman to be released from her accusers and made subject to the forgiving grace He would proffer her. Jesus Himself was the only person present who

could fulfill that requirement! When the accusers slinked away, leaving the woman alone with Jesus the Righteous Judge, He said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again' (v. 11). He overturned the case and set her free--not free because He disregarded the law or her rightful condemnation under the law. No, He set her free on the basis of forgiving grace. Shall we then show *less* grace and forgiveness than our Lord? (Small 1986, 127)

Those who approach the parallel situation of divorce as a "black and white" breach of God's Law, which must correspondingly be countered "according to the letter of the law," need only look at other situations in which Jesus pointed to a higher law. In Luke 6 we find recorded two incidents where Jesus and His disciples did that which was unlawful, at least according to the Mishnah's application of Exodus 34:21.

In the first instance, the disciples of Jesus picked grain from the fields and ate them on the Sabbath Day. When confronted by the Pharisees for this unlawful behavior, Jesus pointed out to them the example of David and his companions (I Samuel 21:1-6), who, in desperate need, had entered "the house of God" and eaten the "consecrated bread" reserved for the priests to eat (6:4). Jesus countered the complaint of the Pharisees with a most startling declaration. He made it clear that He who stood before them was not "under the Law," but actually its Source and Authority: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (6:5).

As if that weren't enough to drive home the point, that episode is followed immediately in Luke by a companion story of Jesus healing a man with a withered hand, again, on the Sabbath Day. Luke's account of this miracle, as well as Mark's (Chapter 3:1-6) omits the direct question put to Jesus by the Pharisees: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:10)? Instead, Luke emphasizes clearly Christ's divinity and His controlling of the situation, once again, to make a broader and deeper point: "But Jesus knew

what they [the Pharisees] were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Get up and stand in front of everyone'" (Luke 6:8).

Jesus then turned to the Pharisees and said to them: "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? (6:9). The question was more rhetorical, meant to expose the hypocrisy and hard-heartedness of the Pharisees' hearts. In Matthew's account of this same healing (Matthew 12:9-14), we have the inclusion of an additional rhetorical question directed at the Pharisees: "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (vv. 11-12). Jesus then answers His questions by healing the man.

Richards uses this pericope as argument against those who would categorically deny anyone the right to remarry after divorce. His comments apply in general to whether the church will approach the issues of divorce and remarriage from the legal approach or grace approach. He comments:

The right question is [not "Is it lawful?" but rather] this: Is there any way to heal the hurt of broken commitments? Is there any way to restore shattered hopes and fan the ashes of love? And to this question Jesus has already given his answer!

Yes!

Yes, there is a way. It is the way of greatness, the way of living with each other as little ones [Matthew 18:3-4]. Healing can be found as we set aside anger and are reconciled to our loved ones with joy. Healing can come as we bring our hurts into the open, and let forgiveness wash away the bitterness and pain. Healing can come as we extend to others the forgiveness we have received from God.

This is the right question. Not, "Is it lawful?" But, "Is there healing?"

But the Pharisees did not ask the right question. And all too often we fail to ask that question ourselves. We too become bound in our legalism. We debate divorce and decry remarriage and become insensitive to the broken hearts of those to whom God would hold out hope. Mercy. And not sacrifice. This is the way of Christ (Richards 1981, 37-38).

The challenge for the church in responding in a manner that reflects the Lord Jesus Christ's handling of the Law is to avoid both the Scylla of anti-nomianism and the Charybdis of legalism. The church, following Jesus, must firmly proclaim both the demand and need for unequivocal repentance ("Repent . . ."; cf. Luke 13:1-5), while at the same time never failing to include and press home what follows (" . . . and believe the Good News" - Mark 1:15).

The Johannine parallel to the Law/Gospel tandem perhaps is best summed up in John 1:17: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." "Grace" does not abrogate and nullify "truth," which certainly must encompass what we would call "Law," but grants an entirely new status and condition where none existed before: "Yet to all who received [Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

There is no getting around the tension between, for example, the absolutist, legal stance that Jesus seems to take in the Sermon on the Mount (" . . . not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. . . I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" [Matthew 5:18, 20]) and the grace He won as a free gift for all ("It is finished" . . . "It has been accomplished" [John 19:30]; "The Lord [God's Messiah] is our righteousness [Jeremiah 23:6]). Human efforts can never "get around" the Law, only Christ's efforts can "cut right through it." The Pauline treatment of this paradox, it might be noted, is dealt with in Romans 7 (particularly vv. 7-13) and Romans 8 (particularly vv. 1-4).

Jesus' approach was not just a grace/mercy approach, but also a personal one. Even though Jesus on numerous occasions ministered to large throngs of people, He never lost the personal touch. Compare, for example, Matthew 13:2 with John 3:2. Preaching to the masses may have been an efficient use of His limited time, but Jesus never lost sight of the value of the single soul. His commitment to individuals, no matter the sacrifice or cost, is clearly revealed in His "Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son" (Luke 15; cf. Ezekiel 34:15-16 for the Old Testament antecedent to the Shepherd-sheep parables of the Gospels).

In all three of those parables we learn that the church's efforts require, among other things, sacrifice ("... [the shepherd] joyfully puts [the sheep] on his shoulders and goes home. . ." - v. 5), diligence ("Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?" - v. 8) and patient waiting ("But while [the younger son] was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him" - v. 20b). Likewise, the message for the church, pictured in Luke 15 as a "flock," a "community of friends and neighbors," and a "family," is that it needs to be redemptive, restorative, and, finally, rejoicing.

As the church approaches those whose lives have been disrupted by divorce, even if fully convinced that they are the ones primarily at fault, it should look beyond their failure to the future God would have for them. It should resist the human inclination to stand apart and be judgmental, censorious, condemnatory.

Instead, the church should stand with people as it exercises true discipline that is committed, concerned, and facilitative to genuine restoration. This was what Jesus Himself did in His handling of His disciples and, especially, Peter (cf. Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-19).

In this regard, one of the most common misunderstandings and misapplications of biblical truth revolves around Jesus' command: "Do not judge . . ." (Matthew 7:1 = Luke 6:37a). On the one hand, it has become a handy, knee-jerk shibboleth for those who would deny the church and its ministry the legitimate role of spiritual oversight and spiritual discipline.

On the other hand, its misunderstanding has, as Frederick Dale Bruner points out, "often been used as a cover for moral laxity, for indifference to evil, and for toleration of falsehood" (Bruner 1987, 274). Rather than offer genuine correction (not castigation) and needed counsel (not condemnation) many Christians simply surrender the higher moral ground.

There are many instances faced by the Church, including situations where church members choose divorce as the solution to their marital problems, where biblical judgement must be rendered, and compassionate, biblical discipline exercised. A correct interpretation of Matthew 7:1 not only allows it, but demands it.

Bruner's exegesis of this portion of Scripture is cogent and correct. He properly observes:

[The statement "Don't judge"] certainly does not mean "do not have discernment" or "do not think," for [Matthew 7:6 which follows] will immediately ask us to discern "dogs" and "pigs" from whom to keep the Word, and the Warnings at the end of the chapter [7:13-29] will tell us that we can and must discern false from true prophets by their fruit. All discernment involves the formation of judgements. . . We are forbidden . . . damning, not discerning . . . (Bruner 1987, 272).

Bruner continues: "The judgment we are asked to surrender is the judgment of condemnation . . . We are not to make final judgments on anyone, to speak assuredly of people's real character, to pretend that we know *God's* verdict on other people's lives at the final judgment" (Bruner 1987, 272).

All of this has direct application to the treatment of those in our midst, including the divorced, whose behavior or status is suspect by some in the

church whose moral earnestness would lead them to dispense the wrong kind of remedy. To such Bruner warns: "We sometimes think we have the *responsibility* to disburse disesteem in the measure we feel people deserve, and we think these disbursements contribute to social equilibrium and justice. For with signs of disapproval the wayward are chastened. But this command tells us to beware of our calculus. Jesus' words amount to an attack on perfectionism" (Bruner 1987, 273).

The Christian who reads Matthew 7:1 rightly approaches these issues from a different perspective: Law and Gospel. "The disciple," writes Martin Franzmann, "lives under the Beatitudes; he derives his existence from God the Giver and has become the instrument and vehicle of divine giving. If he assumes the role of God the Judge, he forfeits God the Giver and must face the Judge: 'For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get [7:2]'" (Franzmann 1961, 59-60).

What role then is proper for concerned Christians who want to be faithful to Christ's words and follow His lead? Franzmann continues:

[Disciples], as the light of the world, cannot but expose the sins of men. . . They must call men to repentance, and every call to repentance involves a judgment on sin. But the call on the lips of the disciple comes not from one who has ascended God's judgment throne and sits there as a judge of men but from one who has stood before that throne and heard himself condemned by God's verdict and then has, in his condemnation and beggary, heard God's Nevertheless of acquittal: "Nevertheless I will be thy gracious King." The disciples' characteristic act is that of the repentant man calling his fellow sinner to repentance, and the accent is on forgiveness. The goal of the disciple's activity is the removal of the speck from his brother's eye--after he has removed the log from his own [7:3-5] (Franzmann 1961, 60).

Over and over again in the Gospels, we see that careful application of both Law and Gospel, judgment and grace, applied by Jesus to the hard of heart, as well as the broken in spirit, the "high and the mighty," as well as the "low and powerless." Even to those who would ignore His counsel and spurn

His call, Jesus still looked beyond their rejection. Jesus' confrontation with the "rich young man" (Mark 10:17-23) in many ways epitomizes and goes to the heart of His stance toward sinners: "Jesus looked at him and [still] loved him" (v. 21).

When we turn to the rest of the New Testament, we see the same redemptive, restorative attitude that Jesus reflected repeated and reinforced. St. Paul, for one, clearly recognized that God can rescue and "recycle" even former "blasphemers and persecutors." "I was shown mercy," St. Paul writes with an enormous sense of gratitude, as well as unworthiness, "because I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (I Timothy 1:13).

Many of our members who have gone through divorce, no doubt, would admit the same thing, even though it may take a protracted interval of time before they reach such a conclusion and perspective. They, too, may have acted in ignorance and unbelief and a whole lot more: confusion, pain, desperation, anger, etc. All of these together cannot nullify the restorative power of God and the reconciling goal of the Gospel, but if God wasn't finished with St. Paul yet, then we should not give up too quickly on those who likewise have fallen short. We should not reject the divorced in our midst as examples of human failures, but receive them as people through whom God's power can yet be made manifest.

As St. Paul goes on to relate, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (I Timothy 1:14-16).

To whom do we direct our ministry: only the strong, the pure, the proper, namely, those who enhance our congregational image or model our goals? The New Testament contains repeated rebukes and emphatic admonishments directed against those who would treat certain members of the Body of Christ as second-class citizens.

James addresses this problem as it related to one looked-down-upon segment of the church of his day, the "poor." "My brothers," James writes, "as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (James 2:1). He then gives some specific examples of how favoritism manifested itself back then.

Using what was probably a not-so-hypothetical example, James illustrates what he meant this way:

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. . . . If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:2-5, 8-9).

It does not take much imagination to translate some of those actions into contemporary illustrations of prejudice and discrimination, conscious or otherwise, against divorced members in some churches. An example might be not allowing divorced members to serve in any leadership capacities, but keeping them out of sight.

The church should make all classes and caliber of people feel valuable, important, and equally welcome. As St. Paul reminds Christians, "God does not judge by external appearances" (Galatians 2:6).

This truth was put to its most severe test when the salient issue became the entrance and full acceptance of Gentiles into the Early Church. It took a dramatic occurrence, a special vision granted Peter (Acts 10), before he recognized that an age-old antipathy and long-standing barrier between Jew and Gentile had been demolished by God. And, according to Galatians 2:11-13, the lesson learned subsequently needed repeating and reminding!

St. Peter summarized the lesson he learned from his "Vision of the Sheet Containing 'Unclean Animals'" (Acts 10:9-16) this way to the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, along with his invited "family and close friends": "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. . . I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:28, 34-35).

In many churches the divorced are made to feel "unclean," bearing the "Scarlet Letter," the "Big D," over their chest. They need to be accepted as persons for whom Christ died, persons who need the "good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (10:36) like everyone else, even when their past life choices and behavior may not have been legitimate and defensible.

St. Paul in Romans 14 and 15, along with parallels in I Corinthians 8 and 10, establishes similar principles in his discussions about the "weaker" brother. It may not always be safe or appropriate to draw parallels from situations that, on the surface, seem far removed from current concerns and issues: those who "stick" to observing Jewish dietary laws and those who "don't stick" to their marriages! It is still possible, though, to try to derive enduring principles that can be applied to modern contexts.

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters," St. Paul admonishes (Romans 14:1). He then goes on to chide the "strong" brother who sets himself up as "master" and "judge" of the "weak" brother: "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. . . So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way" (14:10-13).

It must be pointed out that the context of Paul's remarks had direct reference to "disputable matters," what theologians call "adiaphora," i.e. things neither commanded nor forbidden by God. There are some things about marital disruption and divorce that are not in dispute and, therefore, demand proper judgment and reproof. Infidelity, promiscuity, abuse, recrimination, an unforgiving spirit, etc. are not "disputable matters."

However, Christians need to remember that God is the ultimate and only infallible Judge, and there are many things within people's hearts that we have no authority or expertise to judge. See above the remarks on Matthew 7:1.

There are many circumstances and situations that are not "black and white," where Christians may have valid disputes or differences of opinion. It is the attitude toward the weaker brother that is the focus here, as well as the goal toward which our actions should strive, namely, to win them over or win them back.

St. Paul highlights both of these when he continues his discussion by saying, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:1-2). This is certainly what St. Paul also had in mind

when he wrote: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some" (I Corinthians 9:22).

Elsewhere St. Paul underscores the approach Christians should take in their dealings with those who have fallen. To the Galatians, St. Paul admonishes, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (6:1-2). If this is how we are to treat those "caught in a sin," the transgressors, how much more forbearance and acceptance and sympathy should we not show to those caught in the aftermath of a sin, the one transgressed in a divorce?

No church is without these categories and classes of members. They existed, as well, at Thessalonica, where St. Paul had to make similar instructions as he did with the Galatians: "We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (I Thessalonians 5:14).

In all of these examples, it is clear that sin, where and when it occurs, is not to be tolerated or condoned or ignored, but dealt with in a manner that seeks redemption and restoration without projecting a spirit of rejection. Such a spirit and concern is evident in St. Paul's pastoral advice to Timothy: "The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (II Timothy 2:24-26).

Another principle that bears directly on who, at times, has the most to offer those facing troubles is this: "Those who have 'gone through it' themselves are often best prepared and positioned to help those just now going through similar problems." It is the approach of the "wounded healer," using Henri Nouwen's phrase. In this regard Paul writes: "[The] God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (II Corinthians 1:3).

In ministering to people's problems and needs, there always remains a delicate balance between "loving the sinner," while "hating the sin." This tension is perhaps best captured in the statement found in Jude 22-23: "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." We might rephrase it: "Hate the clothing but love the one clothed"!

The temptation will always be to say and do too little for fear of stepping on someone's damaged emotions, or to say and do too much for fear of not adequately fulfilling the role of a pastor. How can we come across saying: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20), without giving the impression: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound" (6:1)? We do not want to offer people the gruel of "cheap grace," but feed them the banquet meal of "amazing grace." The former attitude Bustanoby captures in the following chant: "Free from the law / O happy condition / Now I can sin / For there is permission" (Bustanoby 1978, 139-140).

The challenge always remains: how to be neither condemnatory nor condoning, legalistic nor lenient. It is not surprising that Martin Luther said that the work of a pastor requires large measures of "Oratio, tentatio, meditatio" (prayer, testing, and meditation)! The example of Christ and the

principles found in God's Word as penned by apostolic writers, however, give us the confidence that Gospel ministry can succeed, and, where we as pastors fail, we, too, have God's forgiveness and enabling.

Helen Kooiman Hosier offers a fitting summary:

From beginning to end, the Bible shows us God's mercy, forgiveness, and love. We must be people of the Book, and unforgiveness and an unredemptive attitude on the part of the church are not in keeping with the Bible's standards. The challenge to the church is (and always has been) to clearly and unhesitatingly teach biblical truth, but its mission is also to forgive sins (John 20:21-23) and to minister to the fallen. It surely must not condemn those whom the Bible does not condemn, and it must always be prepared to bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted, and to do what it can to restore to spiritual wholeness those whose lives have fallen apart because of their marriage breakups. God is always able to start with His children where they are. The forgiving love of the gospel as practiced by God's people can bring healing ministry to all who fall short of the biblical ideal (Hosier 1985, 91).

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The present project was developed to incorporate input and feedback from both pastors and divorced lay people. The main tools used were two inter-related surveys, Appendices 1 and 2, directed at divorced Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, hereafter, LCMS, lay people, as well as LCMS pastors. The questions were slightly altered, though the substance remained the same, to reflect the two different perspectives and viewpoints.

Allowance was made for open-ended responses, as well as answers to biographical and collateral issues. Not all the additional data was used or incorporated in the final analysis. They were included in the questionnaires as sources of potential generalizations, comparisons, and clues to the issue at hand.

The survey questions were developed and refined through many different re-writes, relying on input and recommendations solicited from a variety of sources. Helpful comments and suggestions were received from Mr. John O'Hara, chief researcher for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Dr. Bruce Hartung, Director of Ministerial Health for the LCMS, Rev. Cal Seban, Administrative Assistant and Counselor for Lutheran Counseling and Family Services, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and Rev. Jeff Schubert, Administrative Assistant, South Wisconsin District--LCMS, and a trained counselor in PREPARE/ENRICH.

Special guidance and invaluable assistance were also obtained from Mr. Don Heinz, a researcher and consultant. He made numerous suggestions as

to the format and content of questions, as well as lent his expertise in the analysis of the raw data.

Much effort was made to eliminate ambiguity in the questions which could lead to unintended meanings or confusion, e.g., agreeing with one part of the question, but not the other. Despite the numerous refinements, some questions, in retrospect, could have been improved and some data which might have proved helpful was overlooked.

The pastors of Circuit #5 of the South Wisconsin District, LCMS, the circuit to which my congregation, Pilgrim, belongs, graciously granted permission to mail surveys to their members whom they identified as having gone through divorce, but had not remarried.

Circuit #5 presented a unique opportunity because of its small numerical size, smallest, in fact, in the Synod, and the close proximity of all its congregations. It is comprised of only 5 churches, all of which are within a 3-mile radius of Pilgrim congregation. All but Pilgrim are located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, although Pilgrim is situated on the border between Wauwatosa and Milwaukee.

Moreover, all five congregations are relatively homogeneous to each other in make-up. Each operates, alone or in an association, a Christian Day School and is a member of the Lutheran High School Association of Greater Milwaukee. The congregations range in size from approximately 625 to 1,600 in communicant membership.

The same survey was also sent to divorced members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Lisle, Illinois, an LCMS congregation that has an active ministry to people who have experienced relationship losses through divorce or death.

As a contrast to the outer-urban/suburban setting of the congregations from Circuit #5 and Trinity, Lisle, cooperation was solicited from the pastor of a rural South Wisconsin District congregation. The original intent was to make comparisons and contrasts between rural and urban, but the number of responses was insufficient to draw any significant conclusions.

Surveys were sent directly to each congregation to be distributed according to a mailing list developed internally by the pastors or their church secretaries. The chief criterion was "divorced members who have not remarried." "Re-marrieds" were not included in the survey in order to reduce the number of variables. Other variables that were not asked for, but which might have influenced some answers, were whether the person was "Divorced--No Children," or "Divorced--With Children," or, in the case of the latter, "Custodial"/Non-Custodial."

A cover letter was sent along for inclusion with each lay survey, explaining the purpose of the survey and encouraging participation. Also included was a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returning.

In order to allow for confidentiality and yet make it possible to distinguish responses from each congregation, a color code was employed with each congregation's surveys being printed on a different color of paper.

Finally, as an additional stimulus and to insure the highest level of response, a postcard was provided for each person who received a survey. It was given to each church to mail to their participants two weeks after receiving their original survey. It included a message that either thanked the people who had already responded or encouraged those who hadn't yet responded to send their surveys in as soon as possible.

Employing the color code, the exact breakdown of returns from the different congregations was as follows:

	<u>Surveys Mailed</u>	<u>Surveys Returned</u>
Congregation #1 (White)	40	26 (65%)
Congregation #2 (Yellow)	24	16 (67%)
Congregation #3 (Salmon)	14	8 (57%)
Congregation #4 (Green)	45	21 (47%)
Congregation #5 (Buff)	20	8 (40%)
Congregation #6 (Pink)	60	26 (43%)
<u>Congregation #7 (Blue)</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4 (50%)</u>
Total	211	109 (52%)

In terms of anonymous surveys, this was an extremely high return: low of 40%, high of 67%. It indicated that it touched a responsive cord for many people. One survey was returned by an 89-year-old woman who had been married 33 years before her divorce!

The other targeted group, pastors, was handled slightly differently. Surveys were distributed at the 1992 South Wisconsin District Fall Pastoral Conference. This allowed them to be disseminated in an efficient and cost-effective manner, as well as returned promptly.

Permission was received to include a survey and cover sheet along with the usual packet of materials handed out to each conference registrant. Because there are clergy present at such conferences who are professors of religion or institutional chaplains or are retired from the ministry, a number of responses could and did reflect clergy not in active, parish ministry. Pastors were directed to return their surveys upon completion in designated boxes anytime during the two-day conference.

At the end of the conference, a list of the names of pastors who were not in attendance was obtained. Those who were still in parish ministry were sent additional surveys and cover letters, along with a return, self-addressed, stamped envelope. In all, approximately 225 surveys were given out to pastors. Of these, 86 were returned (or 38%).

Since the surveys were confidential it was not possible to know which pastors returned theirs. No follow-up postcard similar to that sent to the lay people was utilized, but there was a follow-up encouragement included in a subsequent District mailing sent to all pastors.

The original intent was to sort out the survey responses from the pastors of the seven test congregations and see if any patterns were recognizable between their responses and that of their members. This was possible because the surveys of these pastors had been color-coded in the same way as the ones to their members. However, this data was deemed non-significant for several reasons.

First, there was not 100% participation. Second, most of the congregations had more than one pastor, whether associate or retired assistant. And, third, it soon became apparent that, with the mobility of people and their memberships, there was no reliable way of relating any one person's experience with any one pastor or congregation. Responses given to questions, whether favorable or unfavorable, could reflect experiences from other than their present congregation or pastor(s). In the end, the sole function of color-coding the surveys was to determine how many were returned from each congregation.

There was also an insufficient respondent base from the rural congregation to make comparisons between "rural" and "(sub)urban." Future studies in this area could examine these variables.

A companion survey was sent to 15 other pastors who were identified as sponsoring a recovery program called "Helpmates" in their congregation. This program strives to address the needs of people going through the loss of a spouse, whether by divorce, separation, or death. The majority of these pastors were located in the Midwest. The purpose of this survey was to

determine whether any differences could be discerned between the attitudes and patterns of behavior of pastors who are active in "divorce recovery ministry" and the "general" pastoral population. Of those surveys, 12 were returned (80%).

A condensed form of the survey was distributed to adult worshippers at Pilgrim congregation on a spring weekend (April 17, 1994). Results were tabulated only from those who were 24-years-old or older in order to reflect the age spectrum of the original general survey. The profile helped compare the typical Pilgrim worshiper with the other targeted groups.

As indicated above, the response to the surveys was very gratifying, indicating that for the pastors and particularly the lay people, the survey touched a responsive cord. Several of the original lay surveys included extended comments, describing their situations and experiences. Most of these included comments similar to "I hope this can be of help to other people in the future."

Before data from the surveys could be retrieved in meaningful form, it was necessary to categorize some of the open-ended responses. The surveys were then given to a data entry firm to tabulate. The resulting scores and totals were placed on computer disk.

The computer disk information was then analyzed by Mr. Don Heinz, a researcher and consultant who does many similar studies for organizations, churches, and groups. Through his expertise and analysis, the data was put in usable form and meaningful categories.

Another component of the project's design was to utilize "focus groups" to personalize and put a face on the data and validate and corroborate responses from the questionnaire. This also provided opportunity for direct input and suggestions for constructive, positive, pro-active ministry.

One such "focus group," numbering 3 females and 2 males, was invited for an informal discussion and mutual sharing in the writer's home. Names were solicited from neighboring pastors. Divorced members from Pilgrim congregation were deliberately not included in order to allow for the greatest amount of candor.

Early on in the process, a short-term, Sunday morning support group Bible study was initiated for those at Pilgrim who had experienced separation/divorce. The "Serendipity" model, as well as "Serendipity" materials, were used. The class was attended by approximately 6 to 8 people. It became a second "focus group" and provided additional information on the dynamics of divorce on a concurrent, ongoing basis.

As an off-shoot from this class, a monthly Divorce Recovery Group was formed. The purpose of the group was described in the following way in regular mailings and advertisements through the church's monthly newsletter: "This is not a therapy group or lecture or gripe session, but rather people who want to support one another and help each other through the challenges of the divorce experience."

The group was built around a pot-luck supper at various homes, usually followed by varying topics connected to the divorce experience. Participation ranged from a high of 12 to a low of 6. Much was learned from these intentional and planned events that brought together people from varied backgrounds, but a common experience: divorce. For some, the gatherings were positive stepping stones to further recovery. Others did not need to work through as many problems, but they found the gatherings a positive, affirming experience and an opportunity to help others in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

It is clear from reviewing the results of the various questionnaire's that no two people's divorce experiences are ever the same. What is a significant factor for one person may be unimportant to another. While one person may "strongly agree" with one issue, another will just as "strongly disagree." While this makes ministry to the divorced more complicated, it also tells pastors: "Never assume anything. The best way to find out how someone is being affected is to ask them personally."

Before making generalizations of the perceptions of the divorced and the pastors, it is helpful to have a "snapshot" picture of the respondents of these surveys. Greater detail is provided in Appendices 1, 2, and 4. By far, women outnumbered men, roughly four to one, in the "Divorced Survey" ("Survey of LCMS Members Who Have Experienced Divorce"--Appendix 1).

The survey of Pilgrim members attending worship on a typical weekend ("Questionnaire on Marriage/Divorce Issues" or "Pilgrim Survey"--Appendix 4) indicated eight people who were divorced and one who was separated. All but one of these was female!

The "face" of the divorced in the church is largely female. Since it is usually the female who has custody of children, she also has most of the additional pressures and challenges. While females, in general, make up the largest segment of congregations, churches need to understand what it is about divorce that seemingly drives more men away from the church.

One factor to consider is that 52% of the respondents indicated that their spouse at the time of divorce was "Lutheran," the majority being LCMS. This means that approximately half were not. A comparable examination of Pilgrim's own records would put that figure at 37%.

What could not be determined by the survey, and perhaps should have been, is whether even those "Lutheran" spouses were actually members of a congregation, that is, at least "on the rolls," and, if so, whether they were active or nominal. Another mitigating factor might have been whether they had "become Lutheran" to please a spouse.

In any case, the fact that a significant number of spouses were not of the same church background probably had an impact on the fact that these marriages ended up in divorce. No control group was used to determine the percentage of "mixed marriages" in the general membership of the churches studied.

The median picture of the typical male divorced responder was: 45 years old (mean: 47.826), married 14 years (mean: 14.652) before divorce occurred and a member of his congregation for 9 years (mean: 13.476) before the divorce. For females, the corresponding figures were 43 years old (mean: 44.706), married 14 years (mean: 13.427) before divorce occurred, and a member of her congregation 12 years (mean: 14.708) before divorce. Although many studies speak of "the Seven Year Itch" as a peak time for divorce to occur, these people seem to have "stuck it out" a bit longer.

