

Interfaith Marriage Counseling:
Perspectives and Practices Among
Christian Ministers

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ABSTRACT

Members of the clergy provide a unique perspective to couples entering premarital counseling. The basis for most insights provided by the counseling is derived from church policies and procedures as well as personal and professional opinions and experience. When individuals in a relationship come from different faiths, guidelines and policy may differ or may even be contradictory, and these differences may have a direct effect on the delivery, substance, and outcome of premarital counseling. These differences may thus have an indirect effect on the effectiveness of the premarital preparation. The purpose of this study is to explore and identify differences among clergy/ministers in their practices and beliefs concerning the counseling of couples composed of one Christian and one non-Christian as well as demonstrate how those in interfaith marriages are different than couples from different Christian traditions. More specifically, the study will examine the degree to which religious policies and procedures as well as clergy's own personal and professional opinions and empathy affect the challenge to accommodate interfaith couples. The study will also examine the difficulties that occur when a minister must serve in a religious advisory role given their individual stance on religious intermarriage.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution that transcends most societies, and in our society that institution is closely tied to religion. In fact 78 percent of American couples marry someone of their own religion and many of them are married by clergy (ARIS 2008). But when in a diverse population people are bound to meet and marry outside their own religion, and in fact the remaining 22 percent do just that (ARIS 2008). Even if each party in the relationship intends to maintain his or her own religious identity, both of them will inevitably experience aspects of one another's religiosity if they intend to marry.

Members of the clergy provide a unique perspective to couples entering premarital counseling. The basis for most insights provided by the counseling is derived from church policies and procedures as well as personal and professional opinions and experience. When individuals in a relationship come from different faiths, guidelines and policy may differ or may even be contradictory, and these differences may have a direct effect on the delivery, substance, and outcome of premarital counseling. These differences may thus have an indirect effect on the effectiveness of the premarital preparation.

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify differences among clergy/ministers in their practices and beliefs concerning the counseling of couples composed of one Christian and one non-Christian as well as demonstrate how those in interfaith marriages are different than couples from different Christian traditions. More specifically, the study will examine the degree to which religious policies and

procedures as well as clergy's own personal and professional opinions and empathy affect the challenge to accommodate interfaith couples. The study will also examine the difficulties that occur when a minister must serve in a religious advisory role given their individual stance on religious intermarriage.

Many recent studies of religiously mixed marriages target trends among the group in terms of identifying other variables that distinguish those in such marriages. These variables include: class, education, income, religious activity, marital conflict, and childrearing techniques. Interfaith couples typically come from middle to upper class families, and are usually highly educated with many of them having post-baccalaureate degrees (Sherkat 2004). Although highly educated, interfaith couples tend to have lower incomes than their levels of education would suggest (Lehrer 1995, 1996, 2002; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993), interfaith couples also tend to have significantly lower levels of religious activity, dedication, and belief; as well they tend have elevated levels of marital conflicts (Ellison, Bartkowski, and Anderson 1999; Heaton and Pratt 1990; Krishnan 1993; Maneker and Rankin 1993; McCarthy 2007; Parsons et al. 2007). The overwhelming majority of the literature concerning the subject of counseling interfaith couples is reserved for policy and procedures of ministers, clergy, and rabbis, as well as "how to" guides on counseling such couples (Burton 1992; Reuben 1994; Thomas 1995; Weaver, Revilla, and Koenig 2002). However the unique relationship between religious advisors and those planning to be in mixed marriages is seldom examined, especially from a sociological perspective.

The lack of literature and understanding of this topic suggests the need for an

exploratory study to determine how clergy respond to interfaith couples. The examination of perspectives and practices of Christian ministers in dealing with interfaith couples will provide insight into how the norms, values, and beliefs produced by social structures and institutions are negotiated and implemented among members of differing Christian denominations. This study will add to the existing literature by providing an understanding of the difference in perspectives, policies, and procedures among various Christian denominations, as well as provide context to the pastoral practice of counseling interfaith couples.

It is only logical to assume that within the wide variation among Christian denominations in terms of theology as well as practice and tradition some denominations may be more suitable and willing to accommodate the marriage of two individuals with different faiths. Therefore the current study will establish a discrepancy gradient regarding religious resistance to the notion of interfaith marriage among various Christian clergy. Understanding how comfortable clergy are with someone from their own congregation marrying someone from non-Christian faiths as well as from a variety of other Christian denominations will aid in the development of an interfaith marriage resistance gradient.

These insights may provide an explanation and context for why some clergy may be more willing and equipped to provide counsel to interfaith couples. This is not simply a willingness to provide a service, but of having a more or less common set of shared values and beliefs which may encourage or deter individuals to seek such counsel. If some individuals feel that they or their partner have similar or divergent views than a

clergy member or feel judged or misunderstood as opposed to unthreatened and welcomed, they may be more likely to agree or disagree with what a clergy member has to say which may affect their willingness to participate in premarital counseling at the optimum level. The effects of this process may certainly vary but could include: the increase or decrease of religious participation of one or both members, the amount of conflict which arises from the change in religiosity in either direction, or the creation of dissonance among all members of a family including the children. Particular religious teachings and practices may reflect how an interfaith couple might negotiate whom they want to provide counsel. By identifying these groups, clergy may be more aware and capable of encouraging couples to receive their counsel or to help those in interfaith relationships to fully understand the complexities of their relationship in the context of their own or their spouse's religion.

Data from 23 in-depth interviews conducted with clergy across 14 Christian denominations will aid in understanding 1) the effectiveness of specific counseling techniques, 2) the general understanding of marriage from the pastoral perspective, 3) the dispositions of clergy to the notion of interfaith marriage, and 4) the practices involved in such counseling. Specifically, issues of ideological resistance to interfaith marriage related to the association of meaning with regard to marriage are explored along with the discovery of unanticipated clerical presumptions of gender related to intermarriage. In addition, the association of conservative Protestant groups to state funded and structured pre-marital preparation courses is highlighted as a major unanticipated finding from this study.

From here a review of literature describing interfaith marriage in America is examined by viewing the attributes of those in such marriages, how those attributes affects the likelihood of belonging to specific groups, and how the formation of different groups may affect how its members interact with both in-group and out-group members. Then a description of clerical roles and the meaning associated with spiritual advising is used to illustrate our current knowledge of the subject as well as to point us in the direction where literature is lacking. Following the literature review concerning ministers, the presentation of data collected from clergy will highlight the following areas: policies and procedures, counseling practices, activities and techniques, attitudes toward interfaith marriage, resistance toward interfaith marriages, gendered presumptions and responses, and state associated pre-marital programs. Finally, a discussion of the findings will add context to the finding and suggest how the study is limited as well provide suggestions for further research in the field.

CHAPTER II

INTERFAITH MARRIAGE IN AMERICA

The term interfaith marriage is routinely used in literature to identify couples who do not practice the same religion. This term typically refers to completely separate faiths. Marriages that consist of a Christian and a Muslim or a Hindi and an atheist or agnostic would be considered an interfaith marriage. In contrast, marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic, a Baptist and a Presbyterian, or even a Sunni and Shi'ah would be considered an intrafaith union. From this point forward, the term *interfaith* will be used to describe two individuals with two completely different religious orientations, and the term *intrafaith* will be used to describe marriages of two different denominations within one religion. Both types of marriage will be examined, but for now we will focus on what we currently know about interfaith marriage in the United States.

Interfaith marriage is a phenomenon built on the choice of two individuals to share a life while acknowledging the difference between them in terms of their religious backgrounds, beliefs, and practices. The compromise and acceptance of one another's personal choices and beliefs is required for any successful relationship. Although religion and marriage are ultimately personal choices, particular variables may influence the likelihood of holding beliefs or lifestyles that may provide greater opportunities to be in an interfaith relationship. Levels of religiosity and group affiliation will be examined to identify factors that may contribute to or restrict individuals from choosing a partner with a different religious orientation.

With Christianity being the dominant group in America, numerous intriguing

questions can be raised regarding intergroup marriage due to its large group size as well as its extreme differentiation. Christianity in American is denominationalized and therefore different groups share many of the same features and values. On the one hand, this makes their views less distinct from one another because of the similarities; on the other hand, many of them may emphasize the validity and importance of their differing views. In either case, levels of individual religiosity and commitment to particular groups may affect the likelihood of someone marrying outside his/her own faith. Low levels of religiosity and liberal group affiliation may be related to higher levels of interfaith marriage. Recent literature involving interfaith marriage and the state of religion as a whole will provide a foundation for the discussion of interfaith marriage in America.

Current State of Intermarriage

In diverse societies, institutions are forced to adapt and to accommodate a wide variety of people and cultures. Institutions such as religion and marriage are no exception. National data indicate that 22.9 percent of Americans marry outside of their own religious traditions (interfaith marriages) (ARIS 2008), including those households with different preferences or no religious affiliation. The composition of the American family is continually changing and differentiating. In a society such as the United States, not only are trends in age of marriage, number of children, and rates of divorce shaping the face of the American family, but individual group affiliations such as race, ethnicity, and religion also contribute to the composition of family as an institution.

The ARIS (2008) indicates that 40 percent of respondents who identify with a particular religion report that neither they nor anyone in their household belongs to a

religious institution. While Americans remain remarkably religious in terms of general affirmations of belief in God and an afterlife, they increasingly express their religiousness in ways not dependent on affiliation with particular churches or other religious organizations (McCarthy 2007). Furthermore, the number of those who do not ascribe to any religious identity more than doubled in the 1990s, from 14.3 million in 1990 to 29.4 million in 2001 (ARIS 2001).

While Americans as a whole are increasingly religiously unaffiliated, they are also increasingly religiously diverse. We are, that is to say, becoming more religiously diverse as a society at precisely the same time that we are becoming less and less attached to the kinds of institutions that have historically helped us engage with religious others (McCarthy 2007). In a study conducted to determine the motives of decisions concerning marriage, Denton (2004) finds that differences in religious ideologies can no longer unequivocally predict marriages and marital decision making. Couples often base their marriages on the wider cultural ideologies such as gender equality more than on their religious ideologies. This indicates that wider acceptance of a cultural set of values is allowing those in different religious groups to share particular beliefs or values with individuals outside an individuals own religious tradition.

The ARIS report (2001) notes a significant growth in religious populations beyond the traditional Catholic/Protestant/Jewish taxonomy. Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim populations, while still only a small percentage of the national total, have all more than doubled since 1990, largely due to immigration. Increased knowledge and acceptance of religions other than Christianity and Judaism due to the growth of

religiously diverse immigrant communities should be noted as well.

Interfaith marriage has been found to affect various aspects of those involved beyond simply the religious aspect. Intermarriage has important effects on family life as well and is related to lower fertility, lower levels of marital satisfaction, greater spousal conflict, and higher rates of divorce (Bean et al. 1987; Ellison et al. 1999; Finnas 1988; Glenn 1982; Heaton and Pratt 1990; Krishnan 1993; Lehrer 1995, 1996a, b 2002; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993; Maneker and Rankin 1993; Sherkat 2004). In addition, interfaith marriages have been positively associated with elevated levels of stress, low community participation (religious and otherwise), higher rates of female employment, and geographic mobility (Lehrer 1995, 1996a, b 2002; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993; Maneker and Rankin 1993; Sherkat 2004).

Most theories and studies concerning intermarriage find one commonality. Those in interfaith marriages must make compromises, and many times the importance and presence of religion and religious practice are significantly decreased as a result. The literature suggests that religion is less prevalent in these unions, but in addition it represents a lack of development in one of the major institutions of socialization. Therefore these couples may be at a disadvantage when it comes to the benefits of social integration which have been shown to have significant impacts on overall well-being, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and health (Koenig et al. 2001).

Those in interfaith marriages tend to be more liberal than conservative, educated, in dual-career families, more likely to change jobs, and therefore to have elevated rates of geographical mobility (Ellison et al. 1999; Lehrer 1995, 1996a, b, 2000; Sherkat 2004).

Increased geographical mobility has been negatively associated with strength of ties to one's family and community (Putnam 2000). On that note, socialization (i.e., by peers, friends, teachers, and especially family members) and familial ties play an important roles in one's religious beliefs and commitment (Parsons et al. 2007). Several studies confirm that an increased salience of religion is indeed associated with a lower probability of intermarriage (Heiss 1960; Rosenthal 1963; Waite and Sheps 1994).

As previously mentioned, those in interfaith marriages tend to have increased potential for individualism and conflict in that fewer shared beliefs and values may be present. Just examine the nature of an interfaith marriage: each person usually has a career, each person has a separate religious belief system, and many people in these marriages tend to relocate more frequently than others (Lehrer 2000), therefore having their "own place" as opposed to being in a "community." The degree of individualism within a relationship, in the case of interfaith marriage, can be seen in two different lights. First, those in interfaith marriages may be the epitome of individualism in their beliefs and lifestyles, and second, those in interfaith marriages may be both conditioned to compromise and work in an egalitarian manner which may provide necessary tools for the participation in collective activities.

According to the family strain explanation, individuals who become religiously independent are more likely to have a background of unhappy family experiences, are unhappy personally, and are likely to find substitutes for religion such as political liberalism (Agnew et al. 2002). On the one hand, individuals may change their previous religious affiliation in order to minimize the strain of their religiously mixed marriage.

This religious marginality, which may have been related to the involvement in a mixed marriage in the first place, is furthered in the attempts to reduce the disruptive force of this religious mixture (Levi-Strauss 1969). On the other hand, individuals may reinforce or increase their religious affiliation and participation to ensure each person does not feel as if his/her religious orientations are being marginalized to reduce the strain of his/her religiously mixed marriage.

Two opposing forces appear to regulate intermarriage rates. On the one hand, small religious communities are motivated to generate high levels of commitment among adherents, which may limit the acceptance of interfaith marriage (Stark and Finke 2000). On other hand, the smaller a religious community in a given geographical area, the more likely its members are to encounter members of other groups including those of other religions which may provide more opportunities to marry outside of a religion (Davidson and Widman 2002). Since interfaith marriages do exist within Christianity two questions arise: 1) “Which denominations produce more congregants who enter interfaith marriage?” and 2) “What are the qualities of those groups that produce an environment which may allow such unions?”

Data from prominent religious surveys such as the America Religious Identification Survey (2008) and the Faith and Family Survey (2005) indicate that those in interfaith marriages have lower levels of religiosity and are more likely to affiliate with mainline Protestant groups or have no preference than evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics. These groups have shown wider definitions of family and marriage which may be more conducive to non-traditional marriages, such as interfaith marriages

(FFS 2005).

In addition, those in interfaith marriages indicate lower levels of believing their children will hold the same religious beliefs as theirs, which may correlate to lower levels of religiosity over generations (ARIS 2008). This suggests that while some congregations may accommodate those with religious differences, they may also be producing a group of individuals who will no longer feel the need for the services of the religious organization. On the other hand, more conservative groups are creating members with strong notions of group loyalty and exclusivity. Though these social groups may have more similarities, conservative Christian groups may not be willing to accept the development of a more inclusive civil religion type of system, defined more by commonality and less by difference, even among other conservative groups. If institutional commitments such as religious life share similarities across denominations due to diversification and differentiation, this may suggest that larger cultural ideals may define the regulations and tendencies of human interaction to an even larger group than the conservative Christians. The following describes how groups form and interact with other groups, and explains how interfaith marriages becoming increasingly likely for groups based on size and ideology.

Interfaith Marriage as a Product of Group Dynamics

In diverse societies, one's likelihood of residing within homogenous groups is low. However, the expansion of a group increases the number of choices an individual may have in mate selection within that group. Not only do groups become more similar through repeated interaction with other groups, but group expansion allows for

similarities between groups to grow while the differences between group become less influential (Simmel 1971).

This is not to say that all groups will not have problems with one another and that small groups will then form one large common group. Although as new members are introduced into a system, their presence will cause increasing levels of interaction, in turn producing higher levels of association and understanding of the differences between group members which may focus attention on the similarities between group members. As groups grow, they begin to share common characteristics with other groups, and because the groups share commonalities they become less distinct from one another. The narrower the circle we commit to, the less freedom of individuality we possess. However, the narrower circle is itself something individual, and it isolates and distinguishes itself sharply from all other circles precisely because it is small or homogeneous. Similarly if the groups in which people are involved are heterogeneous there is more room for individuality, but as parts of this whole they have less uniqueness.

Levels of individual differences correspond not only to the relative narrowness of the collectivity but to its own individualistic composition. In other words, as a group grows or accumulates heterogeneous members more individuals will increase social differentiation which may allow for greater individualization; but if the group is large or heterogeneous and group members have many different orientations then the degree of difference must be extremely large to be noteworthy (Simmel 1971). People essentially become indifferent to difference. Therefore the relevance of one's individual identity associated with a religious group decreases, and as a result the available number of

possible mates increases.

As previously stated, the number of individuals who no longer associate with a particular religious organization but continue to prescribe to a religious belief system is increasing. This suggests that though many people are associated with religious groups, they are not as intimately connected to those groups or are less confined to the group's subjective regulations of behavior. This provides a weakened association to particular religious groups, which may allow for some to select a partner based on criteria other than religious affiliation but criteria based on a larger group affiliation or even solely on affectual criteria.

Though populations grow and diversify and people become more likely to interact with a diverse number of individuals, this does not necessarily mean that people associate with others just because of close proximity. In some cases, close proximity with less than ideal interaction can lead to the isolation of groups from one another. Simmel (1971) explains that as groups expand, they will become more similar to other groups, but simply possessing common characteristics may not equate to the willingness to associate with one another. In fact, interaction alone can act as a dividing line. Groups can engage in conflict due simply to the interaction and identification of differences. The similarities of groups can be ignored or suppressed, and religion is an excellent example. While many Christian groups are similar in general ideology, they may have aspects of their particular theological interpretation that are strongly and aggressively defended.

Though interfaith marriages can be explained through increases in intergroup interaction, it remains difficult to ignore the 78 percent of Americans who marry within

their faith. Clearly religious groups still hold the power in institutions such as marriage. It is the group identity which unites the members, and religious groups are extremely effective in retaining and reproducing members throughout generations. Clearly religious affiliation highly influences the mate selection process, and even in a diverse society with growing group similarities, differences among groups and ideology continue to carry significant weight. The willingness to resist heterogamy among religious groups acts as a defense mechanism which is defined by the subjective culture of the religious group. Proximity and increasing levels of religious diversity pose obstacles for restrictive groups or groups with high cost affiliation, and the collective identity of group members is many times the prevailing form of constraint.

The United States is quite unique in that the level of denominationalism is very high. While groups that remain collectively resistant to the secular beliefs are but just a section of the society, many still hold fairly tolerant views towards the outside world or at least other Christians. The level of diversification in the denominations allows for significant decreases in the level of uniqueness, which may encourage interaction and tolerance or at the very least provide a larger amount of possible interaction.

Religion in American has changed, as previously described. The attribution of change is typically categorized by a few motivators including diversification and expansion. Secularization theory attributes many changes in religion to the differentiation of lifestyles and the effects of diversification and exposure to, and in some cases acceptance of, different ideas. As societies modernize, some institutions, especially religion, which previously designated values and regulated action throughout society, are

privatized and reserved as personal. Thus the accommodation of values and actions of the world outside the institution becomes more commonly practiced. The accommodation of lifestyles and choices is provided to gather and accept a larger group of people into a religion. This process brings a wider variety of people and their ideas into a group, and this may allow for higher levels of intermarriage or acceptance of intermarriage. Even though the level of behavioral restriction in religion may remain high, it is less among some groups. This may allow for relatively small differences to have significant impact on those who are in interfaith marriages or other non-traditional marriages.

If broader definitions of marriage and family are more accepted among certain groups, then what are the qualities of those groups that might allow for such tolerance of interfaith marriage? What qualities of an organization might attract members by being inclusive on views of the family and marriage? Witten (1995) explored a related topic in her book *All is Forgiven* which may provide answers to the questions regarding potential group affiliation for interfaith couples.

Witten (1995) examined the ways in which modern Protestant churches have responded to secularism, particularly to the need to market religion to potential consumers. To address these issues, Witten collected 47 sermons preached between 1986 and 1988 in Southern Baptist and Presbyterian churches. In most sermons, the world is represented as unproblematic for Christian life, which is more a matter of adopting a particular attitude of modest enjoyment of the world's offerings than of making behavioral sacrifices. The notions of sin have also lessened in influence. By finding rhetorical devices to deflect sin onto outsiders, mitigate the sin of insiders, or simply bury

it in therapeutic and polite language, clergy de-emphasize the offensiveness of sin and buffer their congregations against judgment and censure. Like many others, Witten is concerned that religion, on its present course, will become so privatized and so psychologically based that it will be indistinguishable from therapy.

Accommodation, according to Witten (1995), refers to adjustments religion may make in its doctrine or practice that conform to values and behaviors of the secular world. For Witten, the sermons were accommodating, in that they depict religion as a private matter. They also viewed truth as relative and religious practices as efficient. Resistance to secular culture is characterized in some fundamentalist and evangelical reactions, which leads to opposing religious adjustments to secular culture. Sermons classified as resistant reinserted the sacred into secular domains, made religious beliefs cohesive, and separated boundaries between truth and falsehood, with ultimate religious truth and ideals being differentiated from the dominant mentality of the secular society. Sermons were nevertheless accommodationist, in that they depict religion as a private matter and as not inserting the sacred into secular domains. These groups also viewed truth as relative and religious practices as efficient. However, the notion of efficiency applied to both groups somewhat in that religious practice is seen as beneficial for both groups as well as needed for proper moral development. (Witten 1995)

When a society has a pluralist religious composition, it is beneficial to that society if people within those religions can identify common traits and values and focus less on the characteristics that may divide them. The tolerance of religion and accommodation of others' values in areas such as their definitions and parameters of marriage and family,

including all types of mixed and non-traditional marriages, can help to relate commonalities of members in a society. A decrease of those who affiliate with a religious organization may contribute to the decreasing importance of religious homogamy. A diversifying society combined with increasing secularization, which accommodates the values of others and attempts to provide a common value system, may contribute to decreased levels of religiosity. Decreased levels of religiosity may correspond to decreased importance of one's faith in mate selection. This allows more opportunity for people to marry outside their religion. Religion is decreasingly influential in the determination of the values and identity which are central in the formation of intimate relationships.

However, while some attitudinal surveys suggest religion plays a smaller role now than in the past in people's lives in terms of its importance or salience in decision making, religious affiliation rates have increased throughout most of the twentieth century, and in recent decades financial contributions to religious organizations have increased, along with membership in conservative denominations (Amato et al. 2007). Religion is said to enhance one's life and marital satisfaction, to assist and guide one through crisis and chronic illness, to provide an outlet of support when facing psychological stress, and to create happiness (Weaver et al. 2002).

The effects, positive or negative, of religion in one's life are affected by levels of religiosity. Religiosity has numerous components, including the number of times an individual prays, group involvement in religious services or activities, the reading of religious materials, having a belief, and displaying religious commitment in various other

ways (Parsons et al. 2007). The numerous components of religiosity have led to religiosity being placed on a continuum from low to high. Therefore, individuals can have different degrees of religiosity on different dimensions, which can change throughout life depending on one's experiences, surroundings, and age (Bao et al. 1999). An individual's degree of religiosity is developed and maintained in a variety of ways. One's relationships within the community can have a direct effect on one's beliefs and commitment to a religion which may affect the happiness of the individual; as previously mentioned socialization plays an important role in one's religious beliefs and commitment (Parsons et al. 2007). Religiosity and religious affiliation may significantly influence the likelihood of being in an interfaith marriage.

Being in an interfaith marriage and addressing differences of beliefs requires that both individuals explicitly define the foundations for a successful marriage. This may provide difficulties for all Christians, in that marriage is considered a spiritual bond. Many Christian groups believe that a marriage should be a union between two people and God. Appropriate forms of marriage require considerations of variation in terms of race, gender, and age, and such issues have long been debated by different groups with dissenting opinions. However, continuity in terms of beliefs, values, and norms is typically considered an integral area in which couples should support and reinforce one another, and a lack of consistency in these areas has typically been associated with increased levels of conflict and marital dissatisfaction (Lehrer 2002). Therefore, having a relationship with someone from a different religion may significantly affect how well one's beliefs and values complement those of one's partner which may increase levels of

stress or strain in a marriage.

CHAPTER III

ROLE OF A MINISTER

Ministers and clergy members, like any other profession, have a set of roles which they must fulfill. The two general roles typically associated with ministers are that of the pulpit, out in public, and that of the counselor, mostly in private. Both of these roles require the identity of a leader and administrator. Leaders must publicly guide their followers or congregation as a whole as well as privately provide guidance to individual members on a personal basis. In addition, managing a church is much like managing a business or organization, and a great deal of time is devoted to administration and supervision of staff and congregants. Given the variation in terms of role performance, pastoral counseling is an area that has received significant research over the last century. One question seems to resonant when discussing the issue of pastoral counseling and that question is “what makes pastoral counseling unique?” This is to say, “What do pastors do differently than lay counselors or secular professional counselors?”

The most prominent characteristic of a pastoral counselor is the dedication to a specific religious tradition and a moral commitment. First and foremost the notion of a moral commitment must be addressed. Most pastors are formally trained in Christian counseling techniques as well as some form of psychology (Hook and Worthington 2009). While secular professions tend to pride themselves on a value-free approach or moral neutrality, pastors must deal with the very real issue of morality in dealing with counsel seekers. Whether the issue is psychosis, family problems, health issues, self-esteem, depression, marriage before and after, children, faith, or lack thereof the issue of

morality continues to be the foundation upon which pastoral counselors must approach those seeking guidance.

In the nature of the profession, people confide, share, explain, converse, and open their hearts and minds to their clergy. During visits, both formal and informal, ministers hear many personal facts, expressions of feelings, and intimate personal opinions. Ministers must encourage their congregants to be straightforward; they must be honest because essentially the counseling procedure has little value without honesty. Because these situations call for such a degree of honesty there must be an atmosphere of sincerity and openness; this is a confidential relationship that is expected not to be violated by clergy. Violation can result in personal, legal, and financial repercussions which legitimate, in the mind of congregants, a material sense of confidentiality.

Essentially ministers have to provide an environment of welcoming honesty in that the environment is reinforced with the notion that the person being counseled is not only protected by the confidence of their counselor but by the law as well. Ministers are expected under the law to uphold confidentiality, unless in their judgment a person presents harm to themselves or to society or if they have been subpoenaed by a court, both of which only occur in rare circumstances.

The study of pastoral counseling is varied but much of it is dedicated to mental and physical issues of health. Considerable work has been done in the area of health and pastoral counseling. Religion plays a particularly important role in the lives of many people coping with illness (Koenig et al. 2001). Prayer can provide hope, meaning, and strength to endure, relieving the sense of isolation so common with chronic illness

(Koenig 2002). Koenig (1998) finds that religious coping, which includes things like prayer, depending on God for support and comfort, and reading Scripture, was the most important factor in sustaining many of these persons. In addition, nearly 90% indicated that religion was used at least moderately in coping (Koenig 2002). Religious belief and practice help prevent the onslaught of depression (Koenig 1991), as well as enable those who develop depression to resolve more quickly (Koenig, George, and Peterson 1998).

It is important to note that religious participation has also been associated with positive health outcomes. According to Koenig and colleagues (2001), nearly a hundred studies suggesting that religion may be a deterrent to alcohol or drug abuse at all stages of life childhood, adolescence, and adulthood exist. A resounding conclusion is apparent in many of these studies. The more a person is religiously involved, the less likely he or she will use drugs or alcohol (Adlaf and Smart 1985; Amey, Albertch, and Miller 1996; Amoateng and Bahr 1986; Hardert and Dowd 1994; Koenig et al. 2001; Lorch and Hughes 1985).

Hummer et al. (1999) found a 7.6 years increase in life expectancy among persons who attend worship services more than once a week compared with those who do not attend at all. Apparently, significant health and longevity benefits extend to actively religious people in general (Marks 2006). High risk behavior and negative health outcomes often promote psychological distress. In addition to the deterrence of high risk behavior, psychological health has been positively associated with religion (Koenig et al. 2001, Krause 1995, Lee and Ishii-Kuntz 1987). Studies from the late 1980s and 1990s focused heavily on the positive association of religion and various aspects of

psychological well-being, such as greater purpose and meaning in life, greater self-esteem, better adaptation to bereavement, greater social support, less loneliness, less depression, fewer suicides, less anxiety, and less schizophrenia and other psychoses (Azhar & Varma 1995; Coward 1986; Koenig et al. 2001; Lee & Ishii-Kuntz 1987).

Given the positive association of religion to health and general well-being, having a deep religious faith can provide some sense of control over situations or illnesses that otherwise seem beyond control. Given that millions of Americans are involved with religion, it is not surprising to find that clergy are some of the foremost prominent mental and health counselors (Weaver et al. 2002).

There are over 353,000 Christian and Jewish clergy in the United States according to the U.S. Department of Labor (2008), over 300,000 of whom are Protestant ministers, and they are among the most trusted professionals and society (Gallup and Lindsay 1999). More than 10,000 clergy serve as certified chaplains in hospitals and other healthcare institutions, working directly with persons suffering from medical problems (VandeCreek and Burton 2001). Patients often highly value interaction with community-based clergy and hospital chaplains reporting that pastoral visits bring hope, reduce the difficulty of hospitalization, and prepare them for discharge (Johnson and Spilka 1991; VandeCreek and Burton 2001).

In addition to providing counseling for those suffering from psychological or physical obstacles, clergy members are commonly called for both celebration and counseling in connection with positive life transitions for individuals and families. This applies particularly to marriage, including both premarital preparation for the ceremony

itself and general marriage counseling. The family unit is the primary facilitator of religious education for most children. Therefore the relationship or lack thereof between a couple and their religious tradition may significantly affect the outcome of one's religious education, whether it is intense, moderate, or non-existent. For the vast majority of the population who practice some sort of religion, they may well confide their familial problems with their clergy. This relationship gives the clergy members some degree of authority, given that they are ordained and are generally considered trustworthy. Sawin (1981) notes that not only do churches have the possibility to encompass families as part of their congregations, but family and church matters are integrated in ways which make the church a logical place for dealing with family issues. In addition, family and church interests are reciprocal; both church and family are concerned with the pursuit of meaning in life.

The level of trust typically developed between family and church tends to be strong, and therefore much of the clergy's role is strictly operated under this assumption. Since the church and the family are continually reinforcing one another, the interactions typically associated with clergy and congregants are typically assumed from an in-group perspective. This is not say the role of a minister is always focused on dealing with like-minded people or that they do not have the ability to relate to others outside their congregation, because they do routinely interact with people of different schools of thought, and in fact many Christian groups actively project themselves out into the secular world. However, this particular discussion is centered on the private role or the role clergy perform when dealing with congregants or other Christians. When performing

the private advisor role, clergy are typically carrying out their duties of providing for their own group. This mind frame creates an arena which is excellent for caring out the counseling of family issues, and as a result many churches have specific clergy members who focus specifically on the ministry of family and/or marriage.

The general area of counseling family issues includes marriage counseling and ritual performance. Marriage counseling is done at all different stages of marriage: before, during, and after. Pre-marital counseling or, as many call it, pre-marital preparation has been a growing area since the 1970s, when divorce levels started to raise. The 1980s brought the height of divorce rates in America and the spark of the marriage movement. The marriage movement involved the development of marriage preparation legislation at the state level as well as a commercial enterprise (Hawkins et al. 2002). An opportunity arose for America's service sector and as a result commercial pre-marital preparation was made available. As divorce rates began to rise, legislatures responded by implementing programs and incentives for different types of marital preparation education. Over the past few decades, several states have implemented programs that either provide pre-marital education or certify organizations and individuals to provide state funded and state approved curricula.

Studies conducted on premarital education courses have found the education to be quite effective. Many programs involve teaching couples communication skills, conflict resolution, positive reinforcement, problem solving, and perform extensive psychometric inventories (Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg 2001; Williams 2007).

According to Williams (2007) programs such as Relationship Enhancement,

Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Christian PREP, and Practical Application for Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) all highlight the importance of communication and commitment, while inventories like PREPARE, FOCCUS, and RELATE all use psychometric measures to analyze personalities. In addition, PREPARE has many couple-specific programs such as Christian PREPARE for Christian couples, PREPARE-MC for couples with children, PREPARE-CC for cohabitating couples, and MATE for couples over 50. FOCCUS also has various editions (general, Catholic, non-denominational), with additional questions for remarried, interfaith, and/or cohabitating couples. FOCCUS is also available in an abridged edition that is designed for couples with lower reading and education levels. PREPARE and FOCCUS are set up to have a counselor, clergy person, or other trained people administer and go over the results with the couple. In contrast, RELATE is self administered and has individuals take the inventory and received the results on-line. Markman et al. (2004) indicated that 82% of participants using PREP continued to use at least parts of the program, especially parts dealing with communication and conflict management.

However, these studies do not address pastoral counselors specifically or provide any analysis of variation among pastoral counselors in terms of perspectives, policies, and practices. Data are not available for those who actually use these programs, especially clergy. Knowing which specific programs individual clergy use would provide insight as to which groups provide a more consistent approach to premarital as well as marital counseling from congregation to congregation. Implementing these programs into church curricula would allow fellow ministers to have a common source of knowledge

and resources. Ministers who do not have much experience or resources to aid in premarital counseling or only briefly talk with couples could provide a quality service with tested procedures and resources. Christian denominations with hierarchical systems could provide a basic education for clergy as well as provide them with materials to practice fairly easily. This sort of institutionalization may be more difficult for more autonomous groups like Southern Baptists, given that each congregation is independent and free to govern itself. However general knowledge as well as agreed upon procedures could be discussed even among these groups. General knowledge and practice could provide consistency for member of different congregations. However, at this time only one Christian denomination, Catholicism, has this type of consistency. The may be due to the historical tendency to formalize policy and practice, as well as having the ability to implement programs such as premarital preparation through the hierarchical organizational system.

Regardless of a denomination's organization model, the clergy within denominations apply their own ideas into the counseling or services they provide, especially in terms of counseling techniques. Clergy typically counsel couples before agreeing to marry them, and therefore use their own intuition to determine if they will or will not perform the ceremony. Research concerning the relationship between congregants and clergy is somewhat scarce especially in terms of counseling. Few studies have examined what makes pastoral counseling different, and even fewer have studied how congregants view the counseling process. Therefore the amount of research performed on the topic of interfaith couples and their interaction with clergy is extremely

limited. This significant gap in research literature is the primary motivator for this study. We do not know how clergies' perceptions and opinions of interfaith marriage differ among denominations, and we also have absolutely no insight as to how interfaith couples interact with clergy and their own church.

Interfaith marriage produces unique families and therefore unique experiences not only for the couples, which make up about roughly 20 percent of marriages in the US, but for the parents, children, siblings, other family members, and friends as well as social groups including religious groups. The likelihood of being exposed to at least one interfaith couple is fairly high and occurrences continue to increase (GSS 2008). As people continue to marry outside their religious boundaries, ministers will be exposed to such marriages more often. Due to the fact that Christian denominations seem to have variable levels of intermarriage (FFS 2005), one would anticipate variations in terms of exposure, technique, and experience among clergy. However, since virtual no research has been done, we know very little as to what clergy think about interfaith marriage as well as how clergy interact with interfaith couples.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Though the current study is an exploratory endeavor, it is primarily aimed at understanding the meaning of marriage in its relationship to pre-marital counseling for interfaith couples. The study specifically targets how clergy deal with couples with different faiths. Given the variation among Christian denominations some predictions were made concerning how and why particular clergy may be more equipped and willing to provide counseling to interfaith couples. Conservative Christian groups typically have lower levels of intermarriage (ARIS 2008, FFS 2005) and tend to have divergent values from those in interfaith marriage (FFS 2005, GSS 2008), as previously discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore the experience and willingness of clergy may be different in terms of frequency and opportunity of interaction with interfaith couples, especially when clergy in different denominations are compared.

Ideology significantly separates Christian denominations, especially in the area of marriage. Religious organizations have a history of dealing with different types of marriage such as: Protestant/Catholic marriages, racially mixed marriages, and more recently gay marriages. Different Christian denominations may have varying interpretations of who should and should not marry. Denominations with more tolerable views towards other types of mixed marriages (i.e. interracial and homosexual) may be more likely to tolerate religiously mixed marriages or interfaith marriages as well. Therefore, mainline Protestants are anticipated to have more favorable views of and experience with interfaith marriage and therefore lower levels of resistance than

conservative Protestants and traditional Catholics. In addition, it is anticipated that denominations which are hierarchically arranged may be more equipped to implement formalized policy regarding various types of social phenomena, including interfaith marriage, because they have the ability to operate more as a unit than denominations that maintain independent and autonomous congregations. On that note, it was also anticipated that denominations with more formalized policies regarding marriage in general as well as with regard to interfaith marriage, due to the denomination's hierarchical system, would have more uniform counseling practices. A description of the study's setting, participants, and procedures is to follow.

Setting

The setting for this study was a mid-sized city in the southwestern United States. The county in which the city resides is typically politically conservative and has an extremely high concentration of churches. A wide variety of Christian denominations exists as well as various Christian sects, or "cults" as some ministers have referred to them, such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, and multiple non-Christian denominations. The city has roughly 250,000 in population and is home to a Division I university of over 25,000 students, so the setting is populated with a young demographic as well. The racial demographics of the city are roughly 60% White, 27% Hispanic or Latino, 8 % African American, and 5% other races (US Census Bureau 2010).

Participants

A combination of convenience, snowballing and purposeful sampling techniques was used in recruiting clergy to participate. A contact list of religious organizations was

compiled from multiple public and private sources, personal networking (personal contacts, associates, and known congregation members), and referrals from other informants (clergy providing the names of other clergy). Regardless of the technique used to locate individuals, interviewees were contacted first by telephone with a description of the study. If unable to contact them by phone an e-mail was sent to those available with a description of the study. In the event neither technique was successful or available, the researcher travelled to the specific location and attempted contact in person.

The study was designed to incorporate the widest range of Christian denominations possible within the community. The study included 23 ministers, clergy, and other religious leaders varying in age, race, gender, and religious affiliation. The inclusion criteria specified that (1) subjects must be a religiously affiliated advisor who (2) performs weddings/union ceremonies and/or pre-marital preparation counseling.

Many of the minority Christian groups (National Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, and Cumberland Presbyterian, which is a conservative group in a denomination that is typically considered moderate to liberal) were targeted directly. In many cases, only one congregation existed in the city; therefore the informant recruited from that group was asked to participate with or without using personal networking or referrals from other subjects. Other more populous groups (Southern Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.) were contacted via personal networks, referrals by others, or sought out specifically using the contact list.

The sample included 23 ministers, pastors, and clergy across 14 Christian denominations, 22 of whom were male. Along with gender, various independent

variables were used in identifying important differences within the sample. These include: denomination, ideology (conservative/liberal), age, race, years of service, length of time at current church, title, church size, marital status, spouse's religious orientation, number of children, ages of children, and if they have ever had an alternative career.

The distribution of denominations is as follows: 3 Southern Baptists, 3 Non-Denominational, 2 Catholic, 2 United Methodist, 2 Presbyterian PCUSA, 2 Lutheran ELCA, 2 Assemblies of God, and 1 of each National Baptist, Church of Nazarene, Church of Christ (Campbell), Cumberland Presbyterian, Lutheran Missouri Synod, Episcopal, and African Methodist Episcopal. Based on variation among Protestants in both theology and social ideology, the clergy were categorized as conservative Protestants (Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God, Nazarenes, Church of Christ (Campbell), Non-Denominational, Cumberland Presbyterian, and Lutheran- Missouri Synod) and mainline Protestants (United Methodist, Presbyterian PCUSA, Lutheran ELCA, National Baptist, Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal). Distinctions were made even within denominations where one denomination has subgroups that are more conservative and more liberal, such as the Lutherans and Baptists. The Conservative Evangelicals (12) represented 52.2 percent, while Mainline Protestants (9) represented 39.1 percent. Due to variation in tradition and historical separation, the Catholics (2) were set into a separate category as well and represented 8.7 percent of the sample.

Given interfaith marriage has increased considerably in the last 50 years, the age of clergy members may be significant in that some may view interfaith marriage as a growing trend, and therefore age was taken into account. The ages of ministers ranged

from 30 years old to 72 years old and, for comparative reasons, were divided in 10-year cohorts. The samples' age cohorts were as follows: 30-39 (4.3 percent), 40-49 (43.5 percent), 50-59 (34.8 percent), 60-69 (13 percent), and 70 and older (4.3percent).

The ministers also varied in terms of how long they had been a clergy member (range= 6 months to over 30 years). In terms of years of experience, the sample consisted of the following categories: 1-4 years (4.3 percent), 5-9 years (4.3 percent), 10-15 years (21.7 percent), 16-20 years (30.4 percent), 21-30 years (21.7 percent), and over 30 years (17.4 percent). The length of time at the ministers' current church varied from 6 months to over 20 years. The sample categories included: 1-4 years (30.4 percent), 5-9 years (30.4 percent), 10-15 years (17.4 percent), and 16 to 20 years (21.7 percent).

In addition to age, race is common variable for many studies, but it may also be applicable to variation among clergy members and is especially pertinent to notion of interfaith marriage. Simply being a minority may not directly increase the likelihood of marrying outside a religion, but being part of smaller groups means that those groups likely have fewer possible mates available. Many interfaith couples may in fact be interracial couples as well, given that minority racial groups heavily populate minority religious groups. This suggests that minority ministers may have differing experiences based on their own race and the composition of their congregation. The sample was 69.6 percent white or Caucasian, 21.7 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 6.7 percent black or African American.

Given that the topic of this study is marriage counseling, it would be important to have both those who are married and those who are not; however, marriage among

Protestant ministers is extremely prevalent. The majority of the sample (82.6%) was married, while 13 percent were unmarried, and 4.3 percent was divorced. The presence of children could also have influence on ministers' attitudes towards interfaith marriage. A majority (78 percent) of the sample had anywhere from one to five children with ages ranging from newborns to grown 30 year offspring.

The degree to which hierarchy and status within religious institutions varies is considerable. Some denominations have a formal hierarchy, most notably the Catholic Church but also Protestant denominations such as United Methodists, while others have autonomous congregations such as Southern Baptists. The sample included senior pastors, rectors, associate pastors, chaplains, priests, and others. For the purposes of the study the title variable was divided between associate and senior staff. Associate staff accounted for 39 percent and senior staff made up the remaining 61 percent.

In addition to having varied experience, it was important to select clergy who lead different size congregations. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, group expansion provides for more potential heterogeneity and a wider possibility of group-to-group interaction. In other words, as a group increases in size as does the potential for individual variation. Differentiation in terms of congregation size could have effects on the perspectives and practice of pastoral counselors, and therefore different sized congregations were targeted. Congregations with a typical attendance of 50-100 represented the largest group at 47.8 percent followed by those with over 1000 at 26.1 percent, while congregations of 101-200 (4.3 percent), 201-500 (13 percent), and 501-1000 (4.3 percent) composed the remainder.

Procedures

The 23 interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and were all conducted in or at the offices of the clergy. The interviews were semi-structured with close ended questions followed by an elaboration and discussion of each answer. This particular method was chosen to ensure all of the clergy members discussed the same issues and expressed specific opinions that could be comparable, as well as have the opportunity to explain and qualify their responses in an open ended forum. Each interview varied in length but ranged roughly from 45 to 80 minutes each.

The interviews were designed to determine the variation among Christian pastoral counselors in their perspectives and practices. The researcher initially spoke to the clergy about the term "interfaith marriage." All clergy were told how the researcher defined interfaith marriage, which for the purposes of the study interfaith marriage was defined as a couple consisting of one Christian and one non-Christian. If the clergy used the term, the research would ask the clergy to clarify whether he/she meant two different religious denominations or two different Christian denominations. This ensured that both the clergy and interviewer understood what type of couple was being discussed.

The clergy were first asked to describe the counseling process in a general sense; then they were asked about specific techniques such as incorporating specific issues on religious beliefs, praying with a couple, having couples complete a questionnaire, giving them homework or reading assignments, and determining whether the individuals were talked to separately. After the initial techniques portion of the interview, the clergy were asked questions about how and/or if they would change their process for those from

different congregations or those about whom they have prior knowledge or with whom they are acquainted. Then the clergy were asked what would be different in the process for interfaith couples (see Appendix for Interview Schedule).

After discussing tactics and the differences involved in counseling interfaith couples, clergy were asked questions pertaining to their own perspectives such as: 1) whether or not they think interfaith couples may feel deterred from receiving their counsel and why, 2) whether or not they think an interfaith marriage can be as successful as a same-faith marriage and why, and 3) whether or no they think interfaith marriages are likely to end in divorce and why. In addition to the interfaith marriage-specific questions, two subjects, cohabitation and divorce, were addressed to compare pastoral views and values with those related to interfaith marriages.

In addition to the scheduled interviews, respondents were asked to rate their relative comfort level concerning intermarriage with other denominations and other religions by asking them to imagine if a member of their congregation sought their counsel because they were thinking of getting married to someone outside the congregation. They were specifically asked if they would “completely encourage”, “moderately encourage,” “slightly encourage,” “slightly discourage,” “moderately discourage,” or “completely discourage” the union of their own congregants to numerous Christian denominations and other religions (see Appendix for questionnaire).

All responses were coded according to the individual questions asked. Then each of the interviews was compared according to individual codes. Codes for specific questions were grouped into more general codes which related to the type and nature of the

questions. The individual questions were categorized by four major coding schemes. The first was “policies and general procedures” which covered questions concerning church policy and personal policy concerning performing wedding and pre-marital counseling. The second area was “counseling practices” which covered questions involving what types of topics were covered in counseling sessions, how many sessions were typical, and a general description of how the process from counseling to wedding is carried out. The third major code was “tactics and techniques” which categorized the specific activities, methods, and tools used to counsel couples. Finally, the fourth major code was “attitudes towards interfaith marriage” which including questions concerning potential success, potential divorce, potential stress, and what clergy think interfaith couples may think of clergy.

After repeated reviewing of interview transcripts as well as comparative coding schemes, several pervasive themes were identified. The themes were not solely related to specific questions, but arose from various different questions. In other words, as the various interview sessions developed, multiple themes were present in different portions of the interview for different clergy.

The most prominent theme was “resistance to interfaith marriage.” This theme was characterized by negative attributes related to interfaith marriage. Any comment regarding interfaith marriage that was negative or indicated opposition by the individual clergy member or the church was coded “resistance to interfaith marriage.” After all instances of “resistance to interfaith marriage” were documented, several subthemes within the category of “resistance to interfaith marriage” were identified.

First was the subtheme of “unwillingness to perform” which characterized the clergy’s unwillingness to perform wedding ceremonies and/or pre-marital preparation for interfaith couples. Second was the subtheme titled “legitimacy of faith” which signified clergy calling into question the devotion or validity of interfaith couples’ beliefs. The third subtheme under “resistance to interfaith marriage” was “God-centered household” which accounted for clergy’s discussion of the importance of God in a marriage and family. The fourth subtheme was “concern for well-being of children” which indicates when clergy mentioned possible negative outcomes for children, including confusion pertaining to moral and psychological development. The fifth subtheme is the “notion of intimacy” which occurred when a clergy mentioned or discussed potential intimacy problems in a marriage directly or used language such as issues involving the potential bond, closeness, or depth of the relationship. This theme typically associated a level of spiritual and physical connection between a husband and a wife. Finally, the sixth subtheme of “resistance to interfaith marriage” was “conversion” which indicated a clergy’s willingness to work toward conversion of a non-Christian in order to perform a wedding or counseling.

In addition to “resistance to interfaith marriage” and its subthemes, two other themes were identified. First, “gendered responses” were characterized as responses in which clergy made an assumption regarding the religiousness of the gender of one or both of the parties. If the clergy mentioned a story or used an analogy in which he/she distinguished the members of couple in terms of male or female, the theme “gendered responses” was coded as such. Second, the theme “state associated program” indicated that clergy

mentioned that their church used a state certified, funded, and structured pre-marital preparation curriculum. All of these themes and subthemes will be illustrated in the following chapter in which the findings are reported.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The primary objective of this study was to explore the role clergy play in counseling interfaith couples. To understand the extent of how the relationship and process of interfaith marital counseling and its overall parameters are carried out, several basic questions were asked to obtain this type of information. Due to ministers' obvious religious disposition, varying attitudes toward interfaith marriage were anticipated along with varying levels of resistance to interfaith marriage. As a result, data were gathered through questions concerning policies, practices, and attitudes towards interfaith marriage. In addition, unanticipated themes regarding gender assumptions by clergy arose as well as the association of conservative groups to state structured and funded pre-marital programs. This chapter will report the perspectives and practices of the clergy interviewed in this research project with regard to interfaith marriage and pre-marital counseling. The specific topics to be covered are as follows:

1. Policies and General Procedure
2. Counseling Practices
3. Tactics and Techniques
4. Attitudes Toward Interfaith Marriage
5. Resistance to Interfaith Marriage
6. Gendered Assumptions of Interfaith Couples
7. Association of Conservative Groups to State Pre-marital Programs

Table 1 (p. 42) reports the responses for each of the variables used in the development of the coding system, and particularly for topics 1-4. Frequencies of each variable are represented for both the entire sample as well as for three primary categories of clergy: conservative Protestants, mainline Protestants, and Catholics.

Table 1: Variables Associated with Counseling and Interfaith Marriage

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Conservative Protestants</u>	<u>Mainline Protestants</u>	<u>Catholics</u>
<u>Have performed interfaith marriages and/or counseling</u>	9 (39.1%)	2 (16.7%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (100%)
<u>How many sessions do you require?</u>				
2-4	18 (78.3%)	10 (83.3%)	8 (88.9%)	0
4 or more	3 (13%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (11.1%)	0
Varies (anywhere from 3-10)	2 (8.7%)	0	0	2 (100%)
<u>Pray with couple</u>	23 (100%)	12 (100%)	9 (100%)	2 (100%)
<u>Use questionnaires</u>	18 (78.3%)	10 (83.3%)	6 (66.7%)	2 (100%)
<u>Give assignments or reading material</u>	17 (73.9%)	9 (75%)	6 (66.7%)	2 (100%)
<u>Separate the couple</u>	4 (17.4%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (50%)
<u>Would or does counseling differ if one or both are not from the congregation?</u>	13 (56.5%)	5 (41.7%)	6 (66.7%)	2 (100%)
<u>Would or does counseling differ based on prior knowledge or preliminary assessment of couple?</u>	14 (60.9%)	7 (58.3%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (100%)
<u>Would or does counseling differ for interfaith couples?</u>	19 (82.6%)	9 (75%)	8 (88.9%)	2 (100%)
<u>Has formal policy on interfaith marriage</u>	11 (47.8%)	4 (33.3%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (100%)
<u>Can an interfaith marriage be as successful as a same-faith marriage?</u>				
Yes, definitely	2 (8.7%)	0	2 (22.2%)	0
Yes, probably	8 (34.8%)	3 (25%)	4 (44.4%)	1 (50%)
No, probably not	11 (47.8%)	7 (58.3%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (50%)
No, definitely not	2 (8.7%)	2 (16.7%)	0	0
<u>Is a interfaith marriage more likely to end in a divorce?</u>				
Yes, definitely	2 (8.7%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (11.1%)	0
Yes, probably	19 (82.6%)	9 (75%)	8 (88.9%)	2 (100%)
No, probably not	2 (8.7%)	2 (16.7%)	0	0
No, definitely not	0	0	0	0
% who thinks an interfaith couple would feel deterred from seeing a minister/clergy member?	22 (95.7%)	12 (100%)	8 (88.9%)	2 (100%)

Policy and General Procedure

All 23 participants regularly, 4 or more times per year, performed weddings and pre-marital counseling. The overall exposure to interfaith couples was somewhat low – only 39 percent. Considering that just more than 20 percent of Americans marry outside their faith (ARIS 2008), the number of cases where clergy had performed weddings and counseling sessions with interfaith couples was proportional to a national sample. Six (26%) indicated they have performed weddings involving couples with different faiths, and 9 (39%) indicated they had counseled those with different faiths. The six who indicated they had performed interfaith marriages were as follows: 2 Catholic priests, 1 Lutheran Missouri-Synod, 1 National Baptist, 1 Non-Denominational, and 1 Presbyterian PCUSA.

The overwhelming majority of ministers (19) reported that the counseling process would be different for those in interfaith relationships whether or not they had actual experience with interfaith couples. However, many of those (12) indicated they would not be able to continue with the counseling or at least perform the entire program because either 1) they would not be able to perform the ceremony based on the fact that they only performed “Christian marriages” and 2) they thought their advice and expertise might be misplaced and less than fruitful. One response from a Presbyterian minister explained how the counseling of interfaith couples would be different and that the most prominent difference would be the type of marriage a couple would have.

I mostly talked about the idea of compromise and focused on their abilities to resolve differences, but I did tell them that this is not going to be a Christian marriage but that they still could use my advice to have a happy marriage. (Presbyterian PCUSA minister)

Others focused on how the couple would take on different issues but, like the Presbyterian minister, added an opinion of intermarriage. For example, a Lutheran ELCA minister stated.

I'd try to make them realize their differences and try to highlight their similarities. And I try to get them to think about how they expect to deal with this and all different aspects of marriage. So we go through the same things I do with a typical group or couple, but each section we highlight how the different religions are going to affect all of these different areas. And frankly it seems like a... it would be extremely difficult to do this if, if both of the people in the marriage were devout. It seems to me that usually one of them is less religious than the other and therefore they can conform to whatever the more religious one wants to do.

Similarly, a Southern Baptist pastor said,

If they came to me and they came from two different faiths or philosophies, I would find that out in the first session. And I would have to say to them 'guys I think there's some real serious issues here that you need to look at. This is a serious issue before God, and I'm not really your guy to do this. And I would not be able to do this in a clear consciousness.' And I would tell them why; I would not be ugly about and try to condescend to them in any way. I would just say I'm not sure this is going to work, because I'm going to approach this wedding from a Christian standpoint. But there again the chances of it getting that far and not knowing I wouldn't do it are slim on the front end. And that sounds kind of, from the outside looking in, it sounds cold. I don't mean it to be. From my standpoint Christians ought to marry Christians! I think the Bible teaches that. I teach that Christian ought to marry other Christians.

The clergy members were also asked about church policy with regards to interfaith marriage and the counseling of couples. Slightly less than half, 11 of the 23 participants, described the policies surrounding interfaith marriages as specific or institutionalized. Of the 12 that did not indicate their church had specific policies or guidelines, 11 of them indicated Scripture and pastoral discretion as the primary determinants in addressing interfaith marriage.

It's not written down, but they would basically say that Christians should get married.

Now it's not written down but it going to basically up to the congregation and up the pastor. But I do know, I've been here 19 years, I know the congregation well enough to know that their would be some problem if we were going to have a Jew and Christian get married or a Hindu, I'm not trying to call out, but... (Southern Baptist pastor)

Clear differences can be seen among those who do and do not have specific guidelines. The more hierarchical denominations were the groups with the most formalized policy, as opposed to the typically autonomous denominations that emphasized more pastoral discretion. Both groups, however, typically used Biblical definitions of marriage, the interpretation of which varied among conservative and liberal ideologies. On one hand, conservative ministers focused on how Christians should marry other Christians like the previously mentioned Southern Baptist pastor. On the other hand, a United Methodist minister approached the subject similarly, but had a more inclusive view.

(Speaking of a mentor) he was open, he would perform the wedding of anyone, regardless of their faith. Uh, uh but he would share with the couple that the wedding would be a blessing, would observe God's blessing of their union that it would not be a Christian wedding. And, and, and his understanding of that was that you have, uh, that marriage is a, uh, gift of God to all peoples. Uh that asking for the blessing of Christ and presence of Christ in a marriage is a search for a unique dynamic in a marriage that you need to, uh, to what generally is happening in a marriage.

Though several Protestant groups had specific guidelines, the Catholic Church certainly has the most developed set of regulations in terms of institutionalized forms of treatment as illustrated by this Catholic priest who describes what interfaith couples are expected to do to be married in the Catholic Church.

Yes, definitely it's quite extensive; first they have to take the weekend retreat. They have to follow the requirements of their priests and they have to get permission from that priest for this to happen as well as they have to intend for the child or children to

be raised Catholic in the Catholic Church.

Specific courses must be taken in preparation for all Catholic weddings, but the couple is also subject to the approval of the priest. One priest indicated...

Some don't fulfill the requirements so therefore we can't do it but it is important to me and to the church that those who want to be in these type of marriages make these sacrifices... it happens more and more these days, but is a very different lifestyle and a different type of union than what I think God has intended.

Counseling Practices

All of the clergy indicated that they required or strongly recommended pre-marital preparation in order to be married in the church. Most of the clergy, 19 of the 23, indicated they require premarital preparation specifically from themselves or from the church in which they wished to be married. Only 4 indicated that, on occasion, they would marry a couple that had been to pre-marital preparation outside of the church.

Relatively low variance was seen in terms of the actual number of sessions. Eighteen of the 23 participants recommended or required only 2-4 sessions, while just 3 indicated they require 4 or more. This is somewhat surprising considering literature on pre-marital education suggests that adequate preparation typically requires 6-8 sessions for the advantages of preparation to be evident (Stanley 1997).

Reasons for such a low number of sessions were routinely attributed to difficulty of scheduling and unwillingness on the part of the couple to schedule more. This issue was seen most prominently among Protestant ministers but did not seem to depend on ideological or philosophical disposition.

Many practices of pastoral marital preparation, by definition, involve religious

tradition and the values upon which those traditions are built. Even generalized practices or practices which multiple religions have in common such as prayer or the reading of a sacred text are themselves tailored specifically to each orientation. The overwhelming majority, 22 of 23, indicated they incorporated specific issues regarding religious faith into the counseling. The most prominent themes were discussion of religious background, personal testimonies of faith, and general beliefs from both the couple and the minister. This process was described in a variety of different ways, but consistently clergy spoke to the importance of knowing the couples' beliefs and background. The delivery of their message varied from a laid back approach to an aggressive approach, but nearly all, 21 of 23, wanted to know the couple's personal religious testimony to determine if and how they would continue. Here several clergy state the importance of testimonial exchanges.

I have them tell me their testimonies. And I have them tell me their backgrounds. I like to know where they came from, how they were raised, as well as how they met and how their relationship is gone up to this point. (Cumberland Presbyterian minister)

We talk about their life experiences, their struggles, their triumphs, and just kind of exchange each one's testimony. We also talk about each person's ideas about the institution of marriage and family as well their ideas about God. (African Methodist Episcopal minister)

The personal counseling sessions are more focused on the couple; specifically I like to talk about their background and how they came about to decide to get married. How the relationship has gone so far. And I also talk specifically about how they want to raise their kids in what church they're going to go to and try to figure out their beliefs, at least determine whether or not they are believers. (Church of the Nazarene pastor)

I'm gonna just ask them straight-out. I'll tell them about my testimony, and I ask them tell theirs to me. So I'm going to know about their belief right from the beginning. Now, I will tell you, I take it so seriously that I usually don't perform weddings if they aren't both Christians. And I know that up at the front most of the time, and I've done it long enough, and I take it seriously because I don't think I'm supposed to. I don't believe I'm supposed to marry people who are unequally yoked.

(Southern Baptist pastor)

The discussion as to one's personal religious testimony may confer negative outcomes for the counselee if one of the parties is not a Christian due to the fact they will, at least initially, be responsible for 1) discussing their religious orientation and possibly having to explain concepts unfamiliar to the other parties and 2) discussing and defending their orientation in a biased setting to a counselor with overt ties to another faith.

Tactics and Techniques

In addition to the discussions of policy and general practice, couples are expected to participate in traditions and rituals such as reading of sacred texts and prayer. Not surprisingly, prayer was the most consistent activity used in the counseling process. All 23 clergy used prayer in each session. This of course is a typical practice, but the prominence of prayer could be a major barrier for those in interfaith marriages.

The first and foremost activity involved in this type of counseling is one that may cause perhaps the most obvious tension between the minister and couple as well as between both individuals in the relationship. The fundamental aspect of Christian prayer is acknowledgement of a specific deity, which alone may produce a level of uneasiness for those who pray to a different god or have a different understanding of prayer. In addition to merely praying, the topics covered and form of prayer may also present difficulties for the pastor and the couples. On the one hand, some clergy presented prayer in a non-threatening type of way such as this African Methodist Episcopal minister who said, "First and foremost to pray for strength, guidance and peace as well as for clear minds." This message was echoed and expanded by a Presbyterian (PCUSA) who stated:

. . . I pray for the alleviation of anxiety for the couple because it can be an extremely stressful time trying to plan and actually execute a wedding. Not to mention the stress that family actually usually puts on the couple as well. We pray for peace of mind and most importantly we pray for guidance. We pray for God to guide the couple and pray for the couple to let God guide them. (Presbyterian PCUSA minister)

On the other hand, some clergy had a more aggressive and specific approach...

Well, we pray for guidance, strength, clarity of mind, and also for the safety of each of their souls. I typically pray for the couple to have the strength to rebuke evil temptations as they are approaching such an intimate time it is important they do not give in to the flesh. (Assemblies of God minister)

Even though the more general types of prayer make little mention of good and evil, they do require a certain amount of agreeability and compliance as well as participation and acknowledgement. Some people may certainly be able to respect the traditions and rituals of another, but some may also be concerned their own traditions and values are at risk. On that note, the use of more generalized responses (as seen on p. 42), such as those of the more moderate Presbyterian and African Methodist Episcopal ministers may be more palatable to an interfaith couple because the prayer uses non-threatening language and a general notion of God, as opposed to the focus on the couple's endangered souls and assumptions about a physical relationship as illustrated by the Assemblies of God minister.

While prayer was the most frequently mentioned activity, the most popular assessment tool was the use of questionnaires. Eighteen of 23 indicated the use of questionnaires and worksheets in counseling process. Consistency of form was low and no specific tool such as PREPARE or PREVENT (as mentioned in Ch. 3) was indicated as being used by clergy, but general areas of discussion seemed to be prevalent

throughout different denominations. The most prominent themes covered by the clergy's questionnaires are listed in order of frequency: finances/money, children, religious participation, religious education, values, personality, background, and recreation. In addition, most of the clergy who used questionnaire indicated they asked more than 100 questions in these and other areas.

While the use of specific measuring tools was inconsistent, administration and evaluation of them was even more inconsistent. Some ministers had the couple fill out the questionnaire at home, and others had them do it in the session. Some had the couple do the questionnaires together, and others had the couple do the questionnaires separately. Most of the clergy looked over the questionnaires with the couple and discussed the couples' answers, while others thought it was something the couple should discuss themselves. Some ministers indicated making their own materials while others used questionnaires they had come across over the years.

Some exception was taken to the uniformity of questionnaires. Some clergy did not indicate that they, themselves, used standardized assessment tools. However many clergy did refer to church-related premarital courses offered by the church that used specific curricula which provides some uniformity. A more detailed discussion of standardization among denomination is to come later in the chapter, but it is worth noting that 9 of the 12 conservative pastors indicated having updated their materials within the last five years, while only two of the nine mainline pastors had updated their materials in the last five years.

Other than using questionnaires, many of the participants discussed the use of

assignments or reading material. All clergy who dispersed assignments or reading materials used Scripture as the primary text for discussing what marriage is and how preparation for marriage should be carried out.

I usually give them a book chapter that I've been using for several years now as well as a few passages of Scripture. I like them to read those at home and then come and discuss them with me and with one another just to see what they think and this helps them communicate and sometimes it helps them to compromise. (Assemblies of God minister)

Again many of the topics approached with Scripture involve Christian interpretations and therefore may not be shared by all who are discussing them. Stanley et al. (1997) have suggested when individuals are involved in group counseling the responses and engagement may be different than if the couples were counseled individually. The general notion of conformity has been a prevalent theme in sociology and psychology for many years (Asch 1955). Asch found just that even when asked relatively simple questions of perception, individuals' responses can be heavily influenced by group members even when the opinion of the group is contrary to that of the individual.

In light of such findings and general knowledge of how couples interact, only 4 ministers spoke with individuals separately. The remaining 19 explained that they did not see the need to separate the couple to discuss past, present, and future goals or to assess the condition of the relationship. However, several, 6, did indicate if there were special needs such as a child or previous marriage, or if the couple requested to be counseled separately, they would be willing to accommodate the couple's wishes.

Those who did separate the couple focused on hiding secrets or being open with one another but in a safe environment. For instance, this National Baptist pastor discussed

why separating the couple may be beneficial.

Yes, I ask them about secrets they may have that there may be keeping from their partner; I asked them questions about their personal background and spiritual life. I like to get these pieces of information separately sometimes; then (I) have them discuss these issues together and see if anybody leaves anything out.

An idea as to the consistency of the process prompted questions concerning situations in which the counseling might be altered. In other words, “when might the counseling process have to change to accommodate the couple?” It seems logical to assume that if a pastor is willing to separate a couple and thereby deviate from a normal routine at the request of a couple, they may be willing to tailor sessions to meet the individual needs of a couple. In fact, only 10 of the counselors reported not changing the process if one or more parties were not a part of the congregation; however several ministers stressed the importance of finding a church together.

We talk about the differences between denominations and we talk about how to find a good church for the couple if one of the parties isn't part of this church and doesn't necessarily want to go to a church like this; we talk about how the couple can find a church that works for them as long as they find a church. (Assemblies of God minister)

I guess, I do think it would be good if the non-Christian was willing to try because it means he might go with her to church also. That's one thing I would tell a couple is that I wouldn't want, for instance to say have the wife go to church by herself, that's not good for either of them. (Lutheran ELCA minister)

This presents potential problems for the couple because the pastor may not be likely to encourage the couple to go to different ceremonies or for the Christian to participate in another religion alongside their spouse. Even though this type of compromise is essential in the minister's eyes if they ever hope to have a successful marriage, they imply that the

couple not only “find a church” but find a Christian church.

Meanwhile a similar number (9) reported they would not change the process based on their preliminary assessment or knowledge of a couple. As previously noted, the majority of the participants routinely altered their programs/services based on the individual couple. This would make the argument that interfaith couples could be accommodated by ministers due to the fact that they routinely make alterations for other couples. Indeed, the majority of ministers (19) reported that the counseling process would be different for those in interfaith relationships whether or not they had actual experience with interfaith couples. Here, several clergy discussed how they would address the differences in the counseling for interfaith couples.

Yes, absolutely I would talk about the lack of Christ and how that affects the couple, the kids, and their souls. I also talked about how without Christ as the center of their marriage they really have to work extra, extra hard to understand one another to love one another through thick and thin and not to blame each other for everything. They weren't available to lay their burdens down at the foot of Christ but I wish them all the happiness in the world. (National Baptist pastor)

Yes, it (counseling) would have to be quite different because I would have to ask them if they believe or are believers, and if they are not I would try to help but I would not marry them. (Church of Nazarenes pastor)

Yes, it (counseling) would not be the same as a typical counseling session, because I cannot and will not marry a Christian and non-Christian. I am only able to perform Christian marriages and therefore both parties have to be professing believers. So I probably wouldn't even be able to counsel them much because I wasn't performing the wedding. I usually only counsel couples if I'm doing the same. (Assemblies of God minister)

Attitudes Toward Interfaith Marriage

A series of questions concerning clergy's opinions of interfaith couples was addressed to understand how interfaith marriage is viewed in a general context including:

1) whether or not clergy members thought interfaith marriages could be as successful as same-faith marriages, 2) whether the clergy member thought interfaith marriages were more or less likely to end in divorce than same-faith marriages, and 3) whether or not an interfaith couple would feel deterred from receiving counseling from a clergy member.

Having a counselor who believes their counselees are going to be able to handle their problem has significant effects on the outcome of the therapy (Bringle and Byers 1997). However, premarital preparation is typically not seen as therapy, even though the process certainly involves one or more parties looking to another for advice and assurance of success. Therefore, whether or not clergy members thought an interfaith marriage could be as successful as same-faith marriages may have significant effects on how their advice and guidance is received. Only 10 expressed that they thought an interfaith marriage could be as successful as a same-faith marriage, and only two of those 10 responded with a “yes, definitely”, as opposed to the remaining eight who responded with a “yes, possibly.” In addition, the majority (21) of the clergy members thought interfaith marriages were more likely to end in divorce than same-faith marriages. Many confessed that they did not know the statistics but would be inclined to say divorce is more likely. This disposition may significantly affect how the couple perceives the counseling offered by the clergy.

The lack of confidence seen by clergy in the marriage of an interfaith couple is troublesome both for the couple and for the church. If couples do not feel as if their marriage is taken seriously, they may have few reasons to participate actively. The fact that interfaith couples are typically less religiously devout could mean that churches may

lose even more congregants. Though the population of interfaith couples is relatively small, the lasting effects could multiply their numbers. If interfaith couples are willing to compromise and continue to practice their respective religions but are faced with clergy who are unwilling to believe they can have a successful marriage, they may be more likely not only to become less involved but to reduce the potential involvement of their children as well.

Aside from some of the opinions of how interfaith marriages fare in the eyes of clergy, the clergy were aware of the effect of their dispositions on the couples they counsel. The ministers overwhelmingly agreed, all but one, that an interfaith couple might feel deterred from receiving pastoral counseling. Some attributed this to their own personality, such as this Nazarene pastor.

Yes, yeah I think they probably would. I say this because I believe Christians should marry Christians, and the one that comes from this church should know that. So they probably would not come to me or wouldn't come here to have a ceremony.

When asked the same question others tried to empathize with the couple, or at least with the non-Christian.

Yes I think so. The non-Christian doesn't want to hear me talk about Christ and how Christ should be in his life and affecting his life. And how Christ and the lack of Christ is going to have a significant effect on his marriage and family. (National Baptist pastor)

Yeah, they probably would. (Describing an experience with an interfaith couple) He was very uncomfortable with the praying, the Scripture and every thing that we did pretty much. And honestly I wouldn't want to be in his shoes; I would probably be very uncomfortable with the things that their rabbi would be telling me on how to have a successful marriage and the things that we needed to do in terms of Jewish faith. So I understand why interfaith couples might feel deterred, like you said, from receiving counseling from the minister. (Non-Denominational - Bible Church pastor)

Resistance to Interfaith Marriage

Resistance to interfaith marriage was by far the most prominent theme of the study. Due to the degree of denominationalism within Christianity, levels of acceptance and tolerance for other groups may vary based on differences in doctrine and theology. Each minister was asked to rate how comfortable they would be if someone from their congregation came to them and wanted to marry someone outside their particular church. The clergy members were asked to rate over 25 Christian denominations, several “Christian sects” like the Church of Latter Day Saints and Jehovah’s Witnesses, and 10 other religious orientations. Each listed denomination received a score from 1 to 6. The levels of acceptance and resistance were measured as “1 = completely encourage,” “2 = moderately encourage,” “3 = slightly encourage,” “4 = slight discourage,” “5 = moderately discourage,” “6 = completely discourage.” The scores represented in Table 2 (p. 58) note the mean and standard deviation of responses related to the clergy’s level of comfort with each religious denomination.

Table 2 is a clear representation of what types of unions are tolerated and what types are discouraged. Denominations with a mean of 4.0 and above were considered unions that should be discouraged. A clear discrepancy is present in regard to what is to be considered as acceptable under the Christianity umbrella, with the exception of the Metropolitan Community Church (a church primarily composed of homosexual congregants) and Christian “cults” such as Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. A clear distinction between which groups were tolerated and not tolerated is identified by a sudden jump in mean scores for “other Christian” category at 3.39 to the Metropolitan

Community Church at 5.3 followed by Reform Judaism at 5.35 and Unitarian Universalism at 5.39. Relatively low levels of discouragement were seen for other traditional denominations within Christianity. Of course, groups that were more similar were more apathetic to other similar groups; for example, the Lutheran ELCA and United Methodist showed virtually no resistance to each other, just like Southern Baptists and Non-Denominational groups were encouraging of these types of intrafaith marriages.

Table 2: Resistance Gradient for Inter and Intra Faith Marriage: Degree of Discouragement by Clergy

<u>Religious Denominations</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
<u>Islam</u>	5.91	0.288
<u>Hinduism</u>	5.91	0.288
<u>Buddhism</u>	5.91	0.288
<u>New Age</u>	5.91	0.288
<u>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints</u>	5.83	0.491
<u>Jehovah's Witnesses</u>	5.83	0.491
<u>Atheist</u>	5.78	0.422
<u>Agnostic</u>	5.74	0.449
<u>Judaism - Orthodox</u>	5.57	0.662
<u>Judaism - Conservative</u>	5.52	0.73
<u>Unitarian Universalism</u>	5.39	0.839
<u>Judaism - Reform</u>	5.35	0.775
<u>Metropolitan Community Church</u>	5.3	0.926
<u>Other Christian</u>	3.39	1.5
<u>Seventh Day Adventist</u>	3.13	1.058
<u>Church of God in Christ</u>	2.91	1.041
<u>Orthodox</u>	2.91	1.203
<u>American Baptist</u>	2.87	0.815
<u>Church of Christ (Campbell)</u>	2.83	1.072
<u>Other Baptist</u>	2.78	0.902
<u>National Baptist</u>	2.74	0.964
<u>Traditional Catholic</u>	2.7	1.02
<u>Liberal Catholic</u>	2.7	1.185
<u>African Methodist Episcopal</u>	2.7	1.02
<u>Presbyterian Church in America (Conservative)</u>	2.7	1.063
<u>Assemblies of God</u>	2.7	1.222
<u>Other Lutheran</u>	2.7	0.926
<u>Other Methodist</u>	2.65	0.832
<u>Cumberland Presbyterian</u>	2.65	1.191
<u>Church of Nazarenes</u>	2.65	1.229
<u>Presbyterian Church USA</u>	2.57	1.161
<u>Non-Denominational Mega Church</u>	2.57	0.945
<u>Non-Denominational Other</u>	2.52	0.898
<u>Southern Baptist</u>	2.43	1.121
<u>United Methodist</u>	2.43	1.08
<u>United Church of Christ</u>	2.43	0.992
<u>Lutheran Missouri Synod</u>	2.43	0.728
<u>Lutheran - ELCA</u>	2.3	0.926
<u>Episcopal</u>	2.26	1.01
N= 23		

Though the level of resistance toward non-traditional Christian marriages was uniformly widespread, variation within Christianity, or towards intrafaith unions, were divided on ideological lines. Christian denominations were categorized according to ideology, with Protestants divided into conservative, mainline, and black. The black Protestants were separated due to variation in terms of how other groups viewed black Protestants. Though the black clergy did not have divergent opinions in terms of how they treated interfaith couples, the black congregations are typically viewed as unique by other Christian groups. In addition, the Catholic denomination was divided into traditional and liberal categories primarily to illustrate how more conservative groups are more accepting of other conservative groups even between Protestants and Catholics.

The least amount of resistance was seen among groups with similar social ideologies (see Table 3, p. 60). For instance, conservative Protestants were more likely to encourage marriages with other conservative groups just as mainline Protestants were more likely to encourage marriages with other mainline groups. Acceptance of other Christian denominations was fairly widespread for conservative and mainline Protestants as well as Catholics. Nevertheless, just as seen in Table 1 all groups present significant levels of resistance for groups that not only are non-Christian but for groups that are not traditional Christian denominations such as other Christian groups as well as Christian sects.

Table 3: Mean Resistance Scores Among Denominational Families

	<u>Conservative</u> <u>Protestants</u>	<u>Mainline</u> <u>Protestants</u>	<u>Catholic</u>
<u>Conservative Protestants</u>	2.20	2.95	4.25
<u>Mainline Protestants</u>	2.77	1.84	3.42
<u>Black Protestants</u>	2.65	2.72	4.13
<u>Traditional Catholics</u>	2.90	2.77	1.0
<u>Liberal Catholics</u>	3.08	2.25	1.0
<u>Other Christian*</u>	4.54	4.30	5.0
<u>Christian Sects**</u>	5.83	5.77	6.0
<u>Non-Christian</u>	5.83	5.28	5.5
<u>None***</u>	5.83	5.73	5.5

*Other Christian - consisted of the groups identified as Other Christian, Metropolitan Community Church, and Unitarian Universalist
**Christian Sects - consisted of Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) and Jehovah's Witnesses
*** None – consisted of agnostics and atheists

Willingness to perform ceremonies and counseling

The discussion of disapproval and unwillingness to accept interfaith marriage was highlighted by 20 of the 23 ministers. Even in denominations where some groups are conservative and others are moderate, resistance is prevalent throughout. Several ministers illustrate how ideology, in terms of conservatism and liberalism, has little effect on willingness to perform a ceremony between a Christian and a non-Christian.

The following first two excerpts come from Lutheran ministers, one from the Missouri Synod (typically more conservative) and the other from the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Second are two excerpts from Presbyterian ministers, one from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (typically conservative) and the other from the Presbyterian Church of USA (typically moderate to liberal).

If they are non-Christian I would probably say that I would not be able to do the service. We think of a wedding as a worship service and I would not be able to do it with a Muslim or a Buddhist or something. (Lutheran Missouri Synod minister)

If I'm going to do the marriage it is with the understanding that it will be a Christian marriage, Trinitarian in the name of Christ. And I'm very upfront about that as well. It will be a Christian setting. In cases if it's totally different faith, I encourage them do the justice of the peace or find a church here they can have more than one faith represented. But here I do not; I do not, I'm very upfront that this will be a Christian wedding. (Lutheran ELCA minister)

Yes, I guess the policy is that we as ministers are supposed to perform Christian weddings and ceremonies and therefore should not perform weddings for non-Christians. (Cumberland Presbyterian minister)

Christian marriages are supposed to be between two Christians and as ministers; we are supposed to perform Christian weddings so essentially, de facto, we are not really supposed to marry Christians and non-Christians, although everyone does have the right the married regardless of their religious orientation. And I think that's the right perspective. (Presbyterian PCUSA minister)

The messages here present clear uniformity against interfaith marriage, but the delivery was an issue of variation. The more ideologically conservative ministers tended to present their opinions about interfaith marriage in a much more aggressive fashion, both in tone and content. When asked about accommodating an interfaith couple in a wedding or counseling, a pastor from a Non-Denominational and self-described fundamental congregation expressed, "again, it would never get that far, cause I wouldn't do the wedding. I only perform Christian marriages and interfaith marriages are not Christian marriages, simple as that." In addition, a Southern Baptist pastor responded with this to a question about whether or not the counseling would be different for an interfaith couple.

Yes, I wouldn't do the wedding and I would have to tell them that quite bluntly. I would be nice about telling them I wouldn't be able to perform the wedding and I would explain to them that I only perform Christian weddings, which requires that both parties be Christians.

On the other hand, a much more moderate Presbyterian pastor presented this message:

I don't think I could do a service with other deities present. I can't worship another god and since a wedding is a worship service, I couldn't have another god present while I'm worshipping my God...we have to listen and help them sort out their issues. I would have to tell them that it couldn't be a Christian wedding and therefore I may or may not be able to do the ceremony. I may be able to do it if they are an agnostic or Jewish possibly, but it's unlikely.

A similar response was seen in the interview of a Lutheran ELCA minister.

Yes, we're not supposed to do non-Christian weddings. We can do a separate ceremony. We can have one service ceremony here at the church where it is a Christian ceremony and then they can go somewhere else and have [a]different ceremony, and I have no problem with that. But they cannot, we can't put them together because a wedding service is a worship service, because marriage is a sacrament.

Eighteen clergy also indicated that they would discuss, in detail, the effects of different religious orientations on marriages but, as stated before, many of them would be unwilling to perform the wedding as well as the typical counseling procedure. The topics included in the discussion of different religious orientations on marriages were: 1) the general resistance to interfaith marriage, 2) the legitimacy of the couple's faith, 3) the notion of a God-centered household, 4) concern for the well-being and confusion of children, 5) the notion of intimacy, and 6) the possibility of conversion.

In fact, even those who had performed interfaith weddings indicated overt resistance to the notion of interfaith marriage. For instance, one minister indicated he had performed an interfaith wedding for his brother, but still framed his response negatively toward such unions.

I said, I can marry them but I have to tell them that it's not a Christian marriage. And if they want it in the church, it'll have to be done as a Christian service but all I can do for the couple is marry them. Although, I will probably never marry a non-Christian and a Christian again because I only have one brother and no sisters. (National Baptist pastor)

In addition, a Catholic priest showed resistance to interfaith marriage by doubting the success of said marriage. When asked if an interfaith marriage could be as successful as a same-faith marriage, even though he had performed several, he responded as follows:

No, I would have to say no probably not. I'm sure some people out there have done it [had successful marriages], but I would have to say probably not because they live by different laws, different rituals, and they place importance in different areas of life. Seems to me to be very difficult.

Legitimacy of faith

The most frequent source of resistance on a specific level was the questionable legitimacy of an individual's faiths. Fourteen of the 23 participants called into question the legitimacy of faith for individuals in interfaith marriages. Some overtly spoke of how a devout Christian would just not do such a thing, while others dismissed the faith of interfaith couples by saying one probably just did not care as much as the other.

If a Christian is talking serious about their walk with the Lord and their day-to-day walk, umm then I have a real problem if they are going to marry a non-believer and they're going to have a lot of issues on down the road. (Southern Baptist pastor)

It just seems like if you take being in the way of the Lord seriously, you will not be with someone that doesn't take being with the Lord seriously or that worships a different god. It doesn't make sense to me that an active Christian would put themselves in a relationship with someone who didn't share that passion. (National Baptist pastor)

The premise that either one or both individuals in an interfaith marriage are not serious Christians is clearly depicted. This perspective would not likely be taken favorably by an interfaith couple. The general notion that an interfaith marriage is not what a "Christian marriage" should be is enough without the counselor questioning

whether or they believe what it is they say they believe. Having said that, these pastors do bring up an important point; does being a “good” Christian involve marrying a “good” Christian? Similar to the perspective previously seen, other clergy indicate how the dangers of having a non-Christian spouse may contribute to the erosion of one’s own faith.

An Assemblies of God pastor speaks about the dangers of having a “mixed marriage” when addressing whether or not they think intermarriage is more susceptible to divorce. He notes, “Yes... I would say... yes probably because they lack Christ's foundation; it seems like they would be more likely to live a secular style life and in a secular style life divorce is more tolerated and accepted and sometimes even encouraged.”

A Presbyterian minister also discussed the dangers of “mixed marriage” in response to the question of whether or not they think an interfaith couple might feel deterred from seeing a pastor.

Well yes, one is probably less religious than the other and that one probably does not want to go into it especially with the minister who obviously has a particular point of view. So I don't see why someone of a different faith would seek my counsel on an issue like marriage. (Presbyterian PCUSA minister)

The dangers of having an interfaith marriage are also highlighted by other clergy in response to whether or not an interfaith marriage can be as successful as a same-faith marriage, as seen in the following:

It's going to add more conflict in all areas since faith influences all aspects of life for those who are faithful. I imagine if someone was going to marry a non-Christian it's very possible their faith is not strong. (Church of Nazarene pastor)

You would seriously have to learn how to compromise which is good and bad. When you learn how to compromise, you can communicate well with your spouse but at the same time you may not be quite as devoted to your faith as you should be. This could cause many problems. A stagnant Christian is not a productive Christian, and just like

other religions, if you don't practice your faith you're not setting a good example for your children because you're just showing them that religion is just a tag you put on or just like a suit you wear and not necessarily a lifestyle and eternal choice.
(Presbyterian PCUSA minister)

Concern about a God-centered household

In addition to suggesting an interfaith couple was less than devout, ten of the clergy members suggested that interfaith marriage was in opposition to God's plan, specifically with respect to a God-centered household. In Christianity, like many religions, education, specifically religious education, starts at home and therefore several clergy across denominational lines point to the dangers of not having a God-centered household. Some used popular Biblical imagery to describe how a family and household should be formed.

Just my own personal conviction and I can't say I'm speaking for the church or for others who do weddings. I don't feel comfortable or feel at peace doing a wedding where a couple where one or both don't have faith in Christ. Because I'm real passionate about marriage and really want to invest in couples, and help them have a head start in their marriage and just have a fulfilling exciting marriage and I personally believe that Christ is the foundation--He's the concrete, steel reinforced concrete to build a foundation to put up the roof and wall and windows on so to speak. (Non-Denominational Mega Church pastor)

Marriage in my eyes and the eyes of the Episcopal Church is a sacrament; it is a blessing of God and it must be the center of the marriage to have that marriage be considered a Christian marriage and for the strength of that family to be withholding under God. In other words it is extremely important because marriage is considered a sacrament for people and the Episcopal tradition to marry other Christians. The reason for this is that the sacraments can only be upheld with two Christians and the strength of that marriage depends heavily on how much faith they put in Christ.
(Episcopal rector)

Others simply argue that the differences are merely too much to overcome and that the non-Christian just cannot understand.

If the couple doesn't have Christ, they can't see things on the same level. What is important to the Christian may not be to the other; the non-Christian just won't be

able to grasp the importance of Christ in the family. (Non-Denominational – Fundamentalist pastor)

Concern for well-being and confusion of children

Along with general resistance to interfaith marriage, the challenging of one's faith, and the salience of having a God-centered household, another common theme associated with resistance to interfaith marriage was concern for the well-being and fear of confusion of children. Overall, clergy explained that the bifurcation of religion in the home was dangerous because it creates an environment that may harm children in terms of their moral development and spiritual well-being.

The discussion of the well-being of children was highlighted by responses to a variety of questions. First, the discussion of how one would discuss in detail the effects of different religious orientations on marriage opened the door for why different religions may cause ill effects for children. Several clergy had similar responses as seen here.

I would definitely have to discuss with them what the effects would be on the children because having one parent who is a believer and one parent who is not or even believes in a different god is going to have serious consequences for the spirituality of the children. The sheer conflict there seems like it would produce a lot of confusion especially for young children, 'well mommy believes this and daddy believes that' – what are they to think? (Episcopal rector)

I would talk about children, discipline, where they're going to worship, if they're going to do it separately or are they to do it together, or they could take kids to two different churches with two different gods and two different worship services. It seems very complicated for children. (United Methodist minister)

I would have to say it [counseling] would be different. We would have to talk about the effects of not having Jesus at the head of the household and how that will affect both the marriage and the children. I'd be very concerned for the children... we would have to talk about how the Christian way would be different from maybe one of the other religions. How that would affect the marriage and the children and like I said before most heavily the children. (Cumberland Presbyterian minister)

Clergy seem to think that creating an environment where children see and experience two different religions is unhealthy for their emotional and moral development. Concern for the children was also an issue when discussing how successful an interfaith marriage can be or if an interfaith marriage can be as successful as a same-faith marriage. It appears that two adults raising a child must have the same ideas. For instance, a Southern Baptist preacher, in response to whether or not an interfaith marriage can be as successful as a same-faith marriage, said, “I would say no, probably not, because there is too much difference... There is no continuity, there is no unity and it’s likely it would be extremely confusing and distressing for the children.”

A Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister also points to the dangers for children in interfaith families by noting, “It seems there is more individuality within the family and less unity. You've got one parent living on a different set of morals and codes having different rituals and it seems like it would be very difficult for spouses and children.” Similar consequences are highlighted by other ministers as well.

Christ strengthens family and not having that foundation is bad for the souls of both in the marriage as well as the children. If Daddy goes to temple and mommy goes to church, which one do the kids go to or do they go to both, which one is right? That’s hard to explain to a child and have them understand, shucks, I would get confused and I’m a grown man. (Church of Christ – Campbell pastor)

I would have to say no probably not because they're awful consequences to marrying someone that is not a Christian, for a Christian. There's a reason we are commanded not to do such things because it has negative effects for both the Christian involved in the marriage as well as any children they produce as well as the families around them. In addition, a non-Christian marriage does not have the potential to have a spiritual bond the Christian marriage can have and that's that. (Assemblies of God minister)

Notion of intimacy

While the legitimacy of faith, need for a God-centered household, and concern for the children were the most prominent in terms of dangers of interfaith marriages as seen by the clergy members, the notion of intimacy was just as prevalent. Just over half of the sample (12) specifically addressed the idea of potential intimacy. The spiritual bond between couples, as seen by the clergy, is what essentially elevates a “marriage” to a “Christian marriage.” Apparently a Christian marriage produces more than the sum of its parts. To clergy, a Christian marriage is only attainable when both members believe their union is between one another and God. Since this type of bond is available to Christians, most of the ministers across denominations do not understand why someone would look for relationship that could not achieve such a level of intimacy as seen by these ministers.

It is intimacy. Intimacy is so important in marriage. A Christian marriage offers the potential for the most intimacy you can possibly experience. The level of connection cannot be achieved by just a man and a woman. It needs a man and woman and God. (United Methodist minister)

They might have more trouble, but I'm sure some people make it work and have very happy lives. The only problem is they are not able to have the depth as a Christian marriage. They would be missing out on certain aspects of the spiritual bond between two Christians, the intimacy. (African Methodist Episcopal minister)

It's generally thought of as not a good idea to marry a non-Christian because your marriage would not be a Christian marriage and therefore you'd be missing out on things that only Christian marriage can offer. (Episcopal, rector)

Well... without Christ, a marriage cannot be properly filled, the couple is missing out on a divine union and the experiences that can happen in a Christian marriage are not available to those who are not in a Christian marriage. (Assemblies of God minister)

While some focused on interfaith marriages being completely negative, some used much more passive and empathetic language while expressing basically the same

message that only Christians can have “Christian marriage” intimacy. For instance, this Lutheran Missouri Synod pastor acknowledges the likelihood of some success stories, while qualifying what the couple will not be able to share. He said, “as a marriage...umm I think there is lots of success stories of different faiths marrying, but sometimes I think they are missing out on...to me it’s another part of the two becoming one.”

The notion of happiness was echoed by a National Baptist pastor as well who said, “They can be together and stay together and be happy, but they are missing out. They don't have that special bond that only Christians can have together, it isn’t as intimate.” In addition, a Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister indicates what a couple will need to stay together by saying, “they have to get very good at compromising and they're going to have to work very, very hard at staying focused on their union. But they won't ever have the fulfillment of the Christian marriage provides because they simply aren't sharing in Christ.”

Possibility of conversion

Interestingly, several conservative ministers (5 of 12) included notions of conversion within the discussion of intimacy and resistance to interfaith marriage. When highlighting the disadvantages and dangers of interfaith marriage, several ministers suggested they would be more than willing to see the non-Christian converted to ensure the couple developed a divine Christian bond. For example, a Church of Nazarene pastor explained, “It’s not the same type of bond. Sure a couple can love each other and have a deep emotional connection but they will never have the spiritual connection of a Christian marriage unless the non-Christian comes to Christ.” Other clergy use similar imagery in

noting their willingness to share their faith with the non-Christian...

Now I've got people in the congregation who have already married some one who is not a Christian and they long for their spouse to be a part of what they are doing. And I don't put down anybody if they have already made that mistake... I would probably find out on the front end if there is a real issue. And a lot of times, I've had the opportunity to lead one of them to faith, I really have. I look at it as an opportunity; I don't just write them off. (Southern Baptist pastor)

I have had one couple approach me... she used to go here and her to-be husband was Jewish, probably non-practicing, and I think she wanted me to do the wedding, but I told them I could not perform that ceremony unless they were both Christians or if he was interested in hearing about Jesus. (Non-Denominational – Fundamental pastor)

They need to be similar; they need to be both Christians for their own sake and for the sake of their family and their spiritual being. But I want to know if they are believers in Jesus Christ and if they are not then we have some serious issues. I would have to at that point tell them unless the non-Christian's willing to become a believer, truly a believer not just convert so they can get married, then I can't do this wedding. (Southern Baptist pastor)

Gendered Presumptions and Responses

One of the most unexpected findings to emerge from the interviews was the gender assumptions within interfaith relationships noted by clergy. The findings provide insight into the clerical presumptions of gender related to the need for counsel and legitimacy of faith among individuals in interfaith relationships. The assignment of gender was consistent among the sample in suggesting that women were the ones coming to counseling and that they were the ones marrying outside Christianity. Among this sample, it was typically the woman who was most often thought to be involved in marrying a non-Christian. In fact, 19 of the 23 clergy characterized interfaith couples as being a Christian woman and a non-Christian man. Repeatedly women were referred to as the Christian in the relationship and the man as the one who is not a Christian.

Some of the responses came from those with direct experience with interfaith couples and some from using hypothetical stories to illustrate how they would approach the subject. Experience may explain why those who had counseled interfaith couples might assume the Christian to be a woman if they had in the past counseled a Christian woman in an interfaith relationship. However, it does not explain why those without experience, and drawing only from their own beliefs would approach the situation by assuming that the woman was the Christian party. An Assemblies of God minister illustrates this notion by stating...

So just as an example, if I was approached by a couple and she goes to church here, but he doesn't believe or worships a different god, then I would have to remind her about what God tells us in Scripture, and I would be polite to him, the non-Christian, but still be honest.

An African Methodist Episcopal minister also assigned gender by describing how uncomfortable a couple might be given that the man is not a Christian by saying, "I imagine if a couple came in and he was Jewish or Hindu, he would not know what to expect and would probably be uncomfortable, which may make her uncomfortable."

A Southern Baptist pastor uses a similar technique to express that the non-Christian man is simply appeasing his partner by saying, "So if a guy and a girl come in and he doesn't really care either way but just wants to do whatever it takes to marry her, then he might not be completely deterred but I doubt he is looking forward to it [the counseling session]."

Another excellent example of gendered responses is seen in the case of a Southern Baptist pastor who, like the others, assumes the woman in the interfaith relationship would be the Christian planning to marry outside her faith. He explains why a non-

Christian man might feel deterred from seeing him by saying, “say if a couple came in, and she really wanted him to come and he wasn’t a Christian and had never heard of me then he would probably just not know what to expect.”

In further discussion about the role of men and women with respect to spiritual leadership and development, the same minister suggests that women have an innate desire to “fight aloneness” and may therefore have a stronger need than men to seek out a mate. In view of this need, it is therefore important that her mate should be a Christian because she needs a man both for spiritual guidance and for social companionship.

When he (God) said everything was perfect except that man was alone. He knew what he was talking about; he created women to be the suitable mate. Women if you’ve notice fight aloneness. You know, cause man was alone, they are social creatures by nature, and they talk twice as much as we do. Marriage has so many challenges anyway that if you don’t have that underlying foundation, it makes it that much more difficult. Sometimes your faith in Christ or in the Lord God sustains you in some of the difficulties you go through as husband and wife. So if you are not pulling in the direction and have the same foundation there – the same faith – it makes it more difficult. I....He is the head of our home. (Southern Baptist pastor)

This quotation reinforces the idea that women are reliant on men for various forms of support. Clergy, which tends to be a male occupation with roughly 7 of 8 clergy members being male (U.S Bureau of Labor and Statistics 2010), may have presumptions about women that affect how they characterize their congregants. Even though the sample was nearly all men, it would be fruitful to compare the couple characterizations of the male ministers with that of the female minister in the sample. In fact, the subject of who was marrying outside of Christianity was approached quite differently in an interview with a female United Methodist minister. While discussing whether or not an interfaith couple might feel deterred from seeing a minister for pre-marital counseling, the female

minister's responses are rather similar to her colleagues in content but with subtle differences with regard gender assumptions. While her fellow ministers frequently referred to women as marrying outside Christianity, the female minister used gender neutral language.

They may be unfamiliar with what a minister would say; they might feel unwanted because of the kind of discussion that happens within churches. Whoever is the Christian, the man or the women, probably really wants to see a minister if the non-Christian is willing, but I would imagine he or she (non-Christian) is very uncomfortable. (United Methodist minister)

Also, in response to the next question, whether or not they think an interfaith marriage is more likely to end in divorce, the female United Methodist minister again uses language that is unassuming of gender.

Yeah, yeah, they probably are. Although lots of Christians get divorced and it seems like people in all religions get divorced, but it seems like having that added difference would make it hard to maintain a marriage when they're built on two different foundations, his faith and hers.

State Associated Pre-marital Programs

In addition to unanticipated responses concerning gender assumptions, the issue of a premarital preparation curriculum implemented by secular organizations, specifically state funded and structured pre-marital preparation courses, was an especially insightful and unexpected finding. Of the 23 clergy members interviewed, nine reported that their church uses the state provided "Two-Gether in Texas" program to facilitate their pre-marital counseling courses.

As indicated early, many of the pastors at churches that offer such a course highly recommend the completion of the courses in addition to individual preparation with the

minister who is going to marry the couple. However, the significance to this study lies more in the realm of highlighting denominational variation. All of the nine pastors who indicated using the state program came from conservative congregations. None of the mainline Protestant groups or the Catholics indicated that any of their materials or the material related to their pre-marital courses was state approved or certified; although the Catholic Diocese does offer state certified courses they were not specifically mentioned in the interviews. This may initially seem arbitrary due to the fact that many clergy used similar techniques and tactics, covered many of the same topics, and had similar opinions about the institution of marriage. However the way in which conservative groups align themselves with the secular political structure of the state in their use of such a program may provide considerable insight as to the nature of their potential accommodation to the secular world in this regard.

“Two-Gether in Texas” is a state funded and certified pre-marital preparation program aimed at providing couples with at least eight hours of training. Curricula must be certified and registered with the state and are required to cover much of the same material, including communication skills, conflict resolution, role playing, and psychometric measures. The program is provided by professional individuals, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and healthcare-based organizations. Of the faith-based organizations that are certified to offer the program, the vast majority are conservative Protestant churches and conservative Christian counselors. Thirty-one churches are currently registered as providers of the “Two-Gether in Texas” initiative in the sample city. Of those 31 churches, 25 are conservative Protestant churches compared,

to only five mainline Protestant churches and the Catholic Diocese. Although the program is available to all the Catholic parishes in the area through the Diocese, it was not mentioned by the Catholic priests in the interviews with them.

While autonomy is central to many of the conservative denominations, most notably the Southern Baptists, such groups have had continued success in the recruiting and retaining their members, despite their tendency not to be accommodated to the surrounding secular culture. Despite this resistance to the surrounding culture, they have increased the number of members over the several last decades (Amato et al. 2007). It is interesting to consider the strategies of a denomination that has considerable tension with the surrounding culture, growing numbers, and high levels of autonomy in terms of congregational administration and governance. It would seem that uniformity among groups with a less centralized bureaucratic paradigm would be low in terms of how they carry out different programs. However, the strategy of aligning their premarital counseling programs with government established marital preparation courses could provide these groups with exposure to non-traditional potential congregants.

One of the major advantages to having an autonomous denomination is the feeling that the leaders and followers are in control of their own path and that those making the rules are not distant or personal, but rather are in the congregation and are experiencing the same type of life that everyone else is experiencing. They share more common experiences and have common goals. However, being more independent and less bureaucratic typically reduces the ability for denominations to have uniform policy and procedures, therefore making uniformity in terms of programs offered difficult. Although

these groups do not have a centralized hierarchical system in which policies and procedure can be carried out like other groups, they nevertheless show consistency in their use of the state provided pre-marital counseling program.

The notion that more hierarchical denomination may have a more centralized authority structure to implement policy at the local level is logical. For instance, the majority of clergy who reported having formal policy with regard interfaith marriage were from mainline Protestant and Catholic groups which have a more defined hierarchical organization than congregationally organized groups such as the Southern Baptists, the Nazarene Church, or non-denominational groups. Nevertheless, the most consistent area of premarital counseling, with the exception of the Catholics, came from these conservative groups. Ironically, they have made use of secular social institutions to provide the networking for this particular area. The conservative groups have chosen to use state programs, with their own additions, as a primary tool for educating couples wishing to marry. These groups are simply utilizing existing social structure to more efficiently implement programs of their choosing. By using established statewide programs and inserting their own perspectives, these groups can in the area of per-marital counseling policies and practices provide consistency as well as maintain autonomy.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A clergy's views on interfaith marriage is undoubtedly derived from their personal beliefs, professional commitments, and nature of their lifestyle. They are not only obligated to promote Christianity and the well-being of Christians on behalf of their occupation, but by their own faith. They certainly would not be expected to promote behavior that reduces the influence of one's Christian faith, and therefore are extremely resistant to the idea of interfaith marriage. Interfaith unions were repeatedly viewed as less than a "Christian marriage."

In fact, the anticipated outcome that conservative groups would have less experience and show higher levels of resistance to interfaith marriages was not confirmed. Although the interfaith marriage resistance gradient indicated slightly higher levels of resistance for conservative groups, the differences is not noteworthy. The level of resistance is significant across all groups when considering intermarriage among members of interfaith groups as opposed to intrafaith groups.

It appears that as long as someone is marrying another Christian, most Christian clergy are tolerant of the union. However, if the couple is composed of a Christian and someone associated with a Christian fringe group, such as the Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian Universalists, or Christian sects like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, the level of acceptance is more similar to that of interfaith couples or couples with one Christian and one non-Christian. In addition, intrafaith unions seemed to be divided across ideological lines. While Christians were fairly tolerable of other

Christians, the level of acceptance of one another was highest for groups similar in ideology. For examples, clergy in groups such as the United Methodists were more toleraant or encouraging of a Methodist/Lutheran marriage than a Methodist/Southern Baptist marriage. However, these unions were still considered encouraged, just to a lesser degree.

Resistance to Interfaith Marriage

As opposed to intrafaith marriage, resistance to interfaith marriage was uniformly present in the study. All but three clergy members expressed resistance to the idea of their own congregants marrying someone other than a Christian. While the majority of clergy members did not present significant resistance to other Christian denominations, clear lines were seen in terms of who is acceptable to marry and who is not. This is perhaps best represented by the established gradient of accepted groups.

Although it was hypothesized that the conservative Protestants would show the most resistance towards interfaith marriage, the results show that interfaith marriage was resisted across all denominations. Only when looking at intrafaith marriages does one see differences among Christian denominations, and those are primarily based on political ideology and social liberalism. Clear distinctions are made between which groups are, for the most part, accepted by Christians and which groups are not. Most Christian denominations, with the exception of the Metropolitan Community Church, were viewed as acceptable for a possible spouse. This is not surprising, given the data indicating the emphasis of the clergy on the need for a God-centered union. The primary ingredient as seen by the clergy members is the presence of God in a marriage. By each individual

having a relationship with God, the individuals are seen as having a more in-depth relationship with each other. This notion does not simply only mean that Christians can have a higher level of intimacy by marrying other Christians, but that it is God's will for Christians to have this type of union.

Clergy repeatedly discussed how one individual's faith in a marital relation could have a significant effect on the other's faith as well as the religious trajectory of the family. This was described by some of the clergy as happening when one of the individuals is less devout and influences the more devout individual to become less religious. The idea of one partner affecting the other's religiosity was only approached when discussing interfaith couples, but no mention of this phenomenon was mentioned in relation to Christian couples. Due to the fact that many Christians view their faith and relationship to God as a personal issue, variation among couples in terms of religiosity and salience of religion is certain to exist not only for interfaith couples but also for Christian couples, non-believing couples, Muslim couples, and all others.

As described by the clergy interviewed, Christian couples have the potential for additional intimacy, but potential intimacy is much different than actual intimacy. It is argued that the achievement of identity and intimacy is becoming increasingly difficult because of the changing, fluid nature of modern society (Muncy 1983). The mutuality and commitment of intimacy has been correlated with the divine/human relationship and the concept of a religious covenant, but this is an issue of correlation not causation.

In addition to the concern for intimacy, the clergy strongly advocated for the children of interfaith couples due to their concern for the children's well-being and potential

confusion. Instability is never considered a positive aspect of family. The issue of children is an extremely important aspect of member reproduction for religious organizations. Clergy may in fact be resistant to those who are most likely to fall out of the church compared to other congregants who are less likely to drop out.

The fact that interfaith couples are believed to have low levels of religiosity is why religious organizations should put forth an effort to keep these members involved. The degree of resistance shown here suggests that many couples may be turned away from their clergy by their perception that clergy will adamantly refuse to perform their marriage ceremonies. That being said, it is likely that a minister who refuses to marry a couple because their marriage would not be a “true” union would affect the relationship of the couple and the church. Individuals who are entering interfaith marriages and would like to stay connected with their church may face resistance from the church and the pastor in addition to the difficulties of being in an interfaith marriage. It is more efficient for clergy to devote time to those not seen as being “at risk” for reduced religiosity as those in interfaith marriages. By assuming a couple is on the fringe, clergy could easily regard the couples’ choice to engage in this type of relationship as evidence of their lack of devotion and as beyond the clergy’s control.

It is not the purpose of this project to pass judgment upon clergy or those in interfaith marriages, but it seems both parties would have an extremely difficult time interacting with one another given the motivations for each separate party. On the one hand, interfaith couples that seek the advice of clergy would most likely hope for the clergy’s understanding and tolerance of their relationship. On the other hand, it is the clergy’s

responsibility to guide their congregants in the direction they see fit. Members of the clergy is responsible for interpreting God's message and directing their fellow disciples down a "righteous" path. It seems logical that clergy would not agree with a congregant forming a life and family with someone that will not reinforce and/or contribute to the strengthening of one's relationship with his/her church. Clergy have a responsibility to protect their congregants, and in some ways encouraging an interfaith marriage may be counterproductive in that regard. This project simply aims to illustrate how clