

## An Assessment of Strategies used by the Church in Resolving Domestic Conflicts Among Christian Families in Kwanza Sub-County of Trans- Nzoia County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Many of the domestic conflicts that the church has the grace to mediate is marriage conflicts between a husband and wife. The church considers marriage as a holy union and both parties should consider it a lifelong journey. This kind of belief promotes abusive marriages supported by the religious doctrines. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to find out the role of religion in alleviating domestic conflicts in Kwanza Sub-County of Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. This article discusses how the Christian religion legitimizes conflicts against women, perpetuating a symbolic conflicts and stresses the importance of an education that aims more fair and equitable gender relations, eradicating conflicts. The religious morality perpetuated by culture legitimizes conflicts against women, and this is an urgent subject for education.

**Keywords:** Domestic conflicts, Religious/ faith community, Strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

The Church is founded on Christ who is perceived by Christians as the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah; 9:1-6, Luke 2:14; 19:38, Ephesians; 2:14, 2 Thessalonians; 3:16). He said that He came so that the world may have life in abundance (John 10:10). Peace and the Church are, therefore, inseparable. In the beatitudes, Christ gave a summary of his teachings: “blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Peace and reconciliation are inseparable. The scope and consequences of domestic conflicts are often misunderstood and rarely addressed in the evangelical church, resulting in abuse victims and perpetrators not receiving essential ministry. Roughly 85% of the women surveyed indicated that they were Christians; 57% attend church; 35% indicated they had experienced physical abuse in a past relationship; and yet only 7% felt they could confide in a church leader if they felt unsafe due to their partner’s abuse. In another study of 1,000 battered women, 67% indicated they attend church, one-third sought help from clergy, but of those who sought help, two-thirds said their church leaders were not helpful (Lee, 1988).

In Kenya there has been a marked increase in domestic conflicts in the recent times (Kahumbi, 2004). Interestingly, religion particularly Christianity and Islam have done less in averting domestic conflicts. The Bible is the core point of reference for the Church. It highlights several principles of peacebuilding and reconciliation including love, justice, forgiveness and peace. These exalt the value of human lives and the rule of law. The Church is called the body of Christ. To

maintain the integrity, churches must advocate for peace and love among their adherents.

Religion, initially, is popularly associated with peace, with the common good of humanity, with love, with the protection of those less favored, which complicates the perception of the potential for conflicts that underlies its speech and in its practice, especially in relation to women (Citeli & Nunes 2010). Religious taboos often collaborate to keep women suffering conflicts in their relationships. The lack of theological training to deal with domestic conflicts against women can also contribute and feed religious myths that condone this reality. One of the biggest myths of the Christian Church is home as safe and sacred place and should be kept foremost. Families with religious experiences may also be affected by the problem of domestic conflicts.

“Pastoral counselors need to recognize the reality that the family is the most violent group to which women and children belong. Even if there is a desire to see the family as a group living Christian values, where there is comfort, love and joy, we must recognize that the family is a place where not only conflicts but also the tragedy can occur” (Bergesch, 2008, p. 125). Many women are trying to seek and understand the violent relationship which they live through religion. They want to understand the reason for their suffering and their stay in the abusive relationship. They seek answers in religion for the transformation of fellow who once vowed to love them and respect them, but now the violent assaults and systematically (Lemos & Souza, 2009). This search for understanding can occur, often through prayer,

dialogue with God. Often this search - or even some religious counseling - to direct the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. It creates a kind of conformity to the conflicts through the suffering of Jesus, because it is the largest extant suffering. This theological affirmation reduces any human suffering.

Religious values act with great force in the symbolic and subjective plane. The inferiority of women conveyed by religious discourse is a form of symbolic conflicts, enforced through social representations (Tomita, 2004, p. 175). One example that is set up and maintained in religious values is the traditional model of a patriarchal family structure with heterosexual sex, male managers and submission of children and wife to husband and father (Citeli & Nunes, 2010). Women are subjected and embedded in the culture and society that often do not realize what happens is symbolic conflicts. This conflict is so subtle that may be disguised in the name of women's freedom, but in fact is nothing more than slavery.

Church often becomes the refuge, the place where woman suffers violence seek help and acceptance. This is because it is a space allowed to women by the men who assaults. Another relevant factor is that this religious space and their leaders are considered sacred, free of profane feelings. However, we must not forget that religious institutions and their representatives are inserted in the patriarchal system and its policies, ideologies and attitudes contribute, in most cases, for the maintenance of this social organization. An example that makes this clear is that the sins of men are always diminished and even justified, while women are the cause of this sin. When a woman is raped, is very common witness attitudes laying woman in the role of blame for rape. The causes of rape are attributed to women, because of women crept, caused, allowed and asked to be raped.

