Of All Nations:
Exploring Intercultural Marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the GTA

by

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ABSTRACT

The first wave of Coptic immigrants to Canada started nearly fifty years ago. Copts came from their motherland Egypt, searching for religious freedom and economical prosperity. The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) became one of the largest centers in Canada where Copts settled with their families and built their churches. As years passed, the second generation of Copts was starting to marry, not only Coptic spouses, but in many cases, Canadian spouses of varying ethnic backgrounds. This new phenomenon of intermarrying with different cultures was not fully understood, nor at times welcomed, by the Coptic Community. Many Copts wondered about the implications of intercultural marriages (ICMs) on the future of the Copts and the Coptic Church in the GTA.

A phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of couples in intercultural marriages was conducted to search for a clearer understanding of these relationships as they currently exist in the GTA. Four focus groups, with three couples in each group, were organized to determine the most important subjects to be discussed in the later stage of interviews. Eighteen one-on-one interviews were then planned with the couples to talk about the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions.
This study identified many different themes which could be of great help to future couples pursuing intercultural marriages, to their families, to the Coptic Church and Community in the GTA, and to other ethnic Communities facing the same challenges. First, it was clear that the couples interviewed were in very functional and healthy marriages. Second, the Christian faith continues to be a major factor in their lives, as the Coptic spouses all married fellow Christians, even though some did not marry in the Coptic Church. Third, the Coptic Church still plays a significant role in the lives of most of the couples interviewed. Fourth, the couples requested that the Coptic Church, Community, and their families continue to dialogue with them, respect their choices, and embrace them as an integral part of the future makeup of the Church fabric. Finally, the Coptic Community in the GTA should take practical steps to adapt to the Canadian culture through its observance of couples in intercultural marriages.
I was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1970 and lived there until my family and I immigrated to Canada in 1984. Since our arrival in Canada, my family has always lived in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and has moved several times within its boundaries. I completed my high school studies at Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute in Scarborough in 1988. I then enrolled at York University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Math and Statistics. In 1993, my wife Sandra and I were married. In 1994, Sandra, my father, and I started a precious metal refining company in downtown Toronto, where I worked until my ordination into the priesthood. Sandra and I are blessed to have three children: David, Mary, and Andrew. I was ordained as a priest in 1999 and served the congregation of St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church of Scarborough until the initiation of St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church of Toronto in 2007. I graduated from Tyndale Seminary with a Master of Divinity Degree in Youth and Family Ministry in 2006 and started my DMin studies at the Toronto School of Theology in the same year.

I have been blessed by a great family, the members of which have always supported and encouraged one another. My parents, Nabil and Mary, are true examples of hard-working and godly parents who raised their children in the fear of God. My older brother, H.G. Bishop David, travelled to Egypt immediately after his graduation from university to consecrate his life to God as a monk. In 1999, His Grace was ordained as a general bishop to serve as the Pope’s representative in the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, located in New Jersey. It is significant to mention that H.G. Bishop David was ordained as a bishop in the same ceremony in which I was ordained as a priest. Our younger brother, Atef,
is a spiritual, educated, and prosperous family man who serves God in so many different capacities.

Sports played a significant role in my upbringing. I was passionate about playing many sports, especially soccer and basketball. I played soccer with my high school team in Egypt and won a divisional championship with my high school team in Toronto. Sports became an outlet for me to channel my energy, but, most significantly, they were always a way to break significant barriers between youth and myself.
DEDICATION

To Sandra
My wife, soul mate, and best friend

To David, Mary, and Andrew
God’s gift to our family
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God almighty for helping me throughout my life and especially during the years of my DMin studies. I am forever indebted to His kindness for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this program and for bringing me to its conclusion in peace. I am also thankful from the bottom of my heart for the support of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, who is not only the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, but also a dear father and a mentor. Despite His Holiness’ plethora of responsibilities, he always took the time to listen to me and to discuss matters related to my ministry and studies. He also offered me his valuable advice. This generation will be remembered in the history of the Coptic Church for centuries to come because of the vision and pastoral ministry of this great leader. I am blessed to have been a contemporary of H.H. Pope Shenouda III and personally receive his blessing and guidance. I must also acknowledge the support of H.G. Bishop Youssef, bishop of the Southern United States Diocese, and H.G. Bishop David, the general bishop, who have been alongside with me throughout the entire journey of my studies. Their Graces were very generous towards me with their time, advice, and guidance.

It has been a pleasure to partner with many faculty members and staff of the Toronto School of Theology on this journey of learning. Every course I took added to my knowledge, and in every encounter with the staff I experienced a caring community. I am grateful for the leadership of Dr. Andrew Irvine, DMin director, who has been a constant support since the beginning of my program. The lessons I learned from him in the past five years are invaluable. Also, the mentorship of Dr. John Bowen, thesis supervisor, has expanded and often challenged my thought. I have very high respect for his vision and mission.
I am thankful for the members of St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church of Toronto who have shown me the true meaning of a vibrant, loving, and caring Christian community that is eager to proclaim the unconditional love of Christ. It was during the course of my DMin program that this community was born, and I am forever grateful for every member of this church. I thank my colleague, Fr. Daniel Hanna, who has taken more ministerial responsibilities to allow me to work on my thesis. I appreciate the input of many church members who have guided the progress and editing of this thesis including Marian Shehata, Maria Fawzy, and Mary Boutros.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my precious wife Sandra and our dear children Mary, David, and Andrew, who have been faithful partners with me throughout my educational journey and beyond. I realize how challenging it has been for them to endure my busy schedule as a result of my ministry and studies. Their support and prayers have been the greatest encouragement for me to complete my degree.
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INTRODUCTION

The wave of Coptic immigrants from their homeland of Egypt to Canada started in the middle of the twentieth century. Many Copts immigrated to Canada due to economic hardship, seeking a better future for themselves and for their children, while others left Egypt because of religious persecution. Tens of thousands of Copts now call Canada home. These immigrants settled mainly in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) which currently contains one of the largest concentrations of Coptic immigrants in North America. The growing Coptic Community in the GTA and the challenges that affect its second and third generations are becoming a focal point for studies that relate to its future existence within Canadian culture. The first Coptic Orthodox Church in North America was established in Toronto in 1964. Today, there are twenty-one Coptic churches in the GTA, and there are plans to build several others, in order to cater to the Community’s needs.

For guests visiting any Coptic church in the GTA, it does not take long to realize the strong cultural identity which is celebrated in every parish. After being in Canada for over fifty years, Copts are holding tight to their faith, their Egyptian identity, and to their language, culture, traditions, and values. Some Copts make virtually no distinction between being a

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1 There is no official census claiming the exact number of Copts living in Canada, but in a personal meeting with Mr. Amin Meleka, the General Consulate of Egypt in Montreal, he claimed that Copts in Canada exceeded 150,000, with the greatest concentration in the GTA. The meeting took place on November 29, 2010 in the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, Egypt.

2 In many instances, I will use the terms “Church” and “Community” interchangeably to refer to the same group of individuals who are members of the Coptic Church. In doing so, I’m assuming that the Church represents the congregants and the Church Community reflects the teachings of the Church at large. I understand that the Church congregation or Community might not all represent one homogenous group of people who share an identical belief system. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, I will assume that the Church Community represents those individuals who believe in the entire teachings of the Coptic Church and are committed to its theology and practice. Since the word “Coptic” means Egyptian, many Muslim Egyptians may consider themselves Copts. I will assume for this thesis that the mention of “Copts” will refer specifically to Orthodox Christian Egyptians.

3 St. Mark’s, established in 1964, is the first Coptic Orthodox Church in North America. Fr. Marcos Marcos was ordained by H.H. Pope Kirollos VI to minister to the Coptic congregation in North America. Even though he settled in Toronto, Fr. Marcos was responsible for several congregations which were spread throughout North America. Today, there are over 170 Coptic churches in North America being served by approximately 250 priests.
Coptic Christian and a Coptic Egyptian. In that sense, faith and culture have been intertwined to the point of being completely dissolved into one another. As an immigrant Community in Canada, the Coptic Orthodox Church has traditionally been known as an ethnic Church seeking to safeguard its culture, traditions, and language, as a way of preserving its identity. While first-generation Copts living in Canada continue to have social and emotional ties to Egypt, second-generation Copts seem to be more assimilated into Canadian culture, as demonstrated, for example, in their adaptation to Canadian languages and traditions. Because some of these young adult Copts feel that they can relate more to Canadian-born spouses, they are beginning to marry outside of their immediate Egyptian Community.

Rachel Lowen, a Toronto resident who was born a Mennonite, recalls her experience with the Coptic Church following her marriage to a Copt:

I am a Coptic convert. Almost two years ago, I married a Copt in a Coptic ceremony in one of the Coptic churches in the GTA. Although I do come from a Christian background, my baptism in the Mennonite Church was not recognized by the Coptic Church and Abouna, the priest, requested that I be baptized in the Coptic Orthodox tradition … Through marriage, my national and cultural identity became mixed. Although I still identify myself as Mennonite when I am asked, “What religion are you?” by Copts, they also consider me to be Coptic when I explain that I am married to a Copt.¹

Within the Coptic Orthodox Church, Ms. Lowen’s experience is not unique. In the past twelve years as an ordained minister, I have met many couples that have struggled in making the decision that Ms. Lowen and her husband made. They were torn between maintaining their religious identities, satisfying their families, and fulfilling the religious requirements of the adopted faith for the sake of their marriages. In Ms. Lowen’s case, she decided to be rebaptized in the Coptic Church and to marry within it, while also maintaining her Mennonite identity.

When a Copt is about to get married to a Canadian spouse, the couple usually meets with the priest in order to discuss the Church’s rules regarding intercultural marriage (ICM). Because the Orthodox Church does not marry couples of different religions or denominations, both

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¹ Although several waves of Coptic immigrants have arrived in Canada, and newcomers continue until the present time, this timeline refers to the beginning of Coptic immigration to Canada.

parties must be Coptic Orthodox if the couple chooses to get married in the Orthodox Church, and the non-Coptic partner must be baptized and/or confirmed.\(^6\) If the couple agrees, they go through a process of confirming their Orthodox faith and a promise to raise their children in the Coptic tradition. While many young adults agree to this process, others decide to make plans for their marriage outside of the Coptic Church. Those who agree still face a cultural challenge, but many intercultural marriages thrive and flourish and have been a source of refreshment and innovation within the Coptic Community.

This thesis will explore the lived experience of couples in an intercultural marriage and identify some successful techniques that the Church can use to minister to them. I will begin the first chapter by discussing my theology of ministry, to be followed, in the second chapter, by an exploration of intercultural marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Then I will move to the methods chapter which reviews the process undertaken in my research. The fourth chapter provides a detailed analysis of my Action-in-Ministry. It is followed by the conclusion, which brings all aspects of this research into a meaningful correlation.

\(^6\) Canadian spouses from the Oriental Orthodox family do not have to be rebaptized or anointed. Spouses from an Eastern Orthodox background only need to be confirmed through anointing with the Holy Chrism oil. Everyone else needs to be baptized in the Orthodox faith, as well as anointed with the Holy Chrism oil. There are currently some ecumenical discussions to recognize Catholic baptisms, so that the person adopting the Orthodox faith would only be anointed with Holy Chrism oil. However, there is no official decision pertaining to this matter yet.
CHAPTER 1
THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

Theology of Ministry refers to the “theological beliefs and practices that inform the student’s ministerial vocation and practice.” It is the dynamic correlation between theory and practice that gives the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program its edge as it offers the candidates an opportunity to evaluate critically the sources that have informed their vocational identity. This will have a direct implication on the way DMin students determine their research interest and future ministerial implications. Through this critical understanding and assessment of the sources that have informed my ministry, I will be able to consider my core values and evaluate my inherited beliefs. In the first section of this chapter, I will identify three events in my life that were significant in helping me to understand and explain my theological identity (1.1). In the second section, I will review the context of my current ministry and provide a brief description of my ministerial responsibilities as an ordained priest, offering an image that expresses my pastoral identity (1.2). In the third section, I will critically analyze this current context and my practical approach to ministry (1.3). This will include a presentation of how the resources of the DMin program correlate meaningfully with other resources, in order to help me understand my practice of ministry at a deeper level. Finally, I will end this chapter with a presentation of the relationship between my Theology of Ministry and my research interests within the DMin program (1.4), as well as offer some thoughts about my academic journey by way of concluding this chapter (1.5).

1.1 Formation of Vocational Identity

In this section, I will discuss three events that have helped me to understand my vocational identity and explain the theological significance of each of these events. As I prepared this
section, I needed to consider the many highlights of my theological journey thus far and to select those that were most significant in shaping my character. I tried to concentrate on the top three events which have had an enormous effect on my vocational identity and to summarize them in a manner which directly reflects my research interest. I have been influenced by several faithful individuals, whom I was privileged to meet along my theological journey, as well as by places that have contributed to my growth, and by moments that have left lasting impressions on my development. Each of the events that I have chosen to discuss represents a major turning point in my life that has helped to shape and focus my calling and to set forth the ministerial path that I would follow. I will first discuss my calling into priesthood and the events leading to my ordination, followed by the day that a youth I consider as a close friend married a Canadian spouse outside of the Coptic Church, and, finally, the day that I travelled to Egypt to meet with the Patriarch of the Coptic church, H.H. Pope Shenouda III, in order to receive permission to establish St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto (SMSV).

1.1.1 Event #1: My Calling

After I immigrated to Canada with my family in 1984, I became a member of St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church of Toronto. As a teen, I was very involved in the life of the church, participating in Sunday School, youth group meetings, deacons’ ministry, spiritual retreats, and outreach events. When I was nineteen years old, I was asked to serve as a youth leader and received some preparation to co-lead a class. During this time, I came into contact with many youth and their families, to whom I grew very close, and was able to bridge some generational gaps that had occurred in my community. In my youth ministry, I felt compelled to minister to every person individually, monitoring their spiritual growth and their continued involvement in church life and in the sacraments. A few years later, I was asked to deliver Sunday sermons during the main church services, which was a difficult adjustment for me, since it meant that I was then ministering to parishioners from all generations. In the following years, I graduated from university and opened my own small

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8 By Canadian spouse, I mean a person who is not of a Coptic Egyptian ethnic heritage.
business trading precious metals and selling jewellery. My business grew rapidly, and I became financially stable. It was at this precise time in my life, at the age of twenty-nine, that I was called to the priesthood to minister at St. Mark’s in Toronto, alongside the priests who had practically raised me since my youth.

In the Coptic Orthodox Church, a candidate for priesthood is not required to go through formal theological training prior to his ordination. He is usually nominated by the people, the clergy of the parish, or the diocesan bishop. The Pope, or the diocesan bishop, needs to review the candidate’s credentials and grant the approval for his ordination. The candidate is usually one who has participated in the life of the Church, is well grounded in the Orthodox doctrines, and has the pastoral character required to shepherd the people of God. A candidate can never nominate himself for this rank, but must be nominated by others.

Priesthood is very highly esteemed within the Coptic Community. The laity looks upon priests with the utmost respect and honour them as men of God. The Coptic Community bases this respect for clergy members on the teaching given in 1 Timothy 5:17 - “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.” In the Coptic tradition, a priest is never referred to by his first name, but rather by his title as Father or Your Reverence. It is also customary to kiss a priest’s hand when greeting him as a symbol of adoration and deference. With these ideals in mind, I grew up accustomed to holding our clergy members, and the vocation of priesthood, in very high esteem. While I was honoured to receive this calling, I was afraid that this lifestyle would not suit me and that I would not be able to care for the individual spiritual needs of the church members. Initially, I refused the calling, but my priest said that we should pray and leave it in God’s hands.

What happened next was an occurrence beyond my expectations and a sign that I could not resist. On a night shortly after my calling, I prayed to God for guidance, as I was not sure if His will for me involved accepting the calling to priesthood or remaining in His service as a lay person. On that particular night, I had a dream and heard a voice asking me to read the
first epistle of Peter chapter five. I woke up after that dream, opened my Bible and read the following passage:

…Shepherd the flock of God … not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (Vs.1-4)

I realized that night that this was a true calling from God and that this was where He wanted me to be. These words were confirmed when I went to church that morning for Liturgy, and this exact passage was read in the regular lectionary of the day. I accepted my nomination and was ordained on November 14, 1999. That day was an extremely joyful one, as I began a new chapter in my life, fully dedicated to God’s service. I wore the holy garments and celebrated the Eucharist. In the ordination ceremony, I heard the following very important words that were to guide my pastoral ministry from that point forward:

Glory be to our master Jesus Christ, who has chosen you to serve Him and numbered you among His priests … Know the extent of this grace which you have been granted and the perfect gift that you have received.\(^9\)

From this point forward, I understood that priesthood was a gift that God had given to me in order to care for each soul individually and to minister to everyone the word of God in truth.

**1.1.2 Event #2: The Marriage**

As a result of my years serving the youth as a lay counsellor, I grew very close to many of them and considered them to be family. After my ordination, I maintained a close relationship with them as they grew older and came to me for mentoring or confession. A few years after my ordination, a young man spoke with me about a colleague from work to whom he wanted to introduce me. They were getting to know one another and he was thinking of proposing to her. She was not Egyptian and was from another Christian denomination. According to him, she was the perfect candidate, and he wanted to spend the

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rest of his life with her. He wanted us to meet together in order to determine if they would be able to get married in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

We met and I saw that she was an exceptionally decent individual. I explained that, in order to get married in the Coptic Church, the rules state that both partners must be Coptic Orthodox and that she would be required to undergo a period of catechism that would result in her baptism. She explained that she had already been baptized and inquired as to the reason for her rebaptism. I explained some of the dogmatic and theological differences among Christian denominations and the anathemas that still exist which make rebaptism a requirement.

After the couple left the church that day, I lost contact with them for a while and later learned that they had gotten married in her church, which had different rules concerning interdenominational marriages. Here, I need to clarify that as soon as members marry outside of the Coptic Orthodox Church they automatically excommunicate themselves and become unable to partake of the Eucharist. This experience left painful memories in my mind, knowing that the Church not only lost one member, but also his children and all of his future descendants. I pondered on how many similar situations have occurred in other churches and with other clergy members. These concerns and many more revolved in my mind, as I thought about the future of the Coptic Orthodox Church serving the next generation of Copts in the GTA and around the world.

1.1.3 Event #3: The Meeting

The establishment of St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto (SMSV), the first multicultural missionary Coptic Orthodox Church in the Diaspora,\(^\text{10}\) was nothing short of a miracle. Until recently, the Coptic Orthodox Church was known as a Church in which the majority of its parishioners were Egyptian immigrants or second-generation Copts. Within the past few decades, however, a phenomenon had become apparent, as Copts began marrying individuals from outside of the Egyptian culture, and

\(^{10}\) The word ‘Diaspora’ here refers to the lands outside of Egypt, the country of origin of the Coptic Orthodox Church.
some of these members could not find a home for their new families in the existing churches. A small group of parishioners then started praying for the possibility of establishing an English-speaking missionary multicultural congregation in Toronto in order to minister to second and third-generation Copts, as well as to intercultural couples.

After some preparations, I travelled to Egypt on November 13, 2007 to meet with H.H. Pope Shenouda III in Cairo to request the establishment of such a ministry, which would contribute to the continued revival of the Coptic Church, not only in Toronto, but everywhere in North America. When I travelled to Egypt, the eighty-four year old pontiff was celebrating his thirty-sixth anniversary as the patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church. It also happened that he had just been discharged from the hospital, after suffering from some prior health complications. When I arrived at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Cairo, I was told by his secretary that the Pope had declined several meetings with government officials, but that my request for a private meeting was going to be presented to him. To my surprise, and that of many others, the Pope agreed to meet with me privately to hear my proposal concerning the establishment of the new parish in Toronto. After some discussion about the logistics of and preparation for such a ministry, I was granted permission to minister in the first multicultural Coptic Orthodox Church in North America. This day represented for me the birth of a new hope that the Coptic Church was taking positive strides to care for and minister to members from all ethnicities and nationalities.11

I consider the aforementioned images and events to have had major significance in the formation of my vocational identity. The sacredness of my calling into the priesthood laid upon my shoulders the pastoral responsibility of caring for each soul. The loss of a member from my congregation helped me to recognize the need to review my ministry goals and to consider the future of my Church. The establishment of SMSV renewed my hope that I would be able to fulfill my calling and minister to diverse members of my community. The

11 There is no doubt that converts and intercultural marriages had been an integral part in the fabric of many existing Coptic Churches in North America prior to the establishment of St. Maurice and St. Verena. There were also several churches that had programs in place ministering to these members of the community. This ministry, however, was the first one that was intentionally planted to be a missionary and multicultural Coptic Orthodox Church in North America, specifically catering to the needs of believers from all ethnicities and nationalities.
circumstances and individuals involved in these events, and the perspectives they triggered, have shaped my vocation as it stands today and have contributed to my theological practice of ministry.

1.2 Current Context of Ministry

In this section, I will give a description of my current context of ministry, including my specific ministerial responsibilities, and provide a description of the nature and purpose of ministry as it applies to my particular field (1.2.1). I will also offer an image that expresses my pastoral identity in my current context of ministry (1.2.2).  

1.2.1 Specific Ministerial Responsibilities (past and current)

I was ordained as a priest at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, where I had been a member since my arrival in Canada. Because I was privileged to have immigrated to Canada at the age of fourteen, I was proficient in both the Arabic and the English languages. I could also relate easily to the cultural challenges faced by new immigrant families, as well as by those who had lived in Canada for decades.

While I served at St. Mark’s, my desire to provide pastoral care for youth and second-generation Copts occupied most of my thoughts, as well as my time. I initiated several programs for Church youth that would ensure their commitment to the faith and their continued involvement in the life of the church. Since 2001, I have led the youth in several missionary trips to Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, and Mexico. The Coptic Orthodox Youth Association of Toronto (COYA), which I co-led in 2003, is still the voice of the church’s youth. This organization promotes leadership, outreach, spirituality, community activities, retreats, tutoring, and sports ministry. In addition, I have organized several spiritual retreats to both local and international destinations that have allowed the youth to develop a sense of

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12 Doctor of Ministry Handbook, 32.

13 COYA was first established in Sydney, Australia by Fr Philopos Boghdadi, with the assistance of Victor Messiha as coordinator in 1992. Their official website is www.coyasydney.org. The official website for COYA (Toronto) is www.coya.ca.
community and fellowship. Many of the programs that I initiated at St. Mark’s are still in place, ministering to junior high, high school, college, and university students, as well as to young adults, engaged couples, newlyweds, and young families who are members of the church.

Since November 2007, I have been serving as the priest of SMSV in Toronto. I am responsible for many different tasks which combine to form my vocational identity. My current context of ministry can be summarized as occurring in three main areas: liturgical, pastoral, and administrative.

As an ordained minister, one of my central responsibilities is to celebrate the Church’s liturgical sacraments. Members of our congregation have their children baptized as infants and are encouraged to attend spiritual meetings and to be active members in the life of the Church. It is also common that the priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy several times every week and conducts Vespers prayer services. My pastoral responsibilities include teaching, crisis intervention, counselling youth and families, and providing grief support following the death of family members. I also commonly visit members of the parish in their homes, in hospitals, or at their places of business. Since the Coptic Community considers the priest to be like a member of the family, I am often invited to birthday and graduation celebrations. I also have many administrative responsibilities (such as co-ordinating meetings and events, following up with ministry leaders, and participating in the ongoing planning of the new church building), that occupy a substantial portion of my time.

When the congregation of SMSV was formed, all of its ministries had to be built from scratch. With the help of many volunteers, we have established several ministries which reflect the spiritual needs of the congregation. Some of the ministries which we have initiated include community service, outreach, young adults, new mothers, youth fellowship, small groups, and children’s ministry. It was important for me to see lay leaders and multiple ethnic groups represented in the leadership of all of these ministries.

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14 In the Orthodox Church, sacraments are better known as mysteries.
One of my greatest passions in ministry has been the organization of marriage preparation classes. I have led these classes annually for the past seven years, first while serving at St. Mark’s and continuing at SMSV. This seven-week course allows couples that are planning to get married that year to come together, once a week for two hours, in order to establish a strong theological and practical foundation for marriage. Some of the topics discussed in this course include biblical foundations, finances, setting goals, conflict resolution, in-laws, intimacy, and explanation of the wedding ceremony. I have also started a regular follow-up meeting for married couples, where they meet to discuss ongoing marital challenges and to make sure that there are no conflicts that may break up their relationship. This meeting is also intended as an opportunity for fellowship among couples in the congregation and to build spiritual ties among members of the one body of Christ.

1.2.2 An Image to Express My Pastoral Identity

There are several images that come to my mind which could express my pastoral identity in my current context of ministry very well. One, however, has resonated with me throughout my ordained life. This image is that of John the Baptist who said, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice … He must increase, but I must decrease.”15 John made this statement when some of his disciples came to him complaining that Jesus, whom John had baptized, was now baptizing and that people were flocking to Him. In commenting on this passage, St. Augustine sees that John’s answer implies that Christ is God and so deserves the honour He receives from heaven. St. John Chrysostom explains that John maintains his role as a servant, despite what his disciples claim to the contrary, and that “John refers to himself as the friend of the bridegroom rather than servant since on the occasion of a wedding the servants are never as happy as the friends.”16


These two main ideas in the verses, as explained by St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom, represent the themes that have set the direction of my pastoral identity. The first is that I should never take the praise or glory away from God and apply it to myself. The respectful honour that the Coptic Community expresses toward a priest may lead to a feeling of self-glory or pride. John’s statement has been a continual reminder to me that God is the one who has granted me this honour to minister to His children and care for His flock. The second lesson that I learned from these verses comes from the image of John being not only a servant working in God’s field, but also His friend and a partner. My joy is fulfilled when I see a person repenting and returning to the flock because of an outreach effort in which I have participated. My ministry and faithful stewardship is valuable in God’s eyes; He notices and accounts for it. It is a privilege for me to be looking out for individuals and ministering as a priest in the Church of God, and it is vital that, in doing this work, I maintain my modesty and keep my focus on the work of God in their lives.

1.3 Analysis and Integration

In the first section, I explained three events from my theological journey so far that were significant in paving the way to a renewed vision of my vocational identity. I moved in the second section to describe the current context for my practice of ministry, including my responsibilities. I concluded the second section with a biblical image to express my pastoral identity in my ministry. For this image, I chose John the Baptist’s response to his disciples about the Lordship of Christ and about the need for Jesus to increase and for John to decrease. In the following section, I will enter into a critical analysis of my current context and practical approach to ministry. I developed this section to represent the resources and concepts that have informed my theological and ministerial vocation over the past years and that will continue to inform it in the future. I have divided this section into the following six sub-sections that highlight the ways in which my ministry continues to evolve: (1) Rooted in the Coptic Orthodox Church; (2) Orthodox Understanding of Scripture; (3) Evolving Understanding of Church; (4) A Fresh Pastoral Identity; (5) A New Ministry Paradigm; (6)
Missionally-Centred; and (7) A Focus on St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church (SMSV) in Toronto (1.3.1 to 1.3.7).

1.3.1 Rooted in the Coptic Orthodox Church

In order to provide a critical analysis of my current context of and practical approach to ministry, I must begin by giving a general introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, through which my practice of ministry has been grounded. This section will enable me to outline the foundations upon which my faith has been rooted and allow me to engage my inherited values critically in order to determine their application and validity in my current ministry.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, or the Church of Alexandria, is called *The See of St. Mark*. It is known as one of the four earliest centres of Christianity, along with Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome.17 The definition of Orthodoxy can be found in the roots of its name – *Ortho* is Greek for *right opinion* or *teaching*, while *doxa* means *glory*. The combined meaning of the word amounts to “the proper method of rendering glory, right worship, and consequently the right way of teaching about the One to whom the glory is rendered.”18 Orthodox Christianity is divided into two main families, the *Eastern Orthodox* and the *Oriental Orthodox*.19 The Coptic Orthodox Church is part of the Oriental Orthodox family, which also includes the Ethiopian, Syrian, Eritrean, Armenian, and Indian Orthodox Churches. Even though there is ethnic diversity within this family, they still share a united statement of faith and a combined celebration of the sacraments.

The Christian School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark in the first century and is now the oldest centre for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity. Scholars at this school

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17 Tadros Y. Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Alexandria, Egypt: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1993), 16.


19 To learn more about the two families of the Orthodox Church, one can consult: M. Dunaway, *What is the Orthodox Church* (California: Conciliar Press, 1995).
formed the first system of Christian theology and devised the allegorical method of biblical exegesis. Coptic theologians were leaders in the first three ecumenical councils held in Nicea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. They fought many early Christian heresies and were instrumental in establishing the early Christian faith and its doctrines. In addition to establishing the foundations of the Orthodox faith, thousands of Copts were martyred in defence of these doctrines. When the era of Roman persecution ended in the fourth century, Copts “died” to the world by forsaking all of their possessions in order to serve Christ. Through this practice, Copts established monasticism, and St. Anthony the Great became the first monk. From there, monasticism spread to other parts of the world.

The highest and most sacred liturgical practice in the Coptic Orthodox Church is the celebration of the holy sacraments. Fr. Anthony Coniaris defines a sacrament as a “divine rite instituted by Christ and/or the apostles which through visible signs convey to us the hidden grace of God.”

The Orthodox Church numbers among the sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Confession, Priesthood, Holy Matrimony, and Unction of the Sick. Traditionally, the Orthodox Church did not limit the sacraments to seven. The number seven was adopted in the seventeenth century under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church after the Council of Trent, which affirmed this number in opposition to the early reformers who recognized only two sacraments. The number seven is seen as a symbolic indication of the perfection of God’s grace. Some other sacraments or sacramentals that are recognized in the Eastern Orthodox Church include: monastic profession, blessing of water at Epiphany, funeral service, consecration of a church, preaching, prayer, and charity.

Some Orthodox theologians believe that the presence of the sacraments, which proclaim the Lord’s death, resurrection, and second coming, is the defining feature of the Church. John Malaty, Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, 33.

Anthony M. Coniaris, These are the Sacraments: The Life-Giving Mysteries of the Orthodox Church (Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life Pub. Co., 1981), 8.

Ibid., 9-10
Meyendorff claims that in the eyes of the East, the Church is the place where God is present sacramentally. The sacrament is, in effect, the way in which the death and resurrection of the Lord are commemorated and by which His second coming is proclaimed and anticipated. Now, the fullness of this reality – hence also “the fullness of truth and fullness of the magisterium – is present in every local church, in every Christian community gathered around the Eucharistic table and having a bishop at its head.”

Now that I have established a historical framework for my practice of ministry, I will turn to a critical discussion of my understanding of Scripture as it pertains to my ongoing studies.

1.3.2 Orthodox Understanding of Scripture

Orthodox Christians believe that Scripture is the inspired word of God and treat these sacred texts with the utmost respect and adoration. It is the Orthodox understanding that God spoke to holy prophets and apostles at certain times in history to convey to the people His laws and commandments, affirming that “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Because Scripture is believed to be God’s statutes to humanity, it is considered as the recognized source of deducing Christian faith and doctrine, as “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Over the past two centuries, a variety of ways for interpreting Scripture emerged which challenged the traditional ways that Christians in general, and Orthodox Christians in particular, view and interpret Scripture. The appearance of Biblical criticism in the eighteenth century meant that the academic scholar could apply to the Bible the same critical methodologies used in examining any other historical text. The concern of this study was not in the first place how God communicated with His people or the message of Jesus Christ, but rather a “reconstruction of what actually happened or the history of the text

composition.” Thus, a major focus of modern biblical scholarship was that it provided a significant advancement in understanding the history of biblical texts and their composition. In pursuing this endeavor, scholars have reconstructed many traditional beliefs regarding history and authorship of Scripture. It was this modern liberal theology that undermined the traditional understanding of what it means to say that Scripture is authoritative and placed the ultimate authority in one’s own reason.

In recent history, postmodern, postliberal theology has criticized modern approaches and has sought to recover and reinstate a more traditional view of Scripture and Tradition. This approach, which is also known as post-liberal or post-critical, starts with a faith understanding of Scripture as essential before applying critical methods. It is argued that “not even the scientific method can free us from our particular, and limited, historical horizons (histories, languages, and traditions). Yet, it is precisely these horizons that connect us to the past, for it is the past that shapes who we are today.” A great resource, which outlines the ongoing conversation between modern and postmodern theologies, is a book entitled The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions. In this book, the authors engage in a dialogue from opposite points of view concerning matters of faith and the reliability of Scripture. From one spectrum, the liberal scholar Marcus Borg writes, “the gospels contain more than one voice: the voice of Jesus, and the voice of the community. The quest for the historical Jesus involves the attempt to separate out these layers or voices.” From the other perspective, N.T. Wright argues that the quest for the historical Jesus Christ should be rooted in the context of the personal relationship in which:

we discover more about who Jesus is, what he is like, what gladdens him and grieves him, what he longs for and laughs at, what he offers, and what he challenges people

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25 Ibid., 152.

26 Ibid., 153.

to do … one is confronted with a love rooted in historical action and passion, a love that has accomplished for us something that we desperately needed and could not have done for ourselves.\textsuperscript{28}

While I see much value in alternative ways to view and interpret Scripture, I have adopted a hermeneutic consistent with the prevailing thought of the Coptic Church. Such an approach, integral to the Coptic Church's theology, draws on a rich stream of early Church and Eastern Christian interpretation and biblical usage, only recently rediscovered by many Western Christians from a range of theological and ecclesial positions (referred to above as post-critical or post-liberal).

One of the concerns of modern scholarship is the gender reference of God. There is a greater call to refer to God in gender neutral terms or to equally use female and male descriptive language. I recognize that there are several metaphors in Scripture which contain feminine descriptive language about God, such as Proverbs 8:1-3, Isaiah 42:14, and Matthew 23:37. Although these are important for a fuller view of the nature of God, the Church has held these as secondary to the weight of scripture which uses the male imagery. Therefore, I have chosen to utilize the masculine voice to refer to God. My choice is also rooted in the knowledge that Jesus referred to God as Father in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 5:16, Mark 11:25, Luke 11:2, and John 4:23. Yet, I fully understand and recognize that all humans have been created and share equally in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27).

Now that I have explained the Orthodox understanding of Scripture and the interpretive methods that will be employed in this study, I will turn to discuss my understanding of Church and how it has evolved through my ongoing studies.

\textbf{1.3.3 Evolving Understanding of Church}

In the Holy Scriptures, the word \textit{ekklesia}, translated as ‘church’, is used in a variety of ways to convey various meanings. In Acts 7:38, it is used to describe the Jewish people gathered at Mount Sinai, while in Acts 19:32, 39, 41, it is used in a more secular sense, referring to an

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 25-26.
unruly crowd of gentiles that has assembled. The apostle Paul uses it to refer to Christians who have assembled (1 Corinthians 11:18) or sometimes to when they meet at a specific home or city (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 1:2). Since the Church was about the people, it also acquired human attributes. The Church had ears (Acts 11:22), prayed (Acts 12:5), sent and welcomed people (Acts 15:3, 4), decided on matters (Acts 15:22), could be strengthened (1 Corinthians 14:26), and was persecuted (1 Corinthians 15:9). The early believers were willing to meet anywhere – underground, at people’s houses (Romans 16:5, Philemon 1:2), in prisons (Acts 12:1-5) – or to be scattered and still include the Church in their journey (Acts 8:2).

In Orthodox tradition, it is believed that to be part of the Church means that you have become a member of the body of Christ and a part of the divine plan of salvation. God has redeemed the Church with His blood (Acts 20:28), that of Jesus Christ, and thus made a new covenant with her, in which God is the bridegroom and sees the Church as His bride (Revelation 19:7). The Church is also seen as the mother of all believers, since she gives spiritual birth to her children through baptism and nourishes them through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. St. Cyril the Great pointed to certain markers by which the Church could be identified and distinguished in the world. First, he saw the Church as a community that reflects the love of God and practices the commandments of the Holy Scriptures. Second, she is the dwelling place of Christ, in which He lives, rules, and finds rest. Third, the Church is the house of faith in which the genuine beliefs are preserved unaltered and without wavering. Fourth, Church is the place in which spirituality is commonly practiced, and it abides in every aspect of her worship and ministry. Finally, according to St. Cyril, she resembles heaven, as the praises and glorification of her Lord ascend the minds and hearts of the believers, who worship God and long to meet the saviour in the heavenly realms.

Having been deeply rooted in the aforementioned beliefs and doctrines, it was through my studies at the Toronto School of Theology (TST) that my understanding of Church was


30 Malaty, Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, 258-261.
enriched and complemented. I now consider an example where my inherited values were challenged through my studies in the DMin program.

In February 2009, I participated in the Vital Church Planting Conference, which was jointly sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Toronto and the Wycliffe College Institute of Evangelism. Going into this conference, I was sceptical of the value of such an assembly to my ongoing understanding of my Theology of Ministry and especially to my understanding of Church. I felt deterred from participating in this gathering, since I came from a different tradition and cultural background. Because I am passionate about Church planting, however, the title and theme of the conference captured my attention. I decided to attend and to listen, hoping to benefit from other people’s views and experiences. I must admit that in my interaction with the other participants in the conference, through fellowship and numerous one-on-one conversations, I learned an enormous number of lessons.

One of the major challenges that I felt at this conference occurred as I heard the word Church repeated numerous times in unfamiliar ways. As a result, I started thinking about the concept of the Church that I had inherited, and I deliberately searched for a way to define it in my current context. Orthodox theologians see the Church as defined by the presence of the sacraments, which proclaim the Lord’s death, resurrection, and second coming. Another mark of the Orthodox Church is its unity in liturgical worship and the leadership of priests in service. Timothy (Kallistos) Ware comments about this unity when he says, “One altar, one sacrifice, one presence … in every place of worship when the holy sacrifice is offered, not merely the local congregation is present, but the Church universal.”31 His model of a Church was basically the one with which I grew up —people “go” to church, receive the sacraments administered by the clergy, then precede to live a holy life in the world. The Church is constant, guided, and united. Orthodox worshipers find comfort in this consistency and familiarity.

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In the *Vital Church Planting Conference*, I learned about the methods that the *Fresh Expressions*\(^{32}\) churches use to cater to the specific needs of their members. This group has been planting churches in police stations, schools, industrial units that accommodate skateboarding, and local pubs. This is indeed a contemporary attempt by the Church to reach out to people in their homes, their work places, and other locations where they are comfortable. It is also a means for the Church to become more relevant to people’s lives. In this model, the Church “went” to the people, rather than waiting for people to come to it.

While for me, as an Orthodox Christian, the sacramental life continues to be central in my understanding of *Church*, my vision of the life of the Church has been expanded to include other forms of ministry. The Church is no longer only a place to which people go, but it is also a *state of mind* that should be present in people’s lives wherever they exist. I am now drawn to minister in the kind of church that responds to the needs of its parishioners and meets people wherever they are along their journeys in life, a church that is not limited to only a physical location, but one that seeks, instead, to erect a spiritual building for the Holy Spirit in each person’s life through outreach. These new focal points that I have been applying to the practice of my ministry have further led me to reconsider my understanding of the *Church* and how it is to be applied to my current context of ministry.

Having discussed the value of my new, deliberate understanding of *Church*, I will turn to examine critically my pastoral identity and how it has been formed through my ongoing studies.

### 1.3.4 A Fresh Pastoral Identity

Having been ordained as an Orthodox priest for about twelve years, one may conclude that I would have identified my pastoral role by now, but this expectation is far from the truth. In

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\(^{32}\) *Fresh Expressions* began as a joint initiative between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in September 2004 with the appointment of Steven Croft as the Archbishop’s Missioner and Team Leader. Since then, a team of people has been appointed to work on the initiative. Their aim is to energize mission by encouraging new and different expressions of church life. A key element in vision building and advocacy is the clear articulation of the message that the church is not abandoning its traditional practices or the parish and circuit system in order to invest in fresh expressions of church life. They are seeking to move towards a mixed economy, valuing both. Source: [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk) (accessed on March 10, 2009).
actual fact, I have been wrestling with many dimensions of my pastoral identity and role as a priest for the past few years, and I expect that this self evaluation will persist for the rest of my career. Wayne Oates argues that the manner in which one exercises pastoral leadership is closely tied to the way in which one understands his or her pastoral identity. Also, Eric Eriksson has suggested that identity is a matter of taking the significant events of the past, along with the hopes of the future, and forming them into a working synthesis in the present. If Eriksson’s assumption is true, then an individual’s identity, either personal or pastoral, is dynamic, rather than static, and continues to be affected by a person’s pastoral leadership style. This pastoral identity is ever evolving in light of events of the past and aspirations for the future.

I can honestly say that my pastoral identity has been enormously influenced by events of the past. Archbishop John Shahovskoy sets out a map for the Orthodox pastor and the marks that identify his character and ministry. He says that an Orthodox priest should not over-indulge in food, drinking, sleeping, visiting places of amusement, nor absorption in political questions of the day. Ideally, he must not show partiality towards anyone or misjudge people, and he must be unworldly (in the world, but not of the world) and a true spiritual father to all. He continues by suggesting that a priest should not be an evident or strict ascetic because this may frighten many laity away from the spiritual walk with God, but at the same time, he must make modest use of the earthly goods necessary for life. With respect to the responsibilities of the Orthodox priest towards those who have strayed from the faith and who live in sin, Shahovskoy suggests that he “must attract the soul that has strayed, surrendered itself to the spirit and ideas of this world.”

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33 In forming this paragraph, I extracted some ideas from the sample Theology of Ministry Research Paper provided by the TST DMin office, 16. All information about the author on the cover sheet was deleted and, thus, cannot be referenced.


follow the way of the cross, struggling for the soul, suffering for it, praying for it and using every opportunity to draw it away from the wrong path and direct it to the right one. The above-noted guidelines for the life of an Orthodox priest have been a major influence on the practical way that I have lived my life. In addition, I have tried to be closely connected to the laity in my congregation, to keep up to date with current events, and to participate in sports and hobbies as a point of interest that connects me with others.

Most particularly, the idea of personal care for the strayed soul has overshadowed and captured the way my pastoral identity has been shaped by the past. Fr. Pishoy Kamel, whose first name I adopted upon my ordination, was known in the second half of the twentieth century for his amazing love for and individual care to sinners and those who had wandered away from the faith. When I visited Alexandria in 2005, his wife told me a story of how he, as a good pastor, never allowed any of his children to stray and was always seeking their return. She said that when one of his spiritual daughters wanted to convert to Islam, the authorities called him to the police station to meet with her. It seemed that the Coptic girl was being forced to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim man. When the woman had almost become convinced to remain in the Orthodox faith, her fiancé smuggled her out through the back door of the police station. Fr. Pishoy Kamel ran after the car that she had gotten into and clung to its back. When the woman saw how insistent Fr. Pishoy was about not losing her, she returned to the church. This story was among many that taught me the value of each individual soul in my ordained ministry.

Even though my pastoral identity has been formed through events of the past, it continues to be shaped by events in the present. Although the Orthodox perspectives and teachings have had the major influence on the way I have viewed my ministry, my presence at TST and

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37 Ibid., 42-44.

38 Fr. Pishoy Kamel was born in 1932 in Damanhour, Egypt and died in 1979. He was ordained as a priest for St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria in 1959. He became very well known across Egypt for his pastoral care and love of every individual whom he met. He is the author of many spiritual books including Under the feet of the Cross and Daniel, friend of the Angels. Many of his books have been translated into English.

39 It is the custom in Egypt to call a priest to the police station when a Christian intends to convert to Islam in order to try to talk her/him before the announcement of conversion is made public.
exposure to a variety of Christian thoughts and traditions have enormously enriched my experience in ministry. One of the major lessons I have learned through my years of studying at TST is the importance of the pastors’ role in the church as “facilitators” and not only as “leaders” within their communities. By this image, I am referring to the pastor’s ability to be a part of the congregation, or to blend into a crowd, while not necessarily standing out at all times. In the Orthodox tradition, the priest is always seen as the maintainer of the faith and the keeper of cultural identity. At any gathering or church meeting, the priest is usually the centre of attention, and all of the members are gathered around him waiting to hear him answer questions about faith and provide spiritual direction. While I must admit that this responsibility has encouraged me to read, research, and study, yet, I believe that this practice has at times had a negative impact on the congregation in two ways. First, I believe that it has reduced the role of lay leadership in the church. Second, members rely on me to provide quick answers to their questions, rather than spending the time researching for themselves and digging for the answers. I recognize that my presence as a professional or an expert in matters of the faith must continue to be evident within the community, but possibly not to the same extent as has been practised throughout the years.

Becoming a team leader or a facilitator was one of the first lessons that I learned from my academic experience in the DMin program. The style of leadership and conflict resolution exemplified by the DMin director offered me an opportunity to adjust my leadership style. On one occasion, a difference in opinion arose within the Collaborative Learning Group that led to some clearly visible tension in class. Dr. Irvine, in his wisdom, made us sit in class to discuss the issues openly and respectfully. We did not conclude the class on that day until we all said “peace” meaning that the issues had been resolved. This meeting has led to deeper friendships among the group members that have continued until the present day.

These experiences and more have led me to a fresh view of leadership in my pastoral identity. First, I have become less stressed about the differences between myself and others.

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40 It is important for me to clarify that the opinions expressed in this thesis may not always represent the perspectives of the Orthodox Church. As a researcher, I wanted to remain true to my journey through TST and to the opinions expressed by my co-researchers during the interviews. Nevertheless, the teachings and doctrines of the Orthodox Church have been, and will always remain, central to the praxis of my ministry.
Second, I have become more able to relate to my parishioners on a personal level, as a friend, in addition to being a priest and a mentor. Even in meetings in which it was customary to set up chairs in a theatre style, I now prefer for them to be in a circle in order to establish that everyone’s experience is valuable to the collective knowledge of the group. I am also adjusting my leadership style away from seeing myself as the head of the group and towards a vision of myself as someone who is on the same journey as everyone else, still seeking enlightenment and grace from God. Although my community is still adjusting to these ongoing shifts in my leadership style, they have responded to these changes with appreciation and enthusiasm. They see in me now the figure of a father, but also of a friend and a colleague. Thus, a clearer vision of my role as an Orthodox priest is now being crafted and formed.

Now that I have described my evolving pastoral identity, I will consider how my understanding of major cultural experiences that have influenced my pastoral identity points toward a new paradigm of ministry.

### 1.3.5 A New Ministry Paradigm

As an ordained minister in the Coptic Orthodox Church, I have a responsibility to the Church hierarchy and to myself to uphold our faith and traditions. I also bear responsibility to the congregation to teach the correct doctrine. I have always taken this stewardship very seriously and spared no effort in understanding and following my ministerial duties. I have observed, however, that being a Christian Community, which originated in the Middle East and was surrounded by predominantly Arab countries, has meant that some of our traditions and ways of thinking have been enormously influenced by that culture. The issue of gender roles and responsibilities, for example, especially in marriages, has been a constant challenge for our Coptic Community in its attempts to differentiate between social norms and the teachings of Scriptures. In many cases, this may result in conflicts arising within the family unit that may lead to unstable households and break-ups.  

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41 It would be unfair to make any generalizations about all Arab Countries, the Coptic Church Community, or Middle Eastern Culture as if they were homogenous and represent fundamentalist views and opinions. I fully understand and respect that in every culture and community there is a variety of schools of
During the final core course that I took at TST, I was asked to lead an opening prayer in one of the classes. I printed some of the prayers that are recited in the Prime Prayer of the Coptic Church and used them in class. After the prayer was over, the professor drew my attention to the fact that the translation of several passages from the text excluded women. She asked me to consider the feelings of the women in my congregation, who are reciting these prayers in the masculine voice, and what it would be like if the situation was reversed and I was praying to God in the feminine voice. It was then that I began to reconsider the familiar translations of our liturgical prayers and to examine how they could become more gender neutral to reflect an image of inclusion and acceptance to everyone.

This experience made me realize the present need to have a more compassionate understanding towards different views that are current to my ministry. After all, I consider my vocation, which has been entrusted to me by the Lord, to be one that is inclusive in catering to individual souls and in seeking those who have become estranged from the faith. I must search for and remain conscious of the core values upon which I have lived my life and which led me to accept my ordination into priesthood. These values would work as the premise upon which I have and will establish the foundations of my ministry.

Having realized my new ministry paradigm and its implications on my ongoing service as a priest, I will now consider the significance of mission as a core value in the life of the Church and how this is a central value in my own ministry. It is my passion for reaching out to others that has given rise to my current practice of ministry as it has evolved.

1.3.6 Missionally-Centred

Mission can be described as the entire purpose of the Church or the role for which God called the Church into existence. It also refers to the work of the community of faith responding to the Missio Dei, bearing witness to God’s activity in the world by thought, ranging from the extreme conservative to the extreme progressive and liberal. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, I will assume that the values which were imbedded and inherited in Copts represent the conservative end of the spectrum.

communicating the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.⁴³ The calling of mission involves responding to Christ’s love and compassion for everyone, without distinction based on race, gender, or social status. It is obedience to Christ’s command to teach, preach, baptize, and be witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8). The centrality of the Church’s missionary nature is such that if it “ceases to be missionary, it has not just failed in one of its tasks, it has ceased to be Church.”⁴⁴

Stamoolis, for example, claims that the biggest challenge facing the Orthodox Church in the Diaspora has been the fact that it continues to be predominantly ethnocentric.⁴⁵ As Orthodox Christians immigrated to North America, the Church served as a centre for religious education, as well as a cultural centre in which individuals celebrated their heritage, customs, and languages. In that sense, it became almost impossible for the Church to maintain its missionary mandate to incorporate individuals from various backgrounds. The inability of the Orthodox Community to reach beyond its borders remains an ongoing struggle within the Coptic Church. For the past fourteen centuries, the Coptic Community had enclosed itself within cultural walls as a matter of survival. After the Islamic invasion of Egypt in the seventh century, the Coptic language was forbidden to be spoken publicly, and Copts were not allowed to celebrate their feasts publicly or to govern themselves. Many Copts living in Egypt were mistreated and persecuted by the invaders and forced to pay extremely high taxes, well beyond what they could afford.⁴⁶ Countless Copts were martyred throughout the following centuries, while others ended up converting to Islam. As a result of this traumatic past, Copts have found it very challenging to open their doors to individuals of other ethnicities or to accept them into their assembly to practice their religion jointly.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30.
⁴⁶ Malaty, Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, 104-108.
As the Coptic Church is currently trying to overcome its distressing past in being invaded and overpowered by foreign elements, it is beginning to have the freedom of opening its missionary doors to everyone seeking refuge under her wings, especially in the Diaspora. The current challenge which remains before the Church is how much should the inherited culture influence its mission in the Diaspora and to what extent can the Church assimilate into the culture of its new homeland? In *Translating the Message*, Lamin Sanneh observes that, since its origin, the Christian message has been translated into the languages of the nations, and that, therefore, every culture and nation could be deemed as a valid tool to preach Christian theology.\(^{47}\) Sanneh explains the ability of Christianity to adapt to any culture that it might exist in by saying that “Christianity is parallel to culture but not proportionate to it,” while “religion is not culture but not other than culture.”\(^{48}\) If Sanneh is correct in his argument, the Coptic Church must adjust to the language and culture of North America in order to appeal to the citizens of the land. This transformation has already started to occur in the mission of the Coptic Church in Africa. In recent years, the Coptic Church has begun to revive its missionary mandate and spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in South America. Stephen Bevans refers to this practice as the “Translation Model”\(^{49}\) as the Church was transformed from an Egyptian Orthodox Church into a native African or South American Orthodox Church. In its missionary endeavour, the Church was interested only in passing on the Orthodox faith and theology, without attaching any cultural expectations. The African faithful were given the flexibility to use their own native languages, customs, musical instruments, and traditions, while maintaining the sacred truths of the Holy Scriptures and early Church Traditions. This is not a call to abandon all inherited cultural expressions, but rather to become sensitive to the culture of the new homeland and deliver the message in an acceptable manner which appeals to its inhabitants.


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 53.

When I visited the African Coptic Church in Kenya and South Africa, I saw an incarnation of the “Translation Model” in which parishioners felt a sense of belonging and ownership that came with the use of their native symbols, art, and imagery. On my first mission trip to Kenya in 2001, I witnessed a model of the missionary Coptic Church that was both refreshing and contagious. During this mission, I saw joyful Christians who praised the Lord for hours with enthusiasm and adoration, despite living in poverty and deteriorating health conditions. On one occasion, as the Canadian group visited one of the local churches, we were greeted with songs, dancing, and a welcoming spirit. We were given gifts by the congregation which included freshly-laid chicken eggs, fruits, vegetables, and hand knit garments. The genuineness of these people made me think of how we can transfer this African missional church model to our home land of Canada. The living example of a worshipping community that I witnessed in Africa left its lasting mark on my ministry.

My next challenge came about through deep consideration of the need for the Coptic Community in Toronto to undergo a transformation similar to the one that has occurred in Africa. By this claim, I mean that our intention was to become more relevant to North American customs, culture, and traditions, while remaining true to our faith. We must continue to respond to this concern by evaluating ourselves steadily and progressively, while also remaining conscious of the core of the Orthodox faith. It is our intention to continue becoming a distinctly Canadian Coptic Orthodox Church that simultaneously celebrates our diversity and our uniqueness. This calling has led me to the greatest journey of my life, the initiation of SMSV in Toronto.
1.3.7 A Focus on St. Maurice and St. Verena\textsuperscript{50} Coptic Orthodox Church

As a continuation of the theme of mission which became central to my Theology of Ministry, I now turn my attention to focus on SMSV as the first multicultural missionary Church in North America. I believe that this section demonstrates and witnesses to a living example of the expansion of the Coptic Church in the Diaspora and to an active attempt to become inclusive and to reach out to cultures and ethnicities outside its own.

Following my initial meeting with H.H. Pope Shenouda III in Egypt in November 2007 (mentioned above in section 1.1.3), a small core group of parishioners, who were enthusiastic about the idea, gathered to initiate this ministry. We held a series of prayer meetings and discussions about our goals and intentions in taking this initiative. We then rented a local church building in Toronto, which was used for services on weekdays, and a school gymnasium for use on Sunday mornings. We have made it clear that members of all cultures, age groups, and socio-economic statuses are welcomed and accepted in the church.

It was our first priority to establish a mission statement that would reflect our identity as being rooted in the Coptic Orthodox faith, while also emphasizing and celebrating our diversity. SMSV was established to be:

\textit{A ministry of love, integration, and outreach}

\begin{itemize}
  \item This ministry is for the glory of God the Father, His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit the Comforter.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{50} At the end of the third century, St. Maurice was a soldier in the Theban Legion (modern day Luxor in Upper Egypt) who travelled to Gaul (modern day France) to fight for King Maximian in the Roman army. He was the leader of 6600 soldiers, who were all martyred for their faith. St. Verena was a nurse who accompanied the Theban Legion, and when they were all martyred, she settled in what is now Switzerland. Both of these saints became very well known in Europe and have also been canonized in the Catholic Church. We chose to name our church after these saints because they were both Copts, Christian Egyptians, who travelled to the west and preached the word of Christ in their teachings, as well as in their works and lives. In the same manner, as Coptic immigrants to North America, we felt the need to witness to our faith and live our calling to the communities in which we live and work.
o This is a Coptic Orthodox Church in its faith, doctrine, traditions, and teachings. It is under the direct leadership of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

o A faithful community to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, eager and enthusiastic to grow spiritually and to be a positive influence in its surroundings.

o A worshipping community which offers praise and glory to God.

o A multicultural church ministering to people from every nation, tongue, tribe, and language.

o Missionary in nature; spreading the Good News to the whole world.

o It is a place where no one stands alone.

o Focusing on the love of God through spiritual growth and also on the love of neighbour through community service and humanitarian work.  

The multicultural nature of this new ministry was to be its main attraction and mark of distinction. Those who would be willing to join this church would be those who were convinced by its mission and determined to make it succeed. In establishing this multicultural church, the intentions of the founding group were mainly to change people’s attitudes, rather than to reform the doctrines or beliefs of the Church.

The Coptic Church is not only concerned about the ongoing pastoral ministry of its parishioners, but much thought also goes into the future existence and survival of the Church especially in the Diaspora. H.H. Pope Shenouda III has a famous saying that “A Church with no youth is a Church with no future.” This statement concerning the significance of youth ministry to the future existence of the Church, along with Pope Shenouda’s support of missionary endeavours as means for future survival of the Church, gave us the encouragement to search for positive means and resources to enhance and grow our church through missions. *Future Faith Churches* by Don Posterski and Gary Nelson offers a unique perspective on any Church’s chances for growth at the beginning of this millennium.  

At certain points in my ministry, I thought that any church had the potential to overcome the

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52 Even though, as an Orthodox Christian, my primary sources are those published by Orthodox authors, yet there is much value in other works and scholarships published by Catholic or Protestant theologians, as well as by secular researchers. It is profitable to acknowledge the common grounds that all Christian denominations agree on and also have room for theological debate in areas of disagreement. As a researcher and a priest who is in dialogue with Christians of all denominations on a regular basis, I found it essential to investigate and understand where other denominations stand in terms of their theological viewpoints, which may or may not agree with the Orthodox perspectives.
challenges of the upcoming century, with only minimal consideration of its direction and leadership skills. After reading this book, it became obvious to me that the mission and direction of the twenty-first century Church required much thought, prayer, and planning in order to give it a chance at survival. The authors made it clear that the future church needs to exhibit a balance between love for God and love for one’s neighbour.\textsuperscript{53} It must be deliberate in its focus on evangelism, social action, church growth, and strong leadership. They suggest that a church that focuses only on the gospel, without emphasis on social action, can be seen as a soul without a body. The model of “Relational Evangelism” requires that congregants feel comfortable inviting friends to the service. The ministry of SMSV has focused thus far on this model of evangelism. We have also initiated outreach programs along the lines of those suggested by Dr. John Bowen in his book \textit{Evangelism for “Normal” People}, which includes a set of practical suggestions for ordinary people to use in reaching out to community and friends in order to attract them to Christ. The suggestions include the Agnostics Anonymous group, tea parties, Valentine’s Day celebrations, and visitor Sundays at church, where the programs are custom made to suit visitors and seekers.\textsuperscript{54} In addition, we have started Small Group Leadership training courses, which have produced eleven small groups so far, with several others in development.

I am thankful to report that SMSV has been growing and flourishing beyond anyone’s expectations. The congregation needed to move to a bigger school gymnasium only six months after its establishment and to move again after two years. The church has acquired a three acre parcel of land in Markham, Ontario, and plans are now being finalized to build an eight hundred seat church, along with auxiliary facilities such as a banquet hall, Sunday school classrooms, day care centre, and gymnasium. While the new church plant was originally established to minister to second and third-generation Copts, as well as to intercultural couples, it has become a home for many individuals of multiple nationalities who are interested in Orthodoxy and who are not Egyptian by birth. It is also ministering to

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other English-speaking, Coptic-born parishioners who were drawn to its principles. The inclusive nature of this new community has become its mark of attraction, and it is becoming well known among Coptic churches in the Diaspora. I cannot yet determine the outcome of this endeavour, as this model is still in its early stages and is open to criticism and adaptation. Nonetheless, we have already accomplished a great deal of our mission and continue to seek ways to fulfill the rest.

As my understanding of my missional focus remains in continual formation, I will turn now to consider the last section of this chapter – the relationship between my Theology of Ministry and my research interest.

1.4 Relationship between Theology of Ministry and Research Interest

Referring back to the three events that I mentioned in section 1.1 of this thesis, which are my calling, the marriage, and the meeting, I will now consider the ways in which these have helped me to understand my vocational identity and recognize its theological significance. In accepting the calling of my ordination, I undertook a major commitment in obeying a calling that came from God, rather than from the hand of any person. I took a vow at this time to care for individual souls and to look out for those who were disenfranchised. As part of the normal progression of my ministry, I became responsible for many second-generation youth in our community who were reaching the age of commitment and marriage. Unfortunately, for various reasons, many young adults, who were marrying individuals from outside our community, ended up leaving the Coptic Church. Through their marriage in another Christian denomination or by having a civil marriage, they automatically excommunicated themselves from the fellowship of the Orthodox Church and became unable to partake of the holy mysteries. According to the Orthodox understanding, the inability to partake of the mysteries has serious implications for their Church fellowship and, in turn, for their eternal lives.
In addition to the story I related earlier about a young man who married someone from another Christian denomination, I recall the story of Susan, a member of my old youth group that met in the mid 1980s. We knew each other from church because both of our families had migrated to Canada in the same year and we were about the same age. Back then, since the youth meeting was small in size, and we participated in many activities, outings, and conferences, most members knew each other very well. I lost contact with Susan when she travelled overseas to finish her university degree. About six years ago, I ran into her at a local shopping mall, and we had a chance to catch up on old times. On that day, I also met her husband, who was from another ethnic background, and their lovely children. After some detailed conversation, I learned that they had a civil marriage and that no clergy had been present to officiate at the ceremony. When I inquired as to why they had never married in the Coptic Orthodox Church, they implied that they had tried approaching a local clergy member, but that they had not been able to come to an understanding of the requirements for intercultural marriage (ICM) that was agreeable to all parties. In addition, Susan’s parents refused to bless the marriage because of her husband’s different cultural background. I asked them for their contact information and told them that I would remain in touch.

After about one year of pastoral ministry with this family, I was able to bridge all the gaps and to welcome them once more into the Coptic Church. Through a series of meetings and catechism classes, I baptized Susan’s husband, blessed their marriage, and baptized their children. A few more years passed, and I noticed that they had ceased to be practising members of the Church. They explained that various cultural and linguistic barriers were keeping them from being fully immersed in the life of the community. Early in 2009, I invited them to give the Church one more chance by joining SMSV. They accepted the invitation and started coming regularly to Sunday Liturgy, as well as participating in retreats and other activities. It did not take them very long to come to feel a sense of belonging within the first multicultural Coptic Orthodox Church. Despite their busy schedule as professionals, the family manages to participate in the life of the community and continues

55 I have given pseudonyms to the persons and events mentioned in this story so that their true identities are not revealed.
to be a very positive model for other intercultural families in the church. They are fully involved in the church ministry and spare no effort in helping other families.

The experience of Susan’s family with the Coptic Orthodox Church is by no means an isolated case. During my years in ministry, I have seen many people in intercultural marriages struggle to fit in and find acceptance in the Church. These difficulties have often resulted in couples leaving the Church completely or, at minimum, remaining only very loosely connected to it. Because of this complex situation, I have developed an interest in researching possible means for helping intercultural couples to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging inside the Coptic Orthodox Church.

1.4.1 Statement of the Research Problem

In this section, I will introduce the challenge that the Coptic Orthodox Church is presently facing with respect to intercultural marriages and then provide the basic question that my research will answer. Next, I will enlarge on the statement, as appropriate, and discuss related questions or hypotheses that I plan to research.

I intend to explore questions related to the lived experience of couples in an ICM. It is my observation that ICM has been a rising phenomenon within the Coptic Community in the GTA. The Coptic Church expects the non-Copt to fully assimilate into the Community before marriage through baptism, confirmation, and practice. In many cases, cultural and religious lines have been interwoven to the point that it is extremely difficult for non-Copts to assimilate, as they might be looked upon with suspicion or judgment. Because of a lack of understanding, and, in some cases, spiritual ministry that remains unfulfilled, many young adults have abandoned the church along with their spouses. The Coptic Orthodox Church is at risk of losing many of its youth and young adult members if it does not find a solution to these patterns. This research will investigate the challenges facing intercultural marriages in the Coptic Church of the GTA and suggest some solutions to this phenomenon.
My research question is as follows:

In the ever-changing circumstances of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area, I want to research the lived experience of couples who are in intercultural marriages, to discover how the Church has affected these marriages and to identify some successful techniques that the Church Community can use to minister to couples in intercultural marriages.

This research will be of great significance to my current ministry base, as it is becoming more and more apparent to me that many of the couples in ICMs within the Coptic Community in the GTA are seeking my assistance and counsel in their marriages. This research will enable me to connect with these couples and to set out certain criteria as to how I can best serve them with respect and dignity. In ensuring that these couples have positive experiences in the Church, I will be helping them to have successful marriages, as well as influencing their future participation in the Coptic Church. The phenomenon of intercultural marriage has been increasing in all Coptic Communities outside of Egypt. This research will allow other Coptic Churches to understand some of the challenges that face intercultural couples and to try to welcome them more fully into the Community. Finally, this research could be a model that other ethnic churches across Canada could use in trying to understand some of the challenges and triumphs of ICM.

1.5 Conclusion

When I first began my DMin program in August 2006, graduation seemed a distant reality. Many reasons to delay or suspend my studies have appeared along the way, including some that were personal and others that emerged due to my accumulating pastoral or administrative responsibilities. One of the factors that has motivated me to keep going throughout those years has been the practical correlation between my theoretical studies and its application to my ministry. In the beginning, I had no idea what my research focus would be, but Dr. Irvine continued to encourage us to trust the system and believe that it would all come together towards the end. Indeed, the day has come that I am finally able to determine the reason that I have invested my effort in order to make a significant contribution to a field about which I am very passionate.
Over the past few years, the focus and the paradigms I have used in understanding my Theology of Ministry have shifted as a result of my learning journey at TST and in my personal context of ministry. The formulation of this thesis has been a major landmark in my academic, ministerial, and personal endeavours. It has been an exciting journey in discovering truths about my ever-evolving vocational identity. In it, I have identified certain moments that have shaped my pastoral identity, I have developed a clearer understanding of the context of my ministry, and I have critically analyzed my practical approach to ministry, as well as the sources that inform it. Finally, I have identified the relationship between my Theology of Ministry and my research interest. In the next chapter, Exploring Intercultural Marriages, I will discuss the different resources which the Coptic Orthodox Church relies upon to determine its core beliefs as related to my research interest, intercultural marriages.
CHAPTER 2
EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL MARRIAGES

Having discussed my Theology of Ministry, comprising of the theological beliefs and practices that inform my ministerial vocation, I will now turn to investigate the main subject of my research which is Exploring Intercultural Marriages (ICM) in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the GTA. In order to have a full understanding of this subject, there are four areas which must be researched. First, I will examine the Orthodox understanding of marriage which serves as a theological foundation upon which Orthodox Christians conduct their matrimony (2.1). Next, I will study multiculturalism as it is currently practised in Canada (2.2). This section is significant because it portrays the current cultural environment within which Copts are practising their marriages in the GTA. The third area I will consider is intercultural marriage as seen through Scriptures, as well as in modern practice (2.3). Finally, I will discuss teaching in practice on some other matters related to marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church which could be of benefit to expand my knowledge on the subject (2.4). The totality of these four areas under investigation will inform my theological, as well as my theoretical, knowledge of my research topic.

2.1 Understanding Orthodox Marriage

Marriage, also known as Holy Matrimony, is considered one of the sacraments of the Orthodox Church and thus treated with the utmost respect and reverence. The Church traces the foundation of marriage as a sacrament in the words of St. Paul: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:32). The same Greek word, which is translated into English as “mystery”, is equivalent to the Latin word, which is translated as “sacrament”. In suggesting that marriage is a mystery, the Church believes in the work of the Holy Spirit in uniting the couple into one. Here, St. Paul speaks of Christ’s incarnation on earth as the greatest mystery that resulted in Him marrying His bride,

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56 Refer to section 1.3.1 for a discussion on Sacraments in the Orthodox Church.

which is the Church. Just like Christ left His Father in heaven and was united to His bride spiritually on earth, so also, a man leaves his father and his mother and is united with his bride and they are “no longer two but one flesh”. The Church considers this mystery indivisible and everlasting as per the Lord’s words: “Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate” (Matthew 19:5-6).

The Orthodox Church honours marriage as the Lord has blessed the wedding at Cana of Galilee and performed His first miracle at it (John 2:1-11). In attending this wedding ceremony, Christ forever sanctifies and sets apart marriage as acceptable and blessed by God. Furthermore, as marriage is a blessed union sealed by God and is indivisible, the Church believes in monogamy based on the Lord’s teaching that God from the beginning created them as male and female and a man shall be joined to his wife (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-5). In addition, the Church honours marriage as presented in the Holy Scriptures as follows: “Marriage is honourable among all and the bed undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4). St. Athanasius clarifies the meaning of honourable marriage when he notes that marriage has been God’s design since the beginning of creation. God created two genders and blessed and sanctified their union. The fact that the Lord blessed the wedding at Cana of Galilee, belief in monogamy, and honouring marriage, give this sacrament a deeper understanding to Coptic Christians approaching marriage. Copts then understand that God’s design for this union is everlasting, as the couple is spiritually united forever.


59 Ibid., 52-53.

60 Mack, Preserve Them, O Lord, 15.


62 St. Athanasius the Apostolic was Bishop of Alexandria and Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church from 328 A.D. – 373 A.D. His writings are considered authoritative in the Coptic Church and throughout many other churches around the world. He wrote extensively on a variety of theological topics including marriage. He was a prominent figure in fighting the heresy of Arius and establishing the Nicene Creed.

63 Wahba, Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius, 166-169.
In order to further clarify our understanding of this mystery, we must trace its reasons as ordained by God and taught by the Orthodox Church (2.1.1). It is also essential to discuss the marriage ceremony, which outlines the basic beliefs and highlights many symbols that represent the teaching of the Church concerning marriage (2.1.2). In doing so, we come to a fuller realization of God’s intention for marriage as applied in the Orthodox Church.

2.1.1 Reasons for Marriage

There are four main reasons for marriage as taught in the Orthodox Church, these being procreation, chastity, holiness, and attaining heaven. It is the totality of these four reasons that give us a clearer understanding of grounds for marriage as practised in the Church.

2.1.1.1 Procreation

The first reason for marriage as evident in the Old Testament was procreation. In the beginning of human creation, God made Adam and saw that he was alone and that there was no helper comparable to him (Genesis 2:20). God therefore caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and out of his ribs made a woman, Eve. The Lord blessed them and commanded them to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The reason of marriage for procreation was also clear in God’s promise to Abraham when he said, “Look now towards heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them … so shall your descendants be” (Genesis 15:5). Having children became a great sign to a devout Jew, which represented God’s blessing. This was obvious in their traditions, especially, as mentioned in the book of Psalms: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward … happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psalm 27:3-5). Surely, this emphasis on procreation was directly related to God’s promise to Abraham, which is the perpetual existence of the Jewish nation on earth.64

St. John Chrysostom65 mentioned that despite God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”, some couples will remain childless. He notes that in the past, individuals

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64 Wahba, Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius, 16.
conceived and bore children out of a desire to leave a memorial of their lives, but that
Christian belief in the resurrection and everlasting life means that their names will never be
abolished or forgotten, but are preserved in heaven. He encourages couples who cannot bear
children to bear spiritual children for Christ through their ministry and spiritual labour.66

2.1.1.2 Chastity

The second reason for marriage is chastity, as presented in St. Paul’s letter: “Because of
sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own
husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2). Chastity could be defined as:

… not merely avoidance of immorality, but integrity of the person, body and soul,
and direction of oneself towards holiness. This is possible as much for the two who
are made one in marriage as for the celibate person.67

St. John Chrysostom sees that marriage has been given as a remedy against fornication.68 He
teaches that if a person still commits adultery after marriage, it is considered as a great sin
and against God’s plan of monogamy and faithfulness. The act of adultery would result in
nullifying the marriage, and the Lord’s commandment would have been given in vain. He
encourages the believers to remain faithful to this sacrament and to resist any temptation that
may arise from an intruder by responding, “This body is not mine. It belongs to my wife. I
do not dare to mistreat it nor lend it to another woman.”69 He also encourages the wife to
offer the same response, as there is a complete equality in marriage between a man and a
woman.

65 St. John, Bishop of Constantinople, who was born in Antioch in 344 A.D., and has been known as
the golden-mouthed (Chrysostom) since the sixth century, wrote extensively on the sacrament of Holy
Matrimony and the sanctity of marriage. St. John is very well respected in both Orthodox families, Oriental
and Eastern, and is considered an authority when referring to the subject of marriage.

67 Ibid., 22.
68 Ibid., 86.
69 Ibid., 86-87.
2.1.1.3 Holiness

A third reason for marriage is for the couple to live a life of holiness. Not only is the couple exhorted to avoid sexual immorality, but also to encourage one another for piety, good works, and service. Marriage, as taught by St. Athanasius, is:

… a seed of grace sown by Christ in the field of the Church; hence, the couple undertakes the voyage of holiness toward the eternal life in the joint body of matrimony. Both of them encourage each other in virtue … in a word, so great was their emulation in virtue that you would have thought every family and every house a church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God.70

One of the greatest virtues that the couple should grow into is love. As a matter of fact, marriage has been called the Sacrament of Love.71 In this sense, marriage could be seen as “a unique union of two beings in love, two beings who can transcend their own humanity and thus be united not only with each other but also in Christ.”72

2.1.1.4 Attaining Heaven

Attaining heaven is considered to be the most important reason and ultimate goal of marriage. The believing couple is expected to encourage one another to remain focused on eternal life and to spur one another on to grow in virtue. Orthodox Christians see the goal of marriage as “not the fulfillment of one’s needs; rather, the goal of marriage is heaven.”73 Christ taught that in the resurrection, people will “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels” (Mark 12:25). In this verse, the Lord is not rejecting marriage but rather ridding the minds of believers of any expectations of physical desires in the Kingdom of Heaven.74 While there is no carnal relationship in heaven for a married couple, yet, some

70 Wahba, Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius, 179-180.


72 Mack, Preserve Them, O Lord, 17.

73 Ibid., 19.

74 Wahba, Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius, 219.
Eastern Orthodox theologians believe that marriage transcends the limitations and is not constrained by time:

Marriage consists in transforming and transfiguring a natural human affection between a man and a woman into an eternal bond of love, which cannot be broken even by death.\textsuperscript{75}

Having discussed the reasons for marriage, as taught in the Orthodox Church, I now turn to consider the Coptic marriage ceremony. The marriage ceremony, or matrimonial liturgy, represents the accumulation of the Orthodox Church teaching and doctrines concerning this mystery. The seriousness of the sacrament is indeed reflected in the elaborate nature of the ceremony itself.

2.1.2 The Marriage Ceremony

The Coptic Orthodox matrimonial liturgy is conducted under the assumption that the bride and groom have a common faith and belong to the same denomination.\textsuperscript{76} It starts by having the priest offer a series of prayers and blessings asking God to establish His name as the foundation of this new household. The service also includes a confession of the faith in the audible profession of the Nicene Creed, which acknowledges the belief in the Holy Trinity, the resurrection of the dead, and the Lord’s second coming.\textsuperscript{77} The Holy Scriptures are read and prayers of blessing are bestowed upon the new couple in the name of the Almighty God. Throughout the marriage ceremony, the Church exhorts the couple to love, respect, and obey one another, and to maintain the unity of the faith. As the matrimonial liturgy was originally connected to partaking of the Holy Eucharist, Orthodox theologians stated that the greatest witness of the couple to their full commitment to the faith is visible in “their reception of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{75} John Meyendorff, \textit{Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 57.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{76} Bishop Mettaous, \textit{The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony} (Cairo, Egypt: ElSouryan Monastery publications, 2000), 27.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{77} H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy ed., \textit{Liturgy of the Holy Matrimony according to the Coptic Orthodox Church} (2001).}
holy communion and in other acts of faith. Therefore it is at the Divine Liturgy that they can experience together their union in Christ the Lord as husband and wife forever.”

Many symbols are used in the matrimonial liturgy as a sign of the couple’s unity and everlasting love. For example, during the service, the bride and groom are anointed with holy oil. While the priest anoints the couple with the oil, he offers prayers to God for their sanctification, blessing, purity, power, salvation, health, and victory over all the temptations of the devil. The priest also places crowns on their heads and robes around their shoulders, representing their new adoption into the royal family of God and the formation of a new household in His name. The couple is reminded of rejoicing greatly in the Lord’s salvation through being adorned with these precious ornaments as mentioned in Isaiah 61:10: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” Furthermore, the gifts exchanged during the wedding ceremony are usually made of gold, which is a precious metal that does not rust, and its value increases with time. In the same manner, the bond of holy matrimony is:

invaluable and precious, does not perish, rust, or corrupt, even if it met tribulations, as long as it is founded on a true Christian love, and must always be pure through fidelity of both partners to each other.

The early Church traditions have clarified the purpose of marriage, its honour, and the symbols used in the matrimonial liturgy to unite and exhort the couple to love and respect one another. Through the practice of these traditions, the couple receives this holy sacrament with understanding and a promise to live according to God’s teaching.

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80 Ibid., 50.

81 Ibid., 19.
2.2 Multiculturalism

Having discussed the understanding of Orthodox marriage, I will now consider the topic of multiculturalism because it is the context for my study of intercultural marriages. Orthodox Christians, residing in the GTA, live in a multicultural society which embraces and encourages multiculturalism. Thus, it is essential to understand the cultural environment in which Coptic Christians are practising their marriages. In order to do this, I will begin by looking at the Scriptural foundations of multiculturalism, followed by the Canadian Church experience with multiculturalism, and, finally, the Canadian outlook on multiculturalism (2.2.1 to 2.2.3). It is the combination of these three aspects that will prepare me to research the next section on intercultural marriages.

2.2.1 Scriptural Foundation

“God so loved the world” is one of the most recognized verses in the Bible. It can almost always be recited by anyone who hears the words “John 3:16”. The love for the world, or all people of the world along with the entire creation, is a very broad statement which conveyed God’s commitment to everyone, regardless of their race or culture. This love is clearly portrayed by God to all humans since the beginning of time.

After the flood and the safe deliverance of Noah and his family, people wanted to build a city and a tower whose top would have reached to heaven (Genesis 11:4). Until this time, people had spoken the same language, but God then caused their languages to be confused, so that they would not understand one another, and all the people were scattered over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:9). The stories of the flood and of the Tower of Babel have been brought together in order for each to shed light on the other. The end of the flood narrative suggests that the sons of Noah lived together in brotherly love, fulfilling God’s command to fill the earth and subdue it. In actuality, however, while God wanted humans to fill the earth, he also desired to keep for Himself an everlasting mention among the nations. It is in Babel that God confuses human speech, so that the descendants of Noah can no
longer live together, and, thus, under God’s judgment, many different cultures and nations were created.  

One prevailing theme in the Old Testament is the portrayal of God as the exclusive protector of and provider for the nation of Israel. Yet, in several instances, the Lord shows that He provides, loves, and cares for all nations just as much as for Israel. Bowen, for example, lists many interactions between God and gentiles which confirm their appreciation for His power, as well as God’s acceptance of them. Some of these examples include the story of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, who confesses that the Lord is greater than all other gods (Exodus 18:11); Rahab the prostitute, who confesses that the Lord is God in heaven above and in earth below (Joshua 2:8-11); and Ruth, who was a great example of a gentile who chose to belong to God’s family and who was made grandmother of David the prophet as a result of her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Others in the Old Testament were clearly affected by God’s ultimate power over their lives including the Queen of Sheba (2 Chronicles 9:1-8), Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:15-19), and the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4). And it was Micah who prophesied about the nations returning to the Lord, saying:

Many nations shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD. To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:2)

In the New Testament, even though Christ started out His ministry searching for the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6), His ministry later included several loving interactions with gentiles, which portrayed God’s acceptance of all humans. He treated the Samaritan woman with dignity (John 4:1-42), commended the faith of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), and granted the Centurion’s request to heal his servant (Matthew 8:5-13). As the Church started to spread among the Hellenic culture and to the ends of the earth, the apostle Paul taught that there would be no more distinction between Jew and Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Finally, the Book of Revelation

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offers a beautiful, multicultural image of heaven, in which people of all nations, tribes, and tongues are standing before the throne of God dressed in white robes (Revelations 7:9). This image provides a model for Christians living in modern times, which the Church should continue to pursue.

Despite the Old Testament focus on God’s dealings with the nation of Israel, we also see that God’s love towards all humanity led him to create everyone in His own image and likeness and to actively pursue a relationship with each of them. God’s ultimate will was revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who declared God’s love to the whole world and told everyone that salvation is now available to anyone who believes in Him.

### 2.2.2 Canadian Church Experience

Having explored God’s love and acceptance of all humans as portrayed in the Scriptures, I now turn to discuss the experience of several contemporary Canadian Christian Churches in dealing with multiculturalism and the need to look beyond the limitation of race and ethnicity. Many denominations and congregations have been enriched through their ministry to members of different ethnic groups and through opening their doors to other languages and traditions. The Canadian experience with multicultural ministry is paramount to understanding God’s intention for the whole creation to bind together as one.

For centuries, many Church communities were segregated along racial or ethnic lines, and some individual members felt comfortable with this separation. As immigrant communities arrived in Canada, they continued to segregate themselves by establishing ethnic churches to preserve their heritage, culture, and language. Nevertheless, as a result of world missions, one can encounter third, fifth, or even twenty-fifth-generation Christians from all parts of the world, and most denominations are no longer defined by race.84 As they immigrated to Canada, some churches were faced with a choice: to remain ethnocentric, primarily ministering to the immigrant community and preserving their heritage and language, or to become more inclusive and minister to members of different cultures, using a common

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84 Paul Bramadat and David Seljak eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 5.
language, and in the process, losing some aspects of the culture of origin. Within the ministry of the Orthodox Church, I have predominantly experienced the first model, in which the church became a meeting place for new immigrants and a cultural centre, in addition to a place where immigrants could worship in their mother tongue. This model continues to be relevant in the Orthodox Church and is very much needed as a point of first contact for immigrants in the new world. At the same time, as new Canadians begin to settle, make friends, work, play, go to school, and intermarry with various ethnicities, they also experience a need to be together in church to worship and praise God in a common language. Here, we begin to see the emergence of a new, multicultural church that is arising out of the Canadian experience with a distinct culture, tradition, and language, while also remaining true to its roots.

Ronald Kawano, a Korean Anglican priest serving in the Greater Toronto Area, suggests that, especially in metropolitan centres, there is a need to look beyond the traditional ethnic congregation and to make a deliberate move towards forming a multicultural congregation. This new community does not acquire its strength from only one racial group speaking a common language, but from a variety of cultures coming together under one roof. Kawano claims that this new phenomenon could actually save the parish from extinction. He continues by encouraging members of the host community to become intentionally more embracing of and welcoming to their guests in order to create a new inclusive culture of the church. New members often become segregated as a result of differences in cultural practices, unfamiliarity with traditions, and language barriers, or because of their skin colour. The multicultural church must live out God’s command, “When a stranger settles with you in your land, you shall love him like yourself because you were strangers in Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34). This verse reflects the intentional and deliberate acceptance of

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86 For many immigrant Christian Communities, the thought of extinction occupies much of their thought and greatly influences their approach to ministry. The greatest worry is that the Church Community will dissolve into main stream society and lose its original identity.

87 Ibid., 36-37.
others into a church community and promotes the common love which the Lord has extended to His Church.

In a section discussing the emerging multicultural Canadian church, Posterski and Nelson emphasize the necessity of leaders and congregants to be sensitive to the needs of those people from diverse backgrounds.\(^8^{88}\) Serving in a multicultural church requires focusing on what all members share in common in the faith and in Jesus, rather than advancing each individual culture. They make reference to several church communities that have made an intentional effort to become more inclusive and to integrate more ethnic diversity. Willingdon Community Church in Burnaby, British Columbia, for example, has been ministering to diverse congregants for years by providing a simultaneous translation of the service into Korean and has recently added translation into Russian, Japanese, Cantonese, and Mandarin.\(^8^{89}\) The authors claim that future faith churches of the third millennium have the opportunity to become spiritual centres for faith and social care in all communities by ministering inclusively to all their members.

The Orthodox Church has much to observe and learn from the multicultural experience of the Canadian churches. The challenge comes in the way that culture, language, and faith may seem to stand at odds with one another. Yet, it is clear that in the past, the Orthodox Church, as it expanded from one country to another, was able to adapt to local indigenous languages, traditions, and cultures. Now, serious steps must be taken to preserve the Orthodox faith, while communicating it to new believers in a way that they can understand and accept.

### 2.2.3 Canada and Multiculturalism

The context of Canadian multiculturalism will be discussed in this section to portray Canada’s history and commitment to diversity. It is significant here to understand Canada’s stance on the subject to be able to exist as a Church within the framework of our country and uphold one of its most precious foundational values. Understanding Canadian culture will

\(^8^{88}\) Posterski and Nelson, *Future Faith Churches*, 151.

\(^8^{89}\) Ibid., 152.
give the Church a point of contact with the surrounding world and make it to connect with members of the greater community.

Canada is admired around the world for its diversity and for policies that celebrate its cultural mosaic, while allowing different ethnic groups to retain their inherited values. Fleras and Elliot define multiculturalism as:

An official doctrine and corresponding set of policies and practices in which ethnoracial differences are formally promoted and incorporated as an integral component of the political, social, and symbolic order.

There are three manifestations of multiculturalism which are prominent in Canadian culture today. First, multiculturalism emerges from the formula of the original Canadian constitution in 1867, which mandated the preservation of the English and French languages and cultures, as well as the protection of the rights of Aboriginal groups. Second, Pierre Trudeau’s 1971 declaration officially acknowledged and celebrated the contributions of various ethnic groups that immigrated to Canada and contributed to its cultural diversity. Third, a stretch of the definition of culture to include women, visible minorities, and people of special interests has also contributed to the current understanding of multiculturalism. There is a distinction between a pluralistic society and a truly multicultural one. A pluralistic society is one which merely tolerates the presence of different groups, but does little to honour them. While the presence of various ethnic groups can be observed in many countries, a society should not consider itself truly multicultural unless there is a sharing of power, as well as the recognition of their individual contributions to mainstream society.

Canada is seen as a safe haven to persons of all races and traditions, who continue to flourish in an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. Because of its official laws, as well as the efforts of its citizens, Canadian society is a fertile ground to enrich multiculturalism.

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90 Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot, Engaging Diversity: Multiculturalism in Canada (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 2002), 17.

91 Ibid., 22.


93 Ibid., 76.
The question remains whether the Church should be living by the same standards as the secular society. It could be observed that Canadians are, to a great extent, practising what should have been the Church’s mandate in becoming a welcoming and safe environment to persons who seek refuge in it. For this reason, the Church must take note and learn from what has made the Canadian society successful in embracing multiculturalism. The Church must become a safe haven to everyone who desires to take shelter under her wings and find acceptance and grace in being welcomed with open arms.

2.3 Intercultural Marriages (ICM)

Having explored multiculturalism as found in Scriptures, the Canadian Church, and Society, I will now turn my focus to intercultural marriages (ICM). In this section, I will explore the history and understanding of ICM within God’s community, throughout Scriptures (2.3.1 to 2.3.2) and in modern practice (2.3.3). The interest that I have taken in my research has been greatly influenced by my understanding of the topic to be discussed in this section.

2.3.1 Of All Nations

The discussion of ICM must begin with an overview of Scriptures and how God has dealt with unions between His people and other nations. God created all humans in His image and likeness, but some have fallen into idolatry and the worship of gods made with human hands. While God has maintained His commitment to all creation, marriage with the nations has introduced the worship of other gods, which was completely rejected by God. Nevertheless, God’s arms embraced marriages with the nations who were willing to reject their deities and worship Him exclusively.

The Old Testament includes references to many individuals who marry from within their ethnic group and to others who find spouses outside. Joseph, who was an immigrant to Egypt and a Hebrew, was married to Asenath, the daughter of a pagan priest called Potipherah (Genesis 41:45). Joseph had two sons with Asenath, named Manasseh and Ephraim, who were counted among the household of Jacob (Genesis 46:27). Moses married twice, first to Zipporah, the daughter of the priest of Midian, who bore for Moses two sons named
Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 2:16-22, 18:4), and later to an Ethiopian woman. When Aaron and Miriam doubted his prophetic gift because of his union with a gentile, God reprimanded them and struck Miriam with leprosy (Numbers 12:1-13). King David had multiple children from different wives (2 Samuel 3:2-5). Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel brought the Sidonian gods Baal and Asherah to Samaria (1 Kings 16:32-33), and, as a result of Jehoram’s marriage to Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah, a temple for Baal was erected in Jerusalem (2 Kings 8:18; 11:1).

God clearly commanded the Hebrew children not to marry from the people of the land of Canaan because of the possibility that they would turn their hearts against God’s worship or conform to gentile religious practices and begin to offer sacrifices to the idols and join in their praise. This act of serving other gods would arouse God’s anger, and disciplinary actions would follow (Exodus 34:16, Deuteronomy 7:3, 4). It was apparent that Solomon did not heed God’s commandments, but instead intermarried from among the forbidden nations. Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-3). As a result of Solomon’s disloyalty to God’s statutes, demonstrated by his worship of idols, his kingdom was torn apart and given to his servant. Solomon’s actions constitute clear disobedience of God’s commandment forbidding the Hebrews from intermarrying from the nations, as stated in the “herem regulations” of Deuteronomy 7:3-4 which say, “Do not marry them; do not give your daughter to his son and do not take his daughter for your son, for he will turn away your son from me and worship other gods.”94

After Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah noticed that many people had married from among the nations, to the point where their children could not speak the language of Judah. Nehemiah reminded the people of how Solomon’s wives had turned away his heart from worshiping God and caused him to fall into idolatry. He warned them against marrying pagan women and insisted that they should not create confusion between religions and languages for their children (Nehemiah 13:23-28). The reason for Nehemiah’s anger about union with other nations is obvious given the fact that it was clearly against

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God’s commandment (Exodus 34:16), but also that it came from the pagan rituals which might have been adopted by the Hebrew children. Such practices included the Ammonites’ worship of the god Molech and the Moabites’ worship of Chemosh, which involved the sacrificing of children (2 Kings 3:27). Nehemiah first observed the pagan influence in the speech of children, since the mothers naturally taught their children to speak the language they knew. Nehemiah was even more concerned at the idea that if mothers indeed taught their children their foreign language, they were also more likely to pass on their practices of idol worship. This would ultimately cause the Hebrew children to lose their identity. It is evident, then, that God accepted marriage from the nations, as long as there was no breach of the covenants established with their forefathers. In a similar manner, the Church today must be equipped to welcome intercultural marriages and provide a sufficient pastoral ministry that would nourish these unions, as long as they are united in the faith and acceptable by the church canons governing marriage.

2.3.2 A Distinguished Opinion

Following the discussion from Scriptures on God’s acceptance of marriage from the nations, given that they are willing to abandon their worship, I now give an example of a Church theologian who considered the subject of ICM and expressed his strong opinion. St. John Chrysostom made a deliberate statement concerning ICM in his twelfth homily on Colossians 4:18. This statement, which has been regarded as normative in the Orthodox Church, was made by this saint many centuries before it became a significant topic for debate and discussion. These words are seen as progressive and spiritual and hold a great weight when discussing ICM.

He instructs parents who are marrying their daughters to look for a husband who possesses spiritual virtues, rather than finances or prestige, and also teaches them not to care about the husband’s ethnicity, but rather to accept someone who will love and respect their daughter. He said:

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When your daughter is to be married, don’t look for how much money a man has. Don’t worry about his nationality or his family’s social position. All these things are superfluous. Look instead for piety, gentleness, wisdom, and the fear of the Lord, if you want your daughter to be happy.  

This passage, therefore, offers evidence that early Church traditions taught the family that, when choosing a life partner for their daughter, they should not discriminate based on his nationality or socio-economic status, for these criteria are superficial. Rather, they should look to the person’s love of God and how he will treat their daughter. These statements advance our discussion of God’s acceptance of ICM and further support the present need to minister to these families and their children, in the knowledge that they are loved and accepted by God, as well as by the community.

2.3.3 A Contemporary Outlook

Having considered ICM from a scriptural as well as a patristic perspective, I will now turn to reflect on the subject from a contemporary outlook. There are many modern researchers who have taken notice of the increasing phenomenon of ICM and have written extensively on it. These opinions are extremely significant as they offer current opinions on my research area. I will begin by defining the terms (2.3.3.1), then consider the increasing phenomenon of ICM (2.3.3.2), and look at some challenges facing ICM (2.3.3.3), before concluding this section (2.3.3.4).

2.3.3.1 Defining the Terms

Over the course of my studies, I have come across many terms that may be used to describe the kind of marriage that I wish to research, including intercultural, interracial, interethnic, and mixed. Wehrly, Kenny, and Kenny, who have written extensively on the subject of multiracial families, suggest that in the field of psychology there is no agreement on how to accurately define and distinguish between ethnicity, culture, and race. They attempt, however, to consider the use of each of these terms in this way:

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Ethnicity refers to a group’s characteristics with regards to food, work, relationships, celebrations and rituals that separate them from the larger society … while culture is seen as all of the learned behaviours, beliefs, norms, and values that are held by a group of people and passed on from older members to newer members, at least in part to preserve the group … race is generally seen as the physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture, and features that may still be used to identify or create the marginalized status of some people in society. 

In an attempt to consider the use of these terms as related to marriage, Albert Gordon notes that:

Interrace marriage is generally applied to those married persons whose religious, racial, or ethnic background is or was different from each other’s, either prior to or after their marriage. Even if the marriage partners differ from each other in only one of these three categories, they may be said to be intermarried.

Overall, a successful intercultural marriage can be described as:

a process in which two persons learn to live together and adjust to each other in order to work toward common goals and achievements. When persons of different cultural backgrounds marry, because of the cultural factor their difficulties in adjusting to one another are far greater than for couples of the same culture … the success of a marriage means that both husband and wife are well-integrated, working with each other harmoniously for the mutual satisfaction and achievement of common objectives.

For the purpose of my research, I have chosen to define the term ‘intercultural marriage’ as the union between a man and a woman, one of whom is of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian heritage, while the other is Canadian of any other racial, ethnic, or cultural background or heritage. I have chosen to use the word intercultural as opposed to interracial for two main reasons - first, to go along with Canada’s vision of being a multicultural society, and, second, to avoid the negative cultural connotations, including the issues of racism and discrimination, that come along with the use of the word ‘race’. On some occasions, however, I may use the terms intercultural, interracial, interethnic, and cross-cultural

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99 Ibid., 93.
marriages interchangeably to refer to the group of individuals that I am engaging in my research.

### 2.3.3.2 An Increasing Phenomenon

Over the past five decades, the rate of intermarriage has increased in most of the world’s societies, cultures, and religions.\(^{100}\) A report from Statistics Canada, based on a study conducted in 2006, stated that interracial marriages have become increasingly common in Canada.\(^{101}\) According to the report, the number of mixed race couples in Canada was 289,420 in 2006 – one third more than in 2001, the last time the data was collected. The study described this trend toward unions with members of other ethnicities as a clear indication that Canadians are overcoming racial and cultural barriers.

Since the mid-twentieth century, intermarriage has become more socially acceptable in many parts of the world, as attitudes and laws have changed substantially. The story of interracial marriage in the U.S., which was previously outlawed in many states, is a part of American history. In 1958, a white man, Richard Loving, was arrested and asked to leave the state of Virginia when he brought home his black wife, Mildred Jeter. The Lovings did not yield to the state laws, but fought the ruling all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. After nine years, the court ruled in their favour and all laws against intermarriage were pronounced unconstitutional.\(^{102}\) This ruling was a historical landmark, not only in the United States but in other countries around the world that set a precedent of a new dawn for accepting ICM.

Dugan Romano’s book, *Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls*, includes the most up-to-date research on the subject of intermarriage. Romano suggests that there are several factors contributing to this phenomenon, including the increase in international travel,

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technological advancements, the breakdown of traditional social restrictions, and shared world views.  

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Char discusses several other motivations that may lead to an individual becoming involved in an intercultural relationship. These reasons may include love, chance or availability, as well as the desire to escape certain circumstances, parents’ influence, and beliefs about other cultures. In addition, Kannan discusses the general trend towards indifference to religion and the elimination of religious differences as another possible reason for the apparent increase in intercultural marriages. In my own culture, the belief that people should marry from within their own culture and religion was common, and this practice was encouraged; only after moving to Canada did I begin to see an alternative perspective in the general culture and in the Church. Interacting with intercultural families helped me to understand God’s acceptance and grace, which have been extended to all of humanity.

2.3.3.3 Challenges Facing ICM

Theorists have argued that the challenges facing intercultural couples are greater than those faced by couples who share the same culture and religion. Romano, for example, dismisses the claim that love is the only basic ingredient of a successful marriage or that one should focus only on the commonalities between the spouses. He explains that while similar challenges may face any couple, the degree to which these challenges are experienced may be extreme, dramatic, and magnified as a result of cultural differences. Romano discusses a list of potential trouble spots which ICM may face, including values, food and drink, sex, gender roles, place of residence, religion, in-laws, language, raising children, ethnocentrism,

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and coping with death and divorce.\textsuperscript{107} I will focus here on the influence of denominational affiliation, beliefs about raising children, and the role of in-laws in the relationship, as these themes constitute a major component of my research (2.3.3.3.1 to 2.3.3.3.3).

\textbf{2.3.3.3.1 Interdenominational Marriages (IDM)}

I will begin by a discussion of the influence of denominational affiliation on couples in an ICM. While inter-religious marriage could be seen as a major factor affecting ICMs in general, I discovered through my research that all couples that I interviewed were married to Christian spouses. Thus, I will not discuss any challenges of inter-religious marriages, since this subject is not relevant to my research. Nevertheless, I noticed that inter-denominational marriage was a significant factor for the couples who participated in this research, and, thus, this subject will be discussed here in some detail.

The discussion about IDM has occupied a major portion of the ecumenical movement in the past few decades. For centuries, the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches has prevented marriages between different denominations. In 451 AD, the Church witnessed its first schism between the Oriental Orthodox and the Catholic Church due to doctrinal differences in the Council of Chalcedon concerning the divinity of Christ.\textsuperscript{108} Anathemas were pronounced from both sides, preventing one another from fellowship and the recognition of sacraments. Over the course of history, the Church experienced more schisms, which saw the split in the eleventh century of the Eastern Orthodox from the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation, which occurred in the sixteenth century. From the enlightenment age in the seventeenth century to the modern and postmodern ages in the second half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, the Church saw more denominational and non-denominational churches being formed with a variety of doctrines and traditions. While all Christian denominations maintained their faith in one God, the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, inspiration of Scriptures, and belief in eternal


\textsuperscript{108} For complete details about the Council of Chalcedon, one may consult: Tadros Y. Malaty, \textit{Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church}, 74-84.
life, yet many doctrines, traditions, and practices were considerably different. Here, I will list only a few theological and doctrinal differences which have been the centre of dialogue over the centuries between the Orthodox Church and other denominations. These differences are (but are not limited to) the understanding of the Sacraments, the Filioque controversy, belief about Virgin Mary, role of clergy, Tradition, understanding of salvation, purgatory, infallibility of the pope, indulgences, incense, speaking in tongues, and fasting. It is not the place here to enter into a theological debate or to explain the significance of each doctrine and which one the Orthodox Church agrees or disagrees with. Yet, it is important to point out that because of these and other doctrinal differences, churches have not been one in faith or in full communion for centuries and thus have not recognized each other’s sacraments or mysteries. In these differences, we find the roots of the reason that the Coptic Church only marries couples who are of the same religion and denomination to ensure the unity of faith and doctrine in a household. The Church sees that as the couple becomes one in spirit through the mystery of matrimony, they must also become one in faith. While some might deem that these theological or doctrinal differences are insignificant and that denominations must now fully recognize each other’s sacraments in the spirit of ecumenism, yet, this is a decision that is only made by the Holy Synod of the Church when unity is achieved and all anathemas have been removed from all sides.

Here, we must recognize the difference between a schismatic church and a heretical church. A schismatic church is seen as one where certain divisions have occurred due to differences in the faith, but they have maintained their belief in the Holy Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ’s divinity, an unaltered version of the Scriptures, and faith in eternal life. On the other hand, heretical Churches, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, are ones that have denied the Holy Trinity, faith in the Lord’s divinity, have a unique translation of the Holy Bible, and have a different opinion about the afterlife. The latter Churches are not considered Christian, and marriage with their members is absolutely rejected.

109 This explanation was offered by H.G. Bishop Youssef, bishop of Southern United States, in a phone conversation on February 11, 2011.
Ever since the establishment of the World Council of Churches, Christians of all denominations have been in dialogue with one another and created many successful parameters of love and mutual respect. Because of this ecumenical movement, some local agreements have been made between denominations to recognize one another’s sacrament of matrimony. For example, the Coptic Church signed an agreement with the Greek Church in Alexandria regarding mixed marriages, recognizing one another’s baptism and sacrament of matrimony.\footnote{http://www.orthodox.net/ecumenism/pastoral-agreement-regarding-sacrament-of-matrimony-patriarchate-of-alexandria-coptic-church-2001-04-06.html (accessed on February 11, 2011).} Also, the Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Churches in the USA have made a local agreement with the Catholic Church to recognize each other’s baptism, and, thus, individuals may be married in either Church without the need to convert.\footnote{Kochakian and Meno, \textit{Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Interchurch Marriages: and Other Pastoral Relationships}, 13.} Through this ongoing ecumenical dialogue, there is hope that one day full communion between all Christian denominations will be reached and all sacraments recognized.

\textbf{2.3.3.3.2 Impact of Family and In-laws}

I will now consider the impact of the family and in-laws as a considerable factor when deciding to intermarry. Many cultures and religions around the world insist on marriage from within their community (i.e. endogamous marriage), and if a community member fails to meet this requirement, it is a source of shame and disgrace for the family. In certain circumstances, the family considers the member who converts or intermarries to be dead, and the person is no longer welcome in their midst. Even if the consequences are not so severe, the members are still considered to be betraying their community, and their spouses are not completely welcomed and assimilated into the family. Kim, an American Presbyterian, remembers when she first met Jeff’s Jewish family and how they reacted to her. She recalls that his entire family started to laugh at his brother’s comment, “Well, at least she’s not (colour).”\footnote{Jane Kaplan, \textit{Interfaith Families} (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers), 5.} She also mentions that she needed a long time to come to understand the family’s culture, customs, and traditions. Even after many years, she still felt
like an outsider, as they never fully embraced her as a member of the family. Thus, considering a spouse’s family dynamic and culture is one of the most important factors that could influence a marriage. The way that they look at other ethnicities could be a hindrance or an encouragement to a relationship. This finding will be seen to be true of my own research in chapter four.

2.3.3.3 Raising Children

Raising children represents another major challenge to the success of intercultural couples. Romano notes that many discussions revolve around the identity of the children, which religion they will follow, whether they will be taught both cultures (and languages), who their friends will be, and how society will see them. At the present time, living in cosmopolitan cities in North America does not pose as serious a threat to bi-cultural children as it does in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is extremely significant that a couple discusses how culture will influence their relationship, as well as the way that they will raise their children. This topic will be expanded upon in my analysis chapter to consider some of the challenges and strengths in raising cross-cultural children.

2.3.3.4 Summary

Evidence has shown that intercultural marriages have their own unique challenges which each couple must face. In some sense, extra difficulties will be faced in a multicultural union, but with love, understanding, and perseverance, these challenges can also be conquered. While religious or denominational affiliation is a major factor in the decision to intermarrry, many other bridges must also be crossed before a relationship can flourish. Couples must fully understand the venture on which they are embarking and be ready to face each challenge with maturity and wisdom.

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2.4 Teaching in Practice on Some Related Matters

In this section, I will discuss some matters which are related to Orthodox marriage and that play a significant role in the overall understanding of this sacrament. The basic knowledge of these subjects will help me to expand my awareness and to have a practical understanding of other choices surrounding marriage which are faced by Orthodox Christians in the GTA. Here, I will present the basic faith of the Orthodox Church on these subjects, with an understanding of the mosaic of opinions and teachings that may be presently under discussion in our modern culture. I will briefly speak about celibacy, divorce, separation, cohabitation, remarriage, and homosexual unions (2.4.1 to 2.4.6).

2.4.1 Celibacy

Celibacy is highly esteemed in the Coptic Orthodox Church because of the influence of the Holy Scriptures, as well as the writings of the early Church theologians. St. Paul wrote, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman … Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage” (1 Corinthians 7:1, 27). These verses have been foundational for the encouragement and practice of celibacy in the Coptic Church.\textsuperscript{114} While some Copts chose a life of celibacy, yet, marriage was still treated with honour and respect. Even when some extreme thoughts rose in the first few centuries to call for all Christians to abstain from marriage and live a life of celibacy, the Church theologians quickly refuted these thoughts and defended marriage alongside the life of celibacy. On one occasion, a heresy arose proclaiming that since Christ was not married, that marriage was not blessed by God, is evil, and that everyone should be celibate.\textsuperscript{115} Nevertheless, St. Clement\textsuperscript{116} answered this heresy by saying:

\begin{quote}
In the first place, He (Christ) had His own bride, the Church, and in the next place He was no ordinary man that He should also be in need of some helpmate after the
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{115} Wahba, \textit{Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius}, 104.

\textsuperscript{116} St. Clement of Alexandria (150 A.D. – 215 A.D.) was called the father of the Christian philosophy of Alexandria. He also became dean of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. He is a renowned theologian and teacher, who is acknowledged by most Christians around the world.
flesh. Nor was it necessary for Him to beget children, since He abides eternally and was born the only Son of God.\textsuperscript{117}

St. Clement continues his teaching by stressing that there is nothing praiseworthy about abstinence from marriage, unless “it arises from love to God and true chastity as a gift of God’s grace.”\textsuperscript{118}

After the end of the persecution era in the early fourth century, Copts started the monastic movement by voluntarily giving their lives for the Lord and living in celibacy. Their sole goal was to prepare themselves for the Eternal Kingdom, while still living on earth. This vision gave the Copts a new way of living on earth, while trying to experience heaven apart from any marital relationship. The yearning to forsake the world with all its desires and become joined with the saviour became the launching point of a new way of living. St. Anthony the Great became the leader of the monastic movement in the world. Also, St. Paul of Thebes became known as the first pilgrim living in the desert. St. Pachomius, the father of fellowship, founded the communal living in the southern desert and also established two convents for nuns. St. Macarius the Great was the founder of the communal living of monks in the northern desert of Scetis.\textsuperscript{119} This monastic movement contributed to the overall praise of celibacy and the life of consecration in the Orthodox Church.

Currently, all Coptic bishops are chosen from among the monks, and many celibate priests are also in the ministry. There are many women who consecrate their lives and become nuns, worshipping God in many convents. It is worthy to note that celibacy is not only for monks and nuns, but there are many persons living outside of monasteries and convents who have consecrated their lives for Christ and are serving Him in different capacities. Because of the ascetic teachings of the early Church theologians and the monastic movement that started in the Egyptian deserts, celibacy is still viewed as an angelic way of living and is greatly encouraged. Nonetheless, both celibates and married people constitute part of God’s plan in the Heavenly Kingdom. This has been confirmed in these words of St. John

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{117} Wahba, \textit{Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius}, 104.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 106.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Malaty, \textit{Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church}, 49-55.
\end{itemize}
Chrysostom: “So whether we presently live in virginity or in our marriage, let us pursue holiness that we may be counted worthy to see Him and to attain the Kingdom of Heaven.”

2.4.2 Divorce

Throughout the ages, and in many cultures and religions, the issue of divorce has been a subject of constant contention. In the Old Testament, a man was able to divorce his wife by simply giving her a bill of divorce, dating it, having it signed by two witnesses, and delivering it to her. The Jewish rabbinic school of Shammai taught an interpretation of the text in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which offered the grounds on which a husband could divorce his wife as, “A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her.”

The Orthodox Church relies primarily on the encounter described in Matthew 19:1-10, in which the Pharisees ask Christ about the doctrine of divorce. Christ speaks about the beginning, when God made one woman and one man and joined them together, then provides a description within the New Testament of when divorce could be permitted, saying that “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (v.9). In this passage, as well as in Mark 10:1-12, Christ discusses the moral obligation not to divorce. He makes a distinction between the absolute will of God for the couple, that God has united to always remain together, and the sinfulness of humans who are hardened in their hearts and who divorce as a result of their inability to fulfill God’s absolute will.

In the early church, it was inevitable that some members of a household were converted to Christianity while others remained in their old religions. This caused concern among the early converts that some members were seeking divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Paul the apostle told the congregation at Corinth that believers should remain with the unbelieving

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120 Roth and Anderson, trans., *St. John Chrysostom On Marriage and Family Life*, 42.
122 Ibid., 183.
spouse, unless she/he asks to depart, and that only then would there be no obligation to remain together.

The Church also allows divorce if one partner converts to another religion or denounces Orthodoxy. This practice is justified by the concept of *spiritual adultery*, meaning that the person has broken the sacredness of the sacrament through betrayal, either to God or to the spouse. In this case, only the spouse who has not committed physical or spiritual adultery may be granted permission to remarry in the Church.

Most Orthodox Christians enter into marriage with the full knowledge that it is an everlasting bond. When a couple makes the decision to divorce, it is usually due to extreme cases of infidelity, abuse, or major irreconcilable differences. The Church continues to counsel the couple throughout their marriage to try to resolve any problems before it gets to the divorce court. The Church also may continue to offer pastoral care for the couple, even if they end up legally divorced.

### 2.4.3 Separation

Separation is generally not encouraged in the Coptic Church. In some cases, however, if, after a long period of counselling, couples come to the conclusion that they can no longer live together, the Church may allow them to separate, as long as they do not remarry. This permission is granted based on the teaching in the Pauline epistle:

> Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

The decision to separate is usually extremely difficult to make because of its future implications on the couple and on the children, if there are any. There is a loss of emotional support and a chance for the couple to be tempted and fall into sin. Separation might be a good solution at times, in extreme cases of abuse. The Church always recommends counselling and spiritual mentorship prior to making any major decisions that may affect the marriage.
2.4.4 Cohabitation

Cohabitation can be defined as “two adults of different sexes living under marriage-like conditions in a common household and without having officially legitimized their relationship through marriage.”\(^{123}\) The rejection of living together, without being formally married, is rooted in the Church’s doctrine that a conjugal relationship should only exist between a couple following the blessing of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Cohabitation is thus seen as an act of fornication, which is despised by God. As the apostle Paul writes, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The Church therefore makes no distinction between a monogamous couple who live together before marriage and a promiscuous person with many different partners.

Some couples may choose to cohabit for various reasons, including having a period in a non-committed relationship to check their compatibility, fear of long term commitment, a trial period (which may ultimately lead to marriage), or economic or financial concerns. Couples believe that they want to discover each other’s habits, especially of hygiene, sleeping, cleanliness, and day-to-day living prior to commitment. While these reasons may seem convincing, nevertheless, from a Church perspective, the relationship has not been formally blessed by God, and thus the couple cannot celebrate their unity. There are other options which could be suggested to answer one’s concerns without physically living together before marriage such as open dialogue, family house visits, and socializing with friends.

2.4.5 Remarriage

The Coptic Orthodox Church has a strict rule concerning remarriage, which allows only widows, widowers, and persons who have acquired an official remarriage certificate after divorce to marry in an Orthodox ceremony. A remarriage certificate would be acquired from the Council for Marital Affairs, which studies each case individually to determine which

partner qualifies to receive it. The partner who commits adultery, changes religion, or denounces Orthodoxy is not permitted to remarry in the Church.

While, in general, the Church prefers that one not remarry, she does not forbid remarriage, assuming that Church rules approve of the couples who are remarrying. St Ambrose said, “We do not prohibit second marriage, but we do not advise it.” 124 There are some restrictions set on remarriage which include not marrying the sibling of a deceased spouse or someone who may confuse the genealogy, such as an uncle or an aunt.

In 2010, the Supreme Court in Egypt ruled against the Church when it refused to allow a man who had divorced his wife to remarry in the Church. 125 The Church, being represented by H.H. Pope Shenouda III and supported by the entire clergy and laity, banded together to fight that ruling until it was overturned. The Church never stopped the man from marrying in any religious or secular institution, but claimed that it could not change the biblical teaching and canons which forbade remarriage without a proper permission.

2.4.6 Homosexual Unions

The heated discussion on homosexuality and homosexual unions has recently taken centre stage among Churches, which has ultimately caused divisions among denominations and congregations. There are many interpretations that exist in Scriptures dealing with homosexuality that are considered either to validate or condemn homosexual unions. On one end of the spectrum, individuals may argue that homosexuality is natural and has existed since the beginning of time. Thus, unions come naturally to a normal lifestyle and must be recognized by all. On the other hand, some assert that from the beginning, God created humans male and female and asked them to reproduce and fill the earth (Genesis 1:27, 28). Therefore, the union of two persons of the same gender is unnatural. In Orthodoxy, homosexuality is considered a sin and practising individuals are called to repentance. There are several passages in the bible that condemn homosexuality, such as Genesis 19:5-8;

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Leviticus 18:22-23; Romans 1:26-27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9. As a result of considering these passages, homosexual unions are neither officiated in the Church, nor recognized. The Coptic Church issued an official statement on August 30, 2003, denouncing homosexuality, the ordination of homosexuals, and same-sex marriages. This statement included a biblical hermeneutic and the following justification of why the Church rejected it:

These movements not only contradict biblical teachings, but also pose a serious threat to the stability of the family unit, the morals of society, the purity of the Church, and the future of ecumenical unity. While we condemn homosexuality, we invite those who are under this sin to repent out of concern for their eternal lives.126

The discussion on homosexuality and homosexual unions is never a simple one because of the complexity of the subject and the diversity of opinions that exists, either to support or denounce it. It also raises the question if there is a distinction between homosexual desire and homosexual practice. Also, how does the Church react to celibate homosexuals? There might not be an easy answer, but, generally, the Church recommends repentance from any carnal desire, whether homosexual or heterosexual, and a call for abstinence and celibacy for homosexuals. Here, it is vital that the Church approaches this subject with the utmost sensitivity and respect, while refraining from any insulting or homophobic comments. God’s unconditional love must be extended to everyone, without distinction.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical foundation upon which my research is grounded. In it, I have considered the four main pillars upon which my research is based. I started by exploring the Orthodox understanding of marriage, which is foundational to my research. Orthodox marriage is seen as a blessed sacrament in the Church which is sealed and preserved by God. Second, the knowledge of multiculturalism in the Scriptures, as well as in Canadian church and society, was foundational in understanding the current context which Orthodox Christians experience their marriages. Next, the study of intercultural marriages revealed biblical and social perspectives which are currently in dialogue. God has loved the

world and created all humans in His image. He rejects idolatry and wishes for His children to be united under His name. As part of the ecumenical movement, some denominations are starting to recognize one another’s sacraments. This current dialogue must continue in order to reach full denominational communion. Finally, the discussion on teaching in practice on some related matters to marriage was essential to realize the Church’s official opinion on them. It was necessary to recognize the complexity of these subjects being discussed, but also to venture into them with sensitivity and respect. Having concluded this discussion, I now turn to the next chapter which will explore the methods utilized in my research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In this chapter, I will lay out the methods that were used in researching and writing this thesis. I will begin by identifying the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research (3.1) and then explain the analytical approach that I have taken to the qualitative tradition, phenomenology, and, specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology (3.2 to 3.4). I will then discuss the connections between hermeneutic phenomenology and my pastoral ministry, which are of major significance to this thesis (3.5). Finally, I will go into more detail about the research process, including the strategy, data collection, data analysis, and writing the final narrative (3.6 to 3.9).

3.1 The Qualitative Research Methodology Operative in the Analysis

In this research, I have employed qualitative research methodology, since this method is the most suitable for inquiring about intercultural marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church. In describing the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, Berg notes that “qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. In contrast, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things.” 127 Creswell further emphasizes the advantages of qualitative research, stating that:

It begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem … the final written report includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. 128

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There is a clear distinction in interviewing styles between qualitative and quantitative research. The traditional survey techniques used in quantitative research are not present in qualitative research. Instead, in qualitative research, the researcher prepares “a topic guide, based on open ended questions and techniques which will enable him or her to explore the relevant issues in detail.” Marks identifies several significant functions of the qualitative research method, including: (1) allowing the co-researchers to speak in a language that is meaningful to them and not imposed by the researcher; (2) giving the respondents the ability to voice what matters to them; (3) allowing respondents to express their feelings about issues which they might not normally discuss; (4) permitting a skilled researcher to obtain better insight through observations of facial expressions, body language, and spoken language; and, finally, (5) if the research is conducted in groups, allowing for creative techniques which might not be possible with individuals.

Qualitative research is a means to gain insight and knowledge into a topic that is of interest to the researcher and that may involve, for example, issues of gender, culture, and the concerns of marginalized groups. These topics can be filled with emotion, directly related to people’s daily lives, and relevant. Creswell proposes that the researcher should not assume the role of the expert, but rather ask open-ended questions in order to allow the respondents to express their true emotions and feelings in their responses. He suggests that the questions might change through the research process to reflect an increased understanding of the problem. In the case of this study, hearing the concerns and challenges that members of my community have experienced in the past, becoming better acquainted with them, and working to figure out practical solutions to deal with them in the future were all extremely significant components of the research. Creswell’s suggestion of a

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130 Ibid., viii.


132 Ibid., 19.
future call for action in the final report has crucial implications for my future ministry, and possibly for the ministry of the entire Coptic Orthodox Church.

In general, the design of a qualitative research project should proceed in this order: (1) presenting the problem, (2) asking a question, (3) collecting data to answer the question, (4) analyzing this data, and (5) answering the question.\footnote{Creswell, \textit{Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design}, 18.} This method then usually results in the traditional five chapter dissertation.\footnote{Ibid., 19.} In this case, the order of the five chapters is Theology of Ministry, Exploring Intercultural Marriages, Methods, Analysis and Conclusions.

\section*{3.2 Phenomenological Research}

Creswell identifies five different traditions within qualitative research: (1) biography, (2) phenomenology, (3) grounded theory, (4) ethnography, and (5) case study.\footnote{Ibid., 27.} I have chosen phenomenological research as the guiding principle of my qualitative research inquiry. Phenomenology is derived from two Greek words: \textit{phainomenon} (an “appearance”) and \textit{logos} (“reason” or “word”, and hence, “reasoned inquiry”). Phenomenology is thus “a reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essences of appearances.”\footnote{David Stewart and Algis Mickunas, \textit{Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and Its Literature, Second Edition}, (Athens, USA: Ohio University Press, 2000), 3.} Stewart and Mickunas further define \textit{appearance} as follows:

\begin{quote}
An appearance is anything of which one is conscious. Anything at all which appears to consciousness is a legitimate area of philosophical investigation. Moreover, an appearance is a manifestation of the essence of that of which it is the appearance.\footnote{Ibid., 3.}
\end{quote}

Creswell notes that phenomenology has its roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who emphasized the intentionality of consciousness in experiences that “contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on
memory, image, and meaning.” Husserl’s theoretical understanding can be divided into four distinct phases leading up to the contemporary understanding of his work. He first investigated the foundations of logic in terms of psychology. This unsuccessful attempt at explaining this phenomenon led him to the second phase, during which he developed the method known as phenomenological reduction. The third phase was an attempt to create a science, or eidetic phenomenology, emerging from his research. When many of his critics were not convinced of the applicability of this method, arguing that it was too idealistic, Hussurl was led to the fourth stage, during which he claimed that phenomenology could most effectively be applied to the lived-world. This world of the ordinary or of immediate experience became the foundation upon which Husserl established his theory.

Phenomenological research investigates questions about:

…common, everyday human experiences … believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena of our time or typical of a group of people and transitions that are common or of contemporary interest … The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it.

Creswell defines phenomenological study as “describing the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” Creswell further describes phenomenology as:

… an approach to studying the problem that includes entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the participants’ experiences.

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138 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 52.


141 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 57.

142 Ibid., 31.
3.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology – Researching Lived Experience

Max van Manen is a leading researcher and author on the topic of hermeneutic phenomenology and researching lived experience. He describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology made up of the interplay between the two terms in its name:

It is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear; it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) “facts” of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the “facts” of lived experience need to be captured in language and this is inevitably an interpretive process.\(^{143}\)

Van Manen’s presentation of the theory of hermeneutic phenomenology is grounded in three philosophical assumptions. First, the lifeworld, which is the world of everyday life experience, is existential, which means that it shows specific encompassing structures which can be studied and which can reveal meaning.\(^{144}\) Second, this lifeworld obtains a lived meaning which refers to “the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful.”\(^{145}\) Third, the everyday life of ordinary consciousness may be understood as ontological, universal, and conversational.\(^{146}\) Since consciousness is the only access that human beings have to the world, whatever does not relate to consciousness falls outside the boundaries of lived experience. Conscious experiences are ontological, meaning that they relate to the being of things or entities,\(^{147}\) because conscious understanding is the marker of being human in the world. This consciousness is universal because it is important


\(^{144}\) Ibid., 182.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 183.

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 9-10.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 183.
for humans to understand their activities, and it is conversational because understanding is always revealed under conversation and dialogue.¹⁴⁸

Lived experience can be understood as the beginning and the end of phenomenological research. The main purpose of phenomenology is to understand the lived experience, to transform it into words, and to grasp its meaning through these interpretations. Thus, Van Manen argues that:

The effect of the text is at once a reflective re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience.¹⁴⁹

Van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological method is best suited for my research because of its descriptive character, which allows the lived experience of co-researchers to speak for itself, and, because it is interpretive, providing a way to search for meaning within this lived experience.

This research focuses on individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of intercultural marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and involves an attempt to describe the essence of this experience and to draw certain conclusions about it. The description of the lived experience includes both “what” individuals have experienced and “how” they have experienced it. Both Creswell and Merriam emphasize the importance of “bracketing” the researcher’s own experiences and taking a fresh perspective of the phenomenon being studied through the eyes and experiences of the participants. Bracketing is described as “the act of suspending one’s various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world.”¹⁵⁰

This research methodology is ideal for this topic because it expresses genuine concern for the needs of my co-researchers and an authentic interest in their lived experiences. It is also

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¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 175.
very closely tied to my Theology of Ministry, which emphasizes concern for individuals and offering pastoral care. Van Manen expresses the dimension of care and service which this research brings by stating:

Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of “intentionality”. In doing research we question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constructive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one’s very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery.\textsuperscript{151}

3.4 Methodological Assumptions

Van Manen suggests that hermeneutic phenomenology can be understood as a dynamic correlation among six different research interests. The following methodical structure is a way to pursue this research and to reduce it to its basic components:\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a.] considering a phenomenon which is of major interest to the researcher;
  \item[b.] investigating experiences as we live them rather than the way we may conceptualize them;
  \item[c.] reflecting on the main themes which may characterize the phenomenon;
  \item[d.] explaining the phenomenon through mastering the art of writing and rewriting;
  \item[e.] keeping a strong and balanced knowledge of the strategies of instruction related to the phenomenon;
  \item[f.] looking at the whole picture and not just segments or parts thereof.
\end{itemize}

Van Manen does not claim that this research methodology guarantees that the researcher will solve all problems or answer all questions. On the contrary, he suggests that researchers should understand the spirit of the methodology rather than following its actual “letter” or order. He observes that one must continue to be sensitive, thoughtful, scholarly, and talented throughout the entire research process.\textsuperscript{153} He thus implies that there is some flexibility and

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{151}] Van Manen, \textit{Researching Lived Experience}, 5-6.
  \item[\textsuperscript{152}] Ibid., 30-31. Also in Ron MacDonald, \textit{The Singer and the Song – The Pastoral Dimension of Singing in the Reformed Roman Catholic Liturgical Rite}, (Toronto, Ontario: University of St. Michael’s College, 2007), 78.
  \item[\textsuperscript{153}] Van Manen, \textit{Researching Lived Experience}, 34.
\end{itemize}
sensitivity involved in pursuing the felt needs of participants. This heightened sensitivity to the needs of co-researchers is extremely significant to my research.

3.5 Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Pastoral Ministry

There is an intimate relationship between the philosophical and methodological assumptions in Van Manen’s theory of research and the pastoral ministry in the Church. This close connection between research and real life, or lived experience, offers the minister a launching point from which to view his ministry. Ron Macdonald offers five ways through which this methodology could strengthen the practice of pastoral ministry, which I have adapted to illustrate their application to my particular research project as follows: ¹⁵⁴

a. Researching couples in intercultural marriages involves an interplay between knowledge and action that confirms the lived experience of co-researchers as a valid source of information demanding pastoral action.

b. Since knowledge emerges from personal lived experience, the relationship between pastoral knowledge and action in dealing with couples in intercultural marriages could be strengthened by “moving toward a personal and lived sense of principled knowledge.”¹⁵⁵

c. As the research is deemed to be closer to a couple’s lived experience, the exercise of transforming those experiences into writing enables the researcher to become more attentive to and involved in the co-researchers’ concerns and requests.

d. As the research progresses, the ongoing dialogue informs the researcher, who thus becomes aware of his or her own stance on the subject under consideration. There is no doubt that being immersed in this research has given me a great deal of new insight into the subject of intercultural marriages.

e. Phenomenological thinking is seen in itself as a form of action research, which involves the researcher personally on behalf of the faith community. Thus, as intercultural marriage is observed as a growing phenomenon within the Coptic community, this research is of great benefit not only to my own ministry base, but also to the entire Coptic community.

3.6 Research Strategy

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to provide the researcher with the means to create a thoughtful description of the phenomenon and a narrative that fully expresses the

¹⁵⁴ MacDonald, *The Singer and the Song*, 82-83.

lived experience from the perspective of the persons who have experienced it. This experience is then interpreted in terms of themes, structures, or meanings. The research strategy is therefore developed according to the following process:

a. The research question is formulated through a series of discussions with the researcher’s thesis supervisor, advisors, and colleagues to ensure that it accurately captures the essence of the desired research target. Through this process, the research question discussed in this thesis has been refined to: In the ever-changing circumstances of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area, I want to research the lived experience of couples who are in intercultural marriages, to discover how the Church has affected these marriages and to identify some successful techniques that the Church Community can use to minister to couples in intercultural marriages.

b. The researcher then conducts a detailed interview with co-researchers who have experienced the phenomenon in order to better understand their lived experience of intercultural marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

c. The researcher conducts enough focus groups and one-on-one interviews until he or she is satisfied that he has reached “saturation” meaning that no new information is heard.

d. The recorded interviews are then transcribed to produce the text which is used to formulate the phenomenological narrative that describes the co-researchers’ lived experience.

e. A detailed data analysis is conducted to determine the essential and incidental themes that reveal how a phenomenon is explored and articulated. In the endeavour to discover the universal or essential themes, the researcher investigates the aspects or qualities which highlight a phenomenon and without which it could not be known as what it is.

f. A phenomenological narrative is then written which incorporates the essential or universal themes identified in the analysis.

g. In a hermeneutical framework, the researcher then interprets the meanings of the narrative by employing a critical conversation of the themes arising in the analysis.

h. The researcher will finally explain how the phenomenological narrative emerging from the critical interpretation of the data has an impact on his or her pastoral ministry and beyond.

3.7 Data Collection

In order to successfully collect data for an emerging research question, one must view the process as a series of connected activities that are all aimed at gathering the best possible

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157 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 32.
information. Creswell calls these interconnected exercises “the circle of activities.”  

This seven-step circle includes locating individuals, gaining access, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and sorting data.

### 3.7.1 The Site or Individual

Creswell begins his circle by locating either a site or individuals (depending on the tradition being discussed) to participate in the research. In phenomenological study, it is most important to locate individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and are able to clearly articulate their lived experience. Choosing the right people for the study is vital, since settling for individuals who are not qualified may compromise the value of the data being collected. Inappropriate individuals may withhold valuable information, provide information that is biased according to what they want the researcher to hear, or have an agenda to make a point or get back at certain individuals.  

### 3.7.2 Access and Rapport

Next, the researcher needs to gain access to and establish rapport with the individuals being sought out as participants. This involves a procedure of submitting a proposal to the Ethics Review Board that outlines the research interest, subjects being studied, potential harm or risks involved, and the timeline for the proposed completion of the project. The proposal must include an appendix to be reviewed by the participants which includes a clear description of the research project, their role, the right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without any implications, a guarantee that protects the confidentiality of the respondents, a statement about known risks, and the expected benefits of the research. The Ethics Review Board granted approval for my Protocol Submission Reference #23624 on January 30, 2009, an extension on January 30, 2010 and another on January 30, 2011.

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158 Ibid., 109.


160 Appendix B - Research Consent Form.

3.7.3 Purposefully Sampling

When choosing the participants, the researchers must prioritize not only their experience of the phenomenon or the “criterion” but also their interest in the research question and willingness to discuss their experience as participants in the study. This approach is better known in qualitative research as “theoretical” or “purposive” strategy. The theory is based on the fact that co-researchers are chosen because they have acquired knowledge of the project prior to their participation and have an interest in understanding the lived experience of the subject being researched. In the case of my research, it was significant for me to identify and reach some couples who were married outside the Coptic Church in order to obtain their perspective on the reasons that they chose to marry in other Churches.

In phenomenological hermeneutics, it is not necessary to find a large sample of participants, since reporting the findings does not require statistical analysis. Rather, the emphasis is on a smaller sample that is able to generate enough discussion to fully understand the phenomenon and produce enough data to allow the researcher to report on the experience and the findings. The challenge that the researchers face is to discover the unique information that is contained in the data which will be of most benefit to them personally, as well as to the entire community of faith.

As part of my Ethics Review Submission, I had to ensure that selecting the participants did not conflict in any way with my pastoral role in the church. As a priest, I could not directly approach members of the Coptic community in order to request that they take part in my research and, instead, had to rely on participants to come forward on a voluntary basis. Because I hold a leadership role in the community of faith, some members might associate denying my request to participate in the research as having some future negative implications for their membership in the Church, their relationship with God, or their relationship with me personally. I therefore initiated the process by contacting all Coptic

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162 Appendix C – Ethics Review Approval.
163 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 118.
Orthodox clergy members in the GTA by email and then by a personal follow up phone call in order to explain my research and my desire to recruit some volunteers who are in intercultural marriages. I provided a detailed letter which included my contact information that was read on a Sunday morning in most churches in the GTA. Since I was also interested in interviewing some couples who were not married in the Coptic Church, and these would not normally be present at a Sunday liturgy, I asked individuals hearing the message to reach out to friends or family members who fit these criteria with my request and encourage them to participate in the study. I was very pleased when thirty couples from across the GTA contacted me indicating their willingness to participate in the research.

3.7.4 Gathering Data

There are four main types of data to collect in a qualitative research project: (1) observations, (2) interviews, (3) documents, and (4) audio-visual materials.\(^{165}\) In addition to these traditional types of data, in recent years, there has also been an expansion toward considering different forms of data, such as journaling, text forms of email, and other digital media. Creswell suggests that a researcher should gather field notes by observation as a participant, an observer, an outsider, and an insider.\(^{166}\) In phenomenological study, the main process of collecting the information is through in-depth interviews.\(^{167}\) These interviews could last up to two hours in length. There is also the possibility of using outside materials which may enhance the interview such as the work of novelists, poets, painters, and choreographers.\(^{168}\) The researcher must consider the best format for the interviews. Possibilities include focus groups, one-on-one, or phone conversations. One should also prepare the location, equipment for audio recording, interview questions, and consent form.\(^{169}\)

\(^{165}\) Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 120.

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{168}\) Ibid.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 123-124.
3.7.4.1 Focus Groups

Over the past two decades, focus groups have become extremely common in qualitative research projects as a way of collecting data. Social science research has adapted this strategy from marketing research, but it has recently evolved within the social sciences to become a source of considerable innovation. Focus groups are defined as:

> Group interviews, although not in the sense of an alternation between a researcher’s question and the research participants’ response. Instead, the reliance is on interaction within a group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of moderator. The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.\(^{170}\)

Focus groups can be a good means of producing questionnaires for later use or building the content of follow-up data in the primary stages of data collection. They could also add to the data which is collected through other methods, including participant observation and individual\(^{171}\) interviews.\(^{172}\) Ultimately, focus groups are to be used in combination with individual interviews to produce a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied. Morgan has identified three main advantages of observing the behaviour of a large number of participants simultaneously in focus groups: (1) the ability to collect data on a larger range of behaviours; (2) a greater number of interactions with the study participants; and (3) a more open discussion of the research topic.\(^{173}\)

I have chosen to use focus groups to provide preliminary research on my topic of interest and to guide the design of my individual interview questionnaire. In my communication with the thirty couples who volunteered for the research, I explained that the interviews would have two phases. In the first phase, four focus groups containing three couples each...


\(^{171}\) The use of the term “individual interviews” refers here to an interview which is conducted with a married couple together consisting of a husband and a wife.

\(^{172}\) Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 3.

\(^{173}\) Ibid., 8.
would be formed, while in the second, I would conduct eighteen individual interviews with couples. I asked for volunteers who were willing to participate in the first phase and who would also be open to meeting at the home of one of the participating couples. When I had twelve volunteers for the focus groups and four available houses, I tried to coordinate each focus group based on the geographical location in the GTA that best fits each couple. I also tried to construct each focus group out of “homogenous strangers”. This term is used in this discipline to identify the type of participants chosen for each group. Homogenous refers to the couples’ ages, marital status, and the fact that they are all in intercultural marriages. Strangers are preferred over acquaintances in order to allow a diversity in opinions which produces more realistic conversation, feedback, and results.  

Focus groups may present a particular problem with confidentiality. Although it was important to explicitly and repeatedly remind participants that the conversations should be treated confidentially, there was no practical way to ensure that these structures would be adhered to by everyone. Therefore, no claim of confidentiality was made on discussions within the focus groups, but participants were repeatedly reminded to maintain the highest confidentiality with respect to the content of our discussions and were also asked to sign a group confidentiality form.

I conducted the focus groups using what is known as the “funnel strategy.” This approach, as recommended by Morgan, begins with a very broad and unstructured discussion that allows the participants freedom of expression with low moderator involvement, and then moves gently towards a more structured discussion in which the moderator is allowed to ask specific questions pertaining to the research. I started by asking the participants to recall their experiences with the Coptic Church and community, and to reflect on what they thought were the most important subjects to be considered during the individual interviews. Here, bracketing was essential so that I would not bring into the conversation any

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174 Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 37-38.

175 Appendix D – Focus Group Confidentiality Form.

176 Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 41.
preconceived ideas or biases which may have led the participants to provide inaccurate data. While participants were speaking, I took notes of major themes that arose during the discussion, and, at the end, I confirmed these themes with the co-researchers. I then asked if they could help me to formulate these themes into relevant and non-leading questions which I could include in the questionnaire. All of these discussions were audio recorded so that I was able to go back and listen to them to pick up on themes that I missed during the focus groups. One of the suggestions that came out of the focus group discussions was to formulate a survey which could include some generic information about the participants and which they could fill out prior to the interview, in order to save some time at the actual meeting. This information could include names, ages, date of marriage, religious and denominational backgrounds, education, and level of participation in the Coptic Church (if applicable).\textsuperscript{177} After concluding the four focus groups and considering all the major themes, I formulated the individual interview questionnaire along with the survey, using guidance from resources such as \textit{The Art of Asking Questions} by Stanley L. Payne and \textit{Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design -- For Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires} by Norman M. Bradburn, Seymour Sudman, and Brian Wansink.\textsuperscript{178} I then sent the questionnaire back to the twelve couples who had participated in the focus groups as well as to my thesis supervisor and ministry base group for review and comments. After some revisions, I was ready to proceed with the individual interviews.

3.7.4.2 Individual One-on-One Interviews

I conducted eighteen individual interviews with couples, primarily in their homes, although two couples requested to come to my home instead. The interviews lasted anywhere from one to two hours in length and were all audio taped. The co-researchers received all the documents and the interview questions by email prior to my arrival, so that they could become better acquainted with the questions and sign all the necessary forms. Meeting at their houses gave me the opportunity to observe the co-researchers in their natural settings,

\textsuperscript{177} Appendix E – Interview Survey.

\textsuperscript{178} Appendix F – Interview Questionnaire.
where they are most comfortable. I was also able to gain access into their living environments, observe the way that they communicated with one another, and, on some occasions, the way they communicated with their children. I was able to take notes on verbal and non-verbal communication and body language in relation to some topics being discussed. The interview questions focused on the seven main questions which were developed as a result of the focus group discussions.

3.7.5 Recording Information

The researcher may choose a data collection form or a “protocol form” to enable him or her to take notes during the course of the interview.\(^\text{179}\) This form is beneficial for keeping all of the information organized and for easy recollection at a later stage. Creswell’s suggestions for conducting interviews include being prepared to review the purpose of the project with the co-researchers, leaving space between questions in case the respondents jump from one question to the other, memorizing the questions to reduce loss of eye contact, and preparing closing comments to thank the participants.\(^\text{180}\) It is essential that the researcher realizes that the purpose of the entire interview process is to log data and record information through every possible means. I was able to formulate a protocol booklet and record in it most of the observations that I required for my analysis. As mentioned above, I also communicated with the co-researchers, which allowed for productive interviews.

3.7.6 Resolving Field Issues

The researcher must also remain aware of some of the issues or ethical challenges that might be faced in the research field or during interviews and develop the means to resolve them. Some investigators become surprised at the amount of time and energy that it takes to prepare for the interviews. Others are really overwhelmed by the volume of the recorded tapes and transcribed material that they need to sort through. Also, some ethical issues may arise such as the sharing of personal information with the respondents that may ultimately

\(^{179}\) Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 126.

\(^{180}\) Ibid.
affect the data being collected and could alter the results. Having been made aware of these challenges ahead of time helped me to avoid being caught in any of them. My interview process went fairly smoothly, with no major issues to report.

### 3.7.7 Storing Data

The process of storing data is very important to acknowledge at an early stage of the research, and the researcher must become proficient at it as the collection of data increases. Creswell suggests that the researcher should always make backup copies of computer files. The availability of digital recorders now has made it easier to download all audio files onto a personal computer and keep duplicates in a safe place. Creswell also suggests that the investigator should keep a master list of every kind of information gathered, protect the anonymity by frequently changing names and giving them codes, and develop a data collection matrix so that one may be able to easily locate or recall the desired data.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

At this analytic stage of the research, the investigator aims to reduce the data and transform it into a manageable format in order to easily extract the desired information. Creswell suggests three phases in this stage which can facilitate the process. First, the researcher begins with a thorough reading of the interview transcripts in order to grasp the overall message being communicated by the participants. This reading may include jotting down some notes in the margins or writing summary phrases. Second, the researcher should develop a code dictionary in order to classify and sort comments and information which will be used at the end in order to write the narrative. Finally, researchers “relate categories and

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181 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 128-133.
182 Ibid., 134.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., 140.
develop analytic frameworks and procedures ... such comparisons and contrasts may lead to the redesign of a study or to the generation of a new framework.”

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the investigator finds phrases or sentences in the interviews which portray the respondents’ experiences of the phenomenon. These statements are grouped together and given a certain code that assumes that each comment is of equal worth with any other. The statement list should ultimately have comments which do not repeat or overlap. The totality of the statements present in the codes and sub-codes should represent the entire “essence” of the experience.

I began a structured coding scheme based on the interview questionnaire. I built the code dictionary by reviewing four sample interviews. After eliminating any of the co-researchers’ names or personal references from the transcripts, I requested the help of another coder to ensure the reliability and the validity of the code dictionary, and to make sure of data saturation. The dictionary was revised again to capture any new sub-codes for the already-categorized themes, based on the couples’ contributions during the interviews. I used QSR NVivo 8 Student Software to manage the written transcripts and for analysis of the interviews. In addition to describing the different themes, the occurrence of each theme at the group level has also been reported.

3.9 Writing the Narrative

The writing of the narrative is what brings the entire project together into a meaningful compilation. Creswell suggests a writing style that is “personal, familiar, up-close, highly readable, friendly, and applied for a broad audience.” This ensures that the message of the research is accessible not only to the academic circles but also to ordinary people whose

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185 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 142.
186 Ibid., 147.
187 Ibid., 150.
188 Appendix G – Code Dictionary.
189 Ibid., 170.
lives might be affected by it. It is also important to add some detail to the narrative which makes it come alive and which draws the reader immediately into the world of the research. The researcher should be personally present and represented within the thesis report, but should recognize his or her own weaknesses, limitations and biases. The final report should provide readers with a clear grasp of what it is like for someone to experience the phenomenon that is being studied.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter represents a major stride forward in advancing the progress of my thesis. In it, I have presented the framework on which this research is based and provided an overall picture of the strategy which has been employed to bring all activities involved into a dynamic correlation. I have identified the qualitative method employed in the research, phenomenology, and specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, and explained why this methodology is best suited for this inquiry. I have also drawn a connection between the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology and my own pastoral ministry. Finally, the process of developing the research strategy, collecting and analyzing the data, and writing the narrative were discussed in order to lay the foundation of the research in chronological order. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results rendered through the data analysis.

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190 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 170.

191 Ibid., 177.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

The Action-in-Ministry portion of my research has produced approximately seven hours of taped interviews in the four focus groups and twenty-six taped hours in the one-on-one couples’ interviews leading to 413 transcribed pages from the latter interviews. All material has been read, coded, and categorized according to the recurring themes. The coding of this information followed the order of the main themes that came out of the focus group discussions. All information analyzed in this chapter corresponds to the eighteen one-on-one couples’ interviews conducted following the focus groups. I will begin the analysis by summarizing the characteristics of the respondents which were gleaned from the surveys they filled out prior to their one-on-one interviews (4.1). This will be followed by an investigation of the main themes and sub-themes which have been identified in the coding of the interviews. This analysis will trace the following order: (1) meeting and deciding to get married; (2) reaction of family and friends; (3) Coptic Church and Community; (4) influence of culture; (5) factors for success or conflict; and (6) concluding thoughts (4.2 to 4.7).

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents

Each individual participant filled out a personal survey outlining some personal information prior to starting our interview. The idea of the surveys emerged during the focus group sessions as a way of becoming more familiar with the respondents. The questions on the survey included essential information which is paramount in becoming acquainted with the participating members of the study, as outlined and then summarized below (4.1.1 to 4.1.9).

4.1.1 Age

The youngest male participant is twenty-seven years old, and the oldest is sixty-nine years old. The median age for all male participants is thirty-eight years of age. The youngest female participant is twenty-eight years old, and the oldest is fifty-eight years old. The median age for all female participants is thirty-six years of age.

192 Appendix E – Interview Survey.
4.1.2 Ethnic Background

All participants were Canadian citizens and could ultimately be identified as Canadian. However, they were able to trace their ethnic identity back to their country of origin from which they immigrated to Canada as children or adults. In cases where they were Canadian born, they then traced their identity back to the country of origin of their parents, grandparents, or ancestors. Since the purpose of this study is to explore intercultural marriages (ICM) in the Coptic Orthodox Church, one spouse of each couple is always of Egyptian (Coptic)\textsuperscript{193} descent, while the other spouse could be of any other ethnicity. Out of the eighteen Egyptian participants interviewed, there were nine males and nine females. From the eighteen Canadian\textsuperscript{194} participants, there was a great ethnic diversity which included: Polish, Jamaican, German, Greek, Romanian, Dutch, British, Japanese, Indian, Italian, American (of Swedish descent), and Canadian (of European descent). It is also significant here to mention that, in addition to the ethnicities mentioned above, the twelve couples who participated in the focus group sessions represented other ethnicities such as Chinese, Haitian, Irish, Scottish, and Serbian. Thus, we can start to observe that Copts are intermarrying partners “of all nations”. This move represents a new paradigm in Coptic history where ethnic background is no longer a determining factor in choosing one’s spouse. It appears that many Copts have been able to break ethnic barriers and find solace in partners from across the globe.

4.1.3 Religious or Denominational Affiliation

The Canadian spouses portrayed a variety of religious and denominational affiliations prior to their marriage to a Coptic spouse. These associations include: Hindu, Catholic, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Mennonite, Christian Reformed, Anglican, Romanian Orthodox, and Christian non-denominational. Nine out of the eighteen couples interviewed were married in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and they all identified themselves as currently being

\textsuperscript{193} There was one participant who identified herself as Coptic Sudanese, as her family originally emigrated from Egypt to Sudan and she was born in Sudan.

\textsuperscript{194} I refer to one partner of the couple as “Canadian” to distinguish between the spouse with an Egyptian (or Coptic) heritage and his/her spouse associated with another culture or ethnicity.
Coptic Orthodox. Out of the nine couples who married in other Churches or had a civil marriage, four couples had their marriage blessed in the Coptic Church (through baptism or confirmation of the Canadian spouse) and are currently practising members of the Coptic Church. Another three couples were satisfied in their new Christian denomination and are actively practising in them. In the case of the last two couples, their marriages were officiated in another Christian denomination, and, yet, the Egyptian spouses continued to identify themselves as Coptic, while their Canadian partners remained faithful to the Churches (Catholic and Baptist) which officiated in their weddings. It should be mentioned that the Hindu spouse had converted to the Coptic Orthodox faith prior to her marriage, and the couple was married in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

It is clear that, along with the ethnic diversity, came also a mosaic of religious and denominational diversity in Coptic marriages. It seems that one half of the marriages were officiated in the Coptic Church, while the rest occurred in other churches or at City Hall. This ratio is considered to be staggering since the Coptic Church could have easily lost one half of her intercultural marriages to other churches, denominations, or to civil marriages. This number could have a serious implication on the future of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the GTA. It is encouraging to see that four couples have decided to return to the Coptic Church. Two couples showed some interest in returning to the Coptic Church, but were still discussing amongst themselves whether or not they should make the move. It is really interesting to observe that these two Egyptian spouses still considered themselves Coptic Orthodox, despite the fact that they can no longer partake of the Holy Eucharist in the Coptic Church. Finally, the three couples who made the full move to another denomination seemed very content with their new denominational affiliation and showed no interest in returning to the Coptic Church.

4.1.4 Education and Occupation

All spouses interviewed, whether Canadian or Egyptian, were highly educated and held prominent positions in society. The nature of post secondary education and post graduate degrees reported included: college diploma, undergraduate degree, pharmacy, medicine,
MBA, Master of Education, and PhD. The participants reported their current work as being a consultant, business person, financial planner, physician, pharmacist, stay-home mom, PhD student, accountant, law school student, registered nurse, marketing executive, guest service worker, project manager, banker, real estate agent, student advisor, architect, youth and campus co-ordinator, federal public servant, and self-employed.

There is a general sense of compatibility in the couples interviewed in terms of their level of education, jobs, and socioeconomic status. All participants are functional members of society who have succeeded academically and have acquired respected jobs in their communities. The average household income was not observed, neither is it significant in this study. The main observation here is that all couples are financially stable and have found a comfortable place within the Canadian economy and society.

4.1.5 Length of Marriage

The earliest marriage occurred in 1990 and the latest in 2009. The median year of marriage is 2001. Seventeen couples reported that they are in their first marriage, and only one couple mentioned that this is their second marriage.

4.1.6 Children

There were ten couples who had children ranging in age between three months to thirteen years of age. In addition, there were three couples expecting their first child, four couples who had no children, and one couple who had adult children from a previous marriage.

4.1.7 Level of Involvement in the Coptic Church

Participants were asked to identify their level of involvement in the Coptic Church by choosing one of the following four options: (1) very involved,\(^{195}\) (2) moderately involved,\(^{196}\)

\(^{195}\) At least once a month.

\(^{196}\) One to three months.
(3) seldom involved,\textsuperscript{197} or (4) never involved, for each of three categories. The three
categories and the results of the questions were as follows:

a. Sacraments: 7 very involved, 3 moderately, 3 seldom, and 5 never.
b. Community Service: 3 very involved, 4 moderately, 6 seldom, 5 never.
c. Social Events: 1 very involved, 5 moderately, 9 seldom, and 3 never.

It appears that couples are relatively involved in Church sacraments, which is primarily
attending the Divine Liturgy and partaking of the Holy Eucharist. However, they are much
less involved in the community service, and their participation in the life of the community,
as indicated by the social events category, is tremendously low. It is interesting to observe
that some couples reported different levels of involvement in various categories. For
example, it is possible that one spouse would be more involved in Church attendance or in
community service than the other. In these cases, I tried to place the couple in the most
appropriate category, based on the nature of my conversation with them.

4.1.8 Active in Other Denominations

Seven couples reported that they are actively participating in other Christian denominations.
These activities could include anything from being a full member of that denomination to
being involved in a bible study or occasional attendance at services.

4.1.9 Summary

The survey results helped me to become familiar with the participants involved in this study
and also to observe some common trends among them. Many details were revealed
including: age group, ethnicity, religious or denominational affiliation, education, marriage,
children, and level of involvement in the Church. Part of the new information being revealed
is the fact that Copts are increasingly breaking the ethnic barrier in the GTA through their
marriages to members of a very diverse ethnic base. It is obvious that ICM is a growing
phenomenon, especially among the young generation of Copts. The couples getting married
are very compatible when it comes to their education and have very healthy marital lives, as
evidenced by the length of their marriages and by the raising of children (wherever

\textsuperscript{197}Three months to a year.
applicable). It is just as likely for Coptic men as it is for Coptic women to be in an ICM. One half of couples with ICMs are not getting married in the Coptic Church, which is an alarming phenomenon that deserves attention. Several couples who married in other denominations or had a civil wedding never ended up returning to the Church. Some couples who married in other denominations would return back to the Church if circumstances permitted. Out of the couples currently attending the Coptic Church, most are involved in the sacramental life, but much fewer are involved beyond that in other areas, such as community service or social events.

4.2 Meeting and Deciding to Get Married

This section will summarize the results of the responses from the second question of the one-on-one interviews that I conducted with the respondents. The sub-questions revolved around: (1) where the couples met; (2) how long they dated; (3) the factors which helped them decide to get married; (4) any stereotypes that they grew up with towards their own or other ethnicities; and (5) their openness to ICM prior to meeting. These questions were intended to start our conversation and to make me familiar with the couples’ early memories from the time they met. It also served as a time to observe the way in which couples spoke to, communicated with, and treated one another (4.2.1 to 4.2.5).

4.2.1 Where Couples Met

The interviews showed that Copts are meeting their spouses in many different places which represent parts of their daily lives (T10, 1). Work and school were the most frequent places where spouses met, followed by mutual friends, travel, online, socially, and church (T4, 1; T5, 1; T12, 1).

4.2.2 How Long They Dated

Couples reported that, before their wedding, they dated or were engaged anywhere between nine months and up to five years, with an average of two years. Some couples reported that

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198 The first number corresponds to the transcript number of the interview, and the second refers to the page number.
they took breaks in the middle of their relationship because of personal difficulties or resistance from parents. The main reason for the time they took prior to their marriage was to ensure that they loved one another, had mutual understanding concerning major factors affecting their future life together, and to prepare for the wedding.

4.2.3 Factors Helping in Decision

Being compatible spiritually, culturally, and personally were three main categories that arose from the question about the factors that helped the individuals decide to get married. Faith, religion, and spirituality were by far the most common factors that determined if the couples were to be married (T5, 2; T8, 2). For couples that ended up marrying in the Coptic Church, the Copts always made it clear that they wanted to be married in the Church of their birth and also to baptise and raise their children in it (T1, 3; T2, 1). For couples that married in other denominations or had a civil wedding, Christian faith was still essential, but not the denomination.

4.2.4 Stereotypes

For the most part, the Canadian and Egyptian spouses\textsuperscript{199} did not have any negative stereotypes about any other cultures while growing up. They mainly looked for the right person to meet, regardless of where they came from. In that sense, compatibility was more important than ethnicity in terms of choosing a spouse.

There were several Egyptian spouses who mentioned that they knew specifically that they were not going to end up marrying an Egyptian. The reasons given included having been traumatized by the experience of their parents in marriage, especially related to the inferior treatment of women by men; being attracted to a specific race (T3, 3); the inability to relate to the Egyptian culture (T1, 3); immersion into the Canadian culture (T17, 3); and having mostly Canadian friends (T17, 8).

A few Canadian spouses mentioned that they also knew that they were not going to marry

\textsuperscript{199} Generally, I will not distinguish between the comments of the Egyptian versus the Canadian spouses, unless there is an apparent difference in the responses which might add value to the research.
someone from their ethnic community. The reasons given were their indifference about other races (T1, 5), multiculturalism, and the ethnic diversity within their own families (T9, 3).

4.2.5 Openness to ICM

Most of the respondents indicated that they were quite open to ICM. Nevertheless, a few couples indicated that, while growing up, they thought that they would marry someone from their own ethnicity. It made sense to them, and it was going to be much more convenient to share in the same religion, culture, language, and family values. Yet, as they got older, they kept an open mind to the possibility of meeting someone from another culture, knowing that there might be some adjustments to be made (T16, 3; T10, 6).

4.2.6 Summary

Many essential pieces of information were revealed in this section that contributed to the overall inquiry. In the past, the Coptic Church was considered the main meeting place of individuals, ultimately leading to marriage. The assumption of meeting someone at Church to marry was that both people shared a similar ethnicity, faith, and culture, as well as common family values. It was assumed that people from the same culture had a better chance of having a successful marriage. Data is showing that Copts are now not restricted to meeting spouses only at church, but that church has become one of several different possibilities where people are meeting to be married. While people did not restrict themselves to meeting at church, religion and spirituality still played a major role in the persons they were marrying. Whether Copts were married in or out of the Coptic Church, there was always a factor in the other person’s religious beliefs that determined if they were to be married. Ultimately, all spouses were of a Christian denomination and shared in the Christian faith, even though not all shared in Orthodoxy.

One encouraging phenomenon was the fact that couples did not rush into their marriages, but took their time to learn, discuss, and contemplate the risks and sacrifices involved in an ICM. This definitely showed maturity and wisdom on the part of the couples and the ability
to understand that marriage is a lifelong commitment which is blessed by God. In making this decision, individuals ensured that their life partners were compatible in spiritual, cultural, and personal ways. The couples came to a common understanding of religion, spirituality, and their involvement in the Church, prior to getting married. Even though there were some obvious cultural differences, they managed to respect one another’s culture and values. Finally, it was very obvious that couples had loving and respectful relationships by the way in which they spoke to, looked at, and treated one another. Their personalities matched, and they often laughed and joked about their memories.

For the most part, individuals grew up with no negative stereotypes about other ethnicities. Living in a multicultural society enhanced the feeling of coexistence and friendship between everyone. While individuals did not have negative stereotypes, some still expressed that they were not particularly attracted to certain ethnicities. Some Coptic respondents reported that they harboured painful memories from the past, which ultimately deterred them from marrying within the Coptic community. From the Canadian persons’ perspective, the knowledge that they would not marry someone from their own race was mainly a result of the lack of available choices within their own ethnic community in Canada.

4.3 Reaction of Family and Friends

Parents generally play a major role in their children’s lives and especially when it comes to their children’s choice of a spouse, because they are usually very involved and expect to give their blessings. Traditionally, Coptic parents are known for their hands-on relationship with their children, especially in choosing their life partners. In the past, parents were very fearful of ICM, whether these fears were well-founded or not, which could have contributed to its rejection and the creation of major tensions within the family unit. Canadian parents, on the other hand, are usually seen in the Coptic community as being at arm’s length from their children’s decisions, especially those related to marriage. There are no studies on which the Coptic community relies for this perception. It is rather an overall observation of liberalism and the freedom of choice that exists in the West. This section will discuss the reaction of the Canadian and Egyptian families to the participants’ intercultural relationships.
(4.3.1). We will also see how these reactions affected the marriages and what the current relationships of the couples are with their families (4.3.2 to 4.3.3). Interview excerpts are included for some of the questions addressed, and a summary of the interview findings concludes this section (4.3.4).

4.3.1 Reaction of Family

Many Egyptian parents welcomed the Canadian spouse with open arms into the family, while others had some reservations concerning their children’s choice to marry outside the Egyptian community. The majority of parents were open to the idea that their children would marry a Canadian spouse and even expected it at times. Once the parent met the Canadian spouse and learned that they were the right person for their child, then there were generally no major objections, and the child received the parents’ blessing. One respondent mentioned that her parents “couldn’t see me getting married to an Egyptian” (T1, 6).

Another respondent recalled a conversation with her mother asking if the mother would have been happier if her daughter had found an Egyptian version of her fiancé. But the mother responded by saying, “No. I like him just as he is; I love him” (T7, 5).

The cultural norms between the Egyptian and Western styles in dating, proposal, and engagement played a major role in the way some parents reacted to the relationships. In the West, engagement comes closer to the wedding, after a longer period of dating, and once the proposal is accepted and the couple is engaged, they begin planning for the wedding. In Middle Eastern customs, proposal comes very close to the beginning of the relationship, clarifying the intentions of the fiancé that the couple is in a serious relationship. This is followed by an engagement period in which the couple may date. The engagement is a trial period and does not mean that the couple should necessarily marry, even though the breaking of an engagement carries a cultural taboo. This reversal in the order of events created tensions within some families, but, ultimately, parents were trying to understand their children’s position and accommodated them. Some children felt that their parents were putting pressure on the couple to be engaged, even before they had sufficient chance to know one another. Some parents were not even willing to meet the Canadian girl or
boyfriends before they were introduced to the priest and had clear intentions that this relationship was headed for marriage. In particular, one respondent recalled her experience with her father as follows:

So I would say stuff like, “Baba, you have to meet (spouse)”, and he’d be like “(spouse) who?” And I’m like, “My boyfriend.” And I would say it like that. He’d be like, “There are no boyfriends. You know that. No boyfriend. No boyfriends allowed. If he wants to come meet me, he has to meet the priest. He has to meet the priest.” He just kept saying, “He has to meet the priest. And if he’s interested in you, and he’s interested in meeting me, that’s a serious step. He needs to be serious. Is it serious?” And I’m like, “I don’t know. We’re just dating.” He’s like, “Well, I don’t need to meet him right now. This is not my time. It’s not time for me.” (T13, 7)

Some Egyptian parents had a very negative reaction to the news that their children might be marrying from outside the Coptic Community. Their main concerns were that they did not know the Canadian person and her/his family and that they might not be able to speak to them in their mother tongue, making communication difficult. Egyptian parents were also concerned that the couple was not compatible socially; that the couple would divorce if they were not both brought up with the same concept of marriage; or that they might not end up staying in the Coptic Church. One respondent mentioned that her father’s reaction was “so violently against it” (T10, 2), while another said that his family completely rejected the idea because “there are so many differences” (T12, 3). Another concern came from some parents who were not comfortable because the Canadian spouse was not part of the “network” (T1, 7), meaning that he was not someone’s cousin or relative, in which case the parents could easily ask about his family line. Another major concern came from a respondent who mentioned that her father was completely against her marrying from a certain race. She recalled that her father said, “I don’t care if he’s the President of the United States of America. (race) is no” (T3, 3).

Like Egyptian parents, the reaction of the Canadian parents was mixed between being supportive and encouraging, and yet cautious, about their children marrying an Egyptian, with the apparent differences in denominational affiliation, ethnicity, and lifestyle. Many respondents said that their parents were happy with their choice and did not have any objections. Other Canadian parents, who showed some concern, objected to the principle of
marrying outside their ethnicity or wanted a clarification of the Egyptian’s religion and the implication of their marriage on their faith, culture, and raising children. The reaction of one Canadian parent revealed some racial bias with the comment, “Egypt is part of Africa … your children will be coloured” (T16, 4).

4.3.2 Feeling about the Reaction of Family and Friends

Participants were extremely appreciative for the support and guidance which they received from family and friends. The way that the majority of family and friends handled the situation, in offering gentle guidance, helped the couples proceed with blessings. There were several parents, both Canadian and Egyptian, who had severe reactions to the relationships, which resulted in feelings of anger and animosity from their children. One couple felt that the rejection and problems at the beginning of their relationship have pulled them closely together, bringing about the feeling that, “If you have to work hard for the relationship, you appreciate it more” (T2, 3). On another occasion, one respondent felt that it was not fair that her father judged her spouse based on his skin colour. She thought that “if I got a paintbrush and I painted him the colour dad wanted him, my father would pay him to marry me” (T3, 3).

4.3.3 Current Relationships

For the most part, couples currently enjoy a great relationship with their parents, in-laws, extended family members, and friends. It took some time, either prior to or after the wedding, to figure out their comfort zone with one another. For some Egyptian parents, the comfort came after knowing that their children would marry in the Coptic Church. It took some time for everyone to adjust to the language barrier, customs, and traditions, or to the fact that their new son or daughter-in-law was not from their own ethnicity. The presence of grandchildren often resolved many misunderstandings that might have existed prior to the wedding. The following is a quotation which clearly expresses the current relationship between a spouse and his or her in-law, after they have spent time trying to bridge their differences and adapt to one another:
I think (spouse) and my mom have had to figure out their dance a little bit and have come to a place, ultimately, where they really have a lot of respect for each other and now have a very nice relationship. (T17, 6)

There were only a few individuals who expressed that tension still existed between themselves and their in-laws. This was because some parents never accepted their children’s marriage or might have had ongoing concerns about the character or personality of the spouse. In particular, one respondent mentioned that he still feels very nervous visiting his in-laws because they randomly try to test him on certain subjects saying “What do you think of this? and that type of thing” (T10, 7).

4.3.4 Summary

The data arising out of this section is extremely significant in understanding the reaction of parents, extended family, and friends to ICM. There is a clear indication that there is no significant difference between Egyptian and Canadian parents when it comes to their reaction to ICM. Most parents, whether Egyptian or Canadian, accepted it with open arms, while a lesser number showed caution and negative stereotyping towards certain ethnicities or cultures. These prejudices could be attributed to fear of the unknown, cultural biases, lack of knowledge, personal negative experiences, or a lack of open-mindedness.

It is also clear that these reasons for prejudice or negative traits are not only attributed to the Egyptian culture, as both Eastern and Western parents displayed a wide spectrum of reactions. This could be related to the fact that the parents came from across the globe and live in Canada, with their own preconceived ideologies, or to the fact that Canadian multiculturalism has led to all ethnicities adopting similar ideologies and behaviours. It was almost impossible to identify certain behaviour with one particular ethnicity. Instead, the reactions became a personal preference, where each individual parent or family member decided to react in a certain manner. Many reactions from parents were mild, accepting, and accommodating, which usually rendered a respectful response from their children, based on dialogue. The parents’ extreme reactions created animosity and bad feelings within the family unit. It was encouraging to see that most difficulties or misunderstandings have been resolved, with the exception of a few couples who continue to face struggles.
4.4 Coptic Church and Community Receiving and Responding to ICM

This section represents a major element in my ongoing research subject. Here, I will discuss essential factors which have a direct effect on the current ministry of the Coptic Church to intercultural couples. The significance of this section to my current research meant that I spent more time listening to my respondents to determine their level of interaction with the Church and also how they expect the Church to best minister to them. Every comment is unique in a way, but the collective voices of the participants contribute to the practicality of this thesis and make it more accessible. Several topics will be explored here including: (1) the Canadian spouses’ first impressions of the Church; (2) the reaction of the Coptic clergy to their presence; (3) the process leading to their marriage, which includes marriage preparation; (4) the general perceptions of the Canadian spouses to the Coptic Church; (5) the couples’ integration into the Community; and (6) the impact of their marriage on the Church (4.4.1 to 4.4.6).

In addition, this section includes suggestions about how the Church could enhance its ministry to couples in an ICM (4.4.7.1 to 4.4.7.14). A balanced approach of reporting the whole spectrum of opinions by participants on each topic is the key to having a full understanding of their experiences in the Coptic Church. Interview excerpts are included throughout this exploration of the current ministry of the Coptic Church to intercultural couples, and a summary of findings concludes this section (4.4.8).

4.4.1 First Impressions of the Coptic Church

The first impressions of Canadian guests to the Coptic Church were mixed. There were some who had a general feeling of admiration for the traditions, dedication of the community to the faith, presence of many generations, and welcoming spirit. The people who had a good first impression were more likely to come back to the church and be open to getting involved in various capacities. They saw in the people they met the willingness to welcome and receive them with open arms and love. Many respondents mentioned that they felt really excited about going to the Coptic Church for the first time, since they knew that
“it was going to be a big part of my future” (T8, 7), while others noticed that “everyone was very friendly and welcoming” (T15, 12). Some respondents felt that the Coptic community embraced them with open arms and even placed them at “the centre of attention” (T13, 26). All these sentiments made the Canadian members experience a warm feeling and an immediate sense of belonging.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents did not feel welcomed arriving for the first time at church, but expressed sentiments of confusion and struggles with understanding the service. One respondent mentioned that the church was “very foreign to me” (T13, 11), and this was due to the unfamiliar language being used, Arabic wall signs, or rich iconography (T18, 7). Many first encounters of the Church came during weddings or liturgies, which were full of traditions that were unclear to the first-time attendees. One respondent mentioned that the service was difficult to follow because he did not understand all the traditions in a wedding. He said, “I just phased in and phased out, and then, I would ask (spouse), ‘What is he (priest) saying?’ and she would say, ‘This is English’” (T1, 12). The lack of organization was also a factor that left a negative impression with the first-time guests. There were children running around the church, and parents did not seem interested in teaching them to respect God’s house. One respondent was surprised as to “why these people just didn’t behave themselves and stand and keep their kids next to them” (T2, 7).

The initial reaction to the Coptic Church represents the guests’ first reactions to traditions and practices which are foreign to them. The fact that many of these reactions could be seen as criticizing only means that the respondents were honestly expressing their impressions to practices which were unfamiliar to them. These first reactions do not represent their current or ongoing opinions of the Church and its practices. Many participants expressed the fact that as they became more involved in the Coptic Church and understood its traditions, they became more appreciative of them and practised them with joy. Nonetheless, the Church never has a second chance at making a first impression. Initial reactions of the Canadian spouses are significant, as they shed a realistic view on how the Church is seen in the eyes of its guests. This should be taken as a point of consideration and meditation, not just as something to be brushed off and viewed as a mere criticism.
4.4.2 The Reaction of Coptic Clergy to ICM

The Coptic Community places a major emphasis on the reaction of the priests in determining the future of a relationship. The priest is usually the first point of contact for any guest who enters the Church, and his reaction to the presence of this person could leave a lasting impression on this individual. The priest is also responsible for conveying the official rules of the church regarding marriage and holds a major role in facilitating the marriage preparation, conducting the wedding ceremony, and providing ongoing pastoral ministry to the couple. Coptic parents trust the priest’s opinion in blessing a relationship, as they feel that his opinion directly represents the Church’s opinion and ultimately conveys God’s blessing. The clear objection of a clergy member to the idea of ICM in general, or against one person in particular, could ultimately create unrest within the family unit and confusion for the individuals getting married.

On one hand, there were many couples who had very positive experiences with clergy members who were able to meet the couple with respect, welcome the Canadian spouse, listen to their story, and, ultimately, guide them through the rules of the Church leading to their marriage. This reaction brought about a very positive experience, which the couple will remember for life and always recall with appreciation. The following is a typical comment by participants who had a good experience meeting the Coptic priest:

When I met Father (name), he was very polite. I didn’t know what to expect. I had never had any experience with the priests with the black beards and the black tunics. He was very friendly, very accommodating, and very warm. He joked around and he listened. There weren’t judgments, so I think that that was a nice experience. (T13, 11)

In addition to the couples who felt comfortable at the way Coptic clergy handled their relationship, there was even a bigger number of respondents who expressed their frustration at the poor reception of clergy to the news of their intent to marry. One respondent, who was not married in the Coptic Church, recalled the first time that he brought his spouse to the Coptic Church and how he was received by the priest: “He left me. He gave us his back, and then he left right away. He didn’t even shake her hand, like my expectation is shake her hand, welcome her to the church” (T11, 5). Participants felt that some clergy were not even
interested in accommodating the idea of ICM, while others felt they were not given sufficient attention and were discouraged from pursuing this relationship. These negative interactions with priests led the couple to either consider leaving the Coptic Church altogether or to switch to another Coptic priest who might have more experience handling such situations. One respondent summarized her negative experience with the clergy as follows:

I wasn’t comfortable. It wasn’t until we changed and we came to see Father (name) that I felt like I wasn’t doing something bad. The other priest made me feel like I was doing something that was taboo, just wrong. I was going to leave the Church altogether. I was going to leave the Orthodox Church altogether, but, thankfully, I didn’t have to. (T3, 5)

The reaction of priests was a mixture between a complete welcome and respectful reception and an apparent misunderstanding, rejection, and cultural bias. The priests who were open and welcomed the couple warmly, discussed clearly the requirements to marry in the Church, and guided the couple through their relationship were most admired and appreciated. Whereas, the clergy who mistreated the couple or rejected ICM as a concept immediately cut off their Coptic member and also lost the admiration of the potential Canadian spouse. It is important to mention that clergy members who show personal biases against ICM generally claim that such marriages have a very low success rate and thus are not advisable or recommended to Coptic persons who believe in a lasting marriage. Others claim that the Canadian spouse might only want to convert to get married, but are not interested in becoming a faithful member of the Church. Another opinion is that the presence of other cultures in the Church might dilute the culture, language, traditions, or faith. All these unfounded claims are based on personal experiences of clergy members and not on any solid research. The negative reaction of some clergy members has added to the ongoing ethnocentrism of the Coptic Community and its inability to reach beyond its boundaries.

4.4.3 Marriage Preparation

Some churches in the GTA offer marriage preparation courses for engaged couples in various formats. This might include a weekend getaway, meeting weekly for seven
consecutive weeks, or one-on-one counselling. While enrolling in a marriage preparation course is not a requirement prior to getting married, couples are still strongly encouraged to voluntarily enrol into one of the courses being offered in the GTA. The reaction of couples who attended these courses has been mixed. Some couples were extremely grateful for the material learned in these courses, which enriched their faith experience, as well as prepared them for their upcoming marriages. One respondent mentioned her positive experience in the marriage preparation course and the fact that she met another couple that was similar to them saying, “I was just so excited to find just one more other couple that was mixed” (T13, 19). Others felt that there was miscommunication on the purpose of these meetings and that they were primarily a form of screening for the Canadian spouse and not so much about preparing for marriage (T8, 9). Some felt that even though there was some attention given to the couples prior to their marriage, not much attention was given to them following the marriage in the form of marriage enrichment courses or meetings (T1, 13).

4.4.4 Comments on the Coptic Church

This section addresses and summarizes the impressions of the participants on the Coptic Church’s spirituality, culture, traditions, language, sacraments, and other areas in the church which might have strengthened or hindered their marriages (4.4.4.1 to 4.4.4.6).

4.4.4.1 Spirituality

Spirituality in the Coptic Church was an area which the majority of respondents agreed was one of its greatest strength. They felt that there is depth in its practices, conservative teaching, and that it stays true to its roots. One respondent expressed that spirituality in the church is “as deep as you really want to go” (T12, 6), while another said that there was “a real focus on God in the church. The people in the community in general were extremely faithful” (T13, 13). This spirituality has helped couples to maintain a pious life, not only at church, but also at home and in their marriages. Nevertheless, some couples expressed that the Church’s spirituality “takes long time to actually understand” (T4, 9). There was a call from the Canadian spouses to the Coptic Community to be more patient, until they could
fully understand and be engaged in the Church’s spirituality. One respondent summarized his experience with Orthodox spirituality as follows:

Orthodoxy is hard core. So … when people who know that you are trying to make this work come up to you and say things like, you know, “Isn’t this amazing? Isn’t this the most beautiful thing ever? Isn’t this wonderful?”, and you express some doubts or some concerns, if their reaction is “No, no, no, but it’s beautiful; it’s amazing; you should love it; it’s incredible,” that’s not helpful.” (T17, 23)

4.4.4.2 Sacraments

For many respondents, the sacramental life of the Church constituted an integral part of their spirituality and relationship with God. Some spoke very highly of communion, baptism, and confession, which also enhanced their marriage and relationship with one another. One individual mentioned that he likes to partake of holy communion every week because it gives him “fortification to meet the following week” (T6, 6), and another shared how he felt after being baptized as an adult saying, “it just felt like all this weight had been lifted off, like I almost felt light, like I was standing on air” (T7, 10). There were several individuals who had some struggles with the idea of rebaptism for those of other Christian denominations prior to their marriage (T18, 6), the sacrament of confession (T13, 16), and some phrases in the wedding ceremony which, in their opinion, favoured the husband over the wife (T18, 29).

4.4.4.3 Culture

Some aspects of the Church culture, which might have been heavily influenced by the Egyptian culture, were appreciated by respondents, while many others were not valued and dismissed as unnecessary to be practised in Canada. The appreciation revolved around respecting family values, the involvement of every member in the Church, and a general feeling of warmth and affection. One respondent mentioned that she admired the presence of the children and youth in the church and that “it’s not a problem if they (children) talk a little”, (T4, 8) while another noticed the deep “respect for the Church, for the Bible, and for the priest” (T11, 10). These were occasions which reflected the positive influence of the Egyptian culture on the congregation and attracted some to the Church. On the other hand,
several participants felt that many cultural practices, which might have been adopted from a predominantly Middle Eastern culture, have penetrated the Church, especially those aspects related to the treatment of women. One respondent stressed that “the Bible’s very clear in terms of equality between both genders” (T8, 14), which might not be evident on all occasions. The stress on certain vocations or careers was another aspect that was not fully understood by all Canadian spouses. There was a general feeling that Copts only admired some “key professions to be in” (T10, 4) and dismissed others as less prestigious. A general need was felt for the Church and the Community to recognize the presence of a functional culture in Canada and to honour and respect its citizens, who were born or raised in this country. The appreciation of certain aspects of the Canadian culture will surely reflect on the sense of belonging for both the Canadian and Egyptian spouses. The following response may summarize the general feeling of a Canadian person coming into the Coptic Church and being faced with a new culture. This may also represent some of the concerns that the Coptic Church must address to become more culturally relevant to its new members and guests:

If you walk into Pearson airport, and you need to use the restroom, you don’t need to speak any language. There is a little picture of a man and a woman, and you can be completely non-lingual and find your way to the washroom. But, it just seems in the culture that there’s a whole body of knowledge that is not written down, that is not communicated … and you just have to know. And you have to know somebody that knows, and you’re being taught these things, and if you come in from the outside, and you don’t have all this history, you just don’t know. (T1, 11)

4.4.4.4 Traditions, Customs, and Rules

There is a great appreciation for traditions, customs, and rules when they are fully explained and practised with understanding. One respondent mentioned that once he learned the meanings of these traditions, then he was able to “discover how really beautiful it is and how deep it is” (T12, 6). The struggle for most of the participants came as a result of not understanding why these traditions are practised and what the significance is to their spiritual growth. Many rules seemed foreign because of the difference between Eastern and Western cultures. One participant saw that “the rules are very strict in the Coptic Church” (T2, 11), while another mentioned that “no matter what I do in the sanctuary, somebody will tell me I do it wrong” (T10, 14). These sentiments have often discouraged Canadian spouses
from participating fully in the life of the Church. The feeling that one does not understand or is always treated as a foreigner sparks a reaction of not belonging and disheartens them from fully integrating into the Church.

4.4.4.5 Language and Communication

Language and communication constituted one of the largest barriers on which couples commented in the majority of the interviews. There are several churches in the GTA which offer English services that helped to minister to their needs somewhat. Some respondents felt that even the English Liturgies were not fully English, as some parts were celebrated in Arabic or Coptic. Praying in Arabic made many feel that they were outsiders, and their needs were not met. One respondent commented that “you are not really motivated if you go to church and you just don’t understand the service at all. And feel like you’re secondary” (T2, 10). Another challenge was communicating with church members who spoke mainly in Arabic after the service, which made some of the spouses feel excluded. Sometimes people would speak about the Canadian spouse in Arabic in front of them, which made them feel even more excluded. On one occasion, a church member spoke about the Canadian spouse in Arabic with her fiancé, and after they left, she discovered that she was being disrespected while she stood there smiling at the member speaking in Arabic. She shared her feelings after understanding what was being said about her saying, this “didn’t make me feel very excited to become a member of this community” (T17, 8). There were very few couples who did not mind the Arabic language being used in services and in fellowship afterwards, as they thought that it is part of the Egyptian heritage to communicate in their mother tongue. Language and communication is considered as a major area of focus and adjustment for the Coptic Church and Community when seriously considering ways to minister to intercultural couples and their families.

4.4.4.6 Other Comments

There is a clear indication that many couples, who are now worshiping in the Coptic Church, are getting accustomed to many aspects of the Church life and to the people. There is appreciation for the ongoing advances in ministry and care for the soul. This is manifested in
comments about enjoying fellowships with old friends who have come back to the Church and understanding the spirituality of certain customs, like tithing (T7, 14). There were also some concerns expressed about the resistance of some churches or clergy to adapt to change, not in faith but in the way that a message is delivered to a predominantly Western audience. The lack of familiarity of the Church hymnology to Western ears also caused some anxiety. Such concerns show a genuine interest by the couples in the relevance of the Church to current and future generations. The following is a typical comment by a respondent who expressed optimism about the future prospects of the Coptic Church ministering to its congregation in the GTA:

I’m getting more out of church now than really I ever have and I love it. I love seeing the people that we grew up with, and you feel like you’re connecting in a way that you’ve never connected with the same people that you grew up with, and I love it I really, really love it. I do. (T3, 6)

4.4.5 Integration in the Coptic Church

This question was intended to find out how couples felt about belonging to the Coptic Church and their present level of comfort in dealing with the Community. Couples expressed that, to a great extent, their level of comfort varied depending on the Coptic Church that they attended (T13, 19) and how the community extended a welcoming hand to them. Churches that made a deliberate effort to accommodate English-speaking families and taught clearly about integration and multiculturalism were more likely to offer a relaxing and accommodating atmosphere for all their parishioners. These parishes also attracted cross-cultural couples and their families from neighbouring churches. It was identified that one of the biggest strengths of a church is when there is “a willingness to accommodate people culturally, without trying to sacrifice the dogmatic rules that were in place” (T13, 19). It is significant to mention that the attitude of the priests in welcoming people in intercultural marriages had an impact on the comfort level and integration of the couples and, ultimately, on the hospitable approach of the entire congregation of that parish.

On some occasions, actions by and comments from members of the Coptic Community about ICM and the couples’ presence in the Church were highly inappropriate. As a result of
these offensive remarks, some intercultural couples never felt comfortable in a number of Coptic Churches and never integrated into the community. One respondent mentioned that “the community as a whole is not so embracing, at least the church that we were at, of mixed marriages” (T1, 15), while another participant shared that after many years of being married to a Copt and attending a Coptic Church that “I still feel like an outsider” (T14, 12). Even though the negative actions or reactions might have come from individuals, yet, they were understood as representing the general attitude of the Community, especially as there was no clear vocal opposition to these actions to condemn these behaviours. On one occasion, a Canadian spouse was walking in a church hallway when he was confronted by a church member who called him a racial slur name and then “spit at my feet” (T10, 11). Other actions from Copts which prevented the couples from fully integrating into the community included immoral accusations, alienation, segregation, belittling, and marginalization.

4.4.6 The Impact of ICM on the Coptic Church

Couples felt that their mere presence in the Church was a visible testimony for the success of ICM. One respondent felt that the fact that she was in an ICM, but is still attending church regularly and partaking of the holy mysteries, was a great testament to the success of her marriage. She felt that this could be an inspiration to other Coptic girls, demonstrating that they can marry in the church and continue raising their families in it as well. She said, “It is for me, a silent way of saying, girls, you can get here if you take the right path” (T3, 8). Some couples thought that there was a greater pressure laid upon them since they were apparently different and the community felt that there was a bigger chance of them getting divorced if they ever encounter a problem (T10, 18). Some expressed that ICM is a fact of our times and that the Church is slowly trying to adapt to their presence and to enhance their relationships. One respondent mentioned that “the good thing is that the church is holding onto its roots but adapting for this type of marriage” (T16, 11). There was a general feeling that ICM has become a cultural norm, even within the Church, and the community can no longer look down upon those relationships. There were couples who felt that even though ICMs are starting to be accepted in the Church, nevertheless, the true impact of their presence will become more meaningful when the Church begins to ordain priests and
promote leaders from various cultural backgrounds. This quotation represents the desire to see more multicultural leaders in the church:

> Until you start to see priests who are not all Egyptian, deacons, things like that, I see a couple of them in (name) church there who are not Egyptian, but until you start to see leadership roles in the church, it’s not having any kind of effect at all. (T8, 15)

### 4.4.7 Enhancing Church Ministry to ICM

At the conclusion of this section, it is important to discuss how the Church could enhance its ministry to couples in intercultural marriages. The idea is to hear how couples are most comfortable in being ministered to by the Church, as represented by its clergy, congregation, and programs. The discussion has produced fourteen excellent ideas (4.4.7.1-4.4.7.14) which the Church can consider and adopt to create an effective and fulfilling ministry to intercultural couples and their families. Hearing these suggestions from the couples provides a practical dimension of this study to enhance the Church’s ministry to people in ICMs. After all, listening and adhering to these propositions will not only improve the quality of ministry to intercultural families, but will also have a very positive influence on the future of the Coptic Church in the GTA.

#### 4.4.7.1 Promoting Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity

Couples felt most comfortable in a multicultural and diverse atmosphere. This way, none of the couples stand out in the crowd, nor receive any unnecessary stares as to the reason why they are in the church. A respondent recalls the comfortable feeling that she receives when she walks into a multicultural church saying, “we blend in, like everyone else because it is multicultural. There’s whites, yellow, black, in that church; it is different” (T5, 10). While not every church could have a huge cultural diversity, yet it is paramount to promote the concept of multiculturalism to be in line with the Christian spirit of acceptance and welcoming. One respondent felt that multiculturalism is part of the Canadian society and shared that her children go to school with kids from all kinds of ethnicities. She sees that all churches should now make an effort to reach out to all cultures since this is a phenomenon that will likely “magnify generation after generation” (T14, 16). The following comment represents an opinion of a participant who felt that she is being asked to sacrifice many
aspects of her identity, faith, and culture to adapt to the Orthodox Church, while the Church has not budged on any of its cultural practices to try to accommodate her and her family:

I don’t want to have to do all the work to make it work for me. I don’t want to have to be the one who learns all about how Orthodoxy works, and also learns how to speak Arabic and understand the mass, and also learns how to sing in the tones, and also has to do – then it becomes, we’re not going to change anything for you, you’re going to change everything for us, and that’s how you’re going to be most comfortable. (T17, 20)

While this sentiment was true for several respondents, the goal was not to change the core of the Orthodox faith, but rather to see what the Church can do to accommodate its Canadian members and make them feel comfortable and familiar with its culture and practices.

4.4.7.2 English Liturgy

Celebrating the Liturgy in English was an essential component in helping the couples and their children to feel a sense of belonging in the Church. The Church seemed foreign if at any point there was a switch in language or if a sermon was in Arabic. Couples immediately felt disconnected and alienated if they did not understand any part of the service. One respondent mentioned that having an all-English service helps his spouse to get “as much out of it as I am” (T3, 9). Not only was the English language important, but the way it was delivered, pronounced, and read in the Church also made a difference. Couples were unlikely to attend any meeting in the church that was not in English. Some observed that even if the Sunday Liturgy was in English, yet most other meetings and prayers in the Church during the week were in Arabic. A participant saw that it was important to “understand not just the sermon, but also the gospel and the songs and what’s being said and to follow along in order to get comfortable with it” (T1, 20).

4.4.7.3 Building Community

To build community means to have a feeling of warmth and acceptance from everyone around you for who you are and without judgement or pointing fingers. Intercultural couples seek a community that admires the gifts they bring into the Church and looks at them with the love of Christ and with no prejudice. This way, the Church community can “transfer the
love of Christ to them” (T4, 18). It is this feeling of belonging that ultimately wins the soul to Christ. Making friends who can relate and understand is critical in keeping couples involved in the community. Intercultural couples are seeking “a friend in the church that they can talk to” (T13, 23).

4.4.7.4 Do Not Segregate

Couples want to feel that they are part of the general congregation and do not wish to have a special designation that would segregate them from the mainstream community. Some churches, which proposed a special Liturgy for cross-cultural families only, created a schism within their congregations instead of helping to serve them. While it might have been done with the good intention of ministering to their special needs, the Liturgy was perceived as a means to isolate the couples from the rest of the congregation, as if the church has “designated you to be kept away from the general population” (T1, 14).

4.4.7.5 Explaining Traditions and Rituals

The meanings of many traditions and rituals in the Church are not clear when they are performed without explanation. A parishioner could be attending Church for years and not know why certain traditions are celebrated in the Liturgy because they have never been explained. Describing the rituals and traditions of the Church adds depth and spirituality to the parishioners’ growth and helps them become more involved in the service. The following is a typical comment from one of the respondents who realized the significance of explaining church traditions and rituals:

There’s so much in the mass that has a reason for it being there … a couple of sentences here and there as it’s introduced, and say, you know what, the reason why … we say kyrie eleison four hundred times is this. (T1, 22)

4.4.7.6 Marriage Preparation

Preparing for marriage is a combined responsibility between the Church and the couples leading up to their wedding. The Church is responsible for designing an interesting and interactive course that couples are motivated to attend. This course should be structured in a
way that helps couples discuss practical subjects pertaining to their relationship before and after their wedding. On the other hand, couples should make the effort to participate in this course to learn about the challenges that they might face. It is also important for the couples to understand their roles and responsibilities in a committed relationship.

4.4.7.7 Get Involved

As intercultural couples become an integral part of the church, they begin to take active roles in the progress of this community and the implementation of its programs. Their gifts and talents must be explored and used to create a spiritual revival within the Church and the outside community. One respondent suggested that couples should “get involved, and talk to other couples in intercultural marriages” (T1, 26). Another idea was to try to participate in some social activities such as mingling, visiting one another, or arranging a barbecue event, or even taking responsibility for a ministry. It was felt that the lay ministry of women should also be acknowledged and promoted “in terms of social leadership” (T18, 23).

4.4.7.8 Clergy Who Can Relate

The priests are usually at the forefront of welcoming and ministering to people in ICMs. Couples felt the need for the Church to consider ordaining younger priests, who were brought up in North America, or Canadian clergy, who might not be of an Egyptian descent (T12, 12). This would facilitate better communication between the couples and the Church, as well as confirm the fact that the Church is seriously committed to promoting its vision of multiculturalism and diversification (T13, 24).

4.4.7.9 Clarity and Consistency

Some participants struggled with obtaining a clear understanding of the Church rules, especially around baptism, anointing, and other liturgical practices. They observed “inconsistency within priests” (T1, 29) in terms of what was allowed and what was not. Also, many congregation members offered unsolicited, and often contradictory, advice for newcomers, in areas such as in-church manners, fasting, make-up, dress code, and dogmatic
beliefs. Couples were most comfortable when the rules were clear and consistent from all sources.

### 4.4.7.10 Remaining Current and Relevant

In a postmodern age, couples suggested that they need to feel that the Church is in tune with life in the real world. They want to see how the Bible could still be relevant to their daily living and how they can take the teachings they hear on Sunday and apply them on Monday in a practical way. They felt that the church “shies away from sermons or things on real social issues that are happening” (T16, 12) and might be content with discussing feasts of the Church or other biblical passages. This call to be current and relevant was not intended to take anything away from the Church traditions or the faith, but rather to bring them to life on a daily basis.

### 4.4.7.11 Outreach and Home Visits

Reaching out to couples through phone calls or home visits makes them feel special and not forgotten. Especially during times of crisis or hardships, it is essential to feel that the Church was right there, supporting and praying. One respondent, who went through a tough family crisis, voiced his concern that no one from church had asked about him during that time. He said, “It’s not like I was expecting an army of priests walking in and out with their families and all that, but a phone call, just to say ‘Hey, how are you doing? Is everything okay? Anything you need? No? Okay, good, talk to you later’” (T16, 14). Outreach could also be extended to other members of the larger Canadian community who might be interested in knowing more about the Church. It was suggested that this could be done by preparing brochures and handing them out in the community to announce “an English Bible study and probably put at the back just our creed that the people would know what they are going to see” (T4, 15).

### 4.4.7.12 Ecumenism

Some couples felt that they needed to open up the Church to other Christian denominations and have fellowship with them in order to feel that all Christians are members of the one
body of Christ. At times, members of the Coptic Church, especially coming from other cultures or denominations, feel isolated from the rest of the Christians in the world (T4, 14). Through the ecumenical movement, denominations or Churches could come together to learn, edify, and encourage one another as a fortress against living in the midst of a secular world. While full doctrinal unity is still out of reach, yet the love of Christ is what unites everyone.

4.4.7.13 Education and Awareness

As ICM becomes a more common phenomenon in the Coptic Church, couples asked that this subject be addressed and not shied away from. Whether it is clergy or families, voices must be heard and fears discussed. It is important to separate myth from fact. Dismissal and denial are not options as instances of ICM are definitely on the increase. The following is a typical comment from one of the respondents who faced some struggles when it was known that she was in an intercultural relationship. She suggested that Church leaders, as well as parents, try to acknowledge the couple, rather than dismiss or ignore them. She also suggested that church education about ICM should be increased:

Even if you disagree with these two getting together, just sit with them and … empathize with their situation. Welcome them, don’t just … no I won’t talk to you just because … I’ll just look the other way. Empathizing with the couple, whether you agree or disagree. Talk about it and educate people. (T5, 11)

4.4.7.14 Do Not Give Up

Whether couples were married in the Coptic Church or not, they still deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. At no time should any clergy or church member disregard or mistreat any individual, but the love of Christ should always shine through individuals. There is no harm in sharing the Orthodox perspective of the sacrament of marriage, as long as it is spoken about with respect for the couple and the choice is ultimately left for them. There are many couples who were not married in the Coptic Church for various reasons, but it is possible that they would return if circumstances permitted. That is why the Church must never give up on its children and always have an open door to welcome them back.
4.4.8 Summary

This section of the thesis was foundational to my research, as it represented the uncensored opinions, comments, and interactions of the couples with the Coptic Church and Community. It was essential to hear the couples’ triumphs and misfortunes within the Church to bring awareness and to call for action. It is true that this section occupied a major part of this chapter, but it was necessary for me to make these voices heard and allow them to become part of the conversation. Here, we explored the variety of comments received on each subject from an unbiased perspective, and this allowed the couples to express freely their ongoing experiences with the Coptic Church. This discussion has ultimately yielded many significant suggestions, which are vital in understanding how the Church could better minister to intercultural couples and their families.

The fourteen recommendations, which came as a result of this discussion, indicated a real desire for intercultural couples to find a home in the Coptic Church, for them and their families. This is a place where their spiritual and social needs can be met and their gifts nourished. They are not interested in being marginalized or in being segregated from the rest of the Coptic Community, but wish to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. As for couples who were hurt by the behaviour of some community members, a genuine effort by each individual in the Church must be undertaken to resolve and deal with issues of racial discrimination, slurs, myths, or segregation. There is a call for genuine effort by both Coptic clergy and congregations to integrate, accommodate, and welcome couples and individuals of all races and cultures.

4.5 The Ongoing Influence of Background Cultures on ICMs

The purpose of this section is to discover how couples were able to overcome any cultural differences, which they had as a result of their upbringings and to come up with a new formula for their day-to-day living. Even though many spouses were rooted, to a great extent, in their cultural identity, most were able to find a functional method for their daily affairs which worked for them. Traditional expectations were generally not adhered to, but,
on the contrary, couples worked together to identify their areas of strength, and these were their contributions to the marriage. Couples showed a great sense of accommodating one another and were open-minded and flexible to accommodate their spouse, whom they considered as equal.

4.5.1 Role of Culture in Marriage

Some Egyptian spouses felt that there was a great resemblance between their spouse’s original culture and their own Middle Eastern culture, in terms of their values and habits. One respondent felt that “the (country) culture was probably closest to our culture” (T2, 15) in most of the categories discussed. This statement was made to contradict the stereotype that Canadian spouses usually acquire different values or sets of beliefs which may alter those of the Egyptian. For a couple to come together, the similarities between their culture, character, values, and ethics are usually compatible.

4.5.1.1 Gender Roles and Responsibilities

The flexibility shown by couples in terms of their roles and responsibilities was amazing. Each couple was unique, but each one was able to work out a way to accomplish all their tasks (T6, 11). Most women were professionals and worked as many hours, if not more in some cases, as the men. Men were flexible in helping out with the household chores and did not just expect their wives to do them. Some expressed that joining in finishing the household chores gave them more quality time together to enjoy one another’s company (T5, 13). In some cases, men were better cooks, so they took pride in their gift and had no problem with taking responsibility for this task (T8, 23). Overall, there was a sense of a new paradigm arising in couples’ homes which promoted co-operation and teamwork.

4.5.1.2 Finances

Dealing with finances did not create any tension between the spouses, as they found different means to account for their income, expenses, and personal spending. Some couples had both separate accounts and a pooled account to use for common expenses (T1, 23). This allowed each individual the freedom to spend in certain areas without necessarily justifying
their expenses. Other couples preferred one common account from which they both budgeted and spent (T4, 20). It was usually the person who was most gifted with budgeting and numbers who oversaw the bill payments and made sure that they were within their monthly budget (T3, 10).

### 4.5.1.3 In-laws

While some couples were able to find common ground with their in-laws, there were others who struggled to communicate or build a relationship with them. Culture, language, and personal character remained as the greatest challenges for spouses in building a relationship with their in-laws. In some cases, Egyptian parents offered unsolicited advice to the couples, which became a source of discomfort to Canadian spouses who were not used to it. Some couples mentioned that the personalities of the two sets of parents were incompatible with each other, which made them unable to become close friends (T13, 9).

### 4.5.1.4 Food

Traditional ethnic food is becoming more obsolete, as couples are generally eating simple Canadian recipes, fast food, or take out (T12, 13). Yet, there were several couples who tried to cook cultural meals on occasion, international or Middle Eastern, but these were seen as delicacies (T4, 22). Some couples, which had more time and enjoyed cooking, were more diligent in preparing full meals for their families.

### 4.5.1.5 Language

The discussion on language varied substantially among the couples depending on their own attachment to their country of origin and upbringing. Spouses spoke to each other in English and expressed that the language of love transcended any other spoken language. Some struggled with family and friends who were not flexible in accommodating the Canadian spouse and making an effort to speak English in front of them (T2, 15). Couples with a stronger tie to their culture were more inclined to teach their children their mother tongue, whereas spouses who were not as close to their country of origin and did not speak the
language themselves were more comfortable with teaching their children just English (T10, 22). Some couples found it beneficial to teach their children more than one language.

### 4.5.1.6 Communication

Some Canadian spouses expressed concern about the means of communication in the Egyptian community. Canadian spouses saw in their own experience that some Egyptians may not always be straightforward or say what they mean (T8, 21). Others felt that when Egyptians speak together they tend to get very loud, which is something that many Canadians are not used to (T10, 22). These attributes could be personal, rather than cultural, and might not be generalized.

### 4.5.1.7 Raising Children

Participants wanted to provide the best life for their children in terms of their upbringing, spirituality, education, social life, and a barrier-free society that respects their individuality and talents. Parents were looking to become good role models for their children and to teach them how to be faithful and functional members of society, without compromising their morals and values. They also were seeking a Church with a safe environment for their children where they could be respected and treated with dignity. The following two quotations give an idea about parents’ desire to offer their children a healthy spiritual environment in which they are to be raised. There is a major role which the church could help in to support these endeavours.

> We hope to have our household as a small church built on prayer and liturgical cycle and praying together as a family. (T10, 22)

> To me the one thing with my kids is for them to grow up in some sort of youth group so they can grow up with the same kind of friends like I had. Friends I’ve known for 25, 30 years now. (T14, 11)

### 4.5.2 Effect of ICM on Ethnic Identity

The purpose of this question was to discover the effect that marrying someone from another ethnicity had on one’s own identity. Some couples expressed that ICM gave them the
opportunity to learn about other cultures, rather than being confined to one’s own heritage and cultural norms alone. It broadened their horizons and made them realize that there is much more in the world that could be explored and realized (T2, 17).

There were several other couples that expressed that they were still the same and that nothing much has changed as a result of marrying someone from another culture or denomination (T14, 12). This was greatly manifested in the fact that couples still identified themselves with their original Christian denomination or ethnicity, regardless of their marriage in or out of the Coptic Church (T18, 19). One respondent expressed that some Copts equate being Coptic to being Christian and do not see beyond their denomination. This, in turn, might cause them to feel guilty or scared if they left the Coptic Church and joined another denomination (T9, 10).

4.5.3 Effect of ICM on Children

Many couples were optimistic that their children will have the best of both cultures (T7, 23). Whether in the Church or the general society, ICMs are becoming more common, and many children have this new, unique identity that is celebrated. Most children in the Coptic Church now communicate in English, so children of ICMs will not be at a disadvantage (T10, 24). The main concern expressed was the need to find Coptic parishes and priests who would celebrate this diversity within the congregation and help every parishioner to feel accepted and welcomed. One couple mentioned their concern saying, “it is going to depend so much on the priest. I mean, it’s hard right now to find a church where we feel really comfortable raising the kids” (T10, 24).

Among couples that wanted to maintain an association with two Christian denominations, there was a bit of a tension as to what would be the right balance and what would be the effect on the children’s belonging to either Church. The general consensus was that trying to belong to two denominations would ultimately cause confusion for the children, which could eventually make them reject both (T14, 7). Nevertheless, couples that were very strict in denying the children an association with the spouse’s family, who might belong to another Christian denomination, were received with frowning and rejection (T18, 14).
4.5.4 Summary

Intercultural couples are working together to discover a formula to resolve their differences and find a way to live in harmony and synchronicity. While it might have been believed that individuals coming from different parts of the world have different or opposing values, beliefs, or morals, common Christian values and multiculturalism in the Canadian context are bringing people together in ways that might be unprecedented in history. People are discovering that they have more in common than they have differences and are finding ways to unite and live in agreement. Multiculturalism in Canada has become the new culture in the land in which every individual’s culture is respected and celebrated and everyone is trying to find a way to coexist and focus on what is common. There is no doubt that individuals in ICMs still maintained their unique experiences and identities, which have enriched their marriages and were accepted by all parties involved. It is this new, unique, Christian Canadian cultural identity that has allowed many ICMs to thrive and flourish.

4.6 Towards a Healthy ICM

This section is intended to dig deeper into the marriage of intercultural couples to learn the keys for having a successful relationship and to identify other stresses that may cause marriages to fail. The challenges of daily living put much strain on the family unit attempting to survive in the twenty-first century. Thus, couples must continue to work on their marriages daily to ensure that they do not lose the purpose of being together and forming a family. With the rise of family conflicts, it was important to hear from these couples about how they maintain healthy marriages and resolve conflict.

4.6.1 Factors Leading to Success

Couples have identified several key components that were essential in maintaining a successful marriage. Spirituality and religion came first and foremost. One respondent mentioned that “prayer strengthens a marriage” (T8, 26). It is crucial for the family to be united together around God and to be active members of the Church. Having God present in a household brings peace, joy, and unity, as the spouses view one another through the eyes
of Christ. It was the opinion of one couple that their marriage had become stronger since they became more active with the Church (T13, 15). Other important factors for a successful marriage included healthy communication, compromise, compatibility in making the choice of a life partner, and being open-minded to accept the other person’s culture (T14, 22). In addition, love, friendship and keeping the fire in the marriage helped to ensure lifelong relationships that are able to conquer all challenges (T2, 18).

### 4.6.2 Factors Leading to Conflict

Obviously, one can assume that the opposite of any or all of the factors mentioned above would lead to conflict and the possible failure of a marriage. Yet, there were several other factors which couples identified that could ultimately lead to a broken marriage. Not spending enough time together or being very busy at work could send a feeling that the spouse is not a priority (T13, 9). Not deciding early on which church the couple will attend or changing one’s mind after the wedding could cause conflict, especially if one spouse was a faithful member of a Church and was then expected to switch or abandon that Church completely (T10, 25). Pride was identified as a cause of problems, especially when the focus within the family switches from ‘we’ to ‘I’ (T5, 16). Finally, marriage is hard work every day and requires that couples keep figuring it out, even if it seems that problems are increasing (T8, 26). The following is a typical comment by a respondent who gave practical advice on ways that couples need to work on their differences to make their relationships work:

> It is very important not just to love your spouse obviously and adapt to him, but you have to adapt to the whole package … which is the culture, the Church, the family, the friends of the family. It comes in a package … There’s a great degree of selflessness that goes into making that work. (T2, 5)

### 4.6.3 Summary

The best people to offer advice on how to have a successful ICM are those who have experienced it themselves. Couples have identified many techniques through which they could enjoy a happy life together. Having God clearly present in their married lives was an essential factor that brought unity and peace. Also, belonging and being involved in one
Church helped the couple to have a stronger relationship, since they can serve and grow spiritually together. Other factors included having open communication, compromise, love, and friendship. There were also influences that led to the deterioration of the relationship. These included neglect, pride, not deciding on a home church, and losing momentum. The couples truly did some soul searching to identify all the factors that helped them achieve prosperity in their relationships and others which caused conflict through the years. These responses reflected the maturity and depth of these relationships. It is thus obvious that persons in these ICMs have built their marriages on solid foundations and are deeply committed to their long term prosperity and success.

4.7 Concluding Thoughts

This question represented the final segment of the interview in which participants had the opportunity to mention any last thoughts, reflect on the topic under investigation, and to indicate if they were interested in being updated about the progress of the research. The comments referenced here helped bring the interview to a reasonable conclusion and to thank the couples for their willingness to participate in the research.

4.7.1 Additional Significant Information

Prior to concluding the interview, the respondents were given one final chance to either emphasize a point that they made earlier or to mention other significant information that was not covered in the previous questions. Couples particularly focused on the ongoing transformation that is currently taking place in the Coptic Church, from being a predominantly Egyptian Church to becoming a multicultural Church. It was felt that the key factor that would ensure the future success of the Church in the GTA was for the clergy and community to embrace this change and to remain open and welcoming (T1, 29). There are many denominations or religions that are open to accepting and welcoming intercultural couples if they do not find their place in the Coptic Church. Individuals, male or female, should be able to walk through the Church doors and not worry about how they will be judged by church members (T3, 16). Creating a safe environment for intercultural couples helps to ensure their participation in the Coptic Church, now and in the future (T7, 27).
4.7.2 Impressions about Interviews

The research subject was of great interest to all participants, as it had direct implications on their lives. Some mentioned that they were proud that the Coptic Church was investigating this phenomenon, which shows a direct interest by the Church in offering pastoral care to all her children (T8, 28). They were hopeful that, through this research, Copts would have a better understanding of ICM and empathize with members of different ethnicities and cultures. Others mentioned that the interviews gave them an opportunity to discuss many matters which they rarely venture into as they were able to verbalize opinions that they thought about but never discussed openly (T5, 18).

4.7.3 Follow up Information

Couples were very interested to know the results of the research, what other couples said, and the practical application or implementation of the research in their daily lives and in the Church (T10, 26). Participants requested that they be updated on the progress of the research (T8, 28).

4.7.4 Summary

The concluding thoughts were a combination of highlighting significant comments from the interviews, the couples’ impressions on our meeting, and interest in being updated about the progress of the research. Participants expressed very positive and hopeful attitudes about the fact that the Church is interested in learning about ICM and trying to implement positive techniques to improve its ministry to them. All couples shared very positive feelings about the interview process and expressed an interest in being updated about its progress. The positive experience of couples during this interview process has definitely affected their perception of the Coptic Church in a constructive way and sent them a clear message that the Church is interested in their belonging and participation, now and in the future.
4.8 Conclusion

The ongoing debate about the perception of ICM in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the GTA is still under discussion and dispute by members of the Community. There are many who are still clearly against the idea of unity between members of different ethnicities, claiming that these marriages only end up in divorce. This chapter offered a clear indication that there are many successful and prosperous ICMs in the GTA between Copts and people from a variety of different ethnicities. These couples have managed to find practical ways to make their marriages work and to overcome their differences. Even though every marriage may face turbulent times at some point, these couples have resolved their differences and have “figured out their dance” (T17, 6). Many factors needed to be considered to view ICM from a panoramic perspective. Family, faith, culture, personal compatibility, and willingness to accept the other were all essential factors in having a successful ICM. The Coptic Church continues to play a significant role in the lives of her children. There is a clear call from couples in ICMs for the Church to remain open, accepting, and willing to nurture these relationships. Not only will the couples benefit from an open and welcoming spirit, but the Church will also gain the full dedication and belonging of her children and their families.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

Having concluded my analysis chapter, I now turn to the conclusion chapter which will bring major aspects of this research to a meaningful end. I will start this chapter by interpreting the data arising from the previous chapter (5.1). Next, I will evaluate the entire process which led me to this point and examine if it rendered the desired results (5.2). I will then consider the contributions of this research from pastoral, as well as academic, perspectives (5.3). Finally, I will identify several significant areas which were not included in this research that could be subjects for further study (5.4) and make some concluding remarks (5.5).

5.1 Interpreting the Data

The biggest challenge facing me in interpreting the data arising from my analysis chapter is the wide spectrum of opinions expressed by the participants on almost every subject discussed. Not only were the opinions different, but they even opposed each other at times. Each experience was unique and yielded exclusive data, which could be the subject of an array of interpretations. One way of interpreting the data is to take one side over another and override the opinions of some, while justifying that they are in the minority. This process of interpretation is not recommended because all voices in a qualitative research study contribute to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. Also, the danger of this methodology is that personal biases of the researcher could play a factor in determining the supremacy of one voice or opinion over the other. Another method for interpretation is to try to detect opposing opinions and then suggest that the ideal way is to find a middle ground upon which a compromise could be suggested and concluded. The danger of this method is that it could make assumptions which are outside of the participants’ experiences and thus yield false results. This phenomenological research is not intended to formulate theories or

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200 The following three opinions of interpreting data have been adapted from the dissertation of Mark W. Harris, *The Search for Meaning in Congregational Worship* (Toronto, Ontario: Emmanuel College, Victoria University, 2007), 133.
make conclusive recommendations. On the contrary, it is meant to engage in a dialogue with couples who are in intercultural marriages, hear their stories, and accurately report their lived experience. Thus, I have chosen a method of interpretation known as Ricoeurian dialectic in which different opinions are allowed to stand alone and based on their own merit, while interacting with one another, so that ultimately none of the opinions is eliminated. 201 In this interpretive methodology, all opinions could be considered essential and valid in the overall evaluation of the lived experience of participants. The ultimate goal is to come to a greater understanding of the entire spectrum of experiences of couples in intercultural marriages.

In this section, I will explore some major themes arising from the study, consider the pastoral implications of this study on the future of the Coptic Church in the GTA, and suggest a call for action (5.1.1 to 5.1.3). It is my intention to represent all the opinions stated by the participants, without personal biases or compromise. It is in this accurate and transparent review of the research that this study finds its legitimacy and effectiveness.

5.1.1 Major Themes Arising from the Study

It might be an impossible task to identify all the themes that have risen as a result of my Action-in-Ministry and were discussed in the analysis chapter. Yet, there are some major themes that are worthy to be mentioned due to their significant impact on this study including functional marriages, the faith factor, increased dialogue, the effect of Church on ICM, and new cultural norms (5.1.1.1 to 5.1.1.5). These themes will ultimately lead me to consider their pastoral implications and to create a call for action.

5.1.1.1 Functional Marriages

One of the most impressive themes, which became very apparent from the beginning of my Action-in-Ministry process to its conclusion, was the obvious involvement of functional

ICMs in the study. During the journey of this research, I witnessed stable and happy marriages and couples who were wholly compatible and dedicated to one another. The definition of having functional marriages does not imply that they were problem-free, but rather that couples were working together on resolving their differences and were fully committed to building strong families. Couples sincerely cared for one another and treated each other with respect and honour. They were compatible in terms of their education, goals in life, understanding of marriage, faith, and raising children. Their homes were clean and orderly, and they treated their children with respect and admiration. This opinion is based on my brief interaction with the couples and the time we spent together in conversations. Thus it is merely a personal and subjective observation and did not arise from the actual content of the responses.

This first theme is helpful to realizing that healthy and happy intercultural marriages are possible in the Coptic Community. This is significant as it stands in opposition to any stereotypes or preconceived ideas that ICMs end up in failure or divorce. The fact that this research has identified model intercultural couples could be groundbreaking for the future generations of Copts who are thinking of being in a cross-cultural relationship.

5.1.1.2 The Faith Factor

Whether couples were married in or outside of the Coptic Church, faith still played a major role in their lives. Even though some couples originally had a civil marriage, their spouses were still Christian and were part of a Christian congregation. All other couples were married in the Coptic Church or other Christian denominations. Faith played a major role in their daily lives and was a source of inspiration and encouragement. Also, all couples were currently involved in an Orthodox or other Christian congregation.

The fact that all couples were currently living out their Christian faith is encouraging as it means that Coptic parents were able to transfer their faith to their children so that the next generation is able to personalize and practise it with their families. The struggle still continues in the minds of some parents and in the view of the Coptic Orthodox Church regarding marrying and practising in other Christian denominations because of the existing
schisms and theological differences between Christian Churches. It is sufficient here to recognize this tension that might exist, without venturing into suggestions of how to resolve it, as this is considered outside of the scope of my research and is reserved for further study.

5.1.1.3 Increased Dialogue

There is a new paradigm arising in the relationship between individuals in ICMs and their parents, members of the Community, and Clergy. Couples want to be heard, understood, and engaged in a respectful dialogue which acknowledges their maturity, spirituality, and sound decision-making. There is no doubt that young adults continue to seek the opinions, experiences, and blessings of family, Clergy, and Community members prior to making the decision of being in an ICM. The role of other parties involved would be primarily as dialogue partners to help individuals make a sound choice, ultimately leading to a happy and successful marriage. As ICMs continue to be a more common phenomenon within the Coptic Community, all parties involved must continue to evaluate individuals not based on ethnicity, race, or personal biases, but rather on the couples’ compatibility on a case by case basis. In the same manner, the Clergy and Church Community must be part of this dialogue to identify their fears, if any, of ICM and to find ways to resolve any misunderstanding about the subject. Simply dismissing the subject as irrelevant or unnecessary will not yield satisfactory feelings for couples. On the contrary, it may create defiance or breaking away from tradition or from the Church altogether.

5.1.1.4 Effect of Church on ICM

The Coptic Church continues to have an enormous influence on the lives of its parishioners and especially those in ICMs. The Church is seen as a beacon of hope and faith and as a connection to the divine. In it, couples partake of the Holy Eucharist and have fellowship with other members in the body of Christ. If given the opportunity, most Copts were happy to belong to the Coptic Church and raise their children in it. For many Copts, the Church was a place where they grew up and shared many memories and experiences. They wanted their spouses and children to share the same memories and to experience the feeling of communal living. While couples were happy to belong to the Coptic Church, they
mentioned that they wanted it to be more accessible which would enrich their spiritual
growth and relationship with God and with others. Couples requested that the Church
remain current and relevant to their lives by tackling issues that affect them on a day-to-day basis.

5.1.1.5 New Cultural Norms

Culture played a major role in the lives of intercultural couples. There is no doubt that each
person had been influenced by their inherited culture, either by birth or through their
parents, yet it was apparent that the predominant culture in couples’ lives now has become
the current Canadian norms and standards. From gender roles and responsibilities to
language, food, and techniques in raising children, everything pointed towards the influence
of the current Canadian culture. Couples were comfortable with living and raising their
children within the norms of the Canadian society, without compromising their faith.
Culture has become a tool for them to live out their daily lives within a defined system that
promoted equality, respect, and diversity.

It is important for us to identify this theme because it has direct implications for the way we
minister to intercultural couples. There is a need for the Church to have a greater
appreciation for our Canadian culture and to promote its strengths and most celebrated
values. In doing so, couples feel that the Church is in tune with their daily living and that it
appreciates the country which hosts us all under its wings.

5.1.2 Pastoral Challenges

One of the most alarming observations arising from this research is the fact that half of the
intercultural couples did not originally marry in the Coptic Church. A large portion of them
became fully integrated into other Christian denominations and were not considering
returning to the Coptic Church. Couples who did not marry in the Coptic Church identified
different reasons why they did not do so, which included:

a) they attended other denominational churches since their youth and became distant from
the Coptic Church, so it was natural to marry in these churches;
b) they did not want to force their spouse to convert, and it was easier to marry in another denomination which did not require the Canadian spouse to convert or be rebaptized;

c) they wanted to remain Orthodox, but not necessarily Coptic;

d) parents were not originally in agreement, so they had a civil marriage;

e) they did not come to a mutual agreement with the priest, and there were misunderstandings concerning the requirements and implications of them marrying in another Church.

Even those who married in the Coptic Church were barely involved in the life of the Church. Many were present in the Church physically and partaking of the Holy Eucharist, but not really involved beyond that. Very few served in the Church, and even fewer were involved in any social activities. This research is conducted under the assumption that if the Church loses its next generation of young adults, then it would have no chance in surviving into the future. The potential loss of half of the intercultural couples poses a great risk to the future survival of the Coptic Church in the GTA. As a pastor, this also causes concerns about whether the Church and its ministers have done everything in their hands to prevent this loss and if there were solutions available to prevent this from continuing to happen in the future.

Another pastoral challenge experienced was the fact that Canadian spouses found the Coptic Church very foreign to them, including its language, traditions, culture, practices, music, and rules. There is a very clear reason why Canadian spouses were never able to fully integrate into the Coptic Church. Many felt that they were being asked to change everything about their faith, culture, and traditions, while the Church was not willing to bend. We are not speaking here about changing theological or doctrinal beliefs, but rather about making the Church more accessible for new Canadian members.

The lack of empathy expressed by clergy members in dealing with ICMs was a major concern that became obvious in this research. Whether priests were not interested, not prepared, or expressed personal biases, the final outcome of many interactions was negative
and resulted in pushing couples away. The preparation of Coptic priests to properly interact with intercultural couples is of paramount importance for the future success of this ministry.

It is important to acknowledge that many couples involved in the research were satisfied with their experience of marrying in the Coptic Church. Nevertheless, there were many more who were hurt and who expressed their struggles with parents, the community, and with clergy. Thus, it is now the time to heal old wounds and have a fresh start. This new beginning must acknowledge mistakes of the past, and the Church must be committed to working hard to render a better future for couples in ICMs. The Church must also provide the best pastoral care to its parishioners, free from any barriers which may hinder their involvement and full participation. The choice is then left to each couple as to the degree of their involvement in the faith community.

5.1.3 Call for Action

In the last section, I mentioned some of the pastoral challenges that became obvious as a result of this research. In this segment I will make suggestions about taking practical steps to resolve these challenges. It is the collective action to be taken by intercultural couples, the Church, Community, families, and Clergy that could ultimately enhance and strengthen the ministry to people in ICMs. It is very easy for each party involved to cast blame on others to justify its position. This would be taking the easy way out and not facing the facts and the challenges. The mere fact that this subject is under investigation is a clear indication that the Coptic Church has acknowledged that ICM is a growing phenomenon and that it must find ways to better minister to those families. Thus, I will make some recommendations that pertain to the responsibilities of intercultural couples, the Coptic Church, Coptic Community, priests, and parents (5.1.3.1 to 5.1.3.5). This call for action will provide a practical guide to suggest possible means to better minister to people in ICMs.

5.1.3.1 For Couples

Until now, intercultural couples have not really had a significant voice in the Coptic Church or a major presence that is effective and felt throughout the region. They have merely tagged
along in existing programs and not voiced their opinions about the effectiveness of Church ministry to them and to their families. Those who felt that they were not heard or who did not have their opinions acknowledged, took the easy way out, either to go quietly back to the pew or to calmly leave the Church altogether. It is now time to understand that intercultural families are an integral part of the fabric of the Church and that there is no way that the Church will have a future without their full participation in its life. Couples must be respectfully outspoken and seek ways to be involved in various areas of the ministry. They must join with various Church leaders in dialogue and conversation to find better ways to minister to people in ICMs and seek their full participation. Most important is to ensure that they are growing spiritually and living a Christian life, in and outside of the Church.

Another call for couples who have left the Church is to consider returning and engaging in a dialogue with the leaders, as there are many ways to re-establish their fellowship with the Church. Leaders are now more equipped and ready to bridge many cultural gaps which might have existed in the past, and many are working to ensure that intercultural couples and their families enjoy a spiritual environment.

5.1.3.2 For the Coptic Church

The Coptic Church in the GTA is currently at a crossroads as it tries to figure out the direction that it should adopt in the future. From one perspective, it is trying to remain faithful to its roots by creating a replica of the Church in Egypt here in Canada. From another perspective, it is facing unique challenges in the Canadian culture which are unprecedented in its history. It is impossible to replicate an ethnic Church and plant it in the West and expect it to survive perpetually. Some Churches may survive for one or two generations, but then they lose vitality. The Church must eventually develop its own characteristics that allow it to survive in the new environment. Just like the African Coptic Church has started to show signs of belonging to and reflecting the African culture, so should the Canadian Coptic Church in the GTA. This is a challenging endeavour because it has the potential of straying from the core of the Orthodox faith or even breaking away from Orthodoxy altogether. This is why this approach must be entrusted to clergy and laity
together, who do not want to change the faith, but who are open to making it more accessible. The goal is to remain faithful to the core of the Coptic Orthodox teaching while recognizing the cultural differences that exist between the motherland Egypt and Canada. The process of soul searching to determine the core or essential practices of the Coptic Orthodox faith must be undertaken to assure the Canadian parishioners that they are not being asked to become Egyptian, but rather that they are requested to adopt the pure Orthodox faith in a Canadian context. Any adaptation of the traditions or culture must be done with full sensitivity to the Orthodox faith and conducted under the guidance of the Church hierarchy.

I must admit that it is never an easy task to distinguish between faith and cultural practices. Nevertheless, the model of St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church (SMSV) could be considered as a successful ministry that maintained the Orthodox faith, but also allowed for cultural expressions to co-exist as an essential value in its fabric. This new model of a Coptic Orthodox multicultural church, which is walking this tightrope, has been blessed and encouraged by the Church hierarchy. In its endeavour to become culturally relevant, SMSV has continued being faithful to the core of the Orthodox faith. It is encouraging to see that since the establishment of SMSV, there have been nine more similar Coptic multicultural mission Churches established in Canada and the United States with the same values and mission statement. It is my hope that all other Coptic Churches in the GTA and beyond would go through an internal transformation to express an explicit commitment to multiculturalism, mission, outreach, and unconditional love for all of their parishioners. This will be the first step in ministering to all members of their parishes.

The Church must also take active steps to eliminate any barriers which may hinder Canadian members from fully integrating into its services. All Liturgies and meetings must be conducted in clear and understood English, so that members do not feel excluded from any service. All traditions, rules, practices, and doctrines should be completely explained to

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202 It is acknowledged that the Church still has a responsibility to minister to new immigrants in their mother tongue, which is Arabic. Since this aspect is outside the scope of my research, it will be deferred to a further study to look at the implications of this suggestion on the immigrant community.
the parishioners to engage them fully in the services. Also, the Church could recognize certain ethnic and cultural celebrations which are of significance to its parishioners, such as Chinese New Year and Black History Month, in order to reflect a message of inclusion and community.

In response to the reality that some Coptic youth are marrying in other Christian denominations or having civil weddings, the Church must better educate its parishioners on the requirements for marrying in the Coptic Church and the implications which would arise from choosing otherwise. This must be done in a very sensitive and respectful manner to all other Christian denominations. Ministering to young adults and educating them in their childhood about the significance of the sacraments, doctrines, and traditions of the Coptic Church could encourage them to grow in a healthy spiritual environment and ultimately choose to continue their spiritual journey in the Coptic Church after their marriages.

I suggest the formation of a GTA-wide dialogue committee which includes representatives of Church leaders, along with delegates of a variety of ethnic groups, to investigate ongoing challenges that these members are facing in the Church and to find ways to resolve them. This committee would develop strategies for engaging intercultural couples in the service and activities of the Church and give them visible leadership roles in the community of faith. Also, leadership training courses could be investigated to better equip intercultural couples and their families to become more prepared to lead the Church in the future.

5.1.3.3 For the Coptic Community

The Coptic Community, being represented in the Church members, has proven to be a key catalyst in the overall vision of ministering to intercultural couples and their families. There were many instances when Church members used racial slurs which were offensive to new Canadian members. Also, the fact that they communicated with one another in Arabic and clustered among themselves sent a negative signal to English-speaking couples that they were being excluded from the fellowship of the Church. It is recommended that Church members make an intentional effort to integrate with intercultural couples through an initiative to reach out to them, inviting them to their homes, and becoming better acquainted
with one another. It is believed that the Coptic Community is very warm and hospitable, but only after breaking through the initial introduction and becoming familiar with one another. This openness to welcome and include others works in favour of advancing the overall mission of the Church as all members feel that they are received and accepted. Community members should also engage in an open dialogue with intercultural couples regarding any fears or stereotypes which they might have to fully understand one another’s perspectives. It is believed that all parties will come to a greater appreciation of each other’s values that they contribute to the community of faith. Thus, eventually, ethnic and cultural barriers could be eliminated, and the entire community becomes consolidated and united in its vision and approach.

5.1.3.4 For Priests

The Coptic Church in the GTA still faces the challenge that there is a large number of Clergy who immigrated to Canada as adults and who find it difficult to interact with people in ICMs. They still find it more convenient to pray and serve in Arabic. Some have even accumulated certain stereotypes against ICM, which leads them to reject or decline involvement in these unions. There is a call now to put aside any preconceived ideas and stereotypes which might have existed in the past and begin to give ICMs a chance to survive and flourish in the Church. There is no doubt in my mind that there are many priests who are proficient in the English language and are very familiar with the Canadian culture and customs. Nevertheless, to become better equipped to minister in a multicultural church, all priests should make a deliberate effort to expand their knowledge of the English language, Canadian culture, and customs of our new, adopted homeland. Priests should engage in an open dialogue with their Canadian members to have a better understanding of their gifts and how they can become more involved in the church ministry. Clergy members could also participate in some training courses from local, national, or international professionals, who might have the expertise of ministering in a multicultural environment. In this way, priests could always remain current on the latest techniques and ideas about ministering to all members of their congregations.
I found that it is extremely beneficial for priests to invest some quality time with each intercultural couple that intends to be wed to fully explain the process of getting married in the Coptic Church, the requirements, and the expectations, and also to make clear the implications of any decision that they take in their future involvement in the Coptic Church or other denominations. If the process is fully transparent, then the couple is usually at ease and can make an informed decision on their wedding plans and future participation in the Church.

5.1.3.5 For Parents

All Coptic participants involved in the study had a very respectful and honourable relationship with their parents. Many parents were able to fully hear and respect their children’s wishes to marry a Canadian spouse, while others were wholeheartedly against it. It is important for all parents who have immigrated to Canada and raised their children in a multicultural environment to recognize the possibility that their children could be in a relationship with a Canadian person, which may ultimately lead to marriage. It is obvious now that Coptic young adults are marrying spouses of all nations, without necessarily being limited by ethnic or cultural barriers. The challenge for some parents is to eliminate racist ideologies or any preconceived stereotypes with which they were brought up and evaluate each potential spouse based on his or her own merits and compatibility with their child. The role of parents thus becomes more of facilitators and prayer partners, rather than enforcers of predetermined rules. It is in this transformation that occurs in the relationship between parents and their children, that parents acknowledge the maturity of their children and their ability to make sound decisions.

5.2 Evaluation of the Study

This section is intended to reflect back on the whole process of researching and writing this thesis. I plan to discover if I was faithful in following the road map which was set in Chapter Three and if the research rendered its desired results. In considering these questions, I hope to be assured of the effectiveness of this study and comforted as to its future implications for my pastoral ministry and for others interested in this research. I will begin by recalling the
process through which I chose my research question, followed by evaluating the Action-in-Ministry and the research methodology, as well as by revisiting the risks and limitations, and evaluating if the study yielded its intended results (5.2.1 to 5.2.5).

5.2.1 Choosing the Research Question

Ever since the beginning of my Doctor of Ministry Program, our cohort was asked to start thinking about our research interest and to try to articulate a specific question which the study would answer. My interest in youth and family ministry was my biggest drive for enrolling in this program and looking for a specific area to research in which I could gain greater experience. In the first two years of the program, my main focus was to research a subject that had future pastoral implications on retaining and ministering to Coptic youth in the Church and passing on the faith from one generation to the next. As the research evolved, I felt that ministering to teens and young adults was extremely important, but it was during the time of their marriage that they either stayed in or broke away from the Church. After the establishment of SMSV and ministering to many intercultural couples, it became clear that this was the area which required deeper and more intense research. It was obvious that ICM was becoming a growing phenomenon, but the Church did not have enough tools or solid research to address it. It was the correlation between my Practice of Ministry and my ongoing studies that gave rise to this research interest. The research question went through several rounds of refinement until it reached its final format. In my research question, I have narrowed my parameters to couples living in the GTA because of the high concentration of Copts who live in this area, the GTA being the first city to have a Coptic Church in the Diaspora, and the fact that this area is where I conduct my personal ministry. I have also identified three main concerns for the research: (1) to research the lived experience of people in ICMs; (2) to discover the effect of the Coptic Church on these marriages; and (3) to identify certain techniques to successfully minister to intercultural couples.

5.2.2 Action-in-Ministry

To obtain the Ethics Review Approval, I had to be very specific concerning the steps which were followed in my Action-in-Ministry. Pre-determining these steps made the process
seamless and enjoyable. I was extremely encouraged by the enormous response to the announcement made in most GTA churches concerning my research topic. I received many more requests for participation from couples than I had anticipated. Even after I had limited my participants to twelve couples for focus groups and eighteen for one-on-one interviews, I continued to receive requests from other couples to participate, which I had to decline. It is possible that I would go back in the future and contact these couples to have an informal interview with them to even further enrich my experience and to hear their stories. Every story was unique and provided me with a vision into the lived experience of ICM.

The fact that there was so much interest in my research topic from couples was the greatest proof of the need to investigate this phenomenon. Couples were enthusiastic during our interviews and willing to share any relevant information requested from them. All the protocols outlined in the Ethics Review Approval, as well as in Chapter Three of this thesis, were followed to render the desired outcome. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Then the narrative was formulated, interpreted, and, finally, pastoral implications were drawn. Following the outlined procedures was the main factor that has kept this research on the right path and enriched my pastoral experience. In hindsight, it would have been helpful to include one or two couples in same-culture marriages to have the ability to compare and contrast their experiences with those in ICMs.

5.2.3 Research Methodology

I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as the guiding principle for my research methodology since it is concerned with the everyday life of the persons under investigation. These experiences yield meanings that could be studied, and results are interpreted and conclusions drawn. It has proven to be descriptive, allowing participants who have experienced the phenomenon to speak for themselves, and interpretive, allowing me to search for meaning within the experience and reflect on it. This methodology has proven to be very beneficial for my research because it offered me a practical tool for investigating my subject of interest in a manner which produced the maximum results. I was able to inquire about ICM from people who have experienced the phenomenon and interpret and reflect on the data.
accordingly. It is implicit that in limiting myself to one research methodology, I am not benefiting from other qualitative research methodologies which possess their own strengths.

5.2.4 Risks and Limitations Revisited

Every research involving humans encounters certain risks and limitations which may hinder its full potential to yield its ultimate results. In my Ethics Review, as well as the Thesis Proposal, I have identified several factors which could potentially affect the outcome of this research. It was possible that the participants would have unpleasant memories, arising as a result of our discussion. For this reason, I offered them contact with both a priest and a Christian counsellor in case a need arose to receive counselling or pastoral care. To the best of my knowledge, the priest and counsellor were not contacted by any of the participants, nor was any further assistance required. As a matter of fact, the interviews were always concluded on a positive note and an optimistic feeling that the Church was on the right track to offer personalized pastoral care to intercultural couples and their families. Another identified risk was the possible loss of privacy through the lack of confidentiality arising from focus groups or the sorting and reporting of information. It is significant here to mention that all involved parties signed a confidentiality form and that no instances of information leakage were reported. All participants respected the confidentiality of the process and were diligent about maintaining the dignity of this research. Also, all protocols were followed with sorting and reporting the data, so that no breach of confidentiality was encountered. All participants were contacted prior to concluding the research to review the analysis chapter and to ensure that it did not violate any confidentiality agreements or reveal their identity, while correctly reflecting their opinions and experiences. One final limitation was identified which concerned how the participants would react to me as clergy conducting the interviews and if this would have a negative effect on the results. This limitation was prompted by the assumption that some people may alter or hold back their experiences so that they would not offend me or jeopardize their relationship with God or with the Church. It is impossible to know for sure if this was the case, but I asked every couple prior to the interview to consider me merely as a researcher and assured them that nothing they said would jeopardize our relationship or have any further implications on their faith or
participation in the Church. Actually, I mentioned that their honesty and direct responses would give this research its validity and would have future implications on how Church members and clergy deal with similar cases. I believe that all participants were very sincere in their responses and my participation as the interviewer did not hinder the research in any way.

5.2.5 Did the Study Yield its Intended Results?

When I first began this research, I did not know what to expect or what the outcome of this journey would be. I was hoping to venture into the lived experience of couples in ICMs, so that, ultimately, I could identify certain areas to enhance my, as well as the Church’s, ministry to them. I believe that the investigation process was faithful to the research question and has rendered the desired results. It has reflected on the lived experience of couples in ICMs, explored how the Church, Clergy, Community, family, and traditions, have influenced these relationships, and, finally, identified several suggestions, either emerging from the couples or as a call for action, to successfully minister to intercultural couples. If given the chance, it is possible to expand the research to include other significant areas which could ultimately influence the ministry, but these were deferred for further study.

5.3 Contribution of the Study

One of the greatest challenges that faced me in writing this thesis was to identify the target audience or those who would benefit from this research. There is no doubt that this process has enriched my own ministry and benefitted me personally above anyone else. The experience that I gained in researching and writing this thesis will last me a lifetime and will have direct implications on the way in which I minister to intercultural couples. Yet, I believe that the benefit could be extended to many more people and entities beyond myself. It is my hope that this research will be of benefit to couples in ICMs, the Coptic Orthodox Community in the GTA, Clergy, the Coptic Church in the Diaspora, all ethnic Churches in Canada, and to researchers engaged in a similar study. Each of these target audience is addressed in this section (5.3.1 to 5.3.6).
5.3.1 To Couples in ICMs

Researching the lived experience of couples in ICMs has provided the participants with a chance to reflect on their experiences through the interview and discussion process. Couples were able to identify and verbalize different factors which have enriched their marriage experience. Many couples involved in this study have mentioned that this was the first time that they have discussed many of the topics in the questionnaire. The fact that they were able to express their opinions and share their feelings has brought about closures and healing related to many former hurts, but also acknowledged positive experiences. Just the fact that the couples were heard and realized that the Church was listening to them brought about a sense of satisfaction and belonging. Their experiences mattered and their opinions were respected. They hoped that mistakes that happened with them in the past would not be repeated in the future. Some thought that, through their marriages, they have broken ethnic and cultural walls that have existed in the Coptic Community for generations, so that future relationships would be welcomed and accepted. Many couples also felt that they were helping other future couples who intend to be in similar relationships. The results and recommendations made by the participants can provide a practical guide to couples who intend to be in intercultural relationships.

5.3.2 To the Coptic Orthodox Community in the GTA

As a result of this study, the Coptic Community in the GTA, as represented by parents, families, friends, and all Church members, is better able to understand the experiences of intercultural couples, especially in dealing with matters that pertain to the Community. In understanding how their actions affected their spiritual lives and involvement in the Church, they are able to be partners in ministering to their future needs. There were individuals who welcomed multiculturalism, but there were many who resisted it or at least did not make an effort to embrace it. The unwelcoming attitude has pushed away many intercultural couples and, in many cases, they have left the Church. It is my hope that this study will encourage the Coptic Community to seriously consider finding practical ways to embrace people in ICMs and to fully integrate all Church members in its daily practices, without distinction based on ethnicity or culture.
5.3.3 To Clergy

Clergy members play a major role in setting the vision and norms of the Coptic Church of the GTA. Exploring the reaction of Coptic clergy has been a key factor in the ongoing dialogue of ministering to people in ICMs. There were many priests who were able to successfully welcome couples, while others sent a message of rejection and negative response. It is my hope that clergy reading this thesis will find better ways to communicate with all members of their congregations, especially those thinking of being in a cross-cultural relationship. Also, having a better understanding of the Canadian culture, I hope they would find more comforting and acceptable ways to deal with members of other ethnicities. Most importantly, for clergy and non-clergy alike, is to eliminate any preconceived stereotypes regarding ICM, which they might have had based on their own experiences, or stories which are told and retold through word of mouth. It is thus the responsibility of each leader to evaluate individual cases, as they are presented, based on their own merits and the compatibility of the couple.

5.3.4 To the Coptic Church in the Diaspora

The past few decades have seen an enormous expansion of the Coptic Orthodox Church throughout the world. It is anticipated that all Coptic Churches in the Diaspora have been facing similar cases of ICMs. While cultures, customs, languages, and traditions may vary from continent to continent or country to country, it is possible that many beliefs or behaviours of Copts would remain similar, regardless of the location. Also, as a Coptic Community living in North America, this study might be of value to many other Coptic communities living in Western countries. As Coptic Churches in the GTA are directly under the care of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, experiences may vary in regions which have a diocesan bishop. Nevertheless, this research would still be of interest to all Coptic Churches in the Diaspora, as it presents multiple facets of ICM that might be worthy of discussion and consideration.
5.3.5 To All Ethnic Churches in Canada

The experience of the Coptic Church with ICM is not unique, but it could be similar to the experience of many other ethnic Churches in the GTA and beyond. Recently, I participated in a Pan-Orthodox meeting which combined all Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches in the GTA. I had an opportunity to briefly speak about my subject of research, which generated much interest from all bishops and clergy members in attendance. Many leaders mentioned that they are facing similar challenges to what the Coptic Church is going through and would like to learn how to best deal with these situations. I was asked to present my findings on this research once it is completed. This research could also add to the spirit of Christian ecumenism, as different denominations could discuss the common challenges they face and, ultimately, come up with unified solutions to strengthen all Churches involved.

5.3.6 To Researchers Engaged in a Similar Study

In a multicultural country like Canada, where cultural diversity is encouraged and celebrated, I anticipate that much interest will be generated on the subject of ICM from many researchers. The experience of the Copts could definitely be a prototype for other ethnic communities living in Canada. Research on this subject is still in its infancy, and much more inquiry needs to happen to fully understand this phenomenon. While this research did not offer a conclusive theory for academic research, it followed the lived experience of couples that are involved in the phenomenon and have experienced it. Couples have given us first-hand accounts about how they have experienced the phenomenon, which has much value for future researchers engaged in its study. Understanding the practical aspect of this study has direct implications for those involved in pastoral ministry to intercultural couples and for those intending to contribute to future research about the subject.
5.4 Areas for Further Study

No study is complete in itself, but there is always room for expansion and further study. As the research progressed, there were other questions and subjects which were identified as outside the scope of my investigation, but still considered worthy of additional study. I have identified six areas which could constitute an extension to this research: (1) divorced intercultural couples; (2) children of ICM; (3) intercultural versus same-culture marriages; (4) changing trends in ICM; (5) interdenominational marriages; and (6) the effect of multiculturalism on the Coptic Church. These subjects were identified to acknowledge the limitation of this study and to recognize the presence of counter arguments, which may arise in response to suggestions or recommendations made in this research. They are explained briefly in the sub-sections that follow (5.4.1 to 5.4.6)

5.4.1 Divorced Couples

All intercultural couples participating in this study are in their first marriage and are still married, with only one exception. This is a Copt who was previously married to another Copt and went through a divorce, but who has since been in an ICM for over twenty years. However, I am aware of the existence of people in ICMs who ended up divorcing. The topic of intercultural couples who went through a divorce was outside the scope of this research. It would be interesting to identify the reasons which led some intercultural couples to divorce, but this is reserved for future study. Whether same culture or intercultural, all marriages have the potential for separation or divorce. Nevertheless, identifying circumstances and reasons which may lead to divorce would be extremely beneficial for couples who are or intend to be in an intercultural marriage.

5.4.2 Children of ICMs

Even though some of the interview questions inquired about the effect of ICM on the children, the couples responded from their own experience and based on their opinions. It would be interesting to hear directly from the children about their own experiences of living in a home with parents who come from different cultures and any effect that this might have
had on their upbringing. Also, if they were part of the Coptic Church growing up, how were they perceived by the general Community and what effect this might have had on them? Another question to consider is how culture affected their upbringing and if they felt more compelled towards either culture.

5.4.3 Intercultural versus Same-Culture Marriages

All participants in this study were intercultural couples in which one spouse was always of a Coptic Egyptian heritage, while the other spouse was of any other ethnicity. They were all married in or outside of the Coptic Church, and their marriages still stand. It would be interesting to further investigate, compare, and contrast the experience of these couples with those of people in same-culture marriages. The emerging generation of Coptic young adults is still marrying from within the Coptic Community and may share similar or possibly different experiences with intercultural couples. Researching this phenomenon would deepen the knowledge of current marriage trends in the Coptic Church.

5.4.4 Changing Trends in ICM

The intention of this study was not to glamorize ICM above same-culture marriages, but rather to explore and interact with this growing phenomenon. Couples should not rush into any marriage without realizing its potential for success or failure. In my own experience, the demographics of couples getting married continue to change yearly. In 2010, twelve out of fifteen couples that I counselled prior to their marriage were intercultural. In the first part of 2011, the numbers have dropped to five out of sixteen couples being intercultural, with the rest being of the same culture. No one can predict the future, but one thing is for certain, and that is that ICM will continue to be an integral part of the future of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the GTA. It would be interesting to study the changing trends of marriages in the GTA and to discover if there were any major factors contributing to the increase or decrease of either phenomenon.
5.4.5 Interdenominational Marriages

It is clear that the Coptic Church only marries couples who are of the same religion and denomination. Many couples were married in the Coptic Church after the baptism and/or anointing of the Canadian spouse, while others refused this practice and were married in other Christian denominations. Some of these couples are happily practising their faith in other Christian denominations and are not considering returning to the Coptic Church. Some of them have mentioned that, if given the chance, they would still come on occasion to the Coptic Church, even to let their children know that this Church is part of their heritage. While full unity between all denominations is still a far-off hope, it would still be interesting to research if there is a way to recognize these marriages to allow these couples full access to the Coptic Church. I am not implying in any way that theological or doctrinal beliefs and practices should be compromised or diluted, but just making the suggestion and leaving the topic for further research and investigation, while fully acknowledging the difficulty in the task. It would also be of interest to compare and contrast the rules of all Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches in acknowledging marriages performed in other denominations. While this might not have direct implications on the way that the Coptic Church applies its policies, there is always the possibility that dialogue may ultimately bring fruits and the creation of a common declaration.

5.4.6 Effect of Multiculturalism on the Coptic Church

A recommendation was made earlier suggesting that the Coptic Church must undergo a transformation to explicitly express its commitment to multiculturalism and mission. While becoming part of the Canadian mosaic of cultures would broaden the base of individuals to which the Church can minister, this study did not take into account the effect of this transformation on new immigrants and on the inherited cultural values of some Copts. I am aware of many new immigrants who arrive to the GTA without any prior knowledge of the English language and who would feel very isolated in an all-English ministry. Also, there are Copts who have lived in the GTA for decades and who still prefer prayer in Arabic and Coptic over any other language. I have also heard some people comment that they speak in English the whole week with colleagues at work or at school, but that they look forward to
speaking Arabic with their Egyptian friends at Church. There are currently many non-denominational Arabic Churches, being planted throughout the GTA, which have attracted many Coptic parishioners because of their focus on preaching in Arabic. The transfer of these Copts to other Christian denominations plays a large role in the decision of any church community to have more English-focused services. Thus, I recognize the complexity of the situation and that decisions might not be as simple as suggested in this thesis. I will not venture here to make any suggestions or solutions, as this is outside the scope of my study, but it would be interesting to learn how to overcome the challenge of ministering to new Coptic immigrants or existing parishioners who prefer praying in Arabic.

5.5 Conclusion

The story of the Coptic Church and Community in the GTA continues to unfold before our eyes. It has only been less than five decades since Copts began emigrating from their homeland Egypt to Canada, searching for religious freedom and economical prosperity. They built Churches and reached high levels of education and success. The second generation of Copts began to intermarry with residents of their new homeland and formed functional intercultural families. During this process, the Church and members of the Community were faced with many challenges as to how to adapt to the emerging model of a multicultural Coptic Church. The lived experience of couples involved in this study has provided a realistic view into the world and lives of intercultural couples in the Coptic Church. It is my hope that this study will be a practical guide to aid the Coptic Church, in the GTA and beyond, in identifying ways to better minister to couples in intercultural marriages and to their families. It is my dream that all Coptic Churches would one day be a safe haven for diverse members of all nations.
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APPENDIX A

THESIS PROPOSAL

A Phenomenological Analysis of Intercultural Marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto

A DMin Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the DMin Program Committee
Toronto School of Theology
February 11, 2010

by

Pishoy Salama
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INTRODUCTION

I recall the story of Susan, a member of my old youth group meeting in the mid 1980s. We knew each other from church because both of our families had migrated to Canada in the same year and we were about the same age. Back then, since the youth meeting was small in size, and we participated in many activities, outings, and conferences, most members knew each other very well. I lost contact with her when she travelled overseas to finish her university degree. About six years ago, I ran into her at a local shopping mall, and we had a chance to catch up on old times. On that day, I also met her husband, who was from another ethnic background, and their lovely children. After some detailed conversation, I learned that they had a civil marriage and that no clergy had been present to officiate at the ceremony. When I inquired as to why they had never married in the Coptic Orthodox Church, they implied that they had tried approaching a local clergy member, but had not been able to come to an understanding of the requirements for intercultural marriage (ICM) that was agreeable to all parties. In addition, Susan’s parents refused to bless the marriage because of her husband’s different cultural background. I asked them for their contact information and told them that I would remain in touch.

After about one year of pastoral ministry with this family, I was able to bridge all the gaps and to welcome them once more into the Coptic Church. Through a series of meetings and catechism classes, I baptized Susan’s husband, blessed their marriage, and baptized their children. A few more years passed, and I noticed that they had ceased to be practicing members of the Church. They explained that various cultural and linguistic barriers were

203 I have given pseudonyms to the persons and events mentioned in this story so that their true identity is not revealed.
keeping them from being fully immersed in the life of the community. Early in 2009, I invited them to give the Church one more chance by joining St. Maurice and St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church of Toronto (SMSV). They accepted the invitation and started coming regularly to Sunday liturgy, as well as participating in retreats and other activities. It did not take them very long to come to feel a sense of belonging within the first multicultural Coptic Orthodox Church. Despite their busy schedule as professionals, the family manages to participate in the life of the community and continues to be a very positive model for other intercultural families in the church. They are fully involved in the church ministry and spare no effort in helping other families.

The experience of Susan’s family with the Coptic Orthodox Church is by no means an isolated case. During my years in ministry, I have seen many intercultural marriages struggle to fit in and find acceptance in the Church. These difficulties have often resulted in the couple leaving the Church completely or, at minimum, remaining only very loosely connected to it. Because of this complex situation, I have developed an interest in researching possible means for helping intercultural couples to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging inside the Coptic Orthodox Church.

I. The Background and Context of the Applied Research Thesis

In this section, I will describe the context in which I will be conducting my research, provide a brief description of my ministry base, and explain how my research interest has arisen from my ministry practice.²⁰⁴

I was ordained in 1999 at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, where I had been a member since my arrival in Canada. Because I was privileged to have immigrated to Canada at the age of fourteen, I was both proficient in Arabic and had no problems learning the English language. I could also relate easily to the cultural challenges faced by new immigrant families, as well as by those who had lived in Canada for decades. I would consider this ability to relate to most of the people in my congregation to be one of my greatest strengths.

While I served at St. Mark’s, my passion to provide pastoral care for youth and second generation Copts occupied most of my thoughts, as well as my time. I initiated several programs for the church youth that would ensure their commitment to the faith and their continued involvement in the life of the church. Since 2001, I have led the youth in several missionary trips to Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, and Mexico. The Coptic Orthodox Youth Association (COYA), which I started in 2003, is still the voice of the youth in the church. This organization promotes leadership, outreach, spirituality, community activities, retreats, tutoring, and sports ministry. In addition, I have organized several spiritual retreats to local, as well as international, destinations that have allowed the youth to develop a sense of community and fellowship. Many of the programs that I initiated at St. Mark’s are still in place, ministering to junior high, high school, college, and university students, as well as to young adults, engaged couples, newlyweds, and young families who are members of the church.

In November 2007, I planted SMSV in Toronto, and I have been serving as its priest since that time. The many different tasks for which I am responsible combine to form my
vocational identity. My current context of ministry can be summarized as occurring in three main areas — liturgical, pastoral, and administrative.

As an ordained minister, one of my central responsibilities is to celebrate the Church’s liturgical sacraments.\(^{205}\) Fr. Anthony Coniaris defines a sacrament as a “divine rite instituted by Christ and/or the apostles which through visible signs convey to us the hidden grace of God.”\(^{206}\) The Church emphasizes participation in all seven\(^{207}\) sacraments, but focuses particularly on celebrating the Eucharist and Confession. Members of our congregation baptize their children as infants and are encouraged to attend spiritual meetings and to be active members in the life of the church. My pastoral responsibilities include teaching, crisis intervention, counselling youth and families, and providing support following the death of family members. I also commonly visit members of the congregation in their homes, at places of business, or in hospital. Since the Coptic community considers the priest to be a member of the family, I am often invited to birthday and graduation celebrations. I also have many administrative responsibilities that occupy a substantial portion of my time. In June 2009, our congregation purchased a parcel of land in Markham, Ontario, on which we plan to erect a church building. Since then, I have been involved in several meetings with such officials as city staff, planners, engineers, and architects, in order

\(^{205}\) In the Orthodox Church, sacraments are better known as mysteries.

\(^{206}\) Anthony M. Coniaris, *These are the Sacraments: The Life-Giving Mysteries of the Orthodox Church* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life Pub. Co., 1981), 8.

\(^{207}\) Ibid., 9-10. The Orthodox Church numbers among the sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Confession, Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony, and unction of the sick. Traditionally, the Orthodox Church did not limit the sacraments to seven. The number seven was adopted in the 17th century under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church after the Council of Trent, which affirmed the number as seven in opposition to the early reformers who recognized only two sacraments. The number seven is seen as a symbolic indication of the perfection of God’s grace. Some other sacraments or sacramentals that are listed by Orthodox writers include: monastic profession, blessing of water at Epiphany, funeral service, consecration of a church, preaching, prayer, and charity.
to work out all necessary permits and other requirements. We hope to begin construction towards the end of 2010.

I have led annual marriage preparation classes for the past five years, first at St Mark’s and continuing at SMSV. Organizing these classes has been one of my greatest passions in ministry. This six-week course allows couples that are planning to get married to come together once a week for two hours in order to establish a strong theological and practical foundation for their marriage. Some of the topics discussed in this course include biblical foundations, finances, setting goals, conflict resolution, in-laws, intimacy, and an explanation of the wedding ceremony.

I am thankful that SMSV has been growing and flourishing beyond my expectations. The congregation has needed to move to accommodate its growth three times – the first time only six months after its establishment, a second time after one year, and a third time in September 2009. Although the new church was originally established to minister to second and third generation Copts as well as to intercultural couples, it has become a home for many individuals of multiple nationalities who are interested in Orthodoxy and who are not Egyptian by birth. It is also ministering to other English-speaking, Coptic-born parishioners who have been drawn to its principles. The inclusive nature of this new community has become its mark of attraction, and it is becoming well known among Coptic churches in the Diaspora.\(^{208}\)

\(^{208}\) The word ‘Diaspora’ here refers to the lands outside of the country of origin of the Coptic Orthodox church which proceeded forth from Egypt.
II. Statement of the Research Problem

In this section, I will introduce the problem that the Coptic Orthodox Church is presently facing with respect to intercultural marriages and then provide the basic question or hypothesis to be answered through my research. Next, I will enlarge on the statement as appropriate and discuss related questions or hypotheses that I intend to explore. Finally, I will provide a working definition of the term ‘intercultural marriage’ and describe how this term will be used in my research.

Guests visiting any Coptic church in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) quickly recognize the strong cultural identity which is celebrated in every community. After close to fifty years in Canada, the Copts are still holding tight to their faith, as well as to their Egyptian identity, culture, traditions, and values. For some Copts, there is virtually no distinction between being a Coptic Christian and a Coptic Egyptian. In that sense, faith and culture are intertwined to the point of being completely dissolved into one another. As an immigrant community in Canada, the Coptic Orthodox Church has traditionally been known as an ethnocentric Church that seeks to safeguard its culture, traditions, and language, as a way to preserve its identity. Although first-generation Copts living in Canada continue to have social and emotional ties to Egypt, second-generation Copts seem to be more assimilated into Canada in terms of the use of Canadian languages, traditions, and culture. As young adults, Copts are beginning to marry outside of their immediate Egyptian community, as some feel that they can more easily relate to Canadian-born spouses. Generally, when a Copt is about to marry a non-Copt, the couple meets with the priest to discuss the Church rules regarding intercultural marriages. The Orthodox Church does not marry couples who are not of the same religion and denomination. Therefore, if they choose
to get married in the Orthodox Church, both parties must be baptized and confirmed as Coptic Orthodox. If the couple agrees to this condition, they undergo a process of confirming their Orthodox faith and a promise to raise their children in the same tradition. Many young adults agree to this process, while others disagree and end up making other plans for their marriage. Those who agree still face a cultural challenge within the Coptic community and sometimes struggle to be integrated into the general Coptic community and culture. Many cases exist of this kind of couples, who agreed to the baptism process in order to please their families, but left the community as a result of the cultural challenge. Still, other interracial marriages continue to thrive and flourish within the Coptic community and have been a source of refreshment and innovation.

My proposed research question is:

**In the ever-changing circumstances of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area, I want to research the lived experience of couples who are in intercultural marriages, to discover how the Church has affected these marriages and to identify some successful techniques that the Church Community can use to minister to couples in intercultural marriages.**

I intend to explore questions relating to the experience of second-generation Coptic youth in relation to the Coptic community in Canada. The first-generation Coptic immigrants in Toronto appear to have isolated themselves from the surrounding Canadian culture as a means of survival and preserving their heritage and language. Second-generation Coptic youth do not have the same strong ties to their culture and heritage. Intercultural marriages have been a rising phenomenon within the Coptic community in Toronto. The Coptic community expects the non-Copt to fully assimilate into the community before marriage through baptism, confirmation, and practice. Cultural and religious lines have been interwoven to the point that it is extremely difficult for a non-Copt
to assimilate as she/he is always looked upon with suspicion and judgment. Due to a lack of understanding and spiritual ministry that remains unfulfilled, many youth have abandoned the church, along with their spouses. The Coptic Orthodox Church is at risk of losing many of its youth and young adult members if it does not find a solution to these patterns. This research will investigate the challenges facing intercultural marriages in the Coptic Church and suggest some solutions to this phenomenon.

Over the course of my studies, I have come across many terms that may be used to describe the kind of marriage that I wish to research, including intercultural, interracial, interethnic, and mixed. Wehrly, Kenny, and Kenny, who have written extensively on the subject of multiracial families, suggest that in the field of psychology there is no agreement on how to accurately define and distinguish between ethnicity, culture, and race. They attempt, however, to consider the use of these terms in this way:

Ethnicity refers to a group’s characteristics with regards to food, work, relationships, celebrations and rituals that separate them from the larger society … while culture is seen as all of the learned behaviours, beliefs, norms, and values that are held by a group of people and passed on from older members to newer members, at least in part to preserve the group … race is generally seen as the physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture, and features that may still be used to identify or create the marginalized status of some people in society.\textsuperscript{209}

In an attempt to consider the use of these terms as related to marriage, Albert Gordon notes that:

Intermarriage is generally applied to those married persons whose religious, racial, or ethnic background is or was different from each other’s, either prior to or after their marriage. Even if the marriage partners differ from each other in only one of these three categories, they may be said to be intermarried.\textsuperscript{210}


For the purpose of my research interest, I have chosen to define the term ‘intercultural marriage’ as the union between a man and a woman, one of whom is of Coptic Orthodox Egyptian heritage, while the other is Canadian of any other racial, ethnic, or cultural background or heritage. I have chosen to use the word *intercultural* as opposed to *interracial* for two main reasons - first, to go along with Canada’s vision of being a multicultural society, and second, to avoid the negative cultural connotations, including the issues of racism and discrimination, that come along with the use of the word ‘race’. On some occasions, however, I may use the terms *intercultural, interracial, and interethnic* marriages interchangeably to refer to the group of individuals that I will be discussing in my research.

**III. The Theoretical Framework and Assumptions Involved in the Study**

In the first section of this proposal, I provided a brief description of my ministry base and how my research interest arose out of my practice of ministry and my faith journey. This was followed by a description of the basic research question that I will test in my study and a working definition of intercultural marriages. In this section, I will outline the basic sources from which the Coptic community draws its principles and how these texts relate to intercultural marriages.

a.) Theory at Work in the Study

The Coptic Orthodox community relies primarily on three sources in order to determine its fundamental beliefs – the Scriptures, Tradition, and Culture. These sources might not all contribute equally to the decision-making practices or to the beliefs of the community, but they all combine to form the totality of its behaviour and core values. In this section, I will list them in order of their influence and examine how each source contributes to the Coptic Orthodox community’s understanding of intercultural marriages.
Scriptures

In the beginning of human creation, God made Adam and saw that he was alone and that there was no helper comparable to him (Genesis 2:20). God therefore caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and out of his ribs made a woman, Eve. The Lord blessed them and commanded them to be “fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The second chapter of the book of Genesis contains the first reference to the union of males and females, when it states that, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The significance of the early mention of this union, and of its inclusion in the creation narrative, is apparent. The purpose of this narrative when observed in Genesis 2:15-24 is unique among the creation stories of the Ancient Near East in its appreciation of the meaning of woman and therefore, in the recognition that human existence is a partnership between man and woman.\(^{211}\) It is in Babel that God confuses human speech, so that the descendants of Noah can no longer live together, and thus cultures and nations are created under God’s judgment.\(^{212}\)

Abraham made an oath with his servant that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites, but that the servant should take her from Abraham’s country and from his family (Genesis 24:2-3). The servant asked Abraham about the possibility that the woman would refuse to return to Canaan with him, but Abraham confirmed his faith in God’s promise that He would send His angel before him and fulfill His covenant to give the land to Abraham and his descendants. It was through divine


guidance that the servant met with Rebecca, who was a relative of Abraham, and she accepted his proposal to marry Isaac and to travel back with him to Canaan. Both this narrative and later sections of scripture clearly emphasize the legal prohibition on marrying Canaanites (Exodus 34:16; Numbers 25; Deuteronomy 7:3). Here, Abraham establishes this principle for the first time, and, later, Isaac also sends Jacob back to his father’s house to find a wife (Genesis 28:1-2).²¹³

The narratives of the Old Testament include individuals who married both from within and from outside of their ethnic group. Joseph, who was a Hebrew immigrant to Egypt, was married to Asenath, the daughter of a pagan priest in Egypt called Pothipherah (Genesis 41:45). Joseph had two sons from Asenath, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were counted among the household of Jacob (Genesis 46:27). The texts also include the two marriages of Moses. The first of these was to Zipporah, the daughter of the priest of Midian, who bore for Moses two sons named Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 2:16-22, 18:4), while the second was to an Ethiopian woman. When Aaron and Miriam doubted his prophetic gift due to his union with a gentile, God reprimanded them and struck Miriam with leprosy (Numbers 12:1-13).

God clearly commanded the Hebrew children not to marry from the people of the land, the gentiles, because of the possibility that they would turn their hearts against God’s worship or offer sacrifices to the idols and join in their praise. This act of serving other gods would arouse God’s anger and result in possible disciplinary actions (Exodus 34:16, Deuteronomy 7:3, 4). Solomon clearly did not heed God’s commandments and instead married women from the nations that God had forbidden to him. Solomon had seven

hundred wives and three hundred concubines; his wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-3). As a result of Solomon’s worship of idols and disloyalty to God’s statues, his kingdom was torn apart and given to his servant.

Cogan refers to the “herem regulations” of Deuteronomy 7: 3-4 in commenting upon Solomon’s disobedience of God’s commandment. These regulations specifically say, “Do not marry them; do not give your daughter to his son and do not take his daughter for your son, for he will turn away your son from me and worship other gods.”

After Israel returned from captivity in Babylon, Nehemiah noticed that many people had married from among the gentiles, and that, as a result, their children could not speak the language of Judah. Nehemiah reminded the people of the story of Solomon, whose wives had turned his heart away from worshiping God and caused him to fall into idolatry. He warned them against marrying pagan women and insisted that they should not confuse their children with the presence of different religions and languages (Nehemiah 13:23-28). Gaebelein confirms that Nehemiah’s objection to inter-religious marriages is based first in the fact that it is clearly against God’s commandment (Exodus 34:16), but is also caused by the possibility that Hebrew children would adopt pagan rituals, including the Ammonites’ worship of the god Molech and the Moabites’ worship of Chemosh, which involved child sacrifice (2 Kings 3:27). Interestingly, Nehemiah’s first observations of pagan influence came from the speech of children, since mothers naturally taught their children to speak the language they knew. Nehemiah’s bigger concern, however, was that if mothers were

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teaching children a foreign language, then they would also teach them to worship their gods,ultimately causing the Hebrew children to lose their identity.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ revealed God’s will for the sanctity of marriage,which is a union between a man and a woman. He taught that from the beginning, God hadcreated them male and female, joined them together, and said that this union should never bebroken (Matthew 19:5-6). This discussion on marriage was followed by one about divorce,in which the Lord proclaimed that individuals who divorce their spouses and remarry wouldbe considered to be committing adultery (Mark 10:10-12). The apostle Paul later confirms the belief of the early church concerning divorce and remarriage, when he states that a woman remains under the oath of marriage with her husband and only becomes free to remarry when he dies (Romans 7:1-3).

Some interpretations of a few verses may justify interreligious or intercultural marriages without requiring conversion. Jonathan Romain, for example, points to some verses that are currently looked upon as a means to validate such marriages,216 including: 1) the command in both the Old and New Testaments to love your neighbour (Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10:27); 2) the claim that there is neither Jew or Greek … for all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28); 3) Paul’s offer of permission for a believing individual to remain with an unbelieving spouse since they are both sanctified (1 Corinthians 7:14); and 4) the fact that God’s grace could cover any human differences (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Closer examination of these verses, however, reveals that, with the exception of the command to remain with an unbelieving spouse, they do not refer to the institution of marriage. Even this reference from

Corinthians is in reference to couples who are already married and do not wish to depart from one another. For these reasons, the Orthodox Church does not accept the generalized interpretation of these verses as justification for marrying couples of different religions or denominations.

**Tradition**

I come from a rich tradition which holds sacred the writing of the early church fathers and their commentaries on the scriptures. St. John, Bishop of Constantinople, who was born in Antioch in 344 A.D. and has been known as ‘the golden-mouth’ since the sixth century, wrote extensively on the sacrament of holy matrimony and the sanctity of marriage. He saw marriage as the union between two believing individuals for chastity, for the sharing of two lives, and for procreation according to God’s will. He insisted that Christ’s presence at the wedding at Cana was extremely important and that this presence would be represented by the welcoming of poor and needy guests, as well as by the modest apparel that the bride and groom would wear. He had witnessed several weddings at which Satan’s presence was manifested in anxiety, pain, excessive expenses, indecency, envy, and drunkenness. Christ, by contrast, brings “cheerfulness, pleasure, moderation, modesty, sobriety, and health” to a wedding.

In his discussion of the passage in Matthew 19:3-6 concerning the Pharisees’ inquiry about divorce, Origin points out that this union refers to Christ and the church. Thus,

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218 Ibid., 34.

Christ did not dismiss His former covenant (wife) with the Hebrew synagogue, but rather the Hebrew community committed fornication, and became an adulteress. She (the synagogue) had plotted against her husband and given him over to death (John 19:15). It was she who left Him, rather than her husband who divorced her and sent her away. He then references Isaiah’s question to the Hebrews, which asks, “Where is your mother’s bill of divorce, with which I put her away” (Isaiah 50:1), proving that the Hebrews were the ones who divorced God.

Regarding the passage in Deuteronomy 21:10-13, which concerns marriage to unbelievers, John Calvin comments that there is harmony in the law and that there are no apparent contradictions. Although the Israelites were prohibited from taking foreigners as wives, lest they turn their hearts against God and sin, a woman who has been taken captive by right of war could become eligible to marry an Israelite. She would gain this eligibility only after renouncing her former life (represented here as her nation), shaving her head, cutting her nails, changing her garments, and lamenting her father and family for an entire month. This tradition was seen as a process through which she could pass over to the people of God and come to belong to them in her new identity. 220

While the early Church was still united in the faith, there were practically no doctrinal concerns regarding marriage of believers from different races or cultures. This concept has changed following the anathemas which were spoken against Christian denominations starting with the first schism during the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, which occurred primarily as a result of disagreements about the nature of Christ. The unfortunate consequence of these events has been that, since that time, Christian families in

both East and West have considered one another as heretics and therefore forbidden fellowship, communal prayer, and marriage. This stance was reaffirmed following the reformation and subsequent Christian movements that were not recognized by the Eastern Church. Only recently, during the ecumenical era in the twentieth century, various Christian denominations have reintroduced the dialogue and attempted to re-establish the Christian fellowship and to work on common goals. Even though the relationship between various Christian denominations has improved enormously in the past few decades, the Orthodox Church maintains its stance forbidding inter-denominational marriages due to the standing anathemas which have not yet been lifted on either side.

In the Coptic Orthodox Church, holy matrimony is considered to be one of the seven church sacraments. The church believes that each couple is spiritually united and inseparable. During the marriage ceremony, the priest proclaims a series of prayers and blessings, asking God to establish this new household with His name as its foundation. Couples participate in a marriage preparation course to help them understand one another, realize their personality types, set future goals, and share in the same faith. The church will only marry couples of the same religion and denomination, in order to increase the probability that the couple will continue to observe the faith and will set their children in the same direction. Through the marriage ceremony, the church exhorts the couple to love, respect and obey one another and to maintain the unity of faith.

The Coptic Orthodox matrimonial liturgy assumes that the bride and groom have a common faith and belong to the same denomination. The service includes a confession of the faith, which involves the recitation of the Nicene creed, recognizing the Holy Trinity, the resurrection of the dead, and the Lord’s second coming. The individuals affirm their
inclusion in the faith community as the “one only holy universal Orthodox Church of
God.” During the service, the bride and groom are anointed with holy oil in order to
receive the Holy Spirit, and they wear crowns and fancy robes that represent their adoption
into the royal family of God and formation of a new household in His name through their
blessed union. The Holy Scriptures are recited and prayers of God’s blessing are bestowed
upon the new couple in the name of the Almighty God.

Culture

Since the mid-twentieth century, intermarriage has become more socially acceptable
in many parts of the world, as attitudes and laws have changed substantially. An enormous
transformation has occurred in attitudes towards intermarriage. Where once both state and
Church frowned upon the practice, it has increasingly become not only accepted, but
encouraged. The story of interracial marriage in the U.S., which was previously outlawed in
many states, including Virginia, is a part of American history. In 1958, a white man, Richard
Loving, was arrested and asked to leave the state when he brought home his black wife,
Mildred Jeter. The Lovings did not yield to the state laws but fought the ruling all the way to
the U.S. Supreme Court. After nine years, the court ruled in their favour and all laws against
intermarriage were pronounced unconstitutional.222

Over the past five decades, the rate of intermarriage has increased in most of the
world’s societies, cultures, and religions.223 Dugan Romano’s book entitled Intercultural
Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls includes the most up-to-date research on the subject of

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221 H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy, ed., Liturgy of the Holy Matrimony according to the Coptic Orthodox Church (2001).
222 Gigi Kaeser and Peggy Gillespie, Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), xi.
223 Romain, Till Faith Us Do Part, 2.
intermarriage which will be used as one of the key references in my research. Romano suggests that there are several factors contributing to this phenomenon, including the increase in international travel, technological advancements, the breakdown of traditional social restrictions, and shared world views.\textsuperscript{224} From a psychoanalytic perspective, Char discusses several other motivations that may lead to an individual becoming involved in an intercultural relationship. These reasons may include love, chance or availability, escaping certain circumstances, parents’ influence, and beliefs about other cultures.\textsuperscript{225} In addition, Kannan discusses the general trend towards indifference to religion and the elimination of religious differences as another possible reason for the apparent increase of intercultural marriage.\textsuperscript{226} My own culture commonly understood that people should marry from within their own culture and religion, and encouraged this practice. My family and I only began experiencing this diversity in the general culture as well as in the church after moving to Canada. Interacting with intercultural families gave me hope and affirmed the possibility that God’s care could be extended to any race. In my current ministry, I witness the quest for companionship in the ever-changing culture around me. Complementing the reasons suggested above, my own observations suggest that in a multicultural country such as Canada, people are less concerned about ethnicity and more about starting a family.

\textsuperscript{224} Dugan Romano, \textit{Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls} (Yarmouth, Me.: Intercultural Press, 2008), xii – xv.

\textsuperscript{225} Walter F. Char, \textit{Motivations for Intercultural Marriages} in Wen-Shing Tseng and John F. McDermott, Jr., and Thomas W Maretzki, eds. \textit{Adjustment in Intercultural Marriage} (Honolulu: Dept. of Psychiatry, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii, 1977), 33-37.

Loneliness could be a major factor which leads some individuals to seek a partner from any culture.

Theorists have argued that the challenges facing intercultural couples are far greater than those faced by couples who share the same culture and religion. Romano, for example, dismisses the claim that love is the only basic ingredient of any successful marriage and that one should only focus on the commonalities between the couple. He explains that while similar challenges may face any couple, the degree to which these challenges are experienced may be extreme, dramatic, and magnified. Romano discusses a list of potential trouble spots which intercultural marriages may face, including values, food and drink, sex, gender roles, place of residence, religion, in-laws, language, raising children, ethnocentrism, and coping with death and divorce. My research will include particular focus on the influence of religion, beliefs about raising children, and the role of in-laws in the relationship.

Theorists have expressed enormously varying opinions about the influence of religion in an intercultural marriage and whether or not couples must necessarily share the same religion. Romano is of the opinion that the odds are against successful interreligious marriages, since most of people’s actions, beliefs, philosophies and attitudes about right and wrong stem from their religious beliefs. Where these beliefs differ, then, there is a higher chance of problems arising and the family breaking down as a result. He does not rule out

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228 Ibid., 30.
229 Ibid., 101.
the possibility that interreligious marriages could work, but only if the couple allows for mutual respect of the other’s religious views.

On the other hand, Rosenberg, Meehan, and Payne are of the opinion that it is very likely that two religions can co-exist in a home. They argue that religion is strictly a personal affair that, ideally, religion should bring people together rather than separating them and that interreligious couples rarely argue about religion. They support this position by pointing to several couples who have managed to resolve their differences and who did not see their different religions as an obstacle in their marriage. The book *Interfaith Families: Personal Stories of Jewish-Christian Intermarriage* also lists a number of successful interfaith marriages between Christians and Jews in America. While many stories have shown the struggles of interfaith marriages, some were very supportive of it and presented the couple as successfully managing to “live and let live”. For example, the book includes the story of a Jewish woman named Barbara, who met and later married a Catholic man named Jay. She recalls, “He’s Irish Catholic, but he had no strong religious beliefs. It didn’t bother me at all that he wasn’t Jewish because religion to me is just not an issue.” Romano contends that in these situations, one partner may convert to the other person’s religion, both members of the couple could each maintain and practise his or her own religion, both could join another religion, or both could elect to stop practising at all. Recently, I have been counselling a couple who came to me seeking the rules of the church concerning marriage. One is a Copt, while the other is Muslim. To my surprise, they have been friends for four years and the

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topic of religion had never come up. I explained that they both need to be Coptic Orthodox to marry in the Church, which means that the Muslim needs to convert. Needless to say, this decision is so difficult because of the cultural ramifications which would befall the Muslim if she were to decide to convert. Though I am still in dialogue with the couple, we are struggling to find a solution, as they have to choose between their love, their families, and their religions.

The impact on family and the in-laws is another considerable factor when deciding to intermarry. Many cultures and religions around the world insist on marriage from within their community, and if a community member fails to meet this requirement, it is a source of shame and disgrace for the family. In certain circumstances, the family considers the member who converts or intermarries to be dead, and the person is no longer welcome in their midst. Even if the consequences are not so severe, the members are still considered to be selling short their community, and their spouses are not completely welcomed and assimilated into the family. Kim, a Presbyterian, remembers when she first met Jeff’s Jewish family and how they reacted to her. She recalls when his entire family started to laugh at his brother’s comment saying, “Well, at least she’s not black.”233 She also mentioned that she needed a long time to understand the family’s culture, customs, and traditions. Even after many years, she still felt like an outsider, as they never fully embraced her as a member of the family.

On other occasions, families were extremely welcoming and embraced the spouse, who felt a sense of complete assimilation and gratitude. At times, parents are excited at the presence of someone from a different culture or race, as they see him or her as “exotic”.

233 Kaplan, Interfaith Families, 5.
Anne, a white American, explains how her mother was happy with her daughter’s marriage to a Somali. The mother bragged to her friends about her son-in-law, saying, “Did you know that Omar had servants as a child?” In the Coptic community, the family is always cautious when a non-Copt is brought home to meet them. Potential spouses are often treated with suspicion until they are validated through a series of interrogative questions. Families also look to the clergy for reassurance that this relationship may be able to continue in the church. While families have traditionally mistreated potential spouses of their children out of fear, anxiety, language barriers, or a misunderstanding of culture, I have seen a real improvement in parents’ attempts to adapt to their children’s requests and wishes.

The next major challenge to the success of intercultural couples comes in raising children. Romano notes that many discussions revolve around the identity of the children, which religion they will follow, whether they will be taught both cultures (and languages), who their friends will be, and how society will look at them. At the present time, living in North America does not pose as serious a threat to bi-cultural children as it does in other parts of the world. I know that most bi-cultural children cannot be fully assimilated in most Coptic Churches around the world, due to a lack of acceptance, to prejudice, or to simple ignorance of their needs. I am hoping that this concept will change in the future as more children of intercultural marriages become more fully assimilated into the Church community.

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234 Kaeser and Gillespie, Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families, 7.

A successful intercultural marriage can be described as

… a process in which two persons learn to live together and adjust to each other in order to work toward common goals and achievements. When persons of different cultural backgrounds marry, because of the cultural factor their difficulties in adjusting to one another are far greater than for couples of the same culture … the success of a marriage means that both husband and wife are well-integrated, working with each other harmoniously for the mutual satisfaction and achievement of common objectives.\(^{236}\)

Evidence has shown that intercultural marriages are no different from any other marriage when it comes to promises and challenges. In some sense, extra challenges will be faced in a multicultural union, but with love, understanding, and perseverance, these can be conquered. In his book, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People*, Ray Anderson advises couples who are about to marry that their marital relation depends upon their relation as friends, not on their roles as husband and wife. As members of the body of Christ, they are to “value each other and care for the effect of their words and actions upon one another.”\(^{237}\)

While religion is a major factor in deciding to intermarry, there are also many other bridges that must be crossed before a relationship can flourish. Marriage preparation and counselling thus becomes an integral part of a relationship prior to its consummation. Couples must fully understand the venture they are embarking on and be ready to face each challenge with maturity and wisdom.

\(^{236}\) Ibid., 93.

b) Assumptions Operative in the Study

- The immigrant Coptic Orthodox community in Toronto has great respect for Scriptures, Tradition, and Culture, and uses all three in informing its behaviour and decision-making.
- Second-generation Copts are marrying partners from among the greater Canadian community.
- Intercultural marriages are struggling to find their identity in an ethnic Church, and, as a result, many of these families abandon the Church or loosen their connection to it.
- A scholarly study needs to be conducted to identify and eliminate the challenges facing intercultural marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church, both to preserve the marriages themselves and to secure the future of the Church.

IV. The Ministry-in-Action Component

The order of my Ministry-in-Action will be as follows:

1. Formation of Focus Groups:  
   a. I will use homogeneous strangers\(^{239}\) as participants\(^{240}\).
   b. I will conduct the focus groups using what is known as the “Funnel Strategy”.
This approach, as recommended by Morgan, begins with a very broad and unstructured discussion that allows the participants freedom of expression with low moderator involvement, then moves gently towards a more structured discussion that allows the moderator to ask specific questions pertaining to the research.
   c. I will have a suggested questionnaire as a guide for the meeting
   d. I will have six to ten participants per group
   e. I will have a total of three to five groups
   f. I will take note of issues that may arise in discussions that I have not previously considered.
   g. I will not mention key terms such as isolation, fear, divorce, singled out, separate, discrimination, segregate, despair, distress, doubt, panic, phobia, suspicion, rejection, lonesome, spiritually dry, or animosity, which may prompt the discussion into my preconceived perspective.
   h. I will try to bring a number of perspectives into contact and dialogue.


\(^{239}\) By “strangers” I mean those couples who were not previously acquainted with each other or with me personally.

\(^{240}\) The term “homogenous strangers” is used in this discipline to identify the type of participants to be chosen in this study. Homogenous refers to the couples’ ages, marital status, and the fact that they are all intercultural marriages. Strangers are preferred over acquaintances to allow a diversity in opinions which produces more realistic conversation, feedback, and results.
2. Analysis of Focus Group Data:
   a. Coding the Data: I will list all mentions of a given code, whether each individual participant mentioned a given code, whether each group’s discussion contained a given code.
   b. Interpreting the Data: I will locate the most important elements of the discussion for inclusion in the study and then sort them into topics. I will go back to the participants a second time to identify what they think should be built into the final data collection phase.
   c. Reporting: I will balance direct quotation of the participants and summary of their discussions.

3. Creation of Interview Questionnaire:

   Upon completion of the Focus Group and analysis, the final questionnaire will be formulated with guidance from different resources including The Art of Asking Questions by Stanley L. Payne and Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design--For Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires by Norman M. Bradburn, Seymour Sudman, and Brian Wansink.

   The participants of this study will be intercultural couples who were married in or outside of the Coptic Orthodox Church. I will mainly focus on couples that have married within the past ten years, with the possible exception of one couple that has been married for a longer period, in order to ask about how this marriage has survived over time. The participants will be asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B) explaining the research and their ability to opt out at any time without any consequences, and providing the contact information of professionals in case they need support. The main focus of the questions will be to obtain their feedback on whether they have been assimilated into the Coptic Orthodox Church (and, if so, how), and on the kinds of challenges they have faced.

   I will find participants for this study from within the 15 churches in the GTA that serve the Coptic Orthodox community. I will contact local priests, give them a description of
the project and ask them to pass the information on to people within their congregation who meet the profile for participating in this study. I will also ask the clergy members to contact some couples who are no longer part of the Coptic community due to their inability to marry in the Coptic Church. If I feel a sense of embarrassment from clergy members to refer me to those couples (since their departure may be seen as an indication of poor leadership), I will try to stress the significance of this study and its future implications to the entire Coptic community. This will hopefully encourage them to co-operate and to join in this endeavour to address a far too common occurrence within the Church. Those who are willing to participate will contact me directly through the contact information given in the research description.

My objectives in this Action-in-Ministry are as follows:

1. To discover the most important challenges facing intercultural marriages through a series of initial focus groups.
2. To learn ways that the Coptic Church can better serve intercultural couples and their families.
3. To gain some insight into the struggles that intercultural marriages go through when first introduced to the Coptic Community.
4. To clarify ways that Coptic clergy and community could better assimilate intercultural marriages into the Church.
5. To identify practical steps that could be followed to actively serve intercultural marriages within the community.

My projected time line is as follows:

March 2010 – May 2010: Focus Groups and Interviews
June 2010 – July 2010: Data Analysis
September 2010 – March 2011: Dissertation Writing & Review
April 2011 – May 2011: Defence
November 2011: Convocation
V. The Qualitative Research Methodology Operative in the Analysis of the Ministry-in-Action

This research will employ Qualitative Research Methodology, since this method is the most suitable for inquiring about Intercultural Marriages (ICM) in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Berg describes the distinction between Qualitative and Quantitative research by claiming that “qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. In contrast, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things.” Creswell further emphasizes the advantages of Qualitative research when he states:

It begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem … the final written report includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action.

For me, hearing the concerns and challenges that members of my community have experienced in the past, becoming better acquainted with them, and working to figure out practical solutions to deal with them in the future is an extremely significant component of this study. Creswell’s suggestion of a future call for action in my final report will include crucial implications for how I would conduct or adjust my future ministry, and possibly for the ministry of the entire Coptic Orthodox Church.

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Phenomenological Research

I have chosen phenomenological research as the guiding principle of my qualitative research inquiry. Phenomenological research investigates questions about:

…common, everyday human experiences … believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena of our time or typical of a group of people and transitions that are common or of contemporary interest … The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it.

Creswell further defines phenomenological study as “describing the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.”

In this research, I will focus on collecting data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, then on presenting a bigger picture that describes the essence of the experience, and on drawing certain conclusions. The description of the lived experience will include both “what” individuals have experienced and “how” they have experienced it. Both Creswell and Merriam emphasize the importance of “bracketing” the researcher’s own experiences from the phenomenon and taking a fresh perspective of it through the eyes and experiences of the participants.

VI. Ethics Review


VII. Risks and Limitations of the Study

It is possible that some of the participants may have had very difficult times with friends, family, and the community in the past and that my questions would raise some

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244 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 57.
unpleasant and difficult memories. For this reason, the information and consent forms that I will provide to them include two sources of pastoral counselling where participants may seek counselling and support. The first is Dr. Wafaa Wahba, a family counsellor, and the second is Fr. Maximos Rizkalla, a priest whose ministry is not related to this study. These two would be standing by during the interviews in case their presence is required and available to be approached after the interviews are finished.

I also realize that this study involves some social risks and the possible loss of privacy, since focus groups present a particular problem for confidentiality. While I will not make any absolute claims to confidentiality of the data obtained from focus groups, as part of maintaining the highest possible confidentiality levels, I will repeatedly remind participants to observe respect for each other’s comments and to maintain confidentiality levels outside of our focus group. Participants will also be requested to sign a group confidentiality form (Appendix D).

Even though co-researchers (subjects) might be known to me by face, I will assure them that anything discussed between us will be kept in strict confidence through the following means:

- Systematically changing each subject’s real name to a pseudonym or case number when reporting data.
- Carefully describing place names so as not to reveal the subjects’ identities.
- Not keeping identifying records or lists any longer than is absolutely necessary, and destroying all material at the end of the research.
- Collecting confidential data in locations that allow privacy, under conditions that minimize the likelihood of other individuals overhearing or seeing the confidential information.
- Separating names or other identifiers from the data.
- Storing data in multiple locations and placing them in metal boxes inside locked closets or locked desk drawers.
- Ensuring that research-related information is not carelessly discussed.
- Offering to have the research team sign a personal statement promising confidentiality, if necessary.

VIII. The Contribution of the Study

This research will be extremely significant to my current ministry base as many of the intercultural couples within the Coptic community in Toronto are seeking my assistance in counselling them in their marriage. This research will enable me to connect with these couples and to set out certain criteria for treating them with respect and dignity. In ensuring these couples’ positive experience in the Church, I am helping them to have a successful marriage as well as influencing their future participation in the Coptic Church. Intercultural marriages have been an increasing phenomenon in all of the Coptic communities outside of Egypt. This research will allow other Coptic Churches to understand some of the challenges that face intercultural couples and try to adequately receive them into the community. Finally, this could be a model to all of the ethnic churches across Canada, and understanding some of the challenges facing the Coptic Church may allow them to relate and learn from some of the experiences, triumphs, and failures that I will describe in my research.
APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

“TST Letterhead”

Researcher:

Name: Fr. Pishoy Salama
Address: 65 Bowhill Dr., Richmond Hill, ON
Phone: 416-818-2588   email: frpishoy.salama@utoronto.ca

I am a doctoral student at the Toronto School of Theology working under the guidance of Dr. John Bowen, Associate Professor of Wycliffe College. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which is taking place on ---. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this research are:

1) To interview intercultural couples to determine their lived experience in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
2) To gain insight and experience about the way that they have been received in the Church, and to determine the factors that contribute to their presence or lack of involvement in the Church.

Two methods of data collection will be involved. Focus groups will be held to determine the broader issues relating to the lived experience of intercultural married couples in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The second method will involve in depth one-on-one interviews with ten couples to determine their lived experience within the Coptic Orthodox Church. Afterwards, I will write a report about the findings. You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me at any time at the address/phone number listed above.

I will use the information from this study to write a thesis. Before it is published, this research will be read by the Research and Thesis advisors and the appropriate evaluation committee.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

1) Your real name will not be used at any point during the collection of information, or in the written case report. Instead, you and any other people or place names involved in your case will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.
2) If you grant permission for audio taping, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than this study, and will not be played for any reason other than the completion of this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you.

3) Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected and records and reports written will be turned over to you.

4) You can request to receive a copy of the final report up to two months before the thesis defense, so that you have the opportunity to suggest changes to the researcher, if necessary.

5) You can request to receive a copy of the report that is handed in to the advisor.

6) Your access to and acceptance within this community of faith will in no way be affected by this research.

7) I acknowledge that focus groups may present a particular problem with confidentiality. Nevertheless, participants will be explicitly and repeatedly reminded that the conversations should be treated confidentially and that certain kinds of information may not be appropriate to mention at all. Also, they will be asked to sign a Focus Group Confidentiality Form.

8) If you have any concerns or questions about this study or the interview process, please feel free to contact the Research or Thesis advisors:

Rev. Dr. Andrew Irvine  
Director, D.Min. Program  
47 Queen's Park Crescent East, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C3  
Tel: 416-978-4039 dmin.director@utoronto.ca

Dr. John Bowen  
Associate Professor, Wycliffe College  
5 Hoskin Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5S 1H7  
416-946-3534 john.bowen@utoronto.ca

9) If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273

10) If as a result of the interview process you feel discomfort or experience unpleasant memories and may need support, please do not hesitate to contact  
+ Dr. Wafaa Wahba – Family Counselor 416-606-2542  
+ Fr. Maximus Rizkalla – Priest 416-200-4230

11) If you wish, you may keep a copy of this information letter as a reference.

Do you grant permission to be interviewed?
Yes ____  No ____

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?
Yes ____  No ____

Do you grant permission to be audio-taped?
Yes ____  No ____

I agree to the terms

Respondent ___________________________ Date _____________

I agree to the terms:

Researcher ___________________________ Date _____________
APPENDIX C

ETHICS REVIEW APPROVAL

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #23624
Dr. John Bowen
Wycliffe College
5 Hoskin Ave.
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON M5S 1H7

Fr. Pishoy Salama
Wycliffe College
5 Hoskin Ave.
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON M5S 1H7

January 31, 2011

Dear Dr. Bowen and Fr. Salama:

Re: Your research protocol newly entitled, “Of All Nations: Exploring Intercultural Marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the GTA”, formerly entitled, “A Phenomenological Analysis of Intercultural Marriages in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto.” by Dr. J. Bowen (supervisor), Fr. P. Salama (PhD candidate)

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research study through the REB’s delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Marianna Richardson
Research Ethics Coordinator
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I, __________________________, recognize the confidentiality of this focus group. I agree to respect all comments made by its members and to refrain from disclosing or discussing with anyone outside of this focus group any information related to the subjects discussed. I realize that some of the topics discussed will be of a private nature to the members and may cause some discomfort or bring back some unpleasant or difficult memories. I will spare no effort to offer support, understanding, and honour to the quality of our discussions.

Signed: __________________________

Date: __________________________
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW SURVEY

Name: __________________________________
Name of Spouse: _____________________________
Address: ________________________________
City: ______________________  Province: _____________  Postal Code: ______
Phone: _____________________  Email: _______________________
Gender: _______________  Age: ___________  Ethnic Background: ______

Denominational or Religious Affiliation: Current _________________  Previous ___
Postsecondary Education: ___________________

Were you baptized in the Coptic Church?  Yes  No  Year Baptized: _____
Were you married in the Coptic Church?  Yes  No  Year Married: ____
Is this your first marriage?  Yes  No

Children:  Yes  No  Ages: __________________________

Are you an active member of the Coptic Church?  Yes  No

What is the level of your involvement in the Coptic Church?

- Sacraments:  Very Involved  Moderate  Seldom  Never
- Service:  Very Involved  Moderate  Seldom  Never
- Social Events:  Very Involved  Moderate  Seldom  Never
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **Individual Interview Survey**
   a. Please fill out the attached Individual Survey

2. **Meeting and Deciding to Get Married**
   a. Please recall how and where you met?
   b. How long did you date before deciding to get married and what were the factors that helped you to make that decision?
   c. Prior to meeting, did you have any stereotypes about individuals from other ethnicities?
   d. Prior to meeting, did you think that you’d be in an Intercultural Marriage?

3. **Reaction of Family and Friends**
   a. How did your family and friends react to the news that you’re getting married to someone from another ethnicity?
   b. How did you feel about their reaction?
   c. What is your current relationship with your family and friends?

4. **Coptic Church and Community**
   a. What role, if any, did the Coptic Church and clergy play in your marriage?
   b. What was your first impression of the Coptic Church and community?
   c. Please comment on the Coptic Church spirituality, culture, traditions, customs, language, sacraments, rules, and any other values which might have enhanced or hindered your marriage.
   d. What was your experience with integration into the Coptic Church and community?
   e. How do you feel your marriage has impacted the Coptic Church and community?
   f. In your opinion, can you identify any areas where the Coptic Church, being represented in the clergy or community, can enhance its ministry to successfully minister to Intercultural couples and their children?

5. **Influence of Culture**
   a. What role did culture play in determining the following criteria in your marriage: gender roles & responsibilities, finances, in-laws, food, language, communication, and raising children?
   b. What effect did I.C.M. have on your ethnic identity and belonging?
   c. If applicable, what effect did it have on your children?

6. **Factors for Success or Conflict**
   a. In your opinion, what are some key factors that determine the way to a successful I.C.M. or reasons which may cause conflict in the long run?

7. **Concluding Thoughts**
   a. Please provide any other significant information or comments which may enhance this research.
   b. What was your impression on the interview and would you like any follow up information?
APPENDIX G

CODING DICTIONARY

(1) Interview Survey
   (1 1) Gender
   (1 2) Age
   (1 3) Ethnicity
   (1 4) Religious affiliation
       (1 4 1) Current
       (1 4 2) Previous
   (1 5) Post Secondary Education
       (1 5 1) College
       (1 5 2) University
       (1 5 3) Post Grad
   (1 6) Occupation
   (1 7) Baptized in C.O.C?
       (1 7 1) Yes
       (1 7 2) No
   (1 8) Married in C.O.C?
       (1 8 1) Yes
       (1 8 2) No
   (1 9) First Marriage
       (1 9 1) Yes
       (1 9 2) No

(2) Meeting and deciding to get married
   (2 1) How & where you met
       (2 1 1) Work
       (2 1 2) School
       (2 1 3) Other
   (2 2) How long dated before marriage and factors helped with decisions
       (2 2 1) How long
           (2 2 1 1) Less than a year
           (2 2 1 2) 1-2 years
           (2 2 1 3) 2 or more years
       (2 2 2) Factors helping in decision
           (2 2 2 1) Religion
           (2 2 2 1 1)- Involvement in church
           (2 2 2 2) Culture
           (2 2 2 3) Other
   (2 3) Stereotypes about the other ethnicities
       (2 3 1) Against persons of similar ethnicity
       (2 3 2) Against persons of other ethnicity
(2 3 3) No Stereotypes
(2 4) Openness to I.C.M.

(3) Reaction of families and friends

(3 1) Initial reaction

(3 1 1) Egyptian
  (3 1 1 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 1 1 2) Pressure
  (3 1 1 3) Negative

(3 1 2) Canadian
  (3 1 2 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 1 2 2) Pressure
  (3 1 2 3) Negative

(3 2) How you felt about reaction

(3 2 1) Egyptian
  (3 2 1 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 2 1 2) Pressure
  (3 2 1 3) Negative

(3 2 2) Canadian
  (3 2 2 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 2 2 2) Pressure
  (3 2 2 3) Negative

(3 3) Current relationship with family and friends

(3 3 1) Egyptian
  (3 3 1 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 3 1 2) Pressure
  (3 3 1 3) Negative

(3 3 2) Canadian
  (3 3 2 1) Positive (accepting)
  (3 3 2 2) Pressure
  (3 3 2 3) Negative

(4) Coptic Church and community

(4 1) Role of Coptic church and clergy in marriage
  (4 1 1) Reaction of priest
    (4 1 1 1) positive
    (4 1 1 2) negative

  (4 1 2) Marriage prep and post marriage follow up

  (4 1 3) Not married in C.O.C.
    (4 1 3 1) attending another church
    (4 1 3 2) challenges in C.O.C. (re baptized, etc)
    (4 1 3 3) strengths of C.O.C. (fosters family, close knit, strong)
 - (4 1 3 4) other

(4 2) First impression of Coptic Church and community
  (4 21) Easy to follow
(422) Hard to follow
(423) Barrier
(424) Welcoming
(425) Feeling lost

(4 3) Comments on Coptic Church/Culture
  (4 3 1) spirituality
    (4 3 1 1) positive
    (4 3 1 2) negative
  (4 3 2) culture
    (4 3 2 1) positive
    (4 3 2 2) negative
  (4 3 3) tradition, customs, rules
  (4 3 4) language/communication
  (4 3 5) sacraments
  (4 3 6) other

(4 4) Integration in Coptic Church
  (4 4 1) Welcomed/sense of belonging
  (4 4 2) Outcast/not belonging

(4 5) how your marriage impacted the Coptic Church and community
  (4 5 1) Effected
  (4 5 2) Not effected

(4 6) Enhancing Church ministry to I.C.M. and children
  (4 6 1) English Liturgy
  (4 6 2) Other

(5) Influence of Culture
  (5 1) Role of culture in your marriage
    (5 1 1) Gender roles and responsibilities
    (5 1 2) Finances
    (5 1 3) In-laws (Egyptian 1, Canadian 2)
      (5 1 3 1) Close/involved
      (5 1 3 2) Too involved
      (5 1 3 3) Not involved/seldom see them
    (5 1 4) Food
      (5 1 4 1) Egyptian
      (5 1 4 2) Canadian
    (5 1 5) Language
    (5 1 6) Communication
      (5 1 6 1) Barriers
      (5 1 6 2) Tradition
      (5 1 6 3) Challenge
      (5 1 6 4) Easy
    (5 1 7) Raising children
    (5 1 8) other

(5 2) effect of I.C.M on your ethnic identity
(5 3) effect of I.C.M on children

(6) Factors for success or conflict
   (6 1) successful I.C.M (Compromise, Respect)
   (6 2) Factors which may lead to conflicts (Fighting)

(7) Concluding thoughts
   (7 1) additional significant info
   (7 2) impression on the interview
   (7 3) follow up info