Those from this group who did receive counseling help from their pastors described their experience in "favorable" terms. 64% answered that question, "C" on the "Divorced Survey," "favorable" or better. Pastors should take encouragement from that figure. On the other hand, roughly 20% described

their experience as "very unfavorable," which reminds pastors that it is hard to "be all things to all people."

One major and troubling finding of the survey was that 82% of the respondents indicated that they had had two or fewer pre-marital counseling sessions with a pastor before their marriage. In fact, 46% claim to have had no pre-marital counseling sessions! It is impossible to say whether these responses were accurate or whether they are based on faulty or selective memories.

A question that should have been asked along with this was: "Did you have a 'church wedding' or a 'civil ceremony'?" It is possible that a significant number of these marriages took place outside the jurisdiction and control of the church or pastor. In such cases, the pastor probably would not have been involved in counseling.

It was a major surprise to discover that the respondents from the one "control sample" used, the "Pilgrim Survey" that included all marital categories, indicated that they had had even fewer counseling sessions than the "Divorced Survey" group. This was particularly surprising since Pilgrim's present pastoral policy is a minimum of five sessions. The divorced respondents to the "Pilgrim Survey" were, as a group, actually slightly above the rest. 75%, as opposed to 86% of the total, indicated that they had two or fewer pre-marital counseling sessions.

One possible explanation: Of the last 25 couples married at Pilgrim, only seven remain at Pilgrim as regular worshipers. The majority moved away after the wedding.

In terms of a background in Lutheran Christian education, the great majority of the divorce respondents did not receive such training or experience.

60% had no Lutheran elementary school experience and 80% had no Lutheran High School background.

This was somewhat surprising, since most of the congregations that were part of the survey operated or supported Lutheran elementary schools or were part of a Lutheran High School Association. The "Pilgrim sample," which included non-divorced respondents, was a mirror image of the general sample.

However, a closer examination of the "Pilgrim sample" revealed that, of the 30 Pilgrim respondents who indicated they were or had been divorced at one time in their life, only two said they had received both a Lutheran elementary and Lutheran High School education. 87% (26 of 30) of them did not receive a Lutheran High School education. 77% (23 of 30) did not receive a Lutheran elementary education. These results seem to suggest that parochial education can have a positive effect in deterring and reducing the chance of divorce taking place in the first place.

A statistic that went counter to this author's own assumptions going into the study dealt with "church hopping" and worship attendance. Only 25% of the respondents to "Question 9" in the "Divorced Survey" said that they changed their "church home" during or after their divorce. Moreover, 69% of the respondents to "Question 11" said that their worship attendance either remained the same or increased during their divorce experience, while an even greater number (79%) of respondents to "Question 12" made the same comment about their record since their divorce experience.

It needs to be remembered that in many respects these divorced respondents are the ones who "weathered the storm," so to speak, and stayed with the church and in the church, if only on the membership rosters. They probably had stronger ties to the church, whether family, friends, or responsibilities, which kept them there.

The figures would no doubt be significantly different if the others, namely, the divorced who left by their own choice or by church discipline action, were included. Schwerdt's study, Social Factors Affecting the Church Involvement of Persons During and/or Following Divorce (Schwerdt 1984), provides insights and understanding into some of these dynamics.

An attempt was made through the Divorced Survey to develop a broader "snapshot" of the faith practice of the respondents, which was "Question 10" in the "Divorced Survey." In summary, it indicated that the religious behavior of divorced members predominantly followed a traditional mode, the term not necessarily being used as a synonym of biblical or desirable. It also raised some questions and issues that were puzzling and perplexing.

84% claimed to worship at least twice a month (48% - "at least once a week"; 36% - "2-3 times a month"). These figures seem inflated when typical and average statistics are compared of the general membership. Religious surveys in recent years, not dependent upon telephone responses, but rather actual church records, have called into question the verbal responses of Americans in general in regard to their worship habits. People seem to exaggerate in order to come across as more religious or more pious than they actually are.

Likewise, 75% of these divorced members claim to "pray privately" at least once a day. The length and breadth and depth of those prayers is, of course, not known.

However, when it came to areas that might represent a deeper commitment level, represented by such activities as volunteering at church, attending a Bible Class, participating in personal or family devotions, the typical respondent indicated that he or she mainly fell in the lowest range.

This would reflect a religion that was more private than corporate in accent. Activity in the community as a volunteer was no different, in fact, slightly less, than at church.

A finding that was not expected and difficult to explain resulted when a cross-tabulation was made in terms of these faith responses and their relationship to attendance or non-attendance at a Lutheran elementary or high school. In most cases, differences between those who attended Lutheran schools and those who did not were not statistically "significant," i.e., answers were too spread out over the various categories to be statistically "significant." "Significance" = " $p < .05$."

One notable exception, where the results fell within the range of statistical "significance," was worship attendance. Those who did not have a Lutheran elementary school background reported that they were more likely to attend worship "at least once a week" than those who did. The ratio for most active attendance was 57.8% for those with no Lutheran elementary background to 32.6% for those with Lutheran elementary background. In the "2-3 times per month" category, the parochial school educated members did have a significant advantage: 53.5% to 23.4%.

Another significant area was "personal reading of the Bible." Those with a Lutheran elementary and/or high school background read the Bible on their own significantly fewer times than those who never had such a Christian education background.

59.6% of those who never attended a Lutheran elementary school claimed to read the Bible once a week or more, compared to 30.8% of those who did attend. 53.2% of those who never attended a Lutheran high school claimed to read the Bible once a week or more, compared to 27.8% of those who did.

A further case where statistical significance could be established was the relationship between Lutheran high school attendance/non-attendance and having personal or family devotions. Those who never attended a Lutheran high school claimed to have such devotions at least once a week or more at the higher ratio of 39.7% for those with no Lutheran high background to 21.1% for those who had a Lutheran high background.

Though the other statistics did not achieve statistical significance, in every case but one, the resulting figures showed the highest levels of faith response, i.e., worship, prayer, Bible Study, volunteering, coming from those with no Lutheran parochial education. There was one exception. Those with Lutheran elementary education were most likely to pray privately once a day or more than those without such a background.

Explaining this finding, which goes contrary to expectations, is problematic. Among the possible hypotheses for this difference would be: 1) persons with higher levels and intensity of Christian education feel they already "know it all" and don't need as much further learning; 2) persons with higher levels of Christian education are more truthful about their religious behaviors; 3) persons with higher levels of Christian education have greater levels of guilt because of falling short of personal or institutional expectations and are more likely to stay away from places, like churches, where they would be reminded of their "failure"; 4) the respondents to this survey with Lutheran elementary or high school backgrounds represent the failures of the Lutheran parochial education system. Is it possible that the real successes would not have shown up, because they didn't get divorced in the first place?

These seemingly negative findings should be weighed against the results mentioned above regarding the sampling from the "Pilgrim Survey." There it

was indicated that the vast majority of the divorced who answered that survey admitted that they had no Christian education background.

Another clear finding from the various surveys taken was that the divorced members of LCMS congregations have a broader, more lenient view of what constitutes "biblical grounds" for divorce than their pastors. Only 4% of the divorced respondents, versus 20% of the pastors, said that "divorce is always wrong in God's eyes *under any circumstance*," while 17%, versus 31% of the pastors, gave "*Adultery*" and "*Desertion*" as the only "biblical" grounds. All five response alternatives are found in Appendices 1, 2, and 4.

It is not clear how all the respondents interpreted the wording of Option "A" given in the survey: "Divorce is always wrong in God's sight *under any circumstance*." The general intent of the language was to give the meaning: "There are no legitimate, biblical grounds for divorce. Any and all divorce is sin." It was not meant to convey the meaning: "Divorce always involves sin in God's eyes." Such a reading would modify the results, but perhaps only marginally.

Option "B," "Divorce is always wrong in God's sight, unless there are 'biblical grounds,' namely '*Adultery*' and '*Desertion*.' No other grounds should be allowed," was intended to reflect the "traditional" view taught in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and elsewhere. For example, Fritz's Pastoral Theology, a "standard" in Missouri Synod circles, comments on divorce:

Although the Word of God knows of but one rightful cause for the dissolution of marriage: fornication, Matt. 19:9, there is, according to the plain apostolic statement; I Cor. 7:15: 'If the unbelieving [spouse] depart, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases,' another case in which the innocent party may not enact, but will *suffer*, the dissolution of his or her marriage, to wit, when a spouse deserts the other *maliciously*. . . (Fritz 1945, 167).

It is noteworthy that all of the respondent groups, whether "Pilgrim sample," "divorced members," as well as "general pastors" and "'Helpmate'

pastors," chose Option "C," namely, "Divorce is wrong in God's sight, unless there are sufficient, serious 'grounds' [even if not specifically mentioned in Scriptures]. Besides adultery and desertion, I would include: *spouse and child abuse, substance abuse [alcohol or drug], or mental cruelty,*" as most closely reflecting their own attitude toward divorce (44%, 31%, 41%, and 50%, respectively). This option would reflect a broadening of grounds not specifically discussed in Scripture.

Several who chose this response indicated that they considered the grounds listed, i.e., "*spouse and child abuse, substance abuse [alcohol or drug], or mental cruelty,*" as simply being extensions or applications of the concept of "desertion," in other words, "desertion of the marriage covenant," rather than "physical desertion of the marriage partner."

Option "D," "I would add to 'c' above: *failure to provide nurture, companionship, emotional support, or spiritual incompatibility,*" represented an extension of that concept even further. Option "E," "Divorce is regrettable but *not wrong in every case*, if the couple feels the marriage is 'irretrievably lost'," could be described as "no-fault divorce."

Few of the general pastors were willing to extend allowable grounds for divorce any further to these last two options, 6% and 2%, respectively, but sizable numbers of the divorced, 26% and 21%, were. Although the sampling was small, an even higher proportion of Pilgrim's "Divorced/Separated" component circled Option "D" (55.5%; 5 of 9). One circled Option "E." See "Appendix 4" for the complete picture.

Although the pool of responses from "Helpmate" pastors was also small, it should nevertheless be pointed out that 90% of their answers were in the last three categories, none gave Option "B," the "traditional" response. This may

suggest that working more actively and regularly with divorced people results in views or practices that are more lenient or tolerant.

Summaries from the two surveys directed to pastors, Appendix 2, give a comparable snapshot of these respondents. Most came from small to moderate in size parishes, 63% having 800 or fewer communicant members. The "Helpmate" pastors tended to come from slightly larger congregations. 50% pastored churches with above 800 in communicant membership. Only 36% of the "general" pastors did.

The pastors were evenly divided among "small town," "urban," and "suburban" settings. Only "rural" was significantly absent. "Helpmate" pastors had the most significant edge in the "suburban" category.

In terms of longevity in the ministry, the "Helpmate" pastors tended to be more recent seminary graduates. Approximately two-thirds of the "Helpmate" pastors had been in the ministry 15 years or less, compared to one-half of the "general" pastors.

Most pastoral respondents indicated that relatively few members in their churches had divorced in the previous year. 70% of the pastors polled had five or fewer couples separating or divorcing in the last year. One "Helpmate" pastor indicated 50 couples in that category, a claim impossible to verify as to accuracy.

Most pastors do little counseling of people in troubled marriages or heading for divorce. 67% of the pastors polled counseled three or fewer individuals or couples who were experiencing marital/divorce problems. "Helpmate" pastors did far more counseling of such cases than the "general" pastors. 77% counseled 10 or more, while 33% counseled 30 or more.

The corresponding figures for the "general" pastors were 6% who counseled 10 or more and .1% who counseled 30 or more. One from each category claimed to counsel 50 individuals or couples!

In general, counseling of those experiencing marital problems or going through divorce does not occupy a major component of the typical LCMS pastor's ministry. However, opportunities seem to increase when it is known by members of the congregation that the pastor supports or is part of a divorce recovery ministry.

More significantly, in terms of building bridges to the divorced, few pastors and churches apparently have intentional ministries directed toward them. 83% said that their congregations offer no such programs.

In terms of using the pulpit to address the subjects of "Marriage" and/or "Divorce," "Marriage" fared far better than "Divorce." 56% of pastors reported having preached on "Marriage" in the preceding year. There was little difference that could be noted between "general pastors" or "Helpmate pastors" on this particularly issue.

However, pastors generally steered clear of the topic of "Divorce," whether "by choice" is not clear. 81% of the "general pastors" and "Helpmate pastors" combined responded "No" to preaching on the subject. The percentage, though, for those who did are approximately twice as high for the "Helpmate" pastors than the "general" pastors.

In terms of how pastors respond when they hear of couples having marital problems, the general pastors surveyed seemed less assertive and direct in their approach than the "Helpmate" pastors (see Appendix 2). Conclusions, however, must be tentative due to the limited number in the "Helpmate" category.

55% of "general pastors," versus 18% of "Helpmate" pastors, identified with a "wait" mode (Options "B" and "C"). The most common response by pastors to dealing with people's marital/divorce problems is Option "C": "I wait *until the person takes the initiative* to come forward." 33% of the general pastors and 31% of the combined total, when the "Helpmate" pastors are added in, gave that answer.

On the other hand, 45% of the "Helpmate" pastors, versus 26% of the general pastors, gave a response that was more immediate and direct, namely, Option "A," "As soon as possible I contact . . ." It would appear, therefore, that having specific ministries directed toward the divorced helps remove some of the hesitancy, reluctance, and timidity of some pastors in dealing with these problems.

A major focus of the surveys to the divorced members and to the pastors was to discover underlying attitudes and perceptions regarding the divorce experience and then make comparisons. Questions were developed that attempted to address both internal and external factors. Internal factors would be items that stress emotional and psychological factors. External factors would include items that reflect how others, such as church members and/or pastors, are perceived to respond to the divorced through attitudes and actions.

The findings confirm the strong emotional impact that divorce has on people, influencing their actions and decisions, their impressions of how others view them or treat them, and their relationship with their pastors. They also point out certain discrepancies and differences in perspectives between the divorced "person in the pew" and the "pastor in the pulpit." In short, there are indeed salient and significant factors that pastors and churches need to be aware of and address.

The "Divorced Survey," mirrored by the "Pastors' Survey," began with twenty-three categories or suggested scenarios constructed to determine attitudes held by the divorced in regard to their situation. The options for response to the issues raised were "Strongly Agree," "Agree Somewhat," "Somewhat Disagree," "Strongly Disagree," or "Does Not Apply." For every question, responses from the divorced were spread across the categories, which confirms that "no two people experience divorce in the same way."

Opportunity was also provided in Question "B" of the surveys for the divorced and pastors to identify specifically the "*ONE issue or factor*" they felt most kept people away from "receiving help from their pastor(s)." Responses varied and generally reflected issues related to the areas of impact mentioned above: internal, for example, "guilt," "embarrassment," "shame," and external, for example, issues involving fellow congregational members or their pastor. Appendix 1, particularly the summary on page 3, as well as Appendix 3, provide greater details of statistical results of the surveys.

Internal, emotional factors in particular were addressed in Questions 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 20. Responses that received at least a 45% combined affirmative rating ("Strongly Agree" + "Somewhat Agree") included: Question 1 ("too much in shock to do anything at the time": 60.3%); Question 5 ("don't want to deal with their side of the [marriage] failure": 47.9%); Question 10 ("too ashamed to let the pastor know": 47.0%); Question 16 ("felt guilty and wanted to avoid additional judgment": 46.9%); Question 17 ("too depressed to do anything": 47.6%); and Question 20 ("mind already made up": 45.0%). 45% is chosen as an arbitrary, but high enough figure to indicate a positive direction.

In addition, 23% of the responses given by the divorced to Question "B," the "*ONE issue or factor*" that most kept people away, made reference to

"embarrassment" (related to Question 5) and 21% spoke of "shame/alienation." While "shock" received the highest combined affirmative rating, namely 60%, as the factor in Question 1, it was, surprisingly, mentioned only three times, or 3% of total responses, as the *"ONE issue or factor."*

"Depression" received a comparable 47.6% rating as part of Question 17, but was mentioned only twice (2%) as the *"ONE issue or factor."* This would support the view that people going through divorce face a combination of factors and a multitude of feelings, and it is not always easy to identify one as more significant than another. The impact is cumulative, and the factors interrelated.

Questions 4, 12, 14 examined how divorce impacted on the relationship of the divorced with their congregation and its members. Here feelings were more clear and deep. 67.3% "felt the congregation's attitude toward the divorce was negative" (Question 4); 72.6% "felt out of place, because the church seems to cater to (intact) families" (Question 12); and 55.0% were "offended by the attitude of some of the people in the church" (Question 14). Surprisingly, in view of the high combined percentages, negative feelings that were related to their congregations rarely appeared as the *"ONE issue or factor."* There was one response that said: "I felt judged by other members."

The divorced member's relationship to his or her pastor(s) was specifically highlighted by Questions 3, 6, 10, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23. The following received at least a 45% combined affirmative rating ("Strongly Agree" + "Agree Somewhat"): 65.4% said that they "did not feel close enough to their pastor to seek his help" (Question 3); 48.0% felt that the pastor "didn't have the sensitivity or understanding" to help (Question 6); 47.0% were "too ashamed to let the pastor know" (Question 10; this also is an "internal" factor); 46.0% did not feel that the pastor had the expertise or ability to help" (Question

19); 45.0% said that their "mind was already made up" and they didn't want anyone, like a pastor, to try to "change" it (Question 20; also an "internal" factor) and 56.9% "preferred going to a professional, rather than pastoral, counselor" (Question 23).

In terms of responses that asked for the "*ONE issue or factor*" regarded most significant, 18 (19% of the total responses put down) indicated a problem of feeling that the pastor would "judge" or "pressure" them and 17 (18%) expressed an opinion that their pastor was "insensitive."

Some interesting and, in some cases highly significant, differences emerged when the results of pastors were compared with those of the divorced in their parishes. Differences even became evident in the manner in which the surveys were filled out by the divorced members compared to the pastors.

The divorced responders answered their surveys with far greater feeling and range on issues. For example, in 22 out of the 23 suggested categories in the survey, the percentage of "Strongly Disagree" responses of the divorced members exceeded that of the pastors (the lone exception was a tie.) Pastors need to be aware that the divorced by nature respond and react with far greater intensity, feeling, and passion, as well as confusion, than pastors themselves would imagine.

In similar fashion, pastors had a marked propensity to hedge their bets. The most common response by the pastors was "Agree Somewhat," perhaps indicating a wariness, or weariness!, to survey-taking on the part of pastors. That response had the highest pastoral percentage in 21 of 23 categories. The exceptions were Question #20, where "Strongly Agree" won out, and Question #22 where "Disagree Somewhat" received the highest percentage.

When issues were divided between those that were basically external and those basically internal, pastoral responses were 28% external and 96%

internal (see Appendix 1, page 3). On the other hand, 55% of the responses of the divorced members mentioned external factors and 74% of the responses reflected internal factors as the "one issue" which keeps people away from pastoral counseling. The totals add up to more than 100%, because more than one answer was given by some. The divorced see problems as more outside themselves than do pastors.

Several observations can be made by reviewing responses to the same issues above, utilizing the parallel "Pastors' Survey." The data, again, demonstrate that it is hazardous for pastors to generalize the circumstances, mental conditions, and responses of any individual divorced person. People, personalities, problems are always unique. Generalizations are only helpful when the divorced are viewed as a group.

A number of the issues surfaced by the 23 questions or scenarios in Part "A" of the surveys indicate that pastors sometimes presume too much. They also sometimes presume too little. We will focus on the more obvious examples (complete details and further analysis are found in Appendix 3).

In terms of accurately identifying internal factors that are impacting the divorced, pastors don't always see eye to eye with them. 89.6% of the pastors, responding either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree Somewhat," felt that the divorced "stay away" from possible counseling situations because they "don't want to deal with their side of the [marriage] failure" (Question 5). A significant number, but far fewer (47.9%) of the divorced indicated the same. The "Strongly Disagree" ratio was even more lopsided: 33.0% [divorced] versus 2.3% [pastors]. Either pastors greatly exaggerate the reluctance of the divorced to share with them or the divorced are not being entirely candid.

While 67.4% of pastors, responding again either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree Somewhat," felt that the divorced are experiencing "anger at God"

because of their predicament (Question 7), only 35.9% of the divorced agreed. In fact, in dramatic fashion, the divorced disagreed more strongly--48.9% [divorced] versus 7.2% [pastors].

Similarly, pastors believed, at twice the affirmative ratio of the divorced (60.0% to 30.0%), that the divorced have "too much anger inside" to talk about their situation (Question 15). Again, on that issue, the divorced disagreed strongly with that supposition at a rate that differed by a factor of seven: 49% versus 7%.

Although "guilt" is a major factor that the divorced deal with, pastors imagine a far greater "guilt trip" being experienced by the divorced than is the ostensible case. Pastors "strongly agreed" or "agreed somewhat," a 93.0% combined total, with the notion that the divorce "feel guilty and want to avoid additional 'judgment'" (Question 16), while the comparable figure for the divorced is 56.9%.

When allowed to offer their own opinion as to the "*ONE issue or factor*" that most kept people away from seeking help, pastors responded with "Guilt" 18 times, which was 24% of the total responses. The same word was less conspicuous, 9 times (9%), on the "Divorced Surveys."

What is perhaps most striking, though, is the fact that 31.4% of the divorced strongly disagreed with that suggestion as opposed to only 1.2% of the pastors! Perhaps this reflects the more liberal or tolerant view that many of the divorced have concerning "grounds" for divorce. It also forewarns pastors, who may be hoping that guilt will be a chief motivating factor to bring the divorced in for counseling, that they may have a long wait!

Another "internal" factor that reveals a disparity in perception is whether the divorced are "too depressed" to do anything (Question 17). Pastors responded affirmatively by a 67.9% (combined) quotient, while the

divorced responded at only a 47.6% rate. The "Strongly Disagree" figure was even more askew: 30.1% [divorced] versus 2.4% [pastors].

As indicated above, quite a few of the questions or scenarios related to the divorced person's relationship with his or her pastor. Again, several discrepancies over perceptions emerged. In most of these cases, pastors, though recognizing significant turn-offs for the divorced, also tended to be more negative or pessimistic in their assessments than many of the divorced would be.

Even though a substantial number of divorced (65.4%) felt that not "feeling close enough" to their pastor (Question 3) was a significant hindrance to seeking help, a sizable number (28.2%) disagreed strongly. More amazingly, zero pastors disagreed strongly with that position!

While pastors follow the divorced in imagining that many of the divorced see pastors as lacking "sensitivity" or "understanding" (Question 6), nevertheless, 31.6% of the divorced strongly disagree with that premise, while only 8.1% of the pastors stand up for their own integrity.

The perception of "shame" in the divorced also resulted in wide discrepancies. By a wide majority, 89.4% of pastors agreed to a greater or lesser extent that the divorced don't seek help because they are "too ashamed to let the pastor know" (Question 10). The comparable divorced figure is 47.0%.

As is often the case, the real story is found when the "Strongly Disagree" responses are compared. 39.0% of the divorced disagreed strongly to the importance of shame as a hindering factor, at least in their particular case, contrasted with 1.2% of the pastors.

"Shame/alienation" was mentioned 15 times by pastors, or 20% of the responses, as the *"ONE issue or factor"* that most kept people away from

receiving help from their pastors. This was nearly identical to the corresponding divorced figure (21%).

It is noteworthy that the perception of pastors differs significantly with the divorced in the area that is probably a pastor's most identifiable activity: preaching sermons. Here pastors definitely imagine the worst. 63.6% of pastors felt that the divorced believe that "the message they get from sermons" leads them to assume that the pastor "would not accept them or their situation" (Question 13). Only 31.3% of the divorce agree, and five times as many of the divorced as pastors disagree strongly (49.5% to 9.4%)! If the divorced have developed a perception of non-acceptance, it is not from sermons. Other pastoral behavior and activity would need to be examined honestly.

It is apparent that many pastors have an uneasy feeling that those with marital problems stay away because they believe the pastor has too many other people to help (Question 18). Not so. It may be true that 57.3% of pastors imagine that such a scenario exists to a greater or lesser extent, but they are supported by only 39.6% of the divorced.

More significantly, 41.7% of the divorced "strongly disagree" with that notion, compared to 8.5% of pastors. If the divorced stay away, it may not be because they feel "My pastor is so busy with other people that he doesn't have time to help me," but more because that they have a perception he does not want to help.

In a related matter, 63.0% of pastors imagine that their lack of "expertise or ability" (Question 19) is a limiting factor. Only 46.0% of the divorced share that view. Again, the divorced strongly disagree with that premise by a striking differential: 34.0% versus 2.5%.

A veritable chasm exists between the perception of the divorced and pastors on whether the divorced are hesitant to come for help because they "fear other problems might be brought up" by the other spouse (Question 21). The divorced hardly considered it. Only 14.1% gave any kind of affirmative response. However, 66.6% of the pastors agreed, although not strongly.

The real chasm is evident when the "Strongly Disagree" answers are compared. That was the choice of 74.4% of the divorced, but only 3.7% of the pastors were as forceful and emphatic in their opinion.

It should be noted that the divorced and pastors were in relative agreement with one scenario that is related to this issue. Question 8 tried to determine how significant the existence of a "non-member spouse" was to the likelihood of people coming to pastors for counseling help. Both groups, divorced and pastors, felt that this factor was a major hindrance. An impressive percentage, 81.7% of divorced and 76.8% of pastors, recognized that people often stay away because a spouse is not a member and wouldn't come anyway to counseling. The divorced members affirmative response, however, was significantly more intense than that of the pastors. Their "strongly agree" ratio to the premise was 63.4% compared to 14.6% by pastors.

It should also be mentioned in passing that this question resulted in a host of spontaneous comments in the margins. Many people made the observation that "My spouse was a member and he/she still didn't want to come for counseling!"

Pastors need to realize that their perceptions differ on many points with those in their midst who are divorced. Whether the pastors were more forthright, realistic and honest in their opinions and responses than the

divorced, or the reverse, is not the main point or the primary focus of this study.

In most human relationships, perceptions guide and determine attitudes and responses as much as anything else. What is deemed reality for one is not reality for another.

When this study was developed, an original hope was to find out how perceptions differed not only between pastors and the divorced, but also among the divorced themselves. One question that seemed pertinent and worthy of pursuing was: "Do the perceptions of men experiencing divorce differ from that of women?" The findings of the present study shed little light on this.

The only categories where it could be detected that male divorced members had opinions that differed significantly from females divorced members were in items 4, 12, 14, and 22 of Part "A" of the survey. Because the categories under consideration are limited, they are repeated in their entirety with the corresponding statistical data.

#4 - "Although I feel that my divorce decision is/was justifiable, I know that it always 'takes two' to break up a marriage, and I did not want to have to deal with my side of the failure."

<u>Group</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	22	2.7273	1.0771	.2296	.0046
Females	76	1.9737	1.0705	.1228	

#12 - "At the time, I *denied* that the problem was real and therefore ignored it until it was too far along."

<u>Group</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	23	2.6522	1.2288	.2562	.0010
Females	79	1.8608	.9021	.1015	

#14 - "I had too much *anger* inside me at the time to feel like I could sit down with someone else and reveal my situation."

<u>Group</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	19	3.1579	1.1673	.2678	.0146
Females	72	2.3889	1.2051	.1420	

#22 - "I/we preferred going to a '*professional counselor*' to deal with the problem, rather than the pastor."

<u>Group</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	14	3.9286	.2673	.0714	.0245
Females	42	3.2143	1.1377	.1756	

The higher the mean score, the greater level of disagreement with the issue at hand. In all four examples above, males had a higher mean score, indicating that they felt they were more willing to deal with their side of the failure, were less in denial, had less anger, and would have been more inclined to go to the pastor than to a professional counselor.