This scapegoating of women is also present within religious institutions:

[...] Playing is a divine gift, and sexuality as a means to achieve the divine purpose of reproduction. This religious conception justifies

the dispossession of women's bodies and makes room for violence against them when they want to exercise their rights to autonomy and freedom [...] There is a traditional view that makes women and their bodies guilty of violence who suffer, although in fact, violence is found rooted in society that is guided by a system itself violent in that engenders it, but it attaches to the body of the woman the violence itself, society, produces, and in which appear religious institutions as an important component. (Orozco, 2009, p. 138)

## OBJECTIVE

The general objective of the study was to assess strategies used by the church in resolving domestic conflicts among Christian families in kwanza sub-county of Trans- Nzoia county, Kenya.

## Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design which enabled the researcher to assess the strategies used by evangelical churches in solving domestic conflicts among Christian families in Kwanza Sub county in Trans- Nzoia County Kenya. The target population in the study included the members of the church, clergy and church leadership of evangelical churches. Data was gathered using questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaire was important because respondents were able to write down their opinion with total freedom and without being pushed to do it. The questionnaires were used to collect data from the 287 Christian families. The study also used interview schedules on 28 church leaders and 15 clergies. They were believed to possess more information on the strategies the church applies in resolving domestic conflicts because many couples seek the advice from them whenever they are in conflict.

## Empirical Findings

### Strategies Used By the Church in Resolving Domestic Conflicts among Christian Families

The table below shows strategies used by the evangelical churches in Kwanza Sub – County in Trans- Nzoia County Kenya in solving domestic conflicts among their adherents.

**Table 1:** Strategies used by the church in resolving domestic conflicts

Statement	Mean	Std. dev
Training/education on domestic	4.312	0.404
Pray for unity	4.098	0.253
Normalize conflict	4.342	0.303
Figure out what conflicting parties need	4.202	0.354
Look for a win/win scenario	4.133	0.253
Not treating conflict like sin	4.203	0.431
Not demanding everyone kisses and makes up	4.012	0.504
Creating allies in peacemaking	4.230	0.453
Never break confidentiality	4.309	0.533
Celebrating resolution	4.282	0.604

**Source:** research data from the questionnaires 2019

**KEY: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, SD- Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree**

The results in table 1 show that the respondents agree (mean 4.000) that strategies used by the church in resolving domestic conflicts among Christian families include: training/education on domestic violence; praying for unity; normalize conflict; Figure out what conflicting parties need; Look for a win/win scenario; not treating conflict like sin; Not demanding everyone kisses and makes up; creating allies in peacemaking; Never break confidentiality and celebrating resolution.

The study established that strategies used by the church in resolving domestic conflicts among Christian families include: training/education on domestic violence; praying for unity; normalize conflict; Figure out what conflicting parties need; Look for a win/win scenario; not treating conflict like sin; Not demanding everyone kisses and makes up; creating allies in peacemaking; Never break confidentiality and celebrating resolution.

During the interview, church leaders also pointed out that religious communities can be incredibly helpful or incredibly damaging to survivors of abuse. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of many victims of domestic conflicts. Many women have confided in their faith leader or clergy when experiencing domestic conflicts, and some women have found the support and assistance of their faith community to be essential in obtaining safety. Other women have felt that their religious community has not helped or supported them, by encouraging the woman to work harder to make a marriage work, to pray for strength to deal with domestic conflicts, or by telling the woman that it is her obligation to stay in a dangerous relationship.

In support of the above, (Smith, 1990) noted that sometimes religious text and traditions have been

misinterpreted or misused by religious leaders, which has resulted in guilt, shame, self-blame, and suffering for victims. Some religious texts have been used to justify abusive behaviors. Yet other faith communities have taken a strong stand against abuse in the home and have found ways to advocate with abuse survivors, help facilitate safety and providing essential support for victims. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of many victims of domestic conflicts. Many women have report that their faith and faith community provided essential support when leaving an abusive relationship, and found their religion to be a comfort to them in very difficult times.

It was also reported that faith communities can assist survivors of domestic conflicts through several ways. This involves making connections with your local domestic conflicts programmes, co-sponsor training on domestic conflicts and partnering with domestic conflicts organizations or become a part of your local domestic conflicts coordinated community response.

Secondly, the church can support domestic conflicts organizations through helping a domestic conflicts organization by taking a special offering, raising money or making donations, volunteering your time or resources to a domestic conflicts organization and offering free space for domestic conflicts support groups or trainings.

Furthermore, educating the faith community on domestic conflicts can help. For example, by putting domestic conflicts information on bulletin or newsletter. Asking someone from their local domestic conflicts program writing an article and also inviting a representative from the domestic conflicts program to speak to church groups, subcommittees, or at meetings. They can also give information through posters with the local domestic conflicts programs with their phone

number available in clergy offices, in restrooms, and at women's meetings. In addition, there is need to understand that abusive individuals tend to be manipulative and coercive and will often make promises to change, yet rarely do they keep those promises. They can also address domestic conflicts in Sunday school or at children's classes or youth groups. For example, children can take a slogan like "Hands Are Not for Hitting" pledge where they trace and color their own hands and sign a promise not to use their hands for conflicts. They can talk about domestic conflicts in sermons or messages from faith leaders.

One of the clergy reiterated that, the best healers focus on prevention. "Why fight a cancer that you could simply avoid"? The same is true for conflict. If we can remain spiritually empowered and hold unity up as our highest ideal, we're doing a lot to protect our wholeness.

Jesus's priestly prayer (John 17) focused intently on Christian unity. If that was the number one issue on his mind prior to his crucifixion, it should be ours, too. Pray for your congregation on your own time, and have regular times of corporate prayer to focus on maintaining oneness. (Jayson, 2017)

One of the church leaders reported that one of the reasons why disputes get out of control is because they start in secret. While people still have their wits about them, they feel like their frustration is shameful and so they nurse it quietly. Eventually it becomes so huge and hard to live with that they no longer care how it makes them appear. By the time it gets to that point, everyone's in trouble.

Similarly, (Jayson, 2017) stated that we need to be able to hold up unity as an ideal while operating with the understanding that there is going to be conflict. It's not shameful or bad to be angry, but it becomes a problem when let it fester. If you can create a process that offers people a safe place to work through frustration before it turns into conflict, that's incredibly valuable.

It was also reported during the interview that pastoring isn't like parenting. You can't just walk into the room and yell, "Hey you guys, knock it off and get along!" Therefore, resolving conflicts between adults require some detective work. First you need to decipher what the issue is truly about. If you can sit down with the two parties together and talk through it, great. But there is a possibility you'll likely need to do some reconnaissance.

Jayson (2017) further added that helping the wounded parties work through what they want or need to bring this conflict to an end isn't just for your edification. Half the time warring factions haven't thought through this question themselves. They jump into a conflict with no real exit strategy, and being forced to think about what their end game is can be a real eye-opener for them.

It was also reported that, as you start looking into this conflict, it might become obvious that one person's truly to blame. It's still your best bet to find a way to resolve the conflict in a way that allows everyone to maintain their dignity. This doesn't mean that you can't have a come-to-Jesus discussion with the guilty party. You just want to do everything within your power to ensure that they can save face in public. In support of this, Jayson (2017) contended that if you don't, you're likely planting a seed of contention that's going to sprout later. And when that friction resurfaces later, it will be twice as resilient to your attempts to squelch it. In this broken world, as noted by one of the church leaders, conflict is natural. It doesn't do anyone any good if you wade in and start behaving like an authoritarian. If there's a fire of discontent burning in your congregation, your anger is only going to act as an accelerant. In fact, communicating your disappointment and sadness will have a much more profound effect than adding your anger to theirs. The conflict is probably running on pride, gossip, jealousy or any number of attitudes. And it will be important later to come back around and begin doing some soul care. But for the time being, resolving disharmony is your most important job (Jayson, 2017).

In Acts 9, Barnabas encourages the disciples to let Paul fellowship with them (despite his former conflicts against the saints). Out of this act of kindness, a bond is formed between the two. On their first missionary journey together they were joined by Barnabas's cousin, John Mark. At some point during their journey, John Mark left and went home. (Acts 13:13). When another campaign was planned later, Barnabas and Paul had a disagreement about bringing John Mark. Barnabas thought Mark could be a helpful addition, but Paul was resistant to the idea because John Mark had abandoned them. Scripture says that it was such a strong disagreement that Barnabas and Paul separated.