These differences are hard to generalize for all males in a similar situation, given the disproportionate number of females to males in the survey. The males, like the females, in this survey are the survivors in terms of remaining with the church. By their presence in the church, or at least on the church roster, they possibly possess a higher commitment level to the church, its principles, and its personnel.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

"Divorce," asserts Rambo, "is a fact of modern life; it affects people in every church in the United States. Any church that doesn't face this reality is avoiding the needs of its own congregation and neglecting a vast number of people in need of its ministry. The hurts suffered by divorced Christians leave them raw, desperate for the love, kindness, and forgiveness to be found in a community of people who love and worship the suffering servant Jesus Christ" (Rambo 1983, 41-42).

Many couples in our churches are covering up the pain of hurting lives and disintegrating marriages. The deleterious effect ripples through whole families, all the way down to the children who are caught in the middle. Many divorced members are grieving emotionally and struggling to find meaning and hope in their lives and create new futures.

The church has not always made its message and ministry real to these people, not necessarily out of aversion or antipathy, but out of negligence or naivete. Oftentimes it is the result of misplacing our priorities. Sometimes it is the result of a lack of know-how and know-when. But the problems must be confronted.

David Thompson observes:

We need to acknowledge at the outset that divorce is *our* problem, not just the problem of those divorcing. We, as a church, have been busy about so many important things--building programs, budgets, outreach committees--that we have neglected the couples and families to whom we're ministering. They, meanwhile, have been adopting humanistic ideas and trying worldly activities, with limited maturity and experience. We have

assumed that people who attend our church are Christians, have truly Christian mind-sets and Christian marriages. That may be far from reality! I suspect many couples are just going through the motions. They're living with just a "form of godliness" (Thompson 1989, 31-32).

Efforts by pastors and churches will have to be more pro-active than reactive. The problem of divorce needs to be recognized as an issue that actually requires attention during marriages and before marriages, not just after marriages are through. This will be taken up again in Chapter 7, "Recommendations for Change."

Many divorced people view the church's response to their predicament as following a double standard. For the divorced, the church sadly seems to treat the "death" of a marriage differently than if it had been the death of a spouse.

Pepler laments:

If the marriage had ended in death . . . , there would have been a funeral. Your friends would have been with your mate or you for the final service. Word and Sacrament would have been a comfort. Next Sunday there would have been prayers for the survivors. The grief could have been open, and even proud. One need not apologize for death.

But this is divorce . . . and divorce is completely and utterly without honor. The church has no prayers for the divorced. No congregational voice will rise up to heaven on behalf of your loss (Pepler 1974, 13).

When a loved one dies, no one cares whether they brought it on themselves by overeating, by too little exercise, or, in some cases of accidental death, by consuming too much alcohol or carelessness. People will still rally around the bereaved. When such death occurs, the persons most directly affected are supported by an outpouring of food, family, and flowers which help ease the hurt and smooth the way for the difficult adjustment period.

Such a transitional period in a person's life has built-in support mechanisms not as readily available to the divorced. Sell comments: "A widow will immediately be surrounded by a network of support [from church and

community]. The passage to widowhood is not only acceptable, but social norms and patterns exist to give direction to it. Not so for the divorce transition. There are almost no normative guidelines, and one's social network breaks down instead of rallying to one's aid" (Sell 1984, 67).

Looking at it from a different angle, people who come upon the scene of an automobile accident, do not first ask: "Who's at fault? Who's to blame? How did this happen?" The proper response is to render all possible care and assistance available.

In similar fashion, Thompson counsels that the primary concern and priority for dealing with the divorced is "to minister to the needs of the injured, and to prevent others, as much as we can, from experiencing the same kind of devastation. Only when this emergency aid has been given should we begin searching for causes of the break-up and make judgments and decisions that we hope will reduce the number of future divorces" (Thompson 1989, 14).

As the data from this present study confirms, many divorced members in our churches need to be recognized and treated as "bruised reeds" (Isaiah 42:3) and, therefore, "restored gently" (Galatians 6:1). Pastors need to exercise enormous patience, recognizing the emotional turmoil going on inside of the divorced, which oftentimes causes them to react in unexpected and unpredictable ways. "What amazes me," remarks Thompson, ". . . is how little is written about [the deathlike experience of divorce's emotional struggle] from a Christian perspective. . . It is as if divorce is a totally rational, highly intellectual choice between biblical and existential ethics, rather than a rush of overpowering emotions which confuse and bewilder couples in crisis" (Thompson 1989, 83).

Joyce Landorf Heatherly describes divorced people, reflecting her own experience, as "unworld" people. Their situation has an other-worldly

character to it in the mind of those who have never gone through the same experience. She writes:

Unworld people experience their ordeal and then are shocked and stunned by the loss of friends, family and associates. There we stand, almost totally alone; and at precisely the time of our greatest need for family and friends . . . we feel abandoned. . . The unworld tearing process seems to break down the very inner fibers of our spirit. It saps and drains us of strength or energy. Daily we encounter a new and unexpected crisis. We stumble about in a dense emotional fog and we are stunned with the unfairness of life and its unabated stream of losses. We cringe with the ever present fear that this new loss or the next blow will be the one to finish off the annihilation process. What's more, while losing friends and family you add your own paranoid thoughts and everyday craziness. Part of the daily struggle you face is the ridiculous fact that it is routinely impossible to remember even the most simple things you've done all your life. . . (Heatherly 1987, 210).

When pastors better understand the dynamics of the divorced experience, they will take these factors more into account as they determine how best to approach the divorced and render pastoral care. It should not be surprising, for example, that "divorced people, in their crazy emotional state, are ready to project lack of forgiveness onto church friends and leaders, so that the slightest problem will be interpreted as gross rejection" (Rambo 1983, 42).

Pastors not aware of these powerful emotional factors may themselves react negatively or improperly to behavior that should be viewed more as defense mechanisms, internal coping devices, attempts to return to homeostasis, even if the balance achieved resumes a dysfunctional pattern. An original rebuff or rejection of our persons or our ministry may actually be a cry for help and understanding.

In terms of "family systems theory," pastors are well advised, when dealing with troubled people and troubled marriages, not to accept everything on face value and, above all, not to proceed without realizing that individuals and their behaviors are always interrelated and interdependent. When dealing with people in a troubled or broken relationship, even when only one comes

forward for help, the pastor should be aware that neither this person alone or the absent partner is the focus. The client is really the marriage relationship. As Wynn points out, "There is a great difference between viewing the marital problem as if it belonged to two individuals in pain, and viewing the relationship between them [emphasis added] as if it were a bridge in need of urgent repair" (Wynn 1991, 45).

Wynn goes on to describe why this second perspective is more accurate and, ultimately, more helpful:

Much of emotional disturbance, far from being only a private intrapsychic experience, is patently systemic. . . We do not live or die to ourselves; all of us are part of a web of relationships that affect our mental health, our knowledge, and our customs. The keen observer can look into an individual's problems and see much; but that same observer can examine a troubled family and diagnose far more. The rules, and rituals, and roles of that family will throw bright light on the behavior and reactions of each of the individuals within it (Wynn 1991, 45).¹

Pastors' own feelings toward the divorced can often be ambivalent and confused, depending upon their own family of origin backgrounds and issues. Anyone who has not experienced the trauma of a dysfunctional home will have a more difficult time relating to such problems. That, of course, does not mean that many clergy homes don't experience similar stresses and strains because of the dynamics peculiar to parsonage life. Clergy marriages are not immune to strife and struggle, and divorce in clergy homes is on the rise.² The tendency, however, is to make assumptions about how other people should solve their problems and re-orient their lives on the basis of our own experiences, without reflecting that the times, the peoples, the issues, the settings, the dynamics are never interchangeable or repeatable.

¹Wynn's revised and updated book, Family Therapy in Pastoral Ministry, is a valuable and insightful introduction to "family systems therapy." In it he provides explanations of "systems" terminology and processes, as well as strategies for interviews and interventions with people in crisis.

²Quoting an article in Leadership (Fall 1981), Thompson reports that, according to one survey, ministers have the third highest rate of divorce among professions, "behind only medical doctors and policemen" (Thompson 1989, 160).

Pastors also must be aware that they struggle between their public role and their private responses. "Most ministers," says David Thompson, "feel torn between institutional concerns for a holy, sanctified church and the needs of individual church members who are failing to measure up to the ideal" (Thompson 1989, 34). It is only natural that pastors, because they have a weighty charge and calling to "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage" (II Timothy 4:2), would feel duty bound consistently and firmly to uphold the standards of God's Word on marriage as an unconditional commitment, a covenant-not-to-be-broken (cf. Matthew 19:6).

The crucial consideration comes in the manner and approach that is taken. In his charge to Timothy, Paul speaks to that very issue: "Correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (II Timothy 4:2). He follows this by an assessment of the way much ministry is received by some: "[The] time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth. . . But you, keep your head in all situations, . . discharge all the duties of your ministry" (4:3-5).

Unfortunately, much pastoral ministry to those divorcing comes "out of season." "The pastor of a church," Oates accurately observes, "often learns of a marital conflict only in its later stages when separation, legal action, or divorce finally brings it to his or her attention" (Oates 1976, 7). Couples with problems too often fail to seek pastoral counseling early enough when chances of success are greatest or, if they do come, they come at a time when, for all practical purposes, the divorce is a fait accompli.

Pastors need to recognize that sometimes the reasons for this lie in the assumptions and perceptions that members in general have about pastors and their lives. Many parishioners hold the view that pastors have perfect marriages, and, therefore, they would not understand the problems of the common people in the pew. Such a view is perpetuated when pastors do not disclose anything of their own frailties as a spouse or parent, as well as their own struggles and failings to live up to God's ideal as a husband or father.

Along this same line, Oates identifies additional reasons behind this reticence and reluctance by couples in marital crises to divulge problems or disclose tensions:

In the mind of many people the minister is "not supposed to know" anything about the angers, the hostilities, the separations, and the irreconcilable differences that beset people. There is a common assumption that [a pastor] knows nothing of this, and a corresponding taboo against the minister ever mentioning it. . . Therefore, people tend to keep a minister carefully ignorant of their own hostile and inflamed relationships. . . One of the major reasons for this blackout of communication is the traditional projection of the "illusion of respectability" upon the minister. Then too, taboos upon divorce are often maintained by pastors. The commitment of the church to the durability of marriage, and the dubious assumption that infidelity is the likely cause of divorce, together conspire to exclude the pastor from such separating experiences in people's lives. The traditional ministerial stance that reconciliation is the *only* viable alternative prompts the couple to assume that the minister will not "listen to" any other option, not even that of temporary separation. As a result, couples in conflict often will not come to the pastor at all (Oates 1976, 7).

In connection with Oates' last comment, a major philosophical hurdle that many pastors must deal with is whether they want to give the impression that they only do marriage counseling or whether they also do divorce counseling, even if that means they do not advise divorce. If an absolutist stance is maintained, namely, "I don't counsel if divorce is viewed as an option," then troubled couples may never make even the first step toward some level of pastoral counseling.

Pastors should also be acutely aware of the impact that other facets of their ministry, outside of any counseling setting, have on preparing the way for fruitful ministry to the divorced. This would, of course, apply as well as to any who struggle with perplexing personal or family problems.

Thompson addresses the matter very powerfully and pointedly for pastors:

Like it or not, the pastor sets the tone and direction in the church. Through his lifestyle, preaching, teaching, and administration, the pastor indicates to the believers by his attitudes and remarks that it is safe to be genuine and honest with God's people.

Pastors and other counselors should ask themselves: "Am I creating an environment which encourages openness? Is this a place where people who have failed can reveal problems and receive forgiveness and acceptance?" A pastor may really have to work at creating this kind of loving environment, since many people have grown up believing that pastors are somehow "a different breed," sinless and perfect themselves (Thompson 1989, 36).

The survey of divorced members indicated that the chief factor(s) that allowed them to have a positive counseling experience with their pastor was finding a pastor who was "warm, caring, non-judgmental and receptive" (see "Divorced Survey," Question "C"). It is clear that it is just as important "how" you say or do something in the parish setting as "what" you say or do.

Just as there is such a thing as "pre-evangelism," there is also something that might be called "pre-counseling." Grant observes: "As people have seen you work, heard what you say, and been aware of the public face of your private life, they have been deciding whether you are a person they would expect to be helpful, should they get into marital difficulties. You have already begun their healing: by embodying, teaching, and preaching a view of marriage" (Grant 1986, 25).

It takes conscious effort to overcome these impressions and assumptions by the divorced. One major area of sensitivity which requires

forethought is the whole area of preaching and public proclamation. Provided that the divorced are present in church to hear a message, they need to know, like everyone else, that the pastor's message speaks to their needs, as well as addresses their genuine and daily concerns.

Along these lines, Thompson writes: "Everyone recognizes the pastor as preacher. Hurting people listen especially for themes of love, grace, faithfulness, forgiveness, holiness, and healing. A parishioner's view of God is determined by these messages. So the pastor has the opportunity to shape people's beliefs not only about God but about themselves, too, depending on the kinds of sermons they hear week after week" (Thompson, 1989, 97).

Since the attitude that the divorced seem to have regarding the biblical grounds for divorce is more liberal and lenient than that of most pastors, pastors will need to make special efforts to make clear what Scripture has to say, as well as where it is silent or not clear. If the church does not try to shape, and in many cases restore, a Christian view of marriage and divorce, it is clear that society already has, and will continue to do so.

Grant offers his own insights into the important role the pulpit plays:

In addition to your ideology, about which you speak from time to time, [people in the pew with marital problems] will also be listening for the indirect communications you offer in sermons. They will be alert to the view of marriage that comes through in illustrations intended for other subjects. They will catch the tone of voice in which you refer to the marriages of people you're preaching about. They will be affected by your choice of texts that convey particular attitudes about relations between the sexes, even if that wasn't the point you were trying to make. In other words, if they are beginning to sense marriage as a point in their lives that may need some attention, they're going to be scanning the environment, at least unconsciously, for signs that the potential helping people either are or are not the ones they will seek. . . (Grant 1986, 26).

Communicating effectively in this way is one of the most difficult tasks a pastor faces, for divorced people, because they are already hurting inside, will oftentimes hear only Law in a sermon even when it is full of Gospel. Therefore,

it is all the more necessary that the Gospel of forgiveness and empowerment come through.

An experience early on in my own ministry validated that problem. After preaching a sermon that directly dealt with the issue of divorce, a rare occurrence, I happened to visit the ensuing week in the home of a female visitor to our worship that Sunday.

After spending over an hour in what I thought was pleasant conversation with a divorced woman, raising her teen-age daughter alone, I was ready to leave when she remarked, quite abruptly, "I need to let you know that I was quite offended by your message Sunday. I thought you were extremely judgmental and very prejudiced against divorced people. Divorce is not 'the unpardonable sin.'"

This took me quite by surprise, as I had spent the last page of the sermon disputing that very thing. Knowing how sensitive the sermon topic was, I intentionally tried to make the Gospel very clear and evident. I also reminded the congregation that God views divorce, along with any sin connected with it, no differently than He views all of our sins: "The blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Not even offering to show her the typed copy of the actual sermon or a tape recording of it could convince her that "what she heard" was not "what I said." The experience taught me an early lesson in communications: "The message sent is not always the message received."

It is very possible in the above experience that my manner and demeanor, also known as body language, did not convey an empathic and forgiving spirit to this divorced woman. Pastors, therefore, can never be too careful, not only in what they say, but how they say it.

The genuine perils of preaching are especially present when trying to reach people whose inner lives are confused and in turmoil. That does not, however, negate the pastoral responsibility to be all the more diligent, work all the harder, and be all the more aware of messages that are sent but not received.

Since the role of preacher is probably the most identifiable role that members relate to and experience on a regular basis, there is simply no way of avoiding or evading this dilemma. The challenge is to preach messages that speak Law and Gospel to real situations and conditions, even when a subject like divorce is not the topic in the forefront. The solution to selective listening is not to "go light" on the Law, because some will hear only that, but to bring God's solution, His remedy, to our fallenness and failure in terms that are clear, cogent, and compelling. We must leave the results to the Holy Spirit to "take away the veil" from people's minds (cf. II Corinthians 3:14-16; 4:2-6).

Needham also argues that, in much of the church's preaching and proclamation, not enough is said to bolster existing marriages and reinforce the whole notion of commitment. "We assume that when people come to Christ they become naturally moral and fully converted. It is not so simple. Many need encouragement to be stronger and more courageous in saying no to divorce when conflict erupts" (Needham 1992, 37).

Continuing with his own vision of what must happen, Needham writes:

More than ever we must not overlook the role of moral values in the survival of marriages. Churches, counselors, and pastors should take seriously their role as agents of moral persuasion. They cannot neglect to rebuild people's lives in a way that includes a moral vision. "The stability of marriage is based upon commitment, not love," theologian Emil Brunner once said. But talk of commitment is increasingly foreign in our culture, and we must not assume that Christians have been formed and shaped by the moral language of commitment. Sometimes only moral conviction will keep them trying (Needham 1992, 37).

Examining another aspect of the problem, it can be stated that pastoral help is often dismissed, discounted, or disregarded because the pastor himself is not perceived as a sympathetic counselor or an understanding friend. Instead, some see the pastor as an adversary--an ecclesiastical "policeman-judge-jury-executioner," all wrapped into one. Many of these perceptions are unfounded and stem from guilt feelings and projection, but many are also very real and valid.

The pastor sensitive to all these issues will be aware that such perceptions can only be removed by patient cultivation and communication of warmth, concern, and integrity. Rassieur offers several approaches that would help achieve this objective:

The pastors to whom parishioners will turn for marital help often engage in pastoral activities similar to the following:

Demonstrating in sermons and prayers both concern and sensitive understanding for the stresses encountered in marriage.

Offering brief study courses during the Sunday morning adult forum to aid the growth of marriages.

Leading a contract marriage growth group, which meets once a week to discuss a chapter from such books as *The Intimate Marriage* by Charlotte and Howard Clinebell.

If married, reflecting a marriage that is growing, vibrant, and joyful.

Being sufficiently open and self-revealing as to be seen by others as human and likely to be caring and nonjudgmental toward troubled marriages (Rassieur 1988, 17-18).

A factor which, in many marriages within our churches, militates against help being sought or received, and over which pastors have limited influence and control, is the reality of mixed-marriages,--whether Christian/non-Christian or LCMS Lutheran/non-Lutheran or LCMS Lutheran/other Lutheran. This makes pastoral counseling very difficult, if not

sometimes impossible, for only one partner may have a relationship with the pastoral counselor.

When marriage problems reach a high level of dissatisfaction, it is usually the wife who takes the initiative to suggest or arrange for counseling, while the husband is often resistant (Wynn 1991, 81).¹ As Jason Towner observes: "Keeping an appointment with a marriage counselor is the nearest a man will ever come to visiting a gynecologist. If a marriage counselor is to help, you have to become naked about your life, your marriage, your sexuality. The counselor will probe and the probing will be uncomfortable. Some men adamantly refuse the treatment that can bring healing" (Towner 1978, 44).

Even though such factors as these may make many pastors hesitant actively to help their members who are going through divorce, they need to recognize that not everything is a negative, nor is everything cause for discouragement. Pastors actually possess automatic advantages and plusses that secular helping professionals lack and would pay dearly to possess. In many ways they actually have more to offer than many nonpastoral counselors.

"Pastors," observes Thompson, "can address the spiritual issues of meaning and purpose for life. Ministers usually have some history with the couple, perhaps understanding some of the issues that have brought on the ideas of divorce. Also the pastor has a ready-made community to support the couple in the difficult process of change" (Thompson 1989, 35).

¹Fisher makes the following observations that are germane to this point: "My experience has been that it is more likely for the initiator [of seeking outside help] to be female. Among the reasons for this: 1) Research indicates married females are more unhappy than married males. 2) Females are more likely to be open to new ways of improving relationships. 3) The person who is experiencing personal change and transformation--perhaps one who is healing past abuse, usually female--will seek time and space to do that work. 4) The person who is going through a spiritual transformation is usually female. 5) The female partner, most often the submissive one in our male-dominated society, is more likely than the dominant one to seek equality. 6) When a relationship is not working, the male often will leave the relationship, not knowing or believing there is a possibility of changing it" (Fisher 1992, 300).

If there is one element that has contributed to the proliferation of divorce in the church and the seeming casual, indifferent approach to addressing the needs of the divorce, it is the loss of community in and sense of connectedness to the Body of Christ. While such concepts as "family," "body," "flock," "household" ought to be determinative of the way Christians relate to each other, our impersonal, autonomous, fragmented society pushes people in the opposite direction. Instead of Brothers and Sisters in Christ, many members in churches have become anonymous, detached, disconnected pew sitters or spectators. Instead of the "Church-of-One-Another" (cf. John 15:17; I Corinthians 12:25; Galatians 5:13; 6:2; Ephesians 4:32; 5:21; I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25), we tend to be the "Church-of-Everyone-for-Himself-Herself."

People who divorce automatically lose their "significant other," and, if there are children involved, possibly "significant others." If the void does not get filled, if a support network is not in place, or if the divorced retreat and withdraw from it, then they can feel abandoned, adrift, alone. How will the void be filled?

David Thompson correctly analyzes the problem and squarely identifies the direction that churches need to take. He writes:

... Most counselors readily admit they are filling a void for people who have no sense of a nurturing community. In our competitive pursuit for personal peace and prosperity, there is little room for simple, friendly relationships. Divorce is but a symptom of this problem of discontinuity among people, and it leads to an even greater breakdown of bonds that hold people together.

Our lack of community is most regrettable in the church, which should be a haven for lonely, alienated people. Many churches have a lot of activities but often fail to provide a sense of unity and oneness of spirit. They are preaching-teaching-learning centers, social activity centers, fund-raising centers. Members have a lot of associations--but few close friendships.

Most church groups tend to be task-oriented. The tendency, in such a ministry, is to avoid time-consuming people problems, and focus, instead, on structural or educational goals. . .

Because of this widespread lack of concern for individuals' needs, church leaders don't know what's happening in parishioners' homes and marriages. Many pastors are taken by surprise when couples in their churches separate and divorce. They are shocked, even outraged. But then the couple is often angry and resentful against the church or pastor who would assume to judge their personal life. They say, "Who does the pastor think he is to censor me or my actions? He doesn't even know me!"

The mere idea of such church discipline as discussed in a number of the Pauline Epistles seems foreign to the modern church member. It smacks of the hateful excesses of a loveless inquisition, rather than a caring act of reconciliation. The disciplined member doesn't view it as brothers and sisters rescuing a friend from spiritual disaster. The erring individual often has never felt love and concern in other ways from this community of believers.

We need a restoration of the distinctive mark of love for one another which characterized the first century church. Lost is the cohesive power of breaking bread together and sharing fellowship around our common heritage in Jesus Christ. The privatization and isolation of our lives from other Christians, and the timidity of the church in attacking this heresy, is one of our most urgent problems. Whether we want to admit it or not, we have adopted the world's value of "live and let live." The other side of this is a smug indifference which says to the wounded and lonely church member, "Be self-reliant. Stand on your own two feet. Work out your own problems" (Thompson 1989, 109-10).

While this speaks to the needs of all the members in the church and not just the divorced, it clearly points out the urgency for churches to create or restore the sense of family and community among members. A related issue would be the restoration of church discipline to the church's means of restoring errant family members to the family circle. This also calls for more effective approaches toward assimilating members as they join congregations, while not overlooking and ignoring the chronic un-assimilated.

All of these categories of members would be benefited by the introduction, promotion, and multiplication of Share Groups, Home Bible Studies, recovery groups, opportunities for fellowship, in other words, places

within the church fellowship where Christians can take off their masks, be transparent, speak heart-to-heart, get beyond the superficial. In such settings and under such circumstances, Christians are freed up to be honest about their problems and shortcomings, their hurts and struggles. Spiritual counsel and correction, admonition and comfort can be shared and applied long before problems escalate and get out of control. Much more would probably be accomplished in these kinds of groups than in the countless meetings that many active members are subjected to, fragmenting their own family lives.

One concern expressed by at least two participants in the "focus group" was the church's perceived poor handling of the subsequent marriages of their Lutheran spouses who had broken their marriages. They were allowed to be married within the church, a neighboring one, without any contact being made with the former spouse to determine whether reconciliation had been attempted or repentance demonstrated.

The message to those divorced and left is "We don't care about your feelings. You'll just have to get used to it." The consideration and courtesy of at least a telephone contact would have been greatly appreciated. This might serve as an up-dated version of the banns.

The church has to be careful that it does not come across so strongly "intact family-oriented" that alternatives which do not reflect the preferred ideal become viewed with a measure, even if unconscious, of condescension, skepticism, or, worse, disdain. The world outside the church is certainly sensitive to such image-casting and needs little excuse to find the church irrelevant and resistible.

Furthermore, the church can ill afford to maintain or promote such an image, for, in doing so it would be positioning itself on the periphery of American society for the foreseeable future. According to SAM the landscape of

American households has changed significantly since 1970. Between 1970 and 1990, "married couples *decreased* by 16% (as a percent of all households) and single adults *increased* by 15% (as a percent of all households)." In fact, the "fastest growing households," according to SAM, are "childless married couples," "single parents," and "people who live alone" (How American households have changed since 1970 1992, 3). Perhaps even more significant, according to a study by the Barna Research Group, the majority of America's unchurched adults (51%) are also single (The majority of unchurched adults in America are single 1992, 1).

Preconceived notions and faulty impressions about singles, and the divorced in particular, can only hamper and hold back successful ministry efforts. Studies that examine the religious views and behavior of the divorced have uncovered some surprises and unexpected conclusions, especially for any who consider the divorced a lost cause.

Quoting from Unmarried America, published by The Barna Research Group in 1993, SAM reports:

From the standpoint of the church, divorced people are an intriguing and challenging group to try to serve. Their lack of church involvement [nine out of ten once attended church regularly, but only about one-fifth now think a person must be at least somewhat involved with a church or other religious organization in order to be "religious"] may make them appear to be alienated or hostile to religion in general. But their private religious practices--frequent Bible reading, regular religious television and radio exposure and dedication to prayer--show that they are far from being a "lost cause." And divorced people are extremely needy people. Philosophically, they are more in tune with the church than their cousins, the never-married. Their schedules and temperaments mean that churches that are creative and take the time to understand divorced adults' unique attitudes, lifestyles and needs will stand the best chances of serving them and making them a part of their communities (How divorced people see the church 1993, 4).

As pastors approach each divorced situation they will have to marshal all the resources, knowledge, and skill available to them. They will have to

make judgments on the basis of their own biblical convictions, pastoral practices, and skills in counseling people in trouble. There will usually be a conflict between "what should be" and "what is" (the ideal and the real). In addressing the usually complicated and complex problems faced by a pastor, Switzer makes the following observation which fitly concludes this section:

[My] perspective is that when we are working with persons who are in fact divorcing or who have recently been divorced, we may be talking with people who have reached the point when mutual destructiveness seems to have reached the point of no return. Therefore, we must inevitably raise the question of what God's will is for the person or persons from this point on. It's quite clear that it is not an easy question to answer. Should a person stay in the marriage, be destroyed, destroy another, perhaps damage children severely? Our answers may differ, but we must raise the question of what God's will is in this particular set of circumstances now that the ideal circumstances no longer exist. After persons have divorced, the question is what the will of God is for the particular person or persons after divorce. In one set of terms, it's the same that it has always been: forgiveness of our sins, renewal of our commitment to God, wholeness and fulfillment in our lives and relationships, seeking to live the life of the kingdom. How will a divorcing or divorced person do that? Each one of us is responsible for working with that person or those persons in the light of all of the circumstances of their lives and in light of our particular faith and tradition, assisting them by all means possible to clarify for themselves in as conscientious a way as possible what the will of God is for him or her or them (Switzer 1989, 159-60).

CHAPTER 7
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Removing Barriers, Building Bridges in the Church

It is clear that the church must take positive actions to ameliorate and amend conditions inside and outside the church that make divorce so prevalent and make ministering to the divorced or divorcing so problematic. Switzer correctly observes:

[If the church's response to the problems surrounding divorce] is to have any significant impact, [it] must be comprehensive, visible, and available. It must therefore be interdisciplinary and it must be multidimensional. By multidimensional I mean, first, that it have an influence on society and hopefully reduce the incidence of divorce through the formation and maintenance of better marriages. Second, I mean that it should touch people at different stages of their pre-married, married, and post-divorce lives. It should assist them in different areas of their personal lives: attitude formation, values, decision-making, emotional distress, spiritual needs, legal and vocational guidance, etc. (Switzer 1989, 167)

Such a total response, Switzer encourages, would need to include and address such issues as better education of young people in the meaning and purpose of human sexuality and marriage, more effective pre-marital counseling, greater publicity given to the early signals of marital distress, and more available and competent marriage counseling (Switzer 1989, 167-168).

If the survey of divorced members reflects reality, then much more will need to be required by pastors in terms of pre-marital counseling. 82% of the divorced who were surveyed indicated that they had two or fewer pre-marital sessions with their pastor. Only 5% replied that they had five or more such sessions.

What the figures do not answer is whether memories are particularly faulty in this area, whether pre-marital counseling sessions are not very memorable experiences for many people, whether these people failed to receive all the counseling offered, or whether many of them did not get married in the church to begin with and, therefore, did not feel compelled to approach the pastor.

In retrospect, the survey to the pastors should have asked them about their minimum requirement or goal for the number of pre-marital counseling sessions. In general, marriages conducted in a church setting have been shown to have greater permanence (Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman 1983, 53).

Recognizing that the efforts put in before marriage may avert disasters and heartaches later on, pastors should insist on a minimum of five counseling sessions. Topics covered should include: Biblical perspectives on marriage and the relationship between husbands and wives, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, personality issues, sexual relationship, children, in-laws, family of origin issues, and the like.

Resources are abundant and training in their use is usually available on a regular basis. Pastors not acquainted with worthwhile options should consider such counseling instruments and tools as PREPARE/ENRICH (P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN 55440) or the TAYLOR-JOHNSON TEMPERAMENT ANALYSIS PROFILE (published by Psychological Publications, Inc., 5300 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90027).

It might be wise and prudent for pastors to suggest or offer the use of the above instruments for "pre-engagement," as opposed to "pre-marital" counseling. By the time engaged couples come to a pastor to arrange a wedding, they have usually taken care of what in their mind are the necessities, that is, they have already made a downpayment on a hall and

perhaps engaged the band for the reception. It is much harder for them to back out of a planned wedding when doing so would make them lose money and lose face. Pre-engagement counseling might avoid that scenario.

If a pastor finds himself too overwhelmed by the number of marriages he must conduct each year, then he can consider recruiting (a) qualified couple(s) and authorize and assign them the responsibility of conducting the preliminary pre-marital work. Roman Catholic churches, it should be noted, make wide use of this practice.

Another alternative would be to require a couple to view a video that covers the major topics that would otherwise be brought up in the pastoral counseling setting. One suggestion might be Building a Christian Marriage (Concordia Publishing House).

At the very least, couples could be provided with reading materials or audio tapes and asked to respond to prepared questions that would indicate whether the homework given was accomplished. Possible suggestions would include: The Act of Marriage (LaHaye and LaHaye 1976); Love Life for Every Married Couple (Wheat 1980); and Achieving the Impossible: Intimate Marriage (Sell 1982).

Since second and subsequent marriages have an even worse track record for success, pastors should insist that couples in that category participate in re-marital counseling, even if they think they already know every thing there is to know about marriage. Issues for such couples are more complicated, complex, and confusing. This makes it all the more necessary to make such counseling mandatory. Suggested resources that pastors can use include: Remarriage: Challenge and Opportunity [Pastor's Reference] (Velandar 1985); Preparing to Marry Again: A Workbook for People Considering a Subsequent Marriage (Dunn 1988); Growing in Remarriage:

Working Through the Unique Problems of Remarriage (Smoke 1990);¹ Second Marriage: Make It Happy! Make It Last! (Stuart and Jacobson 1985); The Second Time Around: Remarriage in America (Westhoff 1977).

An issue raised above, on page 92, needs to be addressed: What will the pastor's/church's approach be to the divorced within their midst when the other spouse wants to be remarried within and by the church? As previously stated, many divorced people feel that the church, either their own or a sister congregation, let them down when an adulterous ex-spouse was allowed to have a church wedding.

This does not mean that such people should or may never be married in the church, but pastors and churches should consider what policies they will follow in terms of remarriages within the church. Obviously there should be some clear indication of repentance, renewal, and rebuilding. Issues of reconciliation, forgiveness, ongoing financial or custodial responsibilities, and any unfinished business from the former marriage need to be addressed.

The former spouse, especially if still within the church, should also be considered and, hopefully, informed and forewarned. At the time a former spouse remarries, many divorced people experience a new crisis or regress in their rebuilding cycle. Old wounds and hurts tend to resurface at that time.

In terms of education, there are a number of approaches that pastors can use to alert couples to the early signs of marital distress. One would be to include brief articles in the church newsletter, perhaps excerpting or summarizing chapters from books on counseling and relationship issues. This would also have the benefit of pointing people to resources they themselves can purchase at a bookstore and read in their entirety. An example of such an article is found in "Appendix 6."

¹Note especially the 46 questions found on pages 177-180 which ask for personal reflection by those considering remarriage.

Pastors who live in areas serviced by church-sponsored religious counseling agencies, like the Lutheran Counseling and Family Service of Wisconsin, can usually receive succinct, ready-made bulletin inserts that focus on specific, potential trouble areas of married life. These could also be adapted for use in church newsletters. Usually such resources encourage couples or individuals to speak to their pastor, but also indicate that the confidential, qualified services of the counseling agency are always available.

Where possible, some churches could also include money in their budgets, designated to help members in marital distress pay for counseling through Christian agencies or approved counseling providers. Although fees at such agencies are usually based on income, some people will never pursue such counseling because they imagine that the cost is too prohibitive. Sadly, they fail to recognize that the alternative often costs even more, financially, as well as emotionally.

Pastors should develop their own list of qualified Christian counselors, as well as public agencies that offer assistance beyond the scope and resources of the church. Persons whose needs are beyond the knowledge and skills, or even schedule constraints, of the pastor can then be referred, rather than put on hold. A participant in the focus group mentioned that she did not receive the timely pastoral counseling she requested because it came during the Lenten season when her pastor said he could not fit her in. The window of opportunity was unfortunately missed.

To improve their counseling skills pastors need to participate in workshops, seminars, and continuing education experiences sponsored by seminaries and Christian colleges or by para-church counseling organizations (like Rapha, Fresh Start Seminars, Inc., Minreth-Meier Clinics), take classes in counseling at local institutions of higher learning or university extension

centers, utilize the resources of trained personnel at the local, district, and synodical level, pursue advanced courses or degrees on the seminary level, such as a Doctor of Ministry, focusing on counseling, develop a personal library of counseling books, particularly dealing with the issues of divorce, single parenting, handling emotions and finance (and, then, actually *read* them!). Most pastors would have to admit that the training they received at the seminary level was the minimum, rather than the maximum or optimum. In most cases, it was also a long time ago.

A variety of journals could be subscribed to in order to keep current on marriage, divorce, and family issues. Among the most notable and readable are: Single Adult Ministries Journal (P. O. Box 730, Redmond, OR 97756); Journal of Christian Counseling (P. O. Box 548, Mount Pleasant, MI 48858); Journal of Marriage and the Family (3989 Central Avenue, #550, Minneapolis, MN 55421); Journal of Pastoral Care (27 Harbor Drive, 901 North Kings Highway, Hunter's Trace, NC 28459); Journal of Pastoral Psychology (12 West 32nd Street, New York, NY 10001); Journal of Psychology and Theology (13800 Biola Avenue, La Mirada, CA 90639). All of these, except SAM Journal, are published quarterly; many would be available at large public libraries or seminary libraries. There is no excuse for pastors not to increase their competencies in understanding and dealing with marriage and divorce issues.

Pastors should also consider whether members do not come to them because of the perception "The pastor is too busy" or "He has too many other people with whom to deal." One way of addressing this issue would be to designate certain office hours during the week when the pastor "will be available for counseling individuals or couples." Periodic or regular announce-

ments in bulletins or newsletters would convey the message "I want to make myself available to people to help. That's why I'm here!"

A major area relating to the issue of counseling, in which pastors clearly need to address their own philosophy of helping divorcing/divorced members, is "when to respond." "Breaking through [their] isolation," writes Needham, "is not an easy task; it requires a graceful balance between reaching out and honoring [their] need for privacy and confidentiality" (Needham 1992, 36). It also requires timing, namely, know-when.

The survey results clearly illustrated that pastors in general take a "wait-and-see" attitude (see complete summary results in "Appendix 2," Question "8"). The most common response (33%) to the Pastors' Survey was "I wait *until the person(s) take(s) the initiative* to come forward with the problem and then make an effort to follow up." This approach falls short in a number of areas.

First of all, it fails to recognize that pastors, by their office and call, are afforded a unique status and position denied secular counselors. They are allowed, even expected, to have widespread access to their members. This extends even outside of church life. As a result, pastors possess a very special tool: "the pastoral right of initiative." Pruyser calls this "the most unique and valuable functional asset" of ministers (Pruyser 1976, 25)." Arnold, likewise, relates that ". . . ministers are among the few in our culture who have the privilege of exercising initiative instead of *having* to wait (Arnold 1982, 200-201)."

Oden elucidates and elaborates on this often under-utilized or even overlooked "advantage." He explains:

No office-bound psychiatrist is free to do this [intervene on his own initiative]. This is why, at the level of accessibility, good pastoral counsel is potentially far more effective than secular, time-cramped, fee-based,

medically modeled psychotherapies. Its accessibility offers it the opportunity to serve prior to the crisis. A timely intervention may prevent unnecessary hurt while promoting needed growth (Oden 1983, 179).

"[The] key ingredient for pastoral care in any context," concludes Rassieur, "is pastoral initiative that is well informed by pastoral intuition. Such intuition is a matter of knowing when to go to a couple and say you are concerned for them and want to have a pastoral conversation with them. No other professional person has that right" (Rassieur 1988, 18).

Exercising this right and properly utilizing it to accomplish your goal is a delicate and discerning art. It is not easily done nor is it always readily received. Those to whom you are trying to communicate concern may have their defense mechanisms fully activated, on "Red Alert" status, ready to repulse any perceived incoming "missiles" directed, they think, at their self-esteem or their decision to separate or divorce.

Although this is a genuine problem and concern, it is, nevertheless, a second reason why *laissez-faire*, "wait-and-see" approaches are mistaken and shortsighted. As Arnold relates:

. . . Human limitations, the distortions in perception, the failure to recognize gifts and abilities, and the tendency to isolate oneself out of pride or shame are troublesome. Those realities move against a naive assumption that we can blissfully sit in an office and expect persons in need of help to appear at our doorstep. Initiative means going to them. It is based on the hard-nosed belief that people don't always know when they need help. And if they do know, they may not have the courage to admit it (Arnold 1982, 37).

Arnold goes on to explain that the problem is as much ours as theirs:

Failure to exercise initiative often is a reflection of our own human condition. We fail to perceive or are fearful of offending. Because of *our* distortion, we do not perceive that a person is in need of help. The result is a missed opportunity for both to experience commonality in caring when it is sorely needed (Arnold 1982, 38).

In order to lower the discomfort level and minimize the awkwardness that is inherent in any such encounter, a pastor might initiate the

conversation in a way that exposes his own vulnerability. He can do this by transferring the presenting problem or embarrassment to himself, rather than to the member going through separation or divorce.

This is best done in person, but oftentimes, because of time and schedule constraints and pressures, the preliminary contact may have to be over the phone. In such cases "efficiency" often has to be weighed over against "effectiveness," and vice versa.

A typical conversation might begin in this fashion:

"Hi, (Person's name)? This is Pastor _____. I've learned that you and _____ are separated/have split up. This has to be a very difficult and painful time for both of you. I have to admit that it's always hard for me to approach people when their life is in such a turmoil. You never know what's best to say or how best to help. I just want to let you know that when you feel that you can sit down and talk things over with me, I would appreciate that opportunity. I want to let you know that I'm here if you need someone just to listen. . . ."

This approach, first of all, lets them know that you are aware of their situation. It makes the covert overt and removes at least one barrier to communication. It also lets them know that you don't consider them the enemy or a problem or an embarrassment to the Body of Christ.

They may indicate a willingness to talk things over right away or that they're not quite ready yet. In the latter case, you may indicate your intent to call them back in a few days/weeks to see how they are doing. That also informs them that you do not intend to ignore or overlook the situation.

If both spouses are members of the church, a pastor will especially need to indicate his desire to be pastor to both parties. Therefore, the optimum scenario would be one in which both parties are involved at the same time. Otherwise, the left out spouse may falsely perceive the pastor as taking sides from the outset.

If one partner refuses or is reluctant to join with the other, the pastor should indicate that it is to that person's advantage to be part of the discussion. You, as pastor, sincerely do not want to hear only one side of the issue.

Sometimes the reason pastors are reluctant to take the direct, personal visitation approach is that they have not modeled this as a regular, integral part of their ministry to individuals and families. Arnold's observation is pertinent: "If the pastor has already established a pattern of general visitation, such calls are much simpler and less alarming" (Arnold 1982, 200).

Earlier Arnold had indicated the wisdom and validity of establishing such a procedure on a more general basis.

Crisis periods are not the only time when it is valuable to indicate pastoral care. Our understanding of human beings as developing creatures lends importance to making regular contacts with people to "get to know them" apart from some dramatic event. In fact, people in crisis are more receptive to help if initiative has been taken toward them long before the crisis occurs. Relationships must have *developed* in order for people to make the most productive use of pastoral care in a crisis. And the initiative in forming that relationship must often be exercised by the pastoral person (Arnold 1982, 37-38).

Arnold later on continues his elaboration of the folly of taking a "wait-and-see" approach:

Some pastors back away from an exercise of initiative such as I have recommended. They prefer to wait until people come directly asking for help. To wait is to be naive about the characteristics of human nature . . . Many people will never be able or willing to ask for help, but they will respond quickly when an offer or an expression of interest is proffered (Arnold 1982, 200-201).

For those who are seriously contemplating divorce and perhaps have moved to the stage of separation, a word of caution and warning may need to be raised. Divorce is not always, perhaps seldom, the answer, even in difficult circumstances. God has resources that will help them address the most serious of problems.

For those who would accept bibliotherapy, guidance and motivation from books written on identified subjects, a number from a Christian perspective could be offered or suggested. They include: From the Brink of Divorce (Carroll 1978); Love Life For Every Married Couple (Wheat 1980);¹ The Myth of the Greener Grass (Petersen 1983); Reconcilable Differences: Mending Broken Relationships (Talley 1985); The Divorce Decision (Richmond 1988); and Happily Ever After [And Other Myths About Divorce] (Durham 1993).

Not only do those contemplating divorce need to deal with the spiritual and theological issues involved in such a decision, but also pastors can also confront them with some very basic, practical truths and realities about divorce and its aftermath. Pastors should realize that sometimes the "antennae" of those seeking or heading toward divorce are not always positioned to receive theological counsel. They may, however, be open and willing to hear practical, no-nonsense advice from a secular slant. If the front door doesn't open, it may be well to try the back door. There are realities that most people in that situation do not want to hear, but need to hear.

Diane Medved devotes a whole book to The Case Against Divorce. Her approach is honest, candid, and straightforward. She makes no apologies for her unambiguous stand and frank opinions, which, by the way, also recognize that some marriages can't or won't be saved. In her attempt to bring a strong dose of reality into the discussion of divorce, Medved sets forth the following four arguments against divorce which many people need to hear and pastors can utilize in their counseling:

1. *Divorce hurts you.* Divorce brings out selfishness, hostility, and vindictiveness. It ruins your idealism about marriage. It leaves emotional scars from which you can never be free. It costs a bunch of money--and significantly reduces your standard of living.

¹Especially valuable is Chapter 15, "How to Save Your Marriage Alone."

2. *Divorce hurts those around you.* It devastates your children for at least two years and probably for life. It hurts your family by splitting it in two; both family and friends are compelled to take sides. It forces you to be hardened against people you once loved. It rips the fabric of our society, each divorce providing another example of marriage devalued.

3. *The single life isn't what it's cracked up to be.* Ask anyone--the "swinging singles" life is full of frustration, rejection, and disappointment. The Mr. or Ms. Right you assume waits for you may be only a futile fantasy. Even a successful affair that bridges you from one marriage to another often becomes merely a second failure.

4. *Staying married is better for you.* You don't have to disrupt your life for two to seven years; instead, solving marital problems provides a sense of teamwork and stands as a concrete accomplishment that enhances problem-solving skills in the larger world. Marriage is statistically proven to be the best status for your health, divorce the worst. Marriage gives you something to show for your time on earth--children (usually) and a bond built on continuity and history (Medved 1989, 13).

It would also be a mistake for pastors to feel that the entire burden of helping rests upon them or must be accomplished by them. Individuals in the congregation who have a background in counseling or social work or law or financial planning could be asked to assist where needed or requested.

Many suggestions for change and improvement are rather simple and follow "common sense," which sometimes is not all that common. William Ross (Ross 1987, 5-6) delineates several basic ways by which churches and their members can better incorporate divorced people into the mainstream of their church life. Most of these suggestions do not require indepth study or prior approval by boards or committees. They can be implemented immediately, unilaterally, simply, provided there is a commitment to being sympathetic, open, and pro-active. The last three suggestions might require the backing, promoting, and cultivating of both the pastoral staff and congregational leaders.

Ross counsels the church in regard to the divorced and their families:

1. *Be accepting.* Acceptance of a person does not necessarily denote approval of what the person has done in the past. . . People who have gone

through the trauma of divorce do not need anyone to point an accusing finger at them. Frequently, they are already laden with guilt for having failed to measure up as a wife or as a husband. Congregations need to reach out to divorced people in an accepting, non-demeaning way.

2. *Treat them as normal people.* Invite them into your home for a meal or for some after-church fellowship. Divorced people desperately need friends, and if those friends are not to be found in the church, they will be found somewhere less desirable. Remember that those who have been divorced often feel "different." . . . Rarely will they participate in couple or family activities, unless specifically encouraged to do so. Therefore we need to treat them as normal people. Seek out their ideas and opinions. Engage them in meaningful, non-patronizing conversations.

3. *Offer to assist them.* Divorced people have needs, too. Sometimes their cars don't start. Sometimes their drains clog. Congregations can schedule work days when skilled persons can make their special abilities and time available to those with fix-up needs. . .

4. *Sit beside them.* Because they feel different, it isn't unusual for divorced people to sit by themselves or to congregate with other "un-touchables." Ask them to sit beside your family, or, better yet, sit beside them yourself.

5. *Remember their children.* When there are young children in the home, single parents would appreciate an occasional day away from them. Your offer to child-sit periodically will mean a great deal to a single parent. . .

6. *Offer non-restrictive Sunday school classes.* A number of those who are divorced greatly dislike being shunted off to singles classes. Others feel uncomfortable in couples classes. Provide divorced people with the opportunity to choose the kind of class in which they will feel most at ease. . .

7. *Develop a counseling resource library.* The wounds of divorce heal very slowly and need to be bathed with understanding. To that end a church can accumulate a library of books and tapes that would be of special assistance to those who have been divorced. . .

8. *Allow them to serve.* Churches need to address the question of whether it is correct to limit the service of those who have gone through divorce, particularly when an individual has been an unwilling party to the divorce, or if the divorce was granted on the basis of biblically justifiable grounds. Likewise, if a person obtains divorce on biblically non-justifiable grounds and later acknowledges his or her sin, the church needs to consider whether it is right to withhold the privilege of serving the Lord in the local church. . . (Ross 1987, 5-6).

Another area where pastors and churches can be more sensitive is the use of language, whether in sermons, Bible classes, publications, or any place

where images and attitudes are conveyed and communicated. Without realizing it, and hopefully not encouraging it, the church can be stigmatizing, offending, and alienating the divorced in their midst by words chosen carelessly and unintentionally.

It is very common to hear terms like "broken families" or "dysfunctional families" used in sermons and other public discourse when the subject is divorced homes. However, those terms are not always accurate or adequately descriptive.

For one thing, to call a family "broken" does not clarify who did the breaking. It may have been an outcome vigorously opposed and consistently resisted by one of the parties, and yet they are equally stigmatized.

Someone listening to a sermon where such descriptive terms are used may be thinking to themselves: "I didn't break anything. I'm trying my hardest to fix things for myself and my children. My spouse left me. My children and I are together. Doesn't he understand the struggles we have and the sacrifices we make?"

Has anyone determined at what point such a "broken" family gets "fixed" (or even "less broken")? If a single parent never remarries, is that home forever "broken"? Such a stigma reinforces a stereotype and gives little credit, let alone solace, where it may be due.

In a similar manner, not every divorced family or single-parent home can be categorized as "dysfunctional." Many two-parent homes function very poorly, while many single-parent homes function at an optimal level, given the conditions and challenges faced.

Karen Greenwaldt suggests using the terms "two households, two families, or children of divorced parents" as alternatives (Greenwaldt 1992, 10). To avert an awkward situation for children from divorced homes, one that often

arises in Sunday School or parochial school, a teacher should not say "Take this (lesson, leaflet, etc.) home to your mom and dad," but rather, "Take this to your mom or dad" (Greenwaldt 1992, 10). This also takes the pressure off the child who must wonder: "Does he/she mean my 'real' (biological) dad/mom or my step-dad/mom?"

In some situations churches will also need to re-think certain traditional, long-standing events. For many churches it is a custom and practice to sponsor "Mother/Daughter" or "Father/Son" banquets. Thirty years ago such events were relatively uncomplicated and readily supported.

However, with the dramatic rise in single parent households, matters are far more problematic today. The called-for parent may not live in the same city or the "wrong" parent may be the one who has custody of the child.

A simple alternative might be to broaden the banquet focus to "Parent/Child" relationships. In this way, either parent, both parents, or a step-parent could be included. If such banquets continued to be gender-specific, they at least could include the option of inviting a "surrogate" parental figure or substituting with a grandparent. Not to make such allowances gives the message to some children: "You can't come. We don't want you. You are not welcome here" (Greenwaldt 1992, 11).

Along this same line, Schwerdt comments:

The list of thoughtless, offending titles is too obvious as announcements of local churches are read in newspapers, on church signboards, on posters, fliers and monthly church mailings. Meaningful and inclusive alternatives exist for most church events with only a touch of creativity. Someone who has experienced the pain of divorce and its social ramifications is more inclined to react positively to an "All Church Camping Weekend" than to a "Family Camping Weekend" (Schwerdt 1984, 60).

Churches should also be careful not to identify activities as "Couples _____" when it is, hopefully, not the intent to exclude a certain segment in

the first place. "Couples bowling/volleyball/bridge" would better be designated "Mixed _____."

A related communication issue that affects the separated or divorced is "How should they be addressed?" "Ms." ??? First names only???" Addressing females, on the whole, seems to present a greater challenge than addressing males, for they are usually the ones who change their name in the first place when they get married.

Also, "Who gets the church mail, if they're separated but not divorced?" What if you have assigned mailboxes at the church? They generally would be next to each other.

"What about contribution envelopes? Should the church issue a new set?" This is a complicated issue, since rarely do the divorced act pro-actively in these situations or choose to initiate solutions.

There are probably no universally applicable answers to these dilemmas for the church office and church secretaries in particular. Rather than guess what people would prefer, pastors should simply admit the dilemma, acknowledge that they have a concern to be sensitive and responsive, and ask the people directly. This could also serve as a less-threatening excuse to make initial contact with them. It would be another way to make the covert overt.

There are numerous approaches that churches can take to minister more directly, sensitively, and helpfully to families of divorce and particularly to the children who are so often caught in the middle. When such ministry is offered it sends a positive message to these families and others in the community that the church truly cares about the needs of all people.

One recent resource intended for ministering to the families of the divorced is entitled: Just Me & the Kids (Schiller 1994). It is a complete program which includes videos for training leaders, as well as videos for leading

and stimulating discussions during the 12-session format. Sessions last for one hour once a week. What is special about this program is that children and parents experience this ministry together, although in separate tracks. Children are divided according to developmental stages: Primary, Kindergarten, Grades 1-2, Grades 3-4, and Grades 5-6.

Small groups for children are team-led by one male and one female. Most often these are people who have had previous experience with divorce and grown through that experience, but the program allows and encourages non-divorced people to be selected and trained as leaders. The children are taught how to process their pain, denial, guilt, and anger through appropriate play activities and the making of crafts.

Another very successful and well developed ministry, directed specifically at children who are part of divorced families, is "Rainbows for All God's Children." It is intended as a special peer program by which children can openly talk about the unique problems and feelings they are experiencing. The parent organization can be contacted at 1111 Tower Road, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173; telephone #708-310-1880.

Another ministry, proposed by Judith Wallerstein, involves a "mentoring program." "Kids need mentors," she suggests. ". . . I'm not talking about big brothers or big sisters. I'm talking about mentors, an older adult who exercises a moral, intellectual and emotional influence, a teacher role . . . The sky's the limit for all the various mentoring relationships possible. Pair up children and adults with similar interests. It can be anything from musical instruments to drawing or painting, stamp collecting, computers, or photography" (Wallerstein 1990, 4-5).

A variation to this approach, suggested by Jones, would be to provide "Good Shepherds." This idea specifically centers on male role models for

children in families headed by single mothers. Men would be recruited, with obvious care, and could schedule a day each month or quarter or twice a year for special activities such as a hike, zoo trip, baseball game, etc. The events would be advertised in advance so that single parents could register their children and the proper number assigned to each volunteer (Jones 1991, 101).

There are additional practical ways that churches can show care and be sensitive to the needs of divorced families. These would include:

- + Provide babysitting at low or no cost at church functions. Many family budgets are so tight and schedules so strained that arranging and paying for a home babysitter would be too much effort and too much expense for some.
- + Offer an "After School" or "Extended Care" Program" or for "latchkey children." This is a variation of child care and babysitting, but much needed and appreciated by parents who must work, but don't have the same human resources available to handle the times when children are forced to be alone.
- + Allow members to advertise, through a bulletin board or newsletter, items that they are in need of, such as clothing, appliances, furniture, etc., or work that they need done (yard work, car repair, painting, help moving, etc.). This could be open to the entire congregation, including widows, elderly, disabled, so that no stigma is attached.
- + Advertise a list of young people or adults who are qualified to be babysitters. These young people could be encouraged to view at least part of their efforts, especially when it revolves around church events, as their service to the Lord and His Church. In addition, responsible adults, usually stay-at-home moms, could be identified as people who would be available to take in someone else's children if and when any emergency situation might arise.

Every pastor and congregation sensitive to the needs of the divorced within their midst should also seriously consider establishing some sort of support group structure within the congregation. If the numbers from one congregation would not sustain a viable group, then neighboring congregations might work together in this ministry area.

Those invited and recruited need not be restricted to the members of your own congregation. Support group ministry for the divorced can also become a valuable outreach effort to the community, demonstrating the church's commitment to and concern for the genuine needs of hurting people.

Jim Smoke, longtime leader in divorce recovery ministry, remarks:

Visionary ministries will recognize the ministry potential here and find creative ways to offer divorce recovery out in the community. The church has a wonderful opportunity here--and we offer what no one else can, the recovery process along with our biblical faith structure. . . If the church can go into the community and love people through their broken experience, then people are going to respond (Smoke 1992, 6).

Rambo clarifies and elaborates why such efforts are needed in the church and why they are so valuable. Speaking from his own experience, he urges:

To be what it ought to be . . . the church has to work hard finding a place for the divorced, to let them know they aren't just grudgingly "accepted." Certainly an outreach group, composed primarily of the divorced to minister to the divorced, would be a first step. We need to be assured of the church's concern and support, to know that there are other divorced people on call to help in the bad times when we feel rejected, suicidal, overwhelmed with guilt. Fellow Christians who have had our same experience can listen to us and offer acceptance and support. In the early days especially, we don't want to hear platitudes about recovery from those we don't feel know what we're going through. The recently divorced are in no shape to hear shallow, easy words of hope. We do need affirmation, affection, and, above all, a place to vent rage, to weep tears of sorrow and pain, to question God, even to wallow in self-pity for a little while. These are part of the healing process, which takes a long time and which requires the patience of friends, family, and church (Rambo 1983, 49-50).

Pastors should never underestimate the value of allowing members who have experienced the pain of divorce actively to minister to those who have just entered into such pain or still need to work through it after many years. They can become, to use Henri Nouwen's term, "wounded healers." Those who have "grown through," Jim Smoke's special phrase, and not just "gone through" divorce, often know better than others what struggles they experienced and

how the Lord ministered to their confusion and concerns, their doubts and fears.

Keener elaborates on how the rejection felt by the divorced can create and produce special insight and understanding into the ultimate rejection that was felt by Christ. He writes:

If all of us who follow Jesus can become sharers in his pain . . . , if we can feel his pain, the pain of a love so great that it drove him to the Cross to reconcile an alienated world to himself--then we will have felt the pain of the ultimate rejection. Because as Hosea so eloquently witnessed, the pain of a broken marriage is but a shadow of God's pain, the testimony that no one has wounded any of us as much as all of us have wounded God, that he pleads day and night for our hearts, our lives--and so many of his people give him so little, absorbed by all their other loves. If *whatever* pain we experience helps us feel the pain of others, if his comfort to us enables us to comfort others, then it will have been enough (Keener 1991, 11).

Any decision, consciously or unconsciously, to overlook this available source of untapped energy, concern, and service is mistaken and myopic. It goes counter to the biblical dynamic, found in II Corinthians 1:3-7, by which "the comforted," in turn, are to become "the comforters." As Small aptly concludes:

Now, really, let's be sensible. A divorced person might be just the very one whom God could use to go to others in marital difficulty to explain the pain and loss incurred by divorce, to tell of the damaging factors not usually considered when one is hurting and bent on divorce. Is this not the very person who could put arms around another presently going through divorce, comforting, encouraging, or just sharing the hurt? Is this not the person who could describe the healing ministry of God to those whose lives have been broken by divorce? Is there anyone in better position to witness to God's forgiving, renewing grace? Is this not the person best equipped to put together a support group in a church that truly has the marks of caring love? (Small 1986, 66)

Pastors, who have not promoted the ministry of the formerly divorced to the newly divorced, will be amazed at the extent to which they truly want to offer their help to those facing similar circumstances. It can be an important final stage in the personal recovery process of the formerly divorced, as well as

a form of redemption, a meaningful way for them to turn their negative experience into a positive.

I was pleasantly surprised at the level and frequency of assistance that members of Pilgrim's "Divorce Recovery Group" rendered to each other, without any pastoral suggestion or coaxing. Members of the group provided transportation to appointments for those without cars, helped with household jobs, accompanied people to doctor's appointments, made themselves available in emergencies, kept in regular phone contact between group meetings, even organized a surprise "50th Birthday Celebration" for one participant. All of this happened despite the fact that virtually none of the members knew each other well or at all before the formation of the group.

Pastors and congregations have a wide range of options that they can consider. At the very least, as suggested above by Small, a pastor could hand pick a few formerly divorced members who, in his judgment and observation, are distinctly qualified and gifted.

These individuals would have given evidence of an understanding of the biblical and theological issues surrounding divorce, demonstrated spiritual and emotional maturity, and would possess personality strengths and problem-solving ability. They would be asked to make themselves available as a caregiver for assignment to the newly separated or those struggling with the realities of divorce. This, it should be noted, would be similar to the dynamics of the "Stephen Ministry" approach. On the highest end of involvement and commitment would be the organization of a "Divorce Recovery Support Group" that would meet on a regular basis.

Fortunately, pastors who do not feel they possess all the expertise to create such a group from scratch have models from which they can draw. Some ministries have been formed specifically to provide training, oversight,

direction, encouragement, programs, and resources for pastors and congregations wishing to minister to the divorced.

Because there are many parallels between divorce and the death of a spouse, both representing the death of a relationship, some programs can reach out to both groups. This has the additional advantage of expanding the base, which would be helpful in smaller congregations where it might be felt the numbers are too small to sustain a divorce recovery group.

An extremely viable and dynamic ministry that some pastors and congregations should consider is "Christian Single Helpmate Groups" or "Helpmates" This ministry was developed through the efforts of Mr. Terry Kulat, who was at one time the Director of Christian Education at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lisle, Illinois. The parent organization (6418 Bradley, Woodbridge, Illinois, 60517) offers experienced guidance and assistance, thorough leadership training, and ready-to-use resources to locally-formed Helpmate chapters. A 600-page "Leadership Manual," including discussion topics and Bible studies, is provided to every chapter that agrees to the Helpmate structure and format. On-site training of congregational leaders by Helpmate staff is a requirement.

A typical Helpmate chapter meets on a weekly basis throughout the year and is self-supporting. Participants are drawn from people who have experienced loss, whether it's the loss of a relationship, like divorce, or the loss of a spouse through death. Free-will donations support both the local chapter and the parent group. In addition to the meeting night, special fellowship and social events are scheduled throughout the year.

Other resources that pastors could utilize to begin an on-going divorce recovery program or to sponsor and develop a special seminar, lasting for up to eight weeks, include books and manuals, such as: Developing a Divorce

Recovery Ministry, (Flanagan 1991); The Fresh Start Divorce Recovery Workbook (Burns and Whiteman 1992); The Complete Divorce Recovery Handbook (Splinter 1992); Ministry to the Divorced: Guidance, Structure, and Organization that Promote Healing in the Church (Richards and Hagemeyer 1986); Re-Singled: Building a Strategy for Surviving Separation by Death or Divorce (Velandar and Lindstrom 1982).

Additional resources are available in video format. One example is: Divorce Recovery: Rebuilding the Castle that has Come Down (Gospel Films, Inc., Box 455, Muskegon, Michigan 49443-0455), a six-part series, developed by Bill Flanagan, that utilizes Jim Smoke's book, Growing Through Divorce as background. It is designed for six two-hour sessions. Session titles are: 1. "Is This Really Happening to Me" [stages of divorce experience]; 2. "Coping With Your Ex-Spouse" [a relational reality that continues to exist; kinds of divorces; guidelines for recovery]; 3. "Assuming New Responsibilities" [planning for yourself and your future; two kinds of marriages; assuming responsibility]; 4. "Being a Single Parent" [single parent problems; guidelines for solo parenting]; 5. "Finding and Experiencing Forgiveness" [what is "forgiveness"; consequences of not forgiving].

Another video series that has just recently been produced, utilizing a wide-ranging list of experts in the field, is DivorceCare (6339 Glenwood Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27612). "Each one of its thirteen-week segments," relates one of its promotional pieces, "includes personal viewpoints from people experiencing divorce, insights and practical advice from experts, Christ-centered biblical input presented in a relevant non-threatening way, and plenty of opportunities for participants to interact and work through feelings." Topics include: "What's Happening to Me?," "The Road to Healing/Finding Help," "Facing Your Anger/Depression/Loneliness," "What Does the Owner's Manual Say?," "New

Relationships," "Financial Survival," "KidCare 1 & 2," "Forgiveness," "Reconciliation," and "Moving On, Growing Closer to God."

Another intermediate step might be to organize a class for the separated and divorced on Sunday mornings or a weekday evening, preferably finding a more inviting and intriguing designation than "class" or "study." Some classes could utilize books, assigning a chapter a week. Many come with study guides or discussion-questions at the end of each chapter, as well as "Action Items" or "Activities" to follow-up on during the week. Books readily adaptable to such an approach would be Growing Through Divorce (Smoke 1976), Suddenly Single (Smoke 1982), Life After Divorce (Reed 1993), Second Chapter: New Beginnings After Divorce or Separation (Splinter 1987), Beginning Again: Life After a Relationship Ends (Hershey 1986), or A Part of Me Is Missing: How to Cope with Life After Divorce (Smith 1979).

"Serendipity House" offers a series of 7-16-week studies that facilitate the sharing of feelings and experiences by the divorced or separated in a non-threatening atmosphere. Selections from the "Serendipity Series" include: Divorce Recovery: Picking Up the Pieces (Madsen 1991); Single Again: Life After Divorce (Singleton 1991); Single Parents: Flying Solo (Cutler 1991); Blended Families: Yours, Mine, Ours (Cutler and Peace 1990).

The "Serendipity" model is not the traditional or typical Bible Study approach, which may turn some pastors off, although alternating chapters utilize scriptural stories as starting points. Those stories function as the stimulus to personal reflection and discussion on the part of participants and the opening up of feelings.

As the introduction indicates: "This is a support group. This is a group in which we can tell our stories. This is a group where we can learn together, pray together, laugh together, and, if necessary, cry together. This is a group

that will help us get through the tough times with grace and style" (Singleton 1991, 5).

Some pastors, mistakenly, I believe, automatically discount such studies as "fluff and feeling stuff." My experience has been that it met some real, immediate needs and involved people in Bible study that were never before involved through any other means. It is not the final or perhaps even the best solution, but it is an intermediate step and can lead to others.

Another possibility is Discovering Life after Divorce, a short-term course that is offered by Concordia Publishing House. It can be used by individuals, as well as groups, and lasts from 4-5 weeks. Its weakness is its short time frame.

Some pastors, reluctant to jump right in to such efforts, can "test the waters" by sending out a survey to members who are either separated or divorced, asking them for general input. This has the dual purpose of informing the pastor "where people are at" in their problems and perceptions, while at the same time making them aware, if even in a small way, that the pastor is concerned about their situation and is endeavoring to explore ways to help. This could prove to be very revealing! A sample survey is found as "Appendix 5."

Churches and pastors should not forget that marriage enrichment classes or workshops are as important in terms of prevention, as "divorce recovery" efforts are for restoration. Again, there is a wealth of resources available.

Some video series options available through Concordia Publishing House are: Renewing the Family Spirit (Ludwig 1989) and Building a Christian Marriage (Brusius and Ludwig 1990). Recent video series produced by Christian Life Resources include: Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem (Rainey

and Rainey 1991) and An Ounce of Prevention - Safeguarding Your Marriage (Richmond 1994).

Since 81% of the pastors surveyed through this project indicated that they had not "preached a sermon focusing on 'Divorce' in the last year," it is apparent that much can be done in this one area. This could also be the reason why the people in the pew, and particularly the divorced themselves, as the surveys bear out (see Appendix 1, pages 12-14), tend to have more liberal views of "biblical grounds for divorce" They receive far too little biblical input to influence their thinking. Allowing a loosening of views regarding divorce to go unchecked within the church will not likely result in stronger marriages in the future!

In part, this may not necessarily reflect a reluctance or timidity to preach on such topics, especially "Divorce," as much as a shortage of appointed Scripture readings that lend themselves naturally to topics on "Marriage" and/or "Divorce." Few appear in the ILCW's (Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship's) 3-year cycle of texts.

Natural marriage texts come up for reading only on the 20th Sunday after Pentecost - Series B (Genesis 2:24), the 14th Sunday after Pentecost - Series B (Ephesians 5:21-31), and the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany - Series C (John 2:1-11; this is also its placement in the "Historic Pericopes" used by the 1941 The Lutheran Hymnal). None of these is found in "Series A"!

The situation is even more difficult for natural divorce texts. Some texts that would speak very specifically to the topic, Matthew 19:3-9, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Malachi 2:16, Luke 16:18, I Corinthians 7:10-16, do not appear at all in any series. Only two, Matthew 5:31 (6th Sunday after the Epiphany - Series A) and Mark 10:1-12 (20th Sunday after Pentecost - Series B) can be found in the ILCW 3-year series. None are found in the "Historic Pericopes." It is

apparent that to preach more often on the subject of divorce or marriage requires using a free text or topical approach.

When these "Marriage and/or Divorce" passages come up in the commonly used pericopal systems, pastors should make every effort to utilize them. Other parallel issues that impact all categories of people, such as guilt, anger, forgiveness, denial, etc., can be approached and developed in sermons, at least anecdotally, through the lens of the divorce experience. A help to accomplish this is included as "Appendix 9."

Pastors might consider preaching a series of sermons highlighting marriage and family life issues on a regular basis. This should be done without ignoring or discounting the non-married and the formerly married in the Sunday morning pews.

Some problematic issues relating to sermons will not easily be resolved. A member of the focus group of divorced people commented how difficult it was for her to hear "Fathers' Day" sermons, recognizing that the father of her child was just the opposite of the one described in the sermon. When such topics arise, they resurface old hurts.

Rather than eliminate any potentially sensitive topics, which would conceivably mean there would be nothing left to preach on, extra care needs to be used in speaking on such subjects. "Mothers' Day" sermons, too, might need to acknowledge the fact that some single mothers often must act as "fathers," too, and vice versa.

The "general or congregational prayers" should regularly include the mention of the struggles and challenges of family life, especially of families which are not together. "Appendix 8" is provided as an example. When the divorced never hear their needs and concerns brought up in prayers, they come

away with the view that they are invisible people to the church at large or, worse, unwanted.

Recommendations for Further Study

Many aspects of the divorce experience and its relationship to the church's ministry were not adequately dealt with in this project. Many questions were still left unanswered or only partially answered. This same questionnaire could be used in other Districts of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod to determine any regional differences of perspectives within the church. It could also be utilized in other denominations to compare one denomination's views with another. Male versus female differences, as well as peculiarities in local, such as rural versus urban, could likewise be pursued in greater depth. In this study, the data base for that was too small.

Projects in the future could consider addressing a similar questionnaire to people divorced over an extended period of time. Such a longitudinal study might indicate how perceptions change as people move through the different stages of grief.

Further comparison and clarification of results from a survey similar to the one used here could be based on additional identifying factors. For example: whether the divorced person initiated the divorce actions or were, reluctantly, on the receiving end. Bruce Fisher describes them as "the dumper" and "the dumpee" (Fisher 1992, 13) and describes at length how their responses differ. Another factor that could be added for differentiation purposes would be whether the person surveyed was "Divorced Without Children" or "Divorced With Children," or, to refine the last category further, "Custodial Parent" or "Non-Custodial Parent."

Additional factors that could be considered for further refinement of a study would be looking at those from the divorced church population with similar levels of pre-marital counseling experiences and/or comparable Christian education background and comparing them with a "control group" of married people. To examine the impact and level of guilt felt by the divorced, a study could focus on those who remained celibate after divorce and those who did not. The dynamics of the divorce experience are so varying and idiosyncratic that there is no shortage of possible refinements and enlargements for future studies.

APPENDIX 1:
SURVEY
OF LCMS MEMBERS
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DIVORCE

Your answers are confidential. Please **CIRCLE** the responses that **most nearly reflect your feelings concerning the issues raised.**
Please respond as **honestly and completely as possible.**

[Summaries of survey questions and comments are included here along with the questions and items surveyed to facilitate com-prehension and analysis. Some results of companion surveys may be combined.]

A. Attitudes About My Situation	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I was too much <i>in shock</i> to be able to do anything at the time.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I was hoping that the problem <i>might "go away on its own</i> if I did nothing.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I did not feel close enough to the pastor(s) to seek his help.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I felt the <i>congregation's attitude</i> toward divorced people was <i>negative</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
5. Although I feel that my divorce decision was justifiable, I did not want to have to <i>deal with my side of the failure</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
6. I felt <i>the pastor(s)</i> did not have the <i>sensitivity or understanding</i> to help me with my problem.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I was <i>angry at God</i> for letting me be in this predicament.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My <i>spouse was not a member of my church</i> (or not a Christian) and (s)he would <i>not come to counseling</i> with me anyway.	1	2	3	4	5
9. At the time, I <i>denied</i> that the problem was real and, therefore, ignored it until it was too far along.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
	1	2	3	4	5
10. I felt <i>too ashamed and a failure as a person</i> to admit my situation and let someone like my pastor know about it.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I believed that my <i>divorce decision was wrong in the eyes of God.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
12. I felt <i>out of place</i> in the church because it seems to cater to (<i>intact</i>) " <i>families</i> " and suddenly I did not " <i>fit in.</i> "	1	2	3	4	5
13. The message I got from the <i>pastor's sermons</i> led me to believe that he would not accept me or my situation.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I was <i>offended</i> by the attitude of some of the people in the church, because they made me feel like a " <i>second class citizen.</i> "	1	2	3	4	5
15. I had too much <i>anger</i> inside me at the time to feel like I could sit down with someone else and talk about my situation.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I felt <i>guilty</i> about my situation and wanted to avoid any additional " <i>judgment</i> " from others.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I was feeling <i>too depressed</i> to do anything even if I knew it was the right thing.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I felt that the pastor(s) had <i>too many other people</i> to worry about than to spend time with me (us) and my (our) situation.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I did not feel that the pastor(s) had the <i>expertise</i> or <i>ability</i> to help me with my problem.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I had already made up my mind what course of action I was going to take and did not want anyone else to <i>try to make me change my mind.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
21. If I got into a counseling situation, there were <i>other problems</i> (not necessarily related to divorce) that my spouse might have brought up, and I did not want that to happen.	1	2	3	4	5
22. When I had <i>other problems</i> and went to the pastor for help, I <i>did not get any</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
23. I/we preferred going to a " <i>professional counselor</i> " to deal with the problem, rather than the pastor.	1	2	3	4	5

B. From your own experience or observation, what *ONE issue* or *factor* do you feel most keeps people away from receiving help from their pastor(s)?

Items marked with an asterisk ("*") are identified as being "internal factors" / those without are "external factors"	<u>Divorced</u> <u>Members</u>		<u>General</u> <u>Pastors</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Guilt*	9	9%	18	24%	27	16%
Shame, alienation*	20	21%	15	20%	35	20%
Depression, lethargy*	2	2%	1	1%	3	2%
Uncooperative, non-member spouse	3	3%	1	1%	4	2%
Felt judged by members	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Felt pastor would judge, pressure them	18	19%	10	13%	28	16%
Anger (at spouse or at God)*	3	3%	2	3%	5	3%
Uncomfortable talking to pastor*	3	3%	1	1%	4	2%
Shyness, "Do it myself" attitude*	6	6%	5	7%	11	6%
Shock, denial*	3	3%	0	0%	3	2%
Pastor viewed as insensitive	17	18%	5	7%	22	13%
Pastor viewed as too busy	8	8%	0	0%	8	5%
Person does not feel "close" to pastor	5	5%	4	5%	9	5%
Embarrassment*	22	23%	2	3%	24	14%
Pride*	2	1%	3	4%	5	3%
Lack of or "weak" faith*	1	1%	2	3%	3	2%
Lack of time, transportation	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Don't fit the church's "family" mold	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%
Divorce decision already made*	0	0%	16	21%	16	9%
It's not church's or pastor's problem	0	0%	4	5%	4	2%
Problem will "go away on its own"	0	0%	4	5%	4	2%
Total	96	100%	76	100%	172	100%

"Helpmate" Pastors

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Church seems to cater to "couples only"	8	62%
Others perceived as 'judgmental'	4	31%
Church does poor job of dealing with feelings (of divorced)	4	31%
Becoming 'single' puts stress on time and energy	3	23%
No activities for divorced members	2	15%
Invitations to church events geared toward "moms" and "dads"	1	8%
One spouse leaves, one spouse stays at church	1	8%
Moralizing	1	8%
Unintended labeling of the divorced	1	8%
Singles are left out at church gatherings	1	8%
Feeling that no one else has problems	1	8%

C. If you received counseling from your pastor, how would you rate your experience with him?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Very Favorable	11	23%
2	3	6%
3	5	10%
4	3	6%
5	9	19%
6	2	4%
7	0	0%
8	2	4%
9	4	8%
Very Unfavorable	9	19%
Total	48	100%

Comment: If anything "5"-and-under is in the "Favorable" zone, then 64% had experiences that were "Favorable" or better (with the largest response--23%--being "Very Favorable"). On the low side, 19% registered in the "Very Unfavorable" zone. Looking at the disproportionate number of "unfavorable responses" at the lowest end, you can conclude that this tends to be a "polar" response--it's "all or nothing." No matter what a pastor does, some will not be helped or impressed no matter what is done. This was substantiated by the fact that members from the *same* congregation, describing their counseling experiences with the *same* pastor, had totally *opposite* experiences--one could feel that the pastor was "wonderful, tremendously supportive," while another found him ineffectual, unsupportive. Pastors should take more solace in the fact that their efforts are more appreciated than they might realize. They should not allow the counseling "failures" to discourage them from situations that can be fruitful.

If you ***DID*** seek out the help and counsel of your pastor and church and felt that -- on the whole -- you *had a favorable, helpful experience* during your divorce experience, comment on *why* you felt that way and *what factors contributed to that*. (What should pastors and congregations *know, be, and do* in order to be the most sensitive to the needs of those going through marital break-up and divorce and effectively minister and help?)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Pastor warm, caring, non-judgmental	13	65%
Pastor receptive	5	25%
Pastor gave me feeling: "You belong"	2	10%
Pastor referred me to a counselor	2	10%
Pastor was "there when I needed him"	2	10%
Pastor candid, professional	1	5%
Pastor "gave me tools"	1	5%
People of congregation were supportive	1	5%
Pastor helped with my child	1	5%
Pastor self-disclosed	1	5%
<u>Pastor offered insight, support</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5%</u>
Total	20	100%

Comment: It is clear that being "warm, caring, non-judgmental, and receptive" are primary qualities that pastors need to emulate and cultivate in their relationships with the divorced.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. Sex: Male - 23 (21%) Female - 86 (79%)

Comment: The "face" of divorced members in our churches is predominantly female. These percentages reflect the "divorced list" I maintain for Pilgrim congregation. In it there are 35 total: 27 females (77%) and 8 males (23%) In only 8 of those situations were both spouses members of Pilgrim at one time--4 such situations still exist. Churches and pastors need to examine what special factors might exist that turn divorced males off to the church.

2. Current Age	24	1	1%
	27	2	2%
	28	1	1%
	29	2	2%
	30	1	1%
	31	1	1%
	32	1	1%
	33	4	4%
	34	1	1%
	35	5	5%
	36	8	7%
	37	1	1%
	38	4	4%
	39	3	3%
	40	4	4%
	41	3	3%
	42	5	5%
	43	4	4%
	44	7	6%
	45	10	9%
	46	4	4%
	47	3	3%
	48	1	1%
	49	1	1%
	50	3	3%
	51	2	2%
	52	3	3%
	54	1	1%
	55	1	1%
	56	3	3%
	57	2	2%
	59	1	1%
	60	1	1%
	61	2	2%
	62	2	2%
	64	1	1%
	65	3	3%
	68	2	2%
	69	1	1%
	72	1	1%
	74	1	1%
	89	1	1%
	Total	108	100%

[The following responses reflect the time period
when the person went through the divorce experience.]

3. How long were you married before you received your divorce?

<u>Years a Member</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
1	1	1%
2	6	6%
3	5	5%
4	5	5%
5	7	7%
6	5	5%
7	4	4%
8	1	1%
9	5	5%
10	2	2%
11	4	4%
12	1	1%
13	4	4%
14	6	6%
15	6	6%
16	4	4%
17	4	4%
18	7	7%
19	5	5%
20	2	2%
21	2	2%
22	5	5%
23	3	3%
24	2	2%
25	1	1%
26	1	1%
29	1	1%
30	1	1%
32	1	1%
33	3	3%
39	1	1%
Total	105	100%

4. How long had you been a member of the church you belonged to at the time of your divorce?

<u>Years a Member</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
1	8	9%
2	2	2%
3	4	5%
4	8	9%
5	3	3%
6	3	3%
7	2	2%
8	3	3%
9	5	6%
10	1	1%
11	2	2%
12	6	7%
13	1	1%
14	2	2%
15	4	5%
16	2	2%
17	3	3%
19	1	1%
20	5	6%
22	1	1%
23	2	2%
24	2	2%
25	2	2%
26	1	1%
27	1	1%
30	1	1%
31	1	1%
32	1	1%
33	1	1%
35	2	2%
36	1	1%
37	1	1%
38	1	1%
40	1	1%
41	1	1%
53	1	1%
Total	86	100%

Comment: The median "picture" of the typical male responder was: 45 years old (mean: 47.826), married 14 years (mean: 14.652) before divorce occurred and a member of his congregation for 9 years (mean: 13.476) before the divorce. For females, the corresponding figures were 43 (mean: 44.706), 14 (mean: 13.427), and 12 (mean: 14.708).

5. What was the religious affiliation of your ex-spouse?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
LCMS Lutheran	45	43%
Other Lutheran	9	9%
Protestant	10	10%
Roman Catholic	20	19%
None	12	12%
Other	8	8%
Total	104	100%

Comment: 52% of the respondents indicated that their spouse was of the "Lutheran" faith, the majority--43%--were Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. It might have been more helpful in determining the significance of religious affiliation to have asked whether the spouse originally came from the same religious background or "converted" prior to or subsequent to the marriage. Still, a large percentage, 48%, came from a "non-Lutheran" background, and 12% had no religious affiliation.

An examination of Pilgrim's own "divorced list" indicates a slightly different picture, indicating, perhaps, that respondents from other churches were "generous" in granting their spouse *church* status. Of the 35 names on Pilgrim's list, only 12 could claim a spouse as "LCMS Lutheran" (34%) and another 1 as "Other Lutheran" (3%)--a total of 37% (rather than 52%). Further analysis could have studied the "depth" of a spouse's religious affiliation in terms of *practice*, rather than mere *profession* ("Was your spouse an official member of a church?").

6. How many pre-marital counseling sessions did you have with your pastor before you were married (not counting the wedding rehearsal)?

<u>Divorced Survey Group</u>			<u>Pilgrim Sample</u>		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
None	50	46%	None	94	49.7%
1-2	39	36%	1-2	69	36.5%
3-4	14	13%	3-4	21	11.1%
5 or more	5	5%	5 or more	5	2.6%
	108	100%		189	100%

Comment: Over 80% of the respondents had two or fewer pre-marital counseling sessions with a pastor. In fact, 46% claim to have had *no* pre-marital counseling sessions! A question that should have been asked along with this is: "Did your marriage ceremony take place in a church (or was it a civil service)?"

It was quite surprising to discover that the sample of Pilgrim worship respondents indicated that they had even fewer counseling sessions than the Divorced Survey Group, particularly since Pilgrim's present pastoral policy is a minimum of five sessions. One possible explanation: Of the last 25 couples married at Pilgrim, only seven are regular worshipers still at Pilgrim. The majority have moved away. For the rest, were they so oblivious to the world during courtship that their memories were short or weak? The overall data, however, strongly suggests that the lack of solid, comprehensive pre-marital counseling may be an advance indicator of future marital problems and disruption.

7. Did you attend a Lutheran elementary school?

	Divorced Survey		Pilgrim Sample	
	yes	44 (40%)	yes	86 (39%)
	<u>no</u>	<u>65 (60%)</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>135 (61%)</u>
Total		109 100%	Total	221 100%

8. Did you attend a Lutheran high school?

	Divorced Survey		Pilgrim Sample	
	yes	22 (20%)	yes	44 (20%)
	<u>no</u>	<u>86 (80%)</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>177 (80%)</u>
Total		108 100%	Total	221 100%

Comment: The majority of the general Divorce Survey respondents did not receive a "Lutheran parochial education" background. This was particularly the case with attendance at a Lutheran High School. Only 20% attended a Lutheran high school. The "Pilgrim sample" was a mirror image of the general sample.

However, a closer examination of the "Pilgrim sample" revealed that, of the 30 Pilgrim respondents who indicated they were or had been divorced at one time in their life, only two said they had received both a Lutheran elementary and Lutheran High School education. 87% (26 of 30) of them did not receive a Lutheran High School education. 77% (23 of 30) did *not* receive a Lutheran elementary education.

A parochial education seemed in this case to have some positive effect on minimizing the chance of divorce occurring. Further study could be done in this area to isolate divorce minimizers (see below, Question 10).

9. Did you change your "church home" during or after your divorce experience (other than for job relocation or moving out of the area)?

yes	27	(25%)
<u>no</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>(75%)</u>
Total	108	100%

Comment: Contrary to my assumptions going into the study, "Church hopping" or "church shopping" did not occur as a major response to going through divorce for these respondents.

10. Please indicate how frequently you do each of the following (circle one numeral for each item).

	<u>once/day or more</u>	<u>at least once/week</u>	<u>2-3 times/ month</u>	<u>once/month or less</u>
a. Attend worship	NA	51 48%	38 36%	18 17%
b. Pray privately	79 75%	19 18%	6 6%	1 1%
c. Volunteer work at church	NA	15 15%	13 13%	71 72%
d. Attend a Bible Class	1 1%	14 15%	5 5%	72 78%
e. Have personal/family devotions	15 16%	18 20%	12 13%	47 51%
f. Read the Bible	17 17%	30 31%	14 14%	37 38%
g. Volunteer work in community	2 2%	8 9%	15 16%	68 73%

Comments: A snapshot of the faith practice of these divorced respondents would indicate members whose religion follows a predominantly traditional mode. The term is not used necessarily as a synonym of biblical or desirable!

84% claim to worship *at least* twice a month (48% - "at least once a week" / 36% - "2-3 times a month"). These figures seem inflated from average statistics of the general membership of most congregations. Recent studies have called into question the responses of Americans in general in regard to their worship habits. Those, too, have been called highly exaggerated.

Likewise, 75% of these divorced members claim to "pray privately" at least once a day. The length and breadth and depth of those prayers is, of course, not known.

However, when it came to areas that might represent a deeper commitment level, represented by such activities as volunteering at church, attending a Bible Class, participating in personal or family devotions, the typical respondent indicated that he or she mainly fell in the lowest range.

Activity in the broader community as a volunteer was no different than at church. The respondents, on the whole, reflected orientations that were more private than corporate in focus.

11. Did you attend worship services:		Number	%
	less frequently	32	30%
	the same	58	55%
	more frequently	15	14%

during your divorce experience than you had prior to it?

12. Have you attended worship services:		Number	%
	less frequently	22	21%
	the same	41	39%
	more frequently	42	40%

since your divorce than you had prior to it?

Comment: Going through divorce did not seem to have a major, negative impact on the respondents. In fact, for 69%, their worship attendance either remained the same or increased *during* their divorce, as well as a comparable 79% *since* their divorce.

13. Which response most nearly resembles your own attitude toward DIVORCE. (Circle one) [This is Question #7 on Pastors' Survey.]

	Pilgrim Sample		Divorced Members		General Pastors		"Helpmate" Pastors		Total	
a) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight <i>under any circumstance.</i>	9	4%	4	4%	16	20%	0	0%	29	7%
b) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight, unless there are "biblical grounds," namely " <i>Adultery</i> " and " <i>Desertion</i> ." No other grounds should be allowed.	53	24%	17	17%	25	31%	0	0%	95	23%
c) Divorce is wrong in God's sight, unless there are sufficient, serious "grounds" (even if not specifically mentioned in Scripture). Besides adultery and desertion, I would include: <i>spouse and child abuse, substance abuse (alcohol or drug), or mental cruelty.</i>	96	44%	31	31%	33	41%	5	50%	165	40%
d) I would add to "c" above: <i>failure to provide nurture, companionship, emotional support, or spiritual incompatibility.</i>	40	18%	26	26%	5	6%	3	30%	74	18%
e) Divorce is regrettable but <i>not wrong in every case, if the couple feels the marriage is "irretrievably lost."</i>	21	10%	21	21%	2	2%	1	10%	45	11%

(one "Helpmate" pastor added his own category)

[The following is a breakdown of the results of the "Pilgrim Survey," Appendix 4, by the same five categories]

	Married	Div/Sep.	Div/Re-Married	Widowed	Single	Total
a) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight <i>under any circumstance</i> .	6 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.4%)	9 (4.1%)
b) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight, unless there are "biblical grounds," namely " <i>Adultery</i> " and " <i>Desertion</i> ." No other grounds should be allowed.	38 (26.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (14.3%)	6 (27.3%)	6 (26.1%)	53 (24.2%)
c) Divorce is wrong in God's sight, unless there are sufficient, serious "grounds" (even if not specifically mentioned in Scripture). Besides adultery and desertion, I would include: <i>spouse and child abuse, substance abuse (alcohol or drug), or mental cruelty</i> .	61 (42.4%)	3 (33.3%)	12 (57.1%)	9 (40.9%)	11 (47.8%)	96 (43.8%)
d) I would add to "c" above: <i>failure to provide nurture, companionship, emotional support, or spiritual incompatibility</i> .	25 (17.4%)	5 (55.5%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (21.7%)	40 (18.3%)
e) Divorce is regrettable but <i>not wrong in every case</i> , if the couple feels the marriage is " <i>irretrievably lost</i> ."	14 (9.7%)	1 (11.1%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (13.6%)	0 (0%)	21 (9.6%)

Comment: Pastors in general, here excluding the responses from the "Helpmate" pastors, have a "narrower" view of "biblical grounds" for divorce than their divorced members. 20% of the pastors, versus 4% of the "divorced" respondents, said that divorce is always wrong in God's eyes *under any circumstance*, while 31%, versus 17% of the "divorced," gave "*Adultery*" and "*Desertion*" as the only "biblical" grounds. The latter, option "b," was intended to reflect the "traditional" view on divorce taught in the Missouri Synod and elsewhere.

It is noteworthy that all of the respondent groups--Pilgrim sample, divorced members, pastors, and "Helpmate" pastors--chose the third option ("c") as most closely reflecting their own attitude toward divorce, 44%, 31%, 41%, and 50%, respectively. This option would reflect a broadening of "grounds" not specifically discussed in Scripture.

Several who chose this response indicated that they considered the "grounds" listed (*"spouse and child abuse, substance abuse [alcohol or drug], or mental cruelty"*) as simply extensions or applications of the concept of "desertion," namely, desertion of the marriage covenant, rather than physical desertion of the marriage partner.

The fourth option ("d") represented an extension of that concept even further. The fifth option ("e") could be described as "no-fault divorce." Few of the general pastors were willing to extend allowable "grounds" for divorce any further to these last two, 6% and 2%, respectively, but sizable numbers of the divorced were (26% and 21%). Although the sampling was small, an extremely high proportion of Pilgrim's "Divorced/Separated" component circled option "d" (55.5%; 5 of 9). Once circled "e."

APPENDIX 2:
**PASTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE
 ON DIVORCE ISSUES**

(Confidential)

South Wisconsin District Fall Pastoral Conference

(LaCrosse, Wisconsin)

October 13 and 14, 1992

INTRODUCTION: The information drawn from this questionnaire will be utilized in a Doctor of Ministry Project conducted by Rev. Paul H. Peckman (Pilgrim Ev. Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin).

The purpose of this survey is to determine and identify what factors pastors believe *hinder* and *inhibit* members of LCMS churches, who have gone through the divorce experience, from utilizing the resources of their congregation and/or pastor(s) Your answers are confidential. Please respond as honestly and completely as possible. Please **CIRCLE** the responses that most nearly reflect your feelings concerning the issues raised.

A. Why Divorcing/Divorced Members "Stay Away" From their Pastors	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
	1	2	3	4	5
1. They are too much <i>in shock</i> to be able to do anything at the time.	1	2	3	4	5
2. They hope that the problem <i>might "go away" on its own</i> if they do nothing.	1	2	3	4	5
3. They do not feel close enough to their pastor(s) to seek his help.	1	2	3	4	5
4. They feel the <i>congregation's attitude</i> toward divorced people is <i>negative</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
5. Although they feel that their divorce decision is justifiable, they do not want to have to <i>deal with their own side of the failure</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
6. They feel <i>their pastor</i> does not have the <i>sensitivity</i> or <i>understanding</i> to help them with their problem.	1	2	3	4	5
7. They are <i>angry at God</i> for letting them be in this predicament.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
	1	2	3	4	5
8. <i>Their spouse is not a member of their church (or not a Christian) and (s)he would not come to counseling with them anyway.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
9. <i>At the time, they deny that the problem is real and, therefore, ignore it until it is too far along.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
10. <i>They feel too ashamed and a failure as a person to admit their situation and let someone like a pastor know about it.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
11. <i>They believe that their divorce decision is wrong in the eyes of God.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
12. <i>They feel out of place in the church because it seems to cater to (intact) "families" and suddenly they do not "fit in."</i>	1	2	3	4	5
13. <i>The message they think they get from their pastor's sermons leads them to believe that he would not accept them or their situation.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
14. <i>They are offended by the attitude of some of the people in the church, because they are made to feel like "second class citizens."</i>	1	2	3	4	5
15. <i>They have too much anger inside them at the time to feel like they can sit down with someone else and talk about their situation.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
16. <i>They feel guilty about their situation and want to avoid any additional "judgment" from others.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
17. <i>They feel too depressed to do anything, even if they know it is the right thing.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
18. <i>They feel that their pastor has too many other people to worry about than to spend time with them and their situation.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
19. <i>They do not feel that their pastor has the expertise or ability to help them with their problem.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
20. <i>They have already made up their mind what course of action they are going to take and do not want anyone else to try to make them change their mind.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

[3]

	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
21. If they get into a counseling situation, there are <i>other problems</i> (not necessarily related to divorce) that their spouse might bring up, and they do not want that to happen.	1	2	3	4	5
22. When they had <i>other problems</i> and went to their pastor for help, they <i>did not get any</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
23. They prefer going to a " <i>professional counselor</i> " to deal with their problem, rather than their pastor.	1	2	3	4	5

Comment: Significant differences were evident in the manner in which the surveys were filled out by the divorced members compared to the pastors. The divorced responders answered the survey with far greater feeling and range on issues. In 22 out of the 23 suggested categories in the survey, the percentage of "Strongly Disagree" responses of the divorced members exceeded that of the pastors. The lone exception was a tie.

Pastors had a marked propensity to "hedge their bets." The most common response of the pastors was "Agree Somewhat," perhaps indicating a wariness, or maybe weariness, to survey-taking--especially at a pastoral conference (!). That response had the highest pastoral percentage in 21 of 23 categories. The exceptions were #20, where "Strongly Agree" won out, and #22 where "Disagree Somewhat" received the highest percentage.

B. From your own pastoral experience or observation, what *ONE issue* or *factor* do you most feel keeps people away from receiving help from their pastor(s)?

Comment: The range of responses is listed in "Appendix 1," page 3. When issues were divided between those that were basically external and those basically internal, pastoral responses were 28% external and 96% internal. The totals add up to more than 100%, because more than one answer was given by some.

On the other hand, 55% of the responses of the divorced members mentioned external factors and 74% of the responses reflected internal factors as the one issue which keeps people away from pastoral counseling.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. What is the size of your congregation (*Confirmed membership*):

<u>Communicant Members</u>	<u>General Pastors</u>	<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>	<u>Combined Total</u>
0-400	31 36%	2 17%	33 34%
401-800	24 28%	4 33%	28 29%
801-1200	10 12%	1 8%	11 11%
<u>Over 1200</u>	<u>20 24%</u>	<u>5 42%</u>	<u>25 26%</u>
Total	85 100%	12 100%	97 100%

Comment: Survey respondents came chiefly from small to moderate in size parishes, 63% being 800 or less. The "Helpmate" pastors tended to come from slightly larger congregations, 50% from above 800 in communicant members, versus 36% of "general" pastors.

2. In what kind of community is your congregation located?

	<u>General Pastors</u>	<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>	<u>Combined Total</u>
Rural	7 8%	0 0%	7 7%
Small town	28 34%	3 25%	31 31%
Urban	23 28%	3 25%	26 27%
<u>Suburban</u>	<u>25 30%</u>	<u>6 50%</u>	<u>31 33%</u>
Total	83 100%	12 100%	95 100%

Comment: Most pastor respondents were evenly divided among "small town," "urban," and "suburban" settings. Only "rural" was significantly absent. "Helpmate" pastors had the most significant edge in the "suburban" category.

3. How many years have you been in the ministry?

<u>Years in the Ministry</u>	<u>General Pastors</u>		<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>		<u>Combined Total</u>	
1	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
2	0	0%	2	17%	2	2%
3	2	2%	1	8%	3	3%
4	2	2%	1	8%	3	3%
5	3	4%	0	0%	3	3%
6	4	5%	0	0%	4	4%
7	5	6%	0	0%	5	5%
8	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
9	4	5%	2	17%	6	6%
10	9	11%	0	0%	9	9%
11	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
12	3	4%	0	0%	3	3%
13	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
14	2	2%	2	17%	4	4%
15	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
16	4	5%	0	0%	4	4%
17	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
18	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
19	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
20	4	5%	0	0%	4	4%
21	1	1%	1	8%	2	2%
22	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
23	0	0%	1	8%	1	1%
24	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
25	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
26	6	7%	1	8%	7	7%
27	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
28	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
30	5	6%	0	0%	5	5%
31	1	1%	1	8%	2	2%
32	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
33	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
35	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
36	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
37	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
39	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
40	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
58	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	85	100%	12	100%	95	100%

Comment: Approximately two-thirds of the "Helpmate" pastors had been in the ministry 15 years or less, compared to one-half of the "general" pastors.

4. How many couples in your congregation experienced marital separation or divorce in the last year? (Give approximate number)

<u>Couples Who Div/Sep</u>	<u>General Pastors</u>	<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>	<u>Combined Total</u>
1	11 15%	0 0%	11 13%
2	15 20%	1 10%	16 19%
3	9 12%	0 0%	9 11%
4	11 15%	2 20%	13 15%
5	9 12%	1 10%	10 12%
6	7 9%	1 10%	8 9%
7	3 4%	1 10%	4 5%
8	3 4%	0 0%	3 4%
10	2 3%	2 20%	4 5%
12	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
15	1 1%	1 10%	2 2%
18	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
20	2 3%	0 0%	2 2%
50	0 0%	1 10%	1 1%
Total	75 100%	10 100%	85 100%

Comment: 70% of the pastors polled had five or fewer couples separating or divorcing in the last year. One "Helpmate" pastor indicated 50 couples in that category (which is impossible to verify as to accuracy).

5. How many individuals or couples did you counsel in the past year who were experiencing marital/divorce problems?

<u>Indiv/Couples Counseled</u>	<u>General Pastors</u>	<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>	<u>Combined Total</u>
1	18 24%	0 0%	18 22%
2	18 24%	1 11%	19 23%
3	18 24%	0 0%	18 22%
4	5 7%	0 0%	5 6%
5	6 8%	0 0%	6 7%
6	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
7	2 3%	1 11%	3 4%
10	0 0%	2 22%	2 2%
12	2 3%	0 0%	2 2%
15	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
16	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
18	0 0%	2 22%	2 2%
22	1 1%	0 0%	1 1%
30	0 0%	1 11%	1 1%
40	0 0%	1 11%	1 1%
50	1 1%	1 11%	1 2%
Total	74 100%	9 100%	83 100%

Comment: 67% of the pastors polled counseled three or fewer individuals or couples who were experiencing marital/divorce problems. "Helpmate" pastors did far more counseling of such cases than the "general" pastors. 77% of them counseled 10 or more. 33% counseled 30 or more. The corresponding figures for the "general" pastors were 7% and 1%. One from each category claimed to counsel 50 individuals or couples.

In general, counseling of those experiencing marital problems or going through divorce does not occupy a major part of the typical LCMS pastor's ministry. However, opportunities seem to increase when it is known by members of the congregation that the pastor supports or is part of a "divorce recovery" ministry.

6. a) Our congregation has an intentional ministry directed toward those experiencing divorce (e.g., a support group, Bible Class, special seminars, etc.)

Yes	14	17%	("Helpmate" pastors are not included in this figure. They <i>all</i> have such ministries.)
No	69	83%	
Total	83	100%	

- b) I have preached a sermon specifically focusing on "Marriage" in the last year.

	<u>General Pastors</u>		<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>		<u>Combined Total</u>	
Yes	48	56%	7	58%	55	56%
No	38	44%	5	42%	43	44%
Total	86	100%	12	100%	98	100%

- c) I have preached a sermon specifically focusing on "Divorce" in the last year.

	<u>General Pastors</u>		<u>"Helpmate" Pastors</u>		<u>Combined Total</u>	
Yes	14	17%	4	33%	18	19%
No	70	83%	8	67%	78	81%
Total	84	100%	12	100%	96	100%

Comment: Little difference can be noted in the percentage of pastors, whether "general" or "Helpmate," who have preached a sermon on "Marriage" in the last year. A significant number of the total have not preached specifically on the topic at all (44%).

The topic of "Divorce" comes up very infrequently as a topic preached during the year by pastors in general. 81% of the total responded "No" to preaching on the subject. The percentages for those who did are approximately twice as high for the "Helpmate" pastors than the "general" pastors.

8. When you learn of a situation where one of your members is having "marital conflict" or "getting a divorce," which is your most normal response: (Circle one)

	General Pastors		"Helpmate" Pastors		Combined Total	
a) <i>As soon as possible</i> , I contact the individual/couple to learn if the information is true.	20	26%	5	45%	25	28%
b) I <i>wait</i> until I know for sure if it is true, then go to the person(s) directly.	17	22%	0	0%	17	19%
c) I <i>wait until the person(s) take(s) the initiative</i> to come forward with the problem and then make an effort to follow up.	26	33%	2	18%	28	31%
d) I first <i>ask their elder to make an elder visit</i> to determine whether the information is true.	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
e) I will <i>speak to the person(s) discretely</i> when I next see them (for example, as they walk out of church) to get their response and possibly set up a time for a visit.	13	17%	4	36%	17	19%
f) I <i>write a letter</i> to the person or couple, expressing my concern over the "news" of possible marital conflict and dissolution and indicate my willingness to provide pastoral support and counsel.	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
g) I <i>stay clear of most marital problems / divorce counseling situations</i> because I do not feel that I have the counseling competency to deal with these kinds of problems.	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%

Comment: The "general" pastors surveyed seem less assertive in their approach than the "Helpmate" pastors. Conclusions must be tentative due to the limited number in the "Helpmate" category. 55%, versus 18% of "Helpmate" pastors, identified with a "wait" mode (options "b" and "c").

Furthermore, 45% of the "Helpmate" pastors, versus 26% of the general pastors, gave a response that was more immediate and direct (option "a"--"*as soon as possible . . .*").

The most common response by pastors to dealing with people's marital/divorce problems is option "c" ("wait until the person takes the initiative to come forward"), 33% of the general pastors and 31% of the combined total, when the "Helpmate" pastors are added in.

It would appear that having specific ministries to divorce helps remove some of the hesitancy, reluctance, and timidity of some pastors in dealing with these problems.

[The following questions were included in the survey sent to pastors with an already existing divorce recovery ministry ("Helpmate" pastors), but did not appear in the same form in the general survey.]

- B. What kinds of things do you feel divorced/divorcing people find as negatives and "turn offs" within their own congregations? (How do we create "barriers" for them?)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Activities identified as "Couples Only"	8	62%
Becoming "single" (after being known as "married")	3	23%
Others who are "judgmental"	4	31%
Events inviting "Mom & Dad" (rather than parent)	1	8%
No activities available for divorced	2	15%
One spouse leaves the church, the other stays	1	8%
Moralizing	1	8%
Church's inability to deal with feelings	4	31%
Unintended labeling	1	8%
Singles left out at gatherings	1	8%
Perception that no one else has same problems	<u>1</u>	<u>8%</u>
Total	13	100%

- C. What are the "key" ingredients for successful divorce ministry--from the standpoint of pastors themselves or their congregations? (How do we create "bridges" to them?)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Bible study, peer groups	7	54%
"Safe" environment	2	15%
Chance to do things with singles	1	8%
God hates divorce, but still loves all	3	23%
Contacts said "I care"	3	23%
Non-judgmental attitude	6	46%
Pastor must be trained to counsel	2	15%
Inclusion, integration of divorced into leadership	1	8%
Be genuine toward their feelings	1	8%
Inclusivity	1	8%
Have "mature" singles lead support groups	1	8%
Personal/pastoral trust	1	8%
Married pastor	1	8%
Contribute time, resources	<u>1</u>	<u>8%</u>
Total	13	100%

6. What kinds of intentional ministry does your congregation provide that is directed toward those who have experienced or are experiencing divorce?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Support Groups	11	100%
Singles Bible Study	3	27%
Individual support, counseling	2	18%
Marriage enrichment sessions	<u>1</u>	<u>9%</u>
Total	11	100%

7. What resources (books, study manuals, videos, organizations, seminars, etc.) have you found the most helpful for ministering to the divorced?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Christian Singles Helpmates, Inc.	6	60%
Rainbows	1	10%
Just Me & the Kids (Singles Ministry Resources)	1	10%
STEP	1	10%
<i>Second Chapter</i> (book by John Splinter)	1	10%
<i>New Beginnings</i>	1	10%
Video: <i>Suddenly Single</i>	1	10%
<i>Starting Over Single</i>	1	10%
Self-help monographs	1	10%
18 [??]	<u>1</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	10	100%

8. What specific steps do you take to let divorced people know that they are "included" in the ministry of the congregation?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Regular publicity in bulletins, newsletters	2	22%
Include divorced on boards and committees	2	22%
Sit with other divorced	1	11%
Define "families" to include divorced	1	11%
Write personal letter, make personal visit or call	3	33%
Provide special groups, workshops, seminars	1	11%
Include the divorced and their needs in prayers, sermons	3	33%
Have "adult" party, not "couples"	1	11%
Make counseling available to them	1	11%
Arrange seating at activities with <i>odd</i> numbers	1	11%
Be aware of my attitude	<u>1</u>	<u>11%</u>
Total	9	100%

**APPENDIX 3:
CROSS-TABULATION OF RESULTS
(PASTORS/DIVORCED)**

Cross-tabulation:		V1	"Too much in shock to do anything" (#1)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	14	3	17	Chi-Square: 9.86699
Strongly Agree		16.9	3.9	10.6	D.F.: 3
	2	36	37	73	Significance: .0197*
Agree Somewhat		43.4	48.1	45.6	Min E.F.: 8.181
	3	14	23	37	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		16.9	29.9	23.1	
	4	19	14	33	Number of Missing Observations: 50
Strongly Disagree		22.9	18.2	20.6	
	Column Total	83	77	160	*anything less than .0500 is "significant"
		51.9	48.1	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		20	3		

Comment: Though most of the divorced and pastors agree that "shock" is a factor, a much higher percentage of the divorced "strongly agree" (16.9% vs. 3.9%). [From here on, "SA" will stand for "Strongly Agree"; "AS" for "Agree Somewhat"; "SoD" for "Somewhat Disagree"; and "StD" for "Strongly Disagree"--when such abbreviation is appropriate. A combining of the totals will be indicated by a "SA/AS" or "SoD/StD."]

Cross-tabulation:		V2	"Hope problem might go away on its own" (#2)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	10	9	19	Chi-Square: 4.79345
Strongly Agree		10.5	10.6	10.6	D.F.: 3
	2	31	38	69	Significance: .1876
Agree Somewhat		32.6	44.7	38.3	Min E.F.: 8.972
	3	18	18	36	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		18.9	21.2	20.0	
	4	36	20	56	Number of Missing Observations: 30
Strongly Disagree		37.9	23.5	31.1	
	Column Total	95	85	180	
		52.8	47.2	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		11	1		

Comment: Pastors, slightly more so than the divorced, view this as a significant negative factor.

Cross-tabulation: V3 "Don't feel close enough to pastor to seek help" (#3)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 24.3	25 24.3	13 15.5	38 20.3	Chi-Square: 36.86750 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2 31.1	32 31.1	54 64.3	86 46.0	Significance: .0000 Min E.F.: 13.027
Somewhat Disagree	3 16.5	17 16.5	17 20.2	34 18.2	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Strongly Disagree	4 28.2	29 28.2	0 0.0	29 15.5	Number of Missing Observations: 23
Column Total		103 55.1	84 44.9	187 100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		6	2		

Comment: Though both the divorced and pastors "strongly agree" or "agree somewhat" that lack of "closeness" to their pastor is a negative factor, the pastors see this as far greater a factor: 79.8% vs. 55.4%. In fact, 28.2% of the divorced "strongly disagree," while 0% of the pastors did. Pastors may feel more pessimistic than the data warrants in viewing their relationships with divorced members.

Cross-tabulation: V4 "Feel congregation's attitude is negative" (#4)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 36.7	36 36.7	33 39.3	69 37.9	Chi-Square: 9.48354 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2 30.6	30 30.6	39 46.4	69 37.9	Significance: .0235 Min E.F.: 9.231
Somewhat Disagree	3 14.3	14 14.3	6 7.1	20 11.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Strongly Disagree	4 18.4	18 18.4	6 7.1	24 13.2	Number of Missing Observations: 28
Column Total		98 53.8	84 46.2	182 100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		11	2		

Comment: Both the divorced and the pastors agree that the perceived "negative attitude" of the congregation is a major negative factor, but *more so* pastors than the divorced: 85.7% vs. 67.3% "SA/AS." In comparison to the pastors, a significant number of the divorced "strongly disagreed" (18.4% vs. 7.1%).

Cross-tabulation:		V5	"Don't want to deal with their side of failure" (#5)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	17 18.1	30 34.9	47 26.1	Chi-Square: 38.45433 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2	28 29.8	47 54.7	75 41.7	Significance: .0000 Min E.F.: 11.944
Somewhat Disagree	3	18 19.1	7 8.1	25 13.9	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Strongly Disagree	4	31 33.0	2 2.3	33 18.3	Number of Missing Observations: 30
Column Total		94 52.2	86 47.8	180 100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		13	0		

Comment: The divorced disagree significantly with the pastors in the role played by not wanting to "deal with their side of the failure." 89.6% of the pastors responded "SA/AS" vs. 47.9% of the divorced. The "SoD/StD" column was quite telling: 52.1% of divorced vs. only 10.4% of pastors. The "StD" column by itself was even more lopsided: 33.0% vs. 2.3%! Either the pastors greatly exaggerate the reluctance of the divorced to share or the divorced are in significant denial with regard to this factor.

Cross-tabulation:		V6	"Pastor doesn't have sensitivity or understanding" (#6)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	24 24.5	10 11.6	34 18.5	Chi-Square: 26.28770 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2	23 23.5	37 43.0	60 32.6	Significance: .0000 Min E.F.: 15.891
Somewhat Disagree	3	20 20.4	32 37.2	52 28.3	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Strongly Disagree	4	31 31.6	7 8.1	38 20.7	Number of Missing Observations: 26
Column Total		98 53.3	86 46.7	184 100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		10	0		

Comment: The divorced and pastors have a similar "SA/AS" quotient in this particular instance: 48.0% vs. 44.6% (though the "SA" response of the divorced is twice as high as the pastors'). However, 31.6% of the divorced vs. only 8.1% of the pastors "strongly disagree" with the premise of pastoral insensitivity. Pastors' assumptions are more negative than they need to be!

Cross-tabulation: V7 "Angry at God for their predicament" (#7)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	15	5	20	Chi-Square: 51.67997
Strongly Agree		16.3	6.0	11.4	D.F.: 3
	2	18	51	69	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		19.6	61.4	39.4	Min E.F.: 9.486
	3	14	21	35	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		15.2	25.3	20.0	
	4	45	6	51	Number of Missing Observations: 35
Strongly Disagree		48.9	7.2	29.1	
Column Total		92	83	175	
		52.6	47.4	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		14	2		

Comment: Pastors assume far more "anger at God" being experienced than the divorced: "SA/AS" = 67.4% (pastors) vs. 35.9% (divorced). In fact, nearly half of the divorced "strongly disagree" with the supposition (48.9% vs. only 7.2% of pastors).

Cross-tabulation: V8 "Spouse is non-member and wouldn't come" (#8)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	45	12	57	Chi-Square: 47.45554
Strongly Agree		63.4	14.6	37.3	D.F.: 3
	2	13	51	64	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		18.3	62.2	41.8	Min E.F.: 5.569
	3	5	15	20	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		7.0	18.3	13.1	
	4	8	4	12	Number of Missing Observations: 57
Strongly Disagree		11.3	4.9	7.8	
Column Total		71	82	153	
		46.4	53.6	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		38	4		

Comment: The example probably should have been constructed differently in view of the fact that 38 of the surveyed divorced people (35%) indicated that this category "Does Not Apply." For many, the response was "My spouse *was* a member--and *still* didn't want to come for counseling" (which is very typical).

Nevertheless, the reluctance of one spouse to join in any counseling situation is very significant in the minds of the divorced (and the pastors concur). "SA/AS" = 81.7% (divorced) vs. 76.8% (pastors). Note, though, that the "divorced" have a "stronger" opinion on this matter (the "SA" and "AS" quotients are basically reverse!).

Cross-tabulation: V9 "Deny problem is real and ignore it too long" (#9)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 -----	13 13.5	25 30.5	38 21.3	Chi-Square: 53.22077
Agree Somewhat	2 -----	22 22.9	48 58.5	70 39.3	D.F.: 3
Somewhat Disagree	3 -----	25 26.0	7 8.5	32 18.0	Significance: .0000
Strongly Disagree	4 -----	36 37.5	2 2.4	38 21.3	Min E.F.: 14.742
Column Total		96 53.9	82 46.1	178 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
"Does Not Apply"		11	4		Number of Missing Observations: 32

Comment: Pastors, far more than the divorced, believe the problem is one of "denial" and delay. "SA/AS" = 89.0% (pastors) vs. 36.4% (divorced). In fact, an enormous difference of opinion is evident in the "StD" column: 37.5% (divorced) vs. a scant 2.4% (pastors). This example, too, perhaps could have been constructed better. It may be that people *knew* they had a problem, but still ignored it too long!

Cross-tabulation: V10 "Too ashamed to let pastor know" (#10)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 -----	16 16.0	28 32.9	44 23.8	Chi-Square: 43.73864
Agree Somewhat	2 -----	31 31.0	48 56.5	79 42.7	D.F.: 3
Somewhat Disagree	3 -----	14 14.0	8 9.4	22 11.9	Significance: .0000
Strongly Disagree	4 -----	39 39.0	1 1.2	40 21.6	Min E.F.: 10.108
Column Total		100 54.1	85 45.9	185 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
"Does Not Apply"		7	0		Number of Missing Observations: 25

Comment: Very similar to the previous example, pastors perceive "shame" as being far more significant a factor than do the divorced: "SA/AS" = 89.4% (pastors) vs. 47.0% (divorced). Again, the divorced "strongly disagree" with the premise far more emphatically than the pastors: 39.0% vs. 1.2%!

Cross-tabulation:		V11	"Believe divorce decision is wrong in God's eyes" (#11)		
V0		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	25	11	36	Chi-Square: 45.75347
Strongly Agree		26.0	12.8	19.8	D.F.: 3
	2	14	46	60	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		14.6	53.5	33.0	Min E.F.: 17.011
	3	19	23	42	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		19.8	26.7	23.1	Number of Missing Observations: 28
	4	38	6	44	
Strongly Disagree		39.6	7.0	24.2	
Column Total		96	86	182	
		52.7	47.3	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		10	0		

Comment: Two-thirds of the pastors (66.3%) assume, strongly or somewhat, that the divorced believe that their "divorce decision" is wrong, while only 40.6% of the divorced concur. The divorced, again, are far more emphatic than the pastors in "strongly disagreeing" with the suggestion (39.6% vs. 7.0%).

This perception "gap" is supported by the previous data (results of Question #13 on "Divorced Survey" and Question #7 on "Pastors' Survey" and Question 10 on "Pastors With Ministry to Divorced" survey) that the divorced hold to more "liberal" views of "biblical grounds" for divorce.

Because these divorced members by manner of selection (names taken from current church roster) are *still in the church*, it is also more likely that they were "victims" of divorce. Spouses *without* "biblical grounds," however perceived, would more likely have been removed from the church roster by self-exclusion, excommunication, or changing churches than those *with* such grounds.

It would have been interesting to know to what extent the divorced believed that their *pastor(s)* "believed that their divorce decision was wrong in God's eyes."

Cross-tabulation:		V12	"Feel out of place, because church caters to families" (#12)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 37.3	38 37.3	23 27.1	61 32.6	Chi-Square: 7.62308 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2 35.3	36 35.3	45 52.9	81 43.3	Significance: .0545
Somewhat Disagree	3 13.7	14 13.7	12 14.4	26 13.9	Min E.F.: 8.636
Strongly Disagree	4 13.7	14 13.7	5 5.9	19 10.2	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Column Total		102 54.5	85 45.5	187 100.0	Number of Missing Observations: 23
"Does Not Apply"		5	1		

Comment: Both pastors and the divorced agree that "feeling out of place, because the church caters to families" is a significant "turn-off" for the divorced. The pastors "put the church down" more so than the divorced, as seen by the "SA/AS" quotient of 80.0% (pastors) vs. 72.6% (divorced) and the significant "StD" quotient difference: 5.9% (pastors) vs. 13.7% (divorced).

Cross-tabulation:		V13	"Pastor's sermons indicate he wouldn't be accepting" (#13)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1 18.2	18 18.2	10 11.8	28 15.2	Chi-Square: 48.23155 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2 13.1	13 13.1	44 51.8	57 31.0	Significance: .0000
Somewhat Disagree	3 19.2	19 19.2	23 27.1	42 22.8	Min E.F.: 12.935
Strongly Disagree	4 49.5	49 49.5	8 9.4	57 31.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Column Total		99 53.8	85 46.2	184 100.0	Number of Missing Observations: 26
"Does Not Apply"		9	1		

Comment: Pastors definitely believe the worst about their preaching! 63.6% "SA/AS" assume that the divorced get "negative vibes" from their sermons, while only 31.3% of the divorced hold the same opinion. Half (49.5%) of the divorced "strongly disagree" (which far overshadows the 9.4% of pastors with the same view). Pastors seem again to assume the worse when it is not indicated.

Cross-tabulation: V14 "Offended by attitude of some members" (#14)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	24 26.4	12 14.1	36 20.5	Chi-Square: 38.93857
Agree Somewhat	2	26 28.6	48 56.5	74 42.0	D.F.: 3
Somewhat Disagree	3	8 8.8	21 24.7	29 16.5	Significance: .0000
Strongly Disagree	4	33 36.3	4 4.7	37 21.0	Min E.F.: 14.006
Column Total		91 51.7	85 48.3	176 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
"Does Not Apply"		12	1		Number of Missing Observations: 34

Comment: Pastors again assume the worst, this time in a category involving other church members. While the 70.6% "SA/AS" of the pastors is greater than the 55.0% of the divorced, the "StD" differential is decidedly lop-sided: 36.3% (divorced) vs. 4.7% (pastors).

Cross-tabulation: V15 "Too much anger inside to talk about it" (#15)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	6 6.0	14 16.5	20 10.8	Chi-Square: 39.63301
Agree Somewhat	2	24 24.0	37 43.5	61 33.0	D.F.: 3
Somewhat Disagree	3	21 21.0	28 32.9	49 26.5	Significance: .0000
Strongly Disagree	4	49 49.0	6 7.0	55 29.7	Min E.F.: 9.189
Column Total		100 54.1	85 45.9	185 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
"Does Not Apply"		7	1		Number of Missing Observations: 25

Comment: Pastors assume much more reluctance stemming from "anger" being present inside divorced members than the divorced themselves acknowledge: pastors' "SA/AS" = 60.0% vs. divorced (30.0%). An even wider gap is evident in the "StD" column: 49.0% (divorced) vs. 7.1% (pastors). This might indicate that the divorced as a whole may be more "approachable," i.e., less angry or defensive, than pastors assume.

Cross-tabulation:		V16	"Feel guilty and want to avoid additional 'judgment'" (#16)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	15	29	44	Chi-Square: 36.03829
Strongly Agree		14.7	33.7	23.4	D.F.: 3
	2	43	51	94	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		42.2	59.3	50.0	Min E.F.: 7.777
	3	12	5	17	Cells with E.F. < 5
Somewhat Disagree		11.8	5.8	9.0	(None)
	4	32	1	33	Number of Missing
Strongly Disagree		31.4	1.2	17.6	Observations: 22
	Column Total	102	86	188	
		54.3	45.7	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		5	0		

Comment: "Guilt" is a major factor, but pastors imagine a far greater "guilt trip" being experienced by the divorced than is the ostensible case. The "SA/AS" quotient is the highest by pastors for this factor than any other: 93.0% (vs. 56.9% by divorced).

What is most striking, though, is the "SoD/StD" differential: 43.2% (divorced) vs. 7.0% (pastors)--with the "StD" column gap by itself even greater (31.4% vs. 1.2%, respectively)!

Naturally, if the divorced have a "broader," more "liberal" understanding of "biblical grounds" for divorce than pastors do, they would experience less (theological) guilt.

If pastors are hoping that "guilt" will be a chief "motivating factor" to bring the divorced in for counseling, they are likely to have a long wait! Only 14.7% of the divorced "strongly agree" with the "guilt" premise.

Cross-tabulation:		V17	"Too depressed to do anything" (#17)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	20	14	34	Chi-Square: 27.70475
Strongly Agree		19.4	16.7	18.2	D.F.: 3
	2	29	43	72	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		28.2	51.2	38.5	Min E.F.: 14.824
	3	23	25	48	Cells with E.F. < 5
Somewhat Disagree		22.3	29.8	25.7	(None)
	4	31	2	33	Number of Missing
Strongly Disagree		30.1	2.4	17.6	Observations: 23
	Column Total	103	84	187	
		55.1	44.9	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		5	2		

Comment: While 67.9% ("SA/AS") of pastors believe that the divorced don't act because of "depression," only 47.6% of the divorced agree, which is still a significant number. However, 30.1% of the divorced (vs. a paltry 2.4% of the pastors) "strongly disagreed."

Cross-tabulation: V18 "Belief that pastor has too many others to help" (#18)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	11	9	20	Chi-Square: 26.46828
Strongly Agree		11.5	11.0	11.2	D.F.: 3
	2	27	38	65	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		28.1	46.3	36.5	Min E.F.: 9.213
	3	18	28	46	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		18.8	34.1	25.8	
	4	40	7	47	Number of Missing Observations: 32
Strongly Disagree		41.7	8.5	26.4	
Column Total		96	82	178	
		53.9	46.1	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		12	3		

Comment: Pastors are much more likely to *believe* that they are viewed by the divorced as having "too many others to help": "SA/AS" = 57.3% (pastors) vs. 39.6% (divorced). 41.7% of the divorced (vs. only 8.5% of the pastors) "strongly disagreed."

What to conclude? Perhaps some pastors *want* to believe their "busy" schedule is what keeps people from seeking their help. It may be more a perception by the members "You don't *want* to help" than "You don't have *time* to help."

Cross-tabulation: V19 "Belief that pastor lacks expertise or ability to help" (#19)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	20	9	29	Chi-Square: 36.11842
Strongly Agree		20.0	11.1	16.0	D.F.: 3
	2	26	42	68	Significance: .0000
Agree Somewhat		26.0	51.9	37.6	Min E.F.: 12.978
	3	20	28	48	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Somewhat Disagree		20.0	34.6	26.5	
	4	34	2	36	Number of Missing Observations: 29
Strongly Disagree		34.0	2.5	19.9	
Column Total		100	81	181	
		55.2	44.8	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		7	3		

Comment: Pastors have a far more negative perception of their "expertise" or "ability" than the evidence warrants. More than half (54%) of the divorced disagree, somewhat or strongly, with the premise.

Most striking is the differential in the "StD" column: 34.0% (divorced) vs. a miniscule 2.5% (pastors)! Pastors seem to have an "inferiority complex," possibly for no good reason.

Another possibility is that the pastors recognize their own inadequacies and limitations *better* than the members! The solution to raising *actual* expertise with *perceived* expertise is further training and personal study in the area of counseling people in crisis or special need.

Cross-tabulation: V20 "Mind already made up" (#20)
V0 Group

V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	16 18.0	47 54.7	63 36.0	Chi-Square: 49.39584
Agree Somewhat	2	24 27.0	31 36.0	55 31.4	D.F.: 3
Somewhat Disagree	3	17 19.1	7 8.1	24 13.7	Significance: .0000
Strongly Disagree	4	32 36.0	1 1.2	33 18.9	Min E.F.: 11.794
Column Total		89 50.9	86 49.1	175 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
"Does Not Apply"		18	0		Number of Missing Observations: 35

Comment: The perception of the pastors and the divorced are at definite odds on this one. Here, finally, the pastors had something to "strongly agree" about--but not in harmony with the views of the divorced! The "SA/AS" quotient was: 90.7% (pastors) vs. 45.0% (divorced)--a differential factor of two (the "SA" quotient by itself saw a difference by a factor of three!). What's more, the "StD" quotient column disparity was even more lopsided: 36.0% (divorced) vs. 1.2% (pastors).

Do pastors, wrongly, assume "There's nothing I can do anyway; their mind is made up," when in reality there is a far greater "window of opportunity," i.e., ministry, there than imagined?

Cross-tabulation:		V21	"Fear other problems might be brought up by spouse" (#21)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	5 6.4	13 16.0	18 11.3	Chi-Square: 86.00175 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2	6 7.7	41 50.6	47 29.6	Significance: .0000
Somewhat Disagree	3	9 11.5	24 29.6	33 20.8	Min E.F.: 8.830
Strongly Disagree	4	58 74.4	3 3.7	61 38.4	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)
Column Total		78 49.1	81 50.9	159 100.0	Number of Missing Observations: 51
"Does Not Apply"		29	5		

Comment: A veritable "chasm" exists between the perception of divorced and pastors on this one. No other premise receives as high an emphatic negative response ("SoD/StD") from the divorced as this one. The perception gap between the divorced and pastors on this issue is the highest of all scenarios surveyed. The "SA/AS" quotient is: 14.1% (divorced) vs. 66.6% (pastors).

More significantly and dramatically, though, the divorced "strongly disagree" 74.4% (vs. only 3.7% for pastors) that the possibility of "other problems" coming up in a counseling situation with spouse present has a negative impact. This particular group of divorced seems to have "nothing to hide."

Cross-tabulation:		V22	"Pastor failed to help them with other problems" (#22)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
Strongly Agree	1	6 10.7	3 3.7	9 6.5	Chi-Square: 46.40556 D.F.: 3
Agree Somewhat	2	5 8.9	19 23.2	24 17.4	Significance: .0000
Somewhat Disagree	3	6 10.7	45 54.9	51 37.0	Min E.F.: 3.652
Strongly Disagree	4	39 69.6	15 18.3	54 39.1	Cells with E.F. < 5 (1 of 8 - 12.5%)
Column Total		56 40.6	82 59.4	138 100.0	Number of Missing Observations: 72
"Does Not Apply"		52	3		

Comment: Both the divorced and the pastors agree that past failure to help with other problems is not a significant "turn off" for seeking help in the present. The divorced are more emphatic on this than the pastors. The divorced "SoD/StD" quotient (80.3%) exceeds that of the pastors (73.2%), but the majority of this total (69.6%) comes from the more emphatic "StD" column (vs. 18.3% for pastors).

This does not *necessarily* mean that pastors have been all that helpful in the past. In no other category did respondents "opt out" of a response as this one. 52 surveys, 48%, were checked "Does Not Apply." Some of those who did respond may simply reflect the situation: "My pastor did not *fail* me with my other problems; I simply haven't *gone* to him before with any of my problems."

Looking at the figures in the most positive light suggests that "past failures" are not a significant barrier to overcome. Creating and cultivating "past successes" would probably reap even greater results.

Cross-tabulation:		V23	"Prefer to go to 'professional' counselor" (#23)		
		V0	Group		
V0	Count Col Pct	Members 1	Pastors 2	Row Total	
	1	17	6	23	Chi-Square: 13.99489
Strongly Agree		23.6	7.2	14.8	D.F.: 3
	2	24	38	62	Significance: .0029
Agree Somewhat		33.3	45.8	40.0	Min E.F.: 10.684
	3	12	26	38	Cells with E.F. < 5
Somewhat Disagree		16.7	31.3	24.5	(None)
	4	19	13	32	Number of Missing
Strongly Disagree		26.4	15.7	20.6	Observations: 55
Column Total		72	83	155	
		46.5	53.5	100.0	
"Does Not Apply"		34	0		

Comment: The divorced and the pastors both agree that people with marital problems would prefer going to a "professional" counselor over a pastor: "SA/AS" = 56.9% (divorced) vs. 53.0% (pastors). However, a far more significant part of the total for the divorced comes from the "Strongly Agree" column in comparison to the pastors (23.6% vs. 7.2%, respectively).

As in the previous category, a sizable number of the divorced did not respond to this category. 34 indicated "Does Not Apply." Whether these people "preferred" *no* counselor, or never considered a counselor other than their pastor in the first place, is not clear.

Differences Between Male and Female Divorced Members?

The only categories where it could be detected that male divorced members had opinions that differed significantly from female divorced members were in categories #4, #12, #14, and #22.

- #4 - "Although I feel that my divorce decision is/was justifiable, I know that it always 'takes two' to break up a marriage, and I did not want to have to deal with my side of the failure."

<u>Group</u> <u>Probability</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Deviation</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	22	2.7273	1.0771	.2296	.0046
Females	76	1.9737	1.0705	.1228	

- #12 - "At the time, I *denied* that the problem was real and therefore ignored it until it was too far along."

<u>Group</u> <u>Probability</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Deviation</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	23	2.6522	1.2288	.2562	.0010
Females	79	1.8608	.9021	.1015	

- #14 - "I had too much *anger* inside me at the time to feel like I could sit down with someone else and reveal my situation."

<u>Group</u> <u>Probability</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Deviation</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	19	3.1579	1.1673	.2678	.0146
Females	72	2.3889	1.2051	.1420	

- #22 - "I/we preferred going to a '*professional counselor*' to deal with the problem, rather than the pastor."

<u>Group</u> <u>Probability</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Deviation</u>	<u>Standard</u> <u>Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Males	14	3.9286	.2673	.0714	.0245
Females	42	3.2143	1.1377	.1756	

Comments: The higher the mean score, the greater level of disagreement with the issue at hand. In all four examples above, males had a higher mean score, indicating they felt they were more willing to deal with their side of the failure, were less in denial, had less anger, and would have been more inclined to go to the pastor than to a professional counselor.

These differences are hard to generalize for all males in analogous situations, given the disproportionate number of females to males in the survey. The males, like the females, in this survey are the survivors in terms of remaining with the church. By their presence in the church, or at least on the church roster, they possibly possess a higher commitment level to the church, its principles, and its personnel. A valuable follow-up study could be to test these male-female differences in the wider population. See also the footnote at the bottom of page 89.

Impact or Influence of Parochial Education?

Cross-tabulation:		V36	Frequency - attend worship			
By		V33	Lutheran elementary school attended?			
V33	Count Col Pct	Yes 1	No 2	Row Total		

V36					Chi-Square: 10.33329	
at least once/week	2	14 32.6	37 57.8	51 47.7	Significance: .0057	

2-3 times/month	3	23 53.5	15 23.4	38 35.5	Min E.F.: 7.234	

once/month or less	4	6 14.0	12 18.8	18 16.8	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)	

	Column Total	43 40.2	64 59.8	107 100.0	D.F.: 2	

Cross-tabulation:		V36	Frequency - attend worship			
By		V34	Lutheran high school attended?			
V34	Count Col Pct	Yes 1	No 2	Row Total		

V36					Chi-Square: 3.17147	
at least once/week	2	7 33.3	43 50.6	50 47.2	Significance: .2048	

2-3 times/month	3	11 52.4	27 31.8	38 35.8	Min E.F.: 3.566	

once/month or less	4	3 14.3	15 17.6	18 17.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 1 of 6	

	Column Total	21 19.8	85 80.2	106 100.0	D.F.: 2	

Crosstabulation:		V40	Frequency - have personal/family devotions		
By		V33	Lutheran elementary school attended?		
V33	Count Col Pct	Yes 1	No 2	Row Total	
V40 once/day or more	1	3 15.8	12 16.4	15 16.3	Chi-Square: 9.26876
at least once/week	2	1 5.3	17 23.3	18 19.6	D.F.: 3
2-3 times/month	3		12 16.4	12 13.0	Significance: .0259
once/month or less	4	15 78.9	32 43.8	47 51.1	Min E.F.: 2.478
Column Total		19 20.7	73 79.3	92 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (3 of 8)

Crosstabulation:		V41	Frequency - read the Bible		
By		V33	Lutheran elementary school attended?		
V33	Count Col Pct	Yes 1	No 2	Row Total	
V41 once/day or more	1	3 7.7	14 23.7	17 17.3	Chi-Square: 8.50290
at least once/week	2	9 23.1	21 35.6	30 30.6	D.F.: 3
2-3 times/month	3	8 20.5	6 10.2	14 14.3	Significance: .0367
once/month or less	4	19 48.7	18 30.5	37 37.8	Min E.F.: 5.571
Column Total		39 39.8	59 60.2	98 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (None)

Crosstabulation:		V41	Frequency - read the Bible		
By		V34	Lutheran high school attended?		
V34	Count Col Pct	Yes 1	No 2	Row Total	
V41 once/day or more	1	1 5.6	16 20.3	17 17.5	Chi-Square: 8.75645
at least once/week	2	4 22.2	26 32.9	30 30.9	D.F.: 3
2-3 times/month	3	1 5.6	13 16.5	14 14.4	Significance: .0327
once/month or less	4	12 66.7	24 30.4	36 37.1	Min E.F.: 2.598
Column Total		18 18.6	79 81.4	97 100.0	Cells with E.F. < 5 (2 of 8)

APPENDIX 4:
QUESTIONNAIRE
ON MARRIAGE/DIVORCE ISSUES

["Pilgrim Survey"]

(This survey was distributed to those attending worship at
Pilgrim Lutheran Church on April 23/24, 1994)

(Please fill out questionnaire completely. The results are part of a "control" study for Pastor Peckman's Doctor of Ministry Project dealing with ministering to the divorced.

Responses are requested from members of Pilgrim who are 24 and over

[to correspond to the respondents of a previous survey].

All questionnaires are anonymous.)

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age: _____
3. Marital Status: Single (never married) Married
 Divorced/Separated Widowed
4. Have you ever been divorced? Yes No
5. Did you attend a Lutheran elementary school? yes no
Did you attend a Lutheran high school? yes no
Did you attend *both* a Lutheran elementary
and Lutheran high school? yes no
6. (If married in the past) How many pre-marital counseling sessions did you have with your pastor before you were married (not counting the wedding rehearsal)?
 None
 1-2
 3-4
 5 or more
7. Which response most nearly resembles your own attitude toward DIVORCE.
(Circle one)

[Response options were the same as for the "Divorced Survey" and the "Pastors' Survey." Results can also be found on page 13 of Appendix 1.]

Survey Results

1. Sex: 79 Male 139 Female = 218 (222 total; several surveys not identified)
2. Age: 50.1 (average for males) / 55.9 (average for females)
3. Marital Status:
 - 23 (10.4%) Single (never married) 146 (65.8%) Married
 - 9 (8+1; 4.1%) Divorced/*Separated* 23 (10.4%) Widowed
 - 21 (9.5%) Divorced/Re-Married (checked "married" as well as "yes" on #4)
4. Have you ever been divorced? 29 Yes 193 No
5. Did you attend a Lutheran elementary school? 86 (38.9%) yes 135 (61.1%) no
 - Did you attend a Lutheran high school? 44 (19.9%) yes 177 (80.1%) no
 - Did you attend *both* a Lutheran elementary and Lutheran high school? 43 (19.5%) yes 177 (80.5%) no
6. (If married in the past) How many pre-marital counseling sessions did you have with your pastor before you were married (not counting the wedding rehearsal)?

	94 (49.7%) None
189	<u>69 (36.5%) 1-2</u> 163 (86%)
	21 (11.1%) 3-4
	5 (2.6%) 5 or more 26 (14%)
7. Which response most nearly resembles your own attitude toward DIVORCE. (Circle one)

	Married	Div/Sep.	Div/Re-Married	Widowed	Single	Total
a) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight <i>under any circumstance.</i>	6 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.4%)	9 (4.1%)
b) Divorce is always wrong in God's sight, unless there are "biblical grounds," namely " <i>Adultery</i> " and " <i>Desertion.</i> " No other grounds should be allowed.	38 (26.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (14.3%)	6 (27.3%)	6 (26.1%)	53 (24.2%)
c) Divorce is wrong in God's sight, unless there are sufficient, serious "grounds" (even if not specifically mentioned in Scripture). Besides adultery and desertion, I would include: <i>spouse and child abuse, substance abuse (alcohol or drug), or mental cruelty.</i>	61 (42.4%)	2 (33.3%)	13 (57.1%)	9 (40.9%)	11 (47.8%)	96 (43.8%)
d) I would add to "c" above: <i>failure to provide nurture, companionship, emotional support, or spiritual incompatibility.</i>	25 (17.4%)	5 (55.5%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (21.7%)	40 (18.3%)
e) Divorce is regrettable but <i>not wrong in every case, if the couple feels the marriage is "irretrievably lost."</i>	14 (9.7%)	1 (11.1)	4 (14.3%)	3 (13.6%)	0 (0%)	21 (9.6%)

APPENDIX 5:
PRELIMINARY SURVEY

[The following survey might be used by a pastor to "get a feel" as to here the divorced/separated members of his congregation are in there needs and how they are dealing with the issues confronting them. To get the widest and most honest response, the survey should be sent to all divorced/separated members with a return, self-addressed-stamped envelope included. A "cover letter" should also be included.]

Confidential Survey

1. How much help do you feel you received from the following people or groups prior to, during, or after your divorce. CIRCLE the number that applies.

	Much	Some	Little	None
	1	2	3	4
a. Your family	1	2	3	4
b. Your friends	1	2	3	4
c. Your pastor(s)	1	2	3	4
d. Your church	1	2	3	4
e. Your fellow workers	1	2	3	4

If you felt you received "little" help or "none," what might have helped that wasn't done?

2. Rate the following areas of need (for which the church might offer assistance) in the order of their importance to you (scale: "1" = "Very High" - "2" = "High" - "3" = "Medium" - "4" = "Low" - "5" = "Very Low" - "NA" = "Not Applicable")

- ___ Support group where I can share my problems in a safe, caring environment
- ___ Support group for my child(ren)
- ___ Legal counsel
- ___ "Big Brother/Big Sister"-type program for my children
- ___ Understanding what God's Word has to say about divorce/restoration
- ___ Child care (If important, what kind, when? _____)
- ___ Financial/food assistance
- ___ Counseling for self
- ___ Counseling for child(ren)
- ___ Help in learning how to manage money/limited resources
- ___ Social events
- ___ Books, articles on the dynamics/problems of divorce
- ___ Single-parenting classes
- ___ Other: _____

3. To whom do you turn the most in dealing with your present situation?

4. The biggest *problem* I have to face right now is

5. The thing that I *need* the most right now is

6. My biggest *disappointment* has been

7. My biggest *fear* is

8. Check the response that mostly closely reflects your own feelings at this time.
 I have "worked through" the grief and issues surrounding my separation/divorce and I feel that I can successfully "move on."
 I am able to cope with most of the issues surrounding my separation/divorce, but I still have significant problems from time to time.
 I still feel overwhelmed by the issues of separation/divorce recovery.
9. (If separated) I have been separated ____ year(s) ____ month(s)
10. (If divorced) I have been divorced ____ year(s) ____ month(s)
 I was separated ____ year(s) ____ month(s) prior to my divorce.
11. Would you be interested in belonging to a Support Group for those working through the grief of divorce or the ending of a relationship?
 Yes No

Your name (not required): _____

If you know anyone else who would benefit from such a group, please give name and address:

Additional Comments: _____

Please return your survey in enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

APPENDIX 6: SAMPLE NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

When Does a Marriage Need a "Tune-Up"?

Marriages--like everything else in this fallen world--are in constant need of "maintenance." There is no such thing as a perfect marriage--for every marriage is composed of imperfect people. Unfortunately, when things are not going as they should, marriage partners oftentimes "bury" the problem, suppress it, minimize it, ignore it, or do nothing (in the hope that it will "all go away").

David Augsburger, in his book The Freedom of Forgiveness, includes a chapter entitled: "*Tune-up for a Tired Marriage*" (pp. 84-88). He comments: "Most of us quickly see a dentist when a tooth aches, a mechanic when the car breaks down, or a doctor when pain strikes. Why not get help [from your pastor or a marriage counselor] when marriage gets stormy?"

He then goes on to spell out three "danger signals"--indications that a marriage has ceased growing and may be headed for trouble. This is when it may be most important--before partners pull away from one another emotionally--to seek assistance, support, and guidance from someone who can show concern, offer hope, and supply spiritual and biblical counsel, hopefully, to both partners. The "danger signals" he identifies are:

"1. *When you realize that you are retreating from your problems instead of resolving them. . .* Forget the phony romantic propaganda which insists: 'A happy marriage has no conflicts, no problems, no irritating disagreements--there can be no anger.' If such marriages are made in heaven, they stay there. They certainly don't appear here on earth.

"Any marriage of two humans will have problems because we humans are problems. That old sickness, self-centeredness, infects every marriage from both sides. So of course there are conflicts. Misunderstanding is inevitable. Disagreements are unavoidable. Anger is always possible.

"A marriage--like every living thing--is in constant danger of deterioration. It must be kept in repair! And that's a task for both. There must be a mutual involvement in resolving the tensions and conflicts that arise.

"2. *When you just can't communicate and both freeze into uncomfortable and unyielding silences, broken only by hostile words or ironical digs.*

"But how can you open up communication? Learn to listen. Listening is ninety percent of good communication. It's not just 'the other half of talking.' It's a skill. A skill that must be learned and practiced. All the time. . .

"Actually, to listen is the queen of compliments; to ignore, the chief of insults. To become human everyone needs listeners and to be human we too must learn to listen. . .

"Loving is listening. Caring is hearing. Love is the opening of your life to another. Through sincere interest, simple attention, sensitive listening, compassionate understanding and honest sharing. An open ear is the only believable sign of an open heart. . .

"3. *When you let the attitudes or actions of the other irritate, alienate and fester within you.* Then you begin letting them accumulate from day to day. You take them to bed at night, refusing to make up, and you 'let the sun go down upon your wrath,' which the Bible forbids (Ephesians 4:26)."

Pastors feel frustrated when Christians seem to ignore at least one of the avenues always open for them to receive Christian support and counsel--themselves. There are many reasons for that--imagined and real -- and many fall at the feet of pastors! And yet "*if one member [of the Body of Christ] suffers, all suffer together*" (I Corinthians 12:26)--or should! Before problems multiply or become too large, seek out Christian counsel--from your pastor or from Christian counselors (such as those at Lutheran Counseling and Family Service). We must all "*bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2).

APPENDIX 7:
SAMPLE SERMON ON "DIVORCE"

Theme: "The Christian and Divorce"
Hymns: 166/394, 466/467, 392/442

Text: Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9
6th Sunday after Epiphany - A

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

Perhaps it seems out of place to preach a sermon on divorce on Valentine's Day--a day when our hearts are turned toward thoughts of love and affection. However, love and affection seem to be on shaky grounds these days, and I am convinced that one of the greatest threats to the church and society itself is the escalating disruption of the family. And divorce is one of the extreme by-products of this disruption.

40% of all couples who get married today will have their marriages ended in divorce. 1,250,000 divorces occur every year in America. And when you consider that divorce affects not only the couple, but any children they may have, as well as parents, grand-parents, friends, and the like, its impact has a ripple effect.

Divorce is one of the most devastating things that can happen to a person. Its trauma is similar to the death of a loved one--but at least when a loved one dies there is a *funeral* and there is *finality* and there is usually *sympathy* for the survivors.

With divorce the "funeral" can drag on for years, as issues and problems may have only just begun. And friends and family, including people in the church, may not know how to be helpful or sympathetic. They can shy away, act differently, give off "negative vibes."

For the divorced there is the feeling of loss--loss of *dreams*, loss of *intimacy*, loss of *status*, loss of *security*, loss of *self-esteem*. Divorce can be a time of confusion, mood swings, pity parties, depression.

Many of you know I am doing research for my Doctor of Ministry degree in the area of ministry to the divorced. One thing I discovered as I surveyed over a hundred pastors is that we rarely preach on the topic of divorce. I suppose it's because we're afraid it's too complicated, too touchy of an issue, too easily misunderstood.

But given how serious the problem is, to say nothing at all is to be like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. Some times I have felt like those three monkeys: "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil." But the problems don't go away by wishing.

Today's Gospel lesson from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount--unless you were daydreaming--should have made you "sit up and notice." It's the kind of lesson that reminds us that being a Christian is not just an outward obedience to a bunch of "rules and regulations," "do's and don'ts," but--essentially--it's a matter of the heart. Jesus "goes to the heart of the matter" as He deals with sins related to the 5th, 6th and 8th Commandments. None of us can go away with self-righteous pride and say: "Thank God, I'm not a sinner like other people, *especially* So-and-So."

Instead, God's Law nails each of us to the wall here. What Jesus' words in today's Gospel Lesson do is exactly what St. Paul said the Law does in Romans 7:(13) "*In order that sin might be recognized as sin, [the Law] produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful*" (cf. 5:20a).

Jesus' words are intended to strip away any *presumption* on our part, any *false belief* in how good we are and how we can save ourselves by our own righteousness. Instead, these words lead us to repent and to turn to the Lord for forgiveness. We can't *hear* the Good News until we have *understood* the "bad news."

The "bad news" is: our sin separates us from a holy God. The Good News for us is, as Paul wrote in Romans, "*Where sin increased, grace increased all the more . . .*" (5:20b).

Frankly, it is not so simple to preach a sermon on "What the Bible Says About Divorce." When the issue of divorce comes up in the New Testament, it is found in contexts that require us to proceed with caution.

Jesus talks about it here in Matthew 5, but you note that it comes in a section where Jesus uses "hyperbole" or exaggeration to make a point (like suggesting that we cut off an arm or pluck out an eye if those parts of our body "offend" us).

It also comes up in Matthew 19, but there Jesus is "put on the spot" by his enemies who try to trap him into saying something that could be *twisted* and *used* against Him.

St. Paul also deals with the issue of divorce in I Corinthians 7, but there, too, the context is very specific. He is asked the specific question about the propriety of a Christian divorcing an unbelieving spouse who has deserted them.

In none of those places do we have a "handy-dandy divorce guide" that gives us quick, easy answers and solutions to many of the problems people in troubled marriages face today. They reflect the divorce practices and culture of that day which are often very different than what we have today.

It would be great if we could ask Jesus or St. Paul: "What should I do with my husband who *violently beats me and abuses the children?*" or "What should I do with my wife who is *addicted to alcohol?*" or "What should I do when my spouse provides *none of the things God intended marriage to supply: companionship, caring, intimacy, emotional, physical, and spiritual support?*"

In a sermon like this we can only deal with some basics and encourage Christians to seek out other answers from their pastors or Christian counselors. Although our text is taken from Matthew 5, I would like to jump ahead to Matthew 19 because it says much the same thing, but puts it into a broader context. There we read:

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

Now to understand what was going on here, you need to realize that the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus in His words and make Him say something that would *alienate* the people or *anger* the authorities. [Remember how Herod the tetrarch had divorced his wife to marry the wife of his brother, and this got John the Baptist *beheaded* for speaking out against it.]

Basically, they wanted Jesus to say something where he was "damned if you do and damned if you don't." If He said, "No, there are *no* grounds for divorce," they would accuse Him of being *against Moses* in the Pentateuch.

If Jesus said, "Yes, there *are* grounds for divorce," then they could accuse Him of *moral laxity*. (In fact, some of the rabbis of the day went so far as to say it was "ok" to divorce your wife if she burnt your toast or if you found someone more attractive.) So what does Jesus do?

The first thing Jesus does is not give them a "Yes" or "No" answer? You don't begin a discussion on divorce on the basis of "grounds" at all. You go back to the "*ground floor*," the beginning. You must start with the "grounds" for *marriage*.

And so, Jesus quotes from Genesis 1 and 2 where God first instituted marriage. Jesus points them (and us) to God's absolute will, God's ideal, for marriage. Those of us who are married and those who contemplate marriage need to be reminded of this all the time.

Divorce was not part of God's original plan. God's past, present, and future intent is that "A man . . . be united [literally "glued"] to his wife (singular) and the two will become one flesh . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Marriage is to be a permanent bond between a husband and wife in which there should be total *intimacy, commitment, sharing, love*. That's the way God planned it--"*from the beginning.*"

The Pharisees realized that Jesus had just switched their discussion from divorce to marriage and so -- not to be out-done --, they tried to make it out that now Jesus was actually contradicting God according to Old Testament law. "*Why then, they asked, did Moses [in Deuteronomy 24] command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?*"

Once again Jesus shows them they are approaching the subject from the wrong angle. First of all, he indicts them with the words: "*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.*" God certainly did not "*command*" divorce, as if there were times when He wanted it. He only "*permitted*" it, allowed it, because of the stubbornness and sinfulness of our human nature.

And He "permitted" it in particular that the "innocent party" would be protected. Divorce, in Old Testament times, was basically a male prerogative. If a man wanted to divorce his wife, he simply said (poof!) "I divorce you." It wasn't a long, drawn-out, complicated legal process.

But God wanted the innocent party protected so that they would be free to remarry without the stigma of adultery hanging over their head. Through Moses God required the husband to give his wife a "certificate of divorce," absolving her of any fault or choice in the divorce. Otherwise, society would consider *her* to be an adulteress. That's what Deuteronomy 24 was all about -- not an excuse for men to get rid of their wives for any and all reasons, but to *prevent hasty divorces*. It protected the innocent party by requiring some minimal "due process."

Furthermore, Jesus points out that divorce happens because someone's heart gets "*hard*." People let their *sinful nature* and *selfish desires* control their attitudes and actions. It is only when our hearts are "hard" that divorce becomes a tempting option. Hard hearts break vows and fail to fulfil promises. Hard hearts find it impossible to forgive.

God's will is *permanent* marriage not *quick* divorce. God's *ideal* is stay together, not separate; God's *solution* is reconciliation not disruption; God's *remedy* is forgiveness not hardness of heart.

Unfortunately, too many marriages are entered into hastily, without considering God's will and purpose. Too many people enter marriage as an escape *from* something, rather than a commitment *to* something. Too little importance is placed on the spiritual aspect of marriage and too much is placed on the sexual component. Too often believers are "unequally yoked" with unbelievers, thinking it makes no difference because "they'll come around in due time." Too often God's "glue" for marriage, His infinite supply of forgiveness, is not used, and marriages turn into battlegrounds.

But what about "grounds" for divorce? The Bible clearly acknowledges two: "*marital unfaithfulness*" (such as adultery) and the [*malicious desertion*] of a "believing" spouse by an "unbelieving" husband or wife (Cf. I Corinthians 7).

But even in these cases, God's will is that we do not seek divorce as our first option, but rather as a last resort. Wherever and whenever there is still the possibility of reconciliation, Christians should seek it--even as God doesn't so easily give up on us when we falter and fall. [If we are instructed to "*love*" even "*our enemies*" (as Jesus later in Matthew 5 teaches) and to "*do good to those who hate us*" and "*bless those who curse us*" and "*pray for those who abuse us*" and "*walk the extra mile*," then that certainly applies in marriages as well. (Cf. Romans 12:18)]

However, when restoration and reconciliation have been sought, when efforts to put things or keep things together again fail and one partner in a marriage continues firm in breaking the marriage covenant, living in adultery, or deserting, then God permits the innocent party to divorce.

[In our text (Matthew 5:32) Jesus makes a statement that is a bit perplexing and easily misunderstood. There He says: "*Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*"

Why should the woman who is the "victim" of her husband's unchastity be penalized? And why should a man who marries a woman who is the "innocent" victim of divorce also be "committing adultery"?

First of all, the man in question "divorcing" his wife here literally "sends her away." He has not done the decent thing and given her a "certificate of divorce" (which would have publically cleared her of causing the marriage break-up). Without that legal proof, she would be "stigmatized" by the world as an "adulteress." Without proof, people might think she displeased her husband by doing something wrong.

It's important to realize that the verbs in this passage are in the "passive" tense, not "active." It's the difference between you doing something and something being done to you. Through no fault of her own, she was "adulterated" by her husband. (Perhaps that's the best way to translate that difficult phrase.)

In a similar way, the person marrying such a woman would likewise be so "stigmatized." Today we have just the opposite problem. With "no fault" divorces, we have taken the "stigma" completely away, placing the victim and the victimizer on an equal plane. I'm not sure which is worse.]

A few things need to be stressed to put divorce into its proper perspective. Divorce is *not* the "unforgivable sin." (That is the "sin against the Holy Spirit.") God forgives the divorced person who repents of their sin, just as he forgives the person who "kills by *hating*" or "commits adultery by *lusting*" (Matthew 5:22, 28). God hates divorce, but He loves divorced people.

When the Bible says: "*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin,*" it means just that -- even the sin of divorce. Think of all the people mentioned in the Bible whose "pasts" were less than perfect, whom God's love forgave, accepted, transformed--Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the thief on the cross, even St. Paul.

We must always remember, too, that situations are not always "black and white." Rarely is only one person entirely "to blame." The "victims" of divorce need to come to grips with their own accountability in a failed relationship, even if that is painful and difficult.

Remember, too, that Jesus in the words preceding our text nailed us all with the sin of adultery. "*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" I won't ask for a show of hands of how many "adulterers" we have on this basis here this morning. We all have sins to repent. All of our hearts at times have been hard, hateful, stubborn, selfish. There is no room for smugness or superiority or self-righteousness.

What Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount is help us recognize the absolute standard of holiness and righteousness that God demands of us. God looks not just at the outward deed, but the inward motivation--not just "what" we do, but "why" we do it.

That's why we confess our sins of "*thought, word and deed.*" When we recognize this we see just how desperately we need to repent and turn to God for forgiveness. And that forgiveness is offered to us fully and freely through Christ.

These words of Jesus in today's Gospel lesson are "hard" words. They are meant, like so many other of Jesus' words, to cause us to exclaim "Why, that's humanly impossible!" Then Jesus can say, "*Now* you've got the picture. With man such things are impossible, but with God all things are possible."

May we begin our thinking on divorce at the same place Jesus did--with God's ideal for *marriage*, going back to the beginning. Build from the foundation of a God-pleasing, God-honoring, God-sustaining marriage and then the seeds of deception, disharmony, distrust, disruption will never see the light of day.

Resources: F. Dale Bruner, Matthew, I & II
Spiros Zodhiates, What About Divorce
Keener, "And Marries Another . . . "

APPENDIX 8:
SAMPLE PRAYER FOR FAMILIES/MARRIAGES

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray for your blessings upon our homes that Christ-like love and action will flow from husbands and wives, parents and children. Give power to overcome the tensions and pressures that harm family life and grant wisdom to avoid the frictions and temptation that disrupt relationships.

We ask that our homes become not merely places where family members gather to eat and sleep--to share a common roof over their heads, but residences where your love and forgiveness are communicated and practiced.

Restore peace and harmony and common purpose in those homes where discord and disunity exist. Turn energies away from criticism and quarreling, from apathy and indifference, to resolving differences and difficulties and fulfilling responsibilities. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, cleanse hearts of bitterness and anger, illumine hearts to see your heavenly purposes, restore hearts to love and serve you through loving and serving one another.

Support those who are single and those who live alone that they, too, may feel part of a larger family, the family of faith. Be their companion and support. Use their talents and gifts to build up your household of faith. Help those families where one parent must take on the responsibilities that should be shared by two. Keep them from discouragement, and direct them to You as the One they can lean on.

Help our young people develop a proper view of marriage that they see it not as an arrangement of convenience, but a relationship of commitment. Impress upon them the need to choose a life's partner carefully and prayerfully, seeking your guidance and following your will. Counteract the false messages that the world sends out in regard to marriage, making it seem old-fashioned or a restriction to growth and freedom. Make our marriages examples for others to see the joy and satisfaction and fulfillment that comes from mutual love, caring, and commitment.

APPENDIX 9: SUGGESTED USE OF CHURCH YEAR PERICOPES

The following selection from verses taken from the 3-year ILCW [Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship] Lectionary Series are offered as possible "links" to raising the issues, problems, challenges of divorce and/or marriage in sermons, Bible studies, topical presentations. They are only suggestive and obviously not exhaustive or even specific to the issue of divorce, but can sensitize the pastor/preacher to ways of tying together realities of divorce with other examples of more general biblical truth and application. The Scripture quotations listed here are from the REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE BIBLE; Old Testament Section, copyright 1952; New Testament Section, First Edition, copyright 1946; New Testament Section, Second Edition, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

2nd Sunday in Advent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series B) Isaiah 40:1-11 - "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (vv. 1-2).

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Romans 15:4-13 - ". . . by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. . . May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (vv. 4, 13).

(Series B) II Peter 3:8-14 - "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? . . . [Be] zealous to be found by him . . . at peace" (vv. 11, 14)

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 3:1-12 - "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (v. 8).

3rd Sunday in Advent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 35:1-11 - "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not! . . . [The] burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water'" (vv. 3-4, 7).

(Series B) Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11 - ". . . the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to given them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. . ." (vv. 1-3).

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) James 5:7-10 - "Be patient, therefore brethren . . . As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (vv. 7, 10).

(Series B) I Thessalonians 5:16-24 - "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances" (vv. 16-18).

(Series C) Philippians 4:4-7(8-9) - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. . . Have no anxiety about anything" (vv. 4-6).

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 3:7-18 - "Bear fruits that befit repentance" (v. 8) ". . . What then shall we do?" (vv. 10, 12, 14)

4th Sunday in Advent

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 1:18-25 - ". . . being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, [Joseph] resolved to divorce her quietly" (v. 19).

1st Sunday after Christmas

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 63:7-9 - "In all their affliction he was afflicted, . . in his love and in his pity he . . . lifted them up and carried them all the days of old" (v. 9).

(Series C) Jeremiah 31:10-13 - "I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow" (v. 13).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Colossians 3:12-17 - ". . . forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, . . . And above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (vv. 13-14).

New Testament Lesson: (Series C) Hebrews 2:10-18 - "Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . . For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (vv. 17-18).

The Baptism of our Lord/First Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 42:1-7 - ". . . a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench" (v. 3).

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series C) Isaiah 62:1-5 - "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land is Married" (v. 4).

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) John 2:1-11 - "Wedding at Cana"

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series C) Isaiah 61:1-6 - ". . . the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. . ." (vv. 1-3).

Epistle Lesson: (Series C) I Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27 - ". . . On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable . . . But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. . ." (vv. 22, 24-26 - these verses are an expansion of the pericope).

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 4:14-21 - (See Old Testament Lesson)

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) I Corinthians 1:26-31 - ". . . God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, . . . so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (vv. 27-29)

(Series C) I Corinthians 12:27 - 13:13 - "Love is . . ." (vv. 4-7).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 5:1-12 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (vv. 9-11).

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 58:5-9a - "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (v. 6)
 (Series B) Job 7:1-7 - "Has not man a hard service upon earth . . . ?" (v. 1)
 (Series C) Isaiah 6:1-8(9-13) - ". . . your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (v. 7).

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series C) Jeremiah 17:5-8 - "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord . . . He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (vv. 7-8).
 Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 5:20-37 - "But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (v. 32).
 (Series C) Luke 6:17-26 - "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (v. 21).

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 - "You shall not hate your brother in your heart . . . You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge . . . , but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (vv. 17-18).
 (Series B) Isaiah 43:18-25 - "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing" (vv. 18-19).
 (Series C) Genesis 45:3-8a, 15 (Story of Joseph and his Brothers) - "So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (v. 8).
 Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 5:38-48 - "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (v. 44).
 (Series B) Mark 2:1-12 - Jesus heals a paralytic brought to him by his friends.
 (Series C) Luke 6:27-38 - "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. . . ." (vv. 27-28, 37).

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 49:13-18 - "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me" (v. 14).
 Epistle Lesson: (Series A) I Corinthians 4:1-13 - "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things" (vv. 12-13).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 6:24-34 - ". . . do not be anxious about your life . . . Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (vv. 25, 34).

(Series C) Luke 6:39-49 - "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye" (v. 41).

First Sunday in Lent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series C) Deuteronomy 26:5-10 - ". . . and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression . . ." (v. 7).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Romans 8:31-39 - "If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, . . ." (vv. 31, 35).

Second Sunday in Lent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series B) Genesis 28:10-17(18-22) - "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go . . ." (v. 15).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Romans 5:1-11 - ". . . we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us . . ." (vv. 3-5).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) John 4:5-26(27-30, 39-42) - "Story of Samaritan Woman at the Well"

Third Sunday in Lent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 42:14-21 - "I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them" (v. 16).

Epistle Lesson: (Series C) I Corinthians 10:1-13 - "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (v. 13).

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Hosea 5:15 - 6:2 - ". . . [the Lord] has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up . . ." (6:1).

(Series C) Isaiah 12:1-6 - "I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, for though thou wast angry with me, thy anger turned away, and thou didst comfort me" (v. 1).

Epistle Lesson: (Series C) I Corinthians 1:18-31 - "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world . . ." (vv. 27-28).

Gospel Lesson: (Series B) John 3:14-21 - "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (v. 17).

(Series C) Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 - "'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (v. 2).

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Ezekiel 37:1-3(4-10) 11-14 - "'Son of man, can these bones live?'" (v. 3).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Hebrews 5:7-9 - "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (v. 8).

(Series C) Philippians 3:8-14 - ". . . one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal . . ." (vv. 13-14).

Third Sunday of Easter

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) I John 1:1 - 2:2 - ". . . the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin . . . all unrighteousness" (vv. 7, 9).

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) I John 3:18-24 - "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts" (v. 19).

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) John 13:31-35 - "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (35).

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) I Peter 3:15-22 - ". . . keep your conscience clear, so that when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (v. 16).

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) I Peter 4:12-17; 5:6-11 - "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you" (v. 6).

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) 2 Corinthians 4:5-12 - "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (vv. 8-9).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 7:(15-20)21-29 - ". . . and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house" (v. 25).

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Hosea 5:15 - 6:6 - ". . . [the Lord] has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up . . ." (6:1).

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Romans 4:18-25 - "In hope [Abraham] believed against hope . . ." (v. 18).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 9:9-13 - "And as [Jesus] sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples" (v. 10).

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Exodus 19:2-8a - ". . . I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (v. 4).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 9:35 - 10:8 - "When he saw the crowds, [Jesus] had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v.36).

(Series C) Luke 7:36-50 - ". . . her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (v. 47).

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) II Corinthians 5:14-21 - "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . ." (vv. 17-18).

Gospel Lesson: (Series B) Mark 4:35-41 - "'Teacher, do you not care if we perish?'" (v. 38)

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series C) I Kings 19:14-21 - ". . . I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (v. 14).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) II Corinthians 12:7-10 - "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' . . . For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (vv. 9a, 10).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 10:34-42 - "And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (v. 42).

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series C) Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16 - "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. . . Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 11:24-30 - "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" ((v. 28).

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 10:25-37 - "'Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise'" (vv. 36-37).

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Romans 8:26-27 - "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. . ." (v. 26).

(Series B) Ephesians 2:13-22 - "For [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility . . ." (v. 14).

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Romans 8:28-30 - "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him . . ." (v. 28).

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Romans 8:35-39 - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (vv. 35, 37).

(Series C) Colossians 3:1-11 - "But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth . . ." (vv.8-9a).

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) I Kings 19:9-18 - ". . . I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (v. 10).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Ephesians 4:30 - 5:20 - "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (vv. 31-32).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 14:22-33 - "[But] when he saw the wind, [Peter] was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me'" (v.30).

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 15:21-28 - "But [the Canaanite woman] came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me'" (v. 25).

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Ephesians 5:21-31 - "Relationship between Husbands and Wives"

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Jeremiah 15:15-21 - "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? . . . I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord" (vv. 18, 20c).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Ephesians 6:10-20 - "Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day . . ." (v. 13).

(Series C) Hebrews 13:1-8 - "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. . ." (v. 4).

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 14:1, 7-14 - "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (vv.13-14).

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) James 1:17-27 - "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (v. 27).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 18:15-20 - "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. . ." (v. 15).

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series B) Isaiah 50:4-10 - "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary" (v. 4).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) James 2:1-5, 8-1, 14-18 - "My brethren, show no partiality . . ." (v. 1).

(Series C) I Timothy 1:12-17 - ". . . [Christ] judged me faithful . . . , though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief" (v. 13).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 18:21-35 - "'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to [Peter], 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'" (v. 22-22).

(Series C) Luke 15:1-10 - "'This man receives sinners and eats with them. . . [There] is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents'" (vv. 2, 10).

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Isaiah 55:6-9 - "[Let] the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (v. 7).

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) James 3:16 - 4:6 - "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (vv. 16-18).

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: (Series B) Genesis 2:18-24 - "Divine Institution of Marriage."

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Philippians 3:12-21 - "[Forgetting] what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on . . ." (vv. 13-14).

Gospel Lesson: (Series B) Mark 10:2-16 - "Pharisees came up and in order to test [Jesus] asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'" (v. 2)

(Series C) Luke 17:1-10 - "Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (vv. 3-4).

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series A) Philippians 4:4-13 - "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. . . I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (vv. 6-7, 11b, 13).

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Epistle Lesson: (Series B) Hebrews 4:9-16 - "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses . . ." (v. 15).

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 18:9-14 - "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men . . ." (v. 11).

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Lesson: (Series C) Luke 19:1-10 - "He has gone in to be the guest of a man [Zacchaeus] who is a sinner. . ." [The] Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (vv. 7, 10).

Last Sunday in the Church Year/Sunday of the Fulfillment

Old Testament Lesson: (Series A) Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24 - "I [the Lord] will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak . . ." (v. 16).

Gospel Lesson: (Series A) Matthew 25:31-46 - "'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'" (v. 40).

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