It's important to recognize that reconciliation doesn't always mean that the relationship is instantly repaired. While both parties need to

recognize that waging war is ultimately hurting the body, it's irrational and idealistic to assume that the parties involved will be able to simply hit the reset button on their relationship. Make sure that there's an opportunity for people to take a break from each other and give themselves some time healing time (Jayson, 2017).

One way to helpful resolution as noted by a number of church leaders, is to help the conflicting parties to separate the conflict from themselves. If you can help them see the conflict as an issue that needs to be fixed for the sake of the body, everyone can work together to put an end to the contention without having to feel like the relationship is totally fixed. Think of it like brokering a cease fire between warring countries. If you're trying to resolve every relational conflict in order to stop the war, you may never get anywhere. Instead, convince them to work with you to bring an end to the conflict. When they both agree to stop lobbing rockets at each other and saying inflammatory things in the media, you can begin working with them to heal the divide. Meanwhile, you don't have to worry about further collateral damage (Jayson, 2017).

By its nature, conflict is focused on the past and played out in the present as pointed out by one of the clergy. If a vision isn't created for an antagonism-free future, the conflict will continue to play itself out. There's something about a war that's so immediate and myopic that the battle is all the combatants see. A good peacemaking pastor will help them to lift their gaze and focus on the future that both parties truly desire. Similarly, Jayson (2017) added that, people are already forgetful of their highest principles and values. Strife magnifies our tendency to lose the plot. As a leader, you should be able to remind the parties who they are in Christ and what is at stake in this drama. They need to remember that our prayer as believers is that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and our responsibility is to facilitate that peace with each other.

Throughout the process of resolving conflict as explained by one of the church leaders, you're going to be privy to a lot of information. Obviously no one is helped when you spread it around. The real temptation enters when you think you're speeding up the peace process by telling person B about the person A's frustrations. Without expressed consent, you should never speak for either party in the conflict. If you can get them together and mediate a discussion, great.

Otherwise, make sure you ask for permission about anything you feel it would be helpful to share with the other party.

Jayson (2017) advises that trust is the most important element in conflict negotiations. If either of the parties feel like you've broken their trust or are favoring the other, you're in trouble. You end up like the poor fool trying to break up a dog fight. It doesn't take too much interference before the dogs turn on the interloper. I've seen too many church fights that indiscriminately focused on the pastor because of a laps in the pastor's judgment and a perceived break in trust.

The enemy desires to stir up conflict and disharmony. Every time he is unable to do so is a cause for celebration. If you and others are able to negotiate conflict's minefield, it's important for you to really help the parties recognize what was averted. Maybe you want to send them a card and congratulate them on a job well done, or maybe you want to treat them to a coffee or a dinner to celebrate the thwarting of the devil's plans. The more you are able to tie their resolution to real kingdom work, the more perspective they'll have next time conflict threatens to raise its ugly head (Jayson, 2017)

The Church's charisma and likewise her unique nature vis-à-vis reconciliation, at whatever level it needs to be achieved, lies in the fact that she always goes back to that reconciliation at the source. For by reason of her essential mission, the Church feels an obligation to go to the roots of the conflict, in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, an equally original reconciliation which will be the effective principle of all true reconciliation. Therefore, the Church has the mission of proclaiming this reconciliation (Kelman ,2008). In the context of the change now taking place on the continent, the church has a role to play in reducing or eliminating all together the root causes of simmering or open conflicts and effecting true peace. One way of effecting true peace is by becoming agents of peacebuilding and reconciliation (Scheper, 2002).

Reconciliation after conflicts informs structural actions to identify and support structures which would tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse in conflict (Boutros –Ghali 1992). He further notes that reconciliation implies building structures for peace in all phases of a conflict, not merely after the violent phase has been replaced by a fragile peace. Structures that

contribute to strengthening and solidifying peace can be institutions that offer forms for peaceful conflict resolution or that prevent violence, such as church institutions

## CONCLUSION

The strategies used by the church in resolving domestic conflicts among Christian families include: training/education on domestic violence; praying for unity; normalize conflict; Figure out what conflicting parties need; Look for a win/win scenario; not treating conflict like sin; Not demanding everyone kisses and makes up; creating allies in peacemaking; Never break confidentiality and celebrating resolution.

## RECOMMENDATION

The church should come up workable strategies in resolving conflicts among Christian couples.

Christian should also develop their own conflict resolutions mechanism at family levels such as use of mediators and third parties among themselves.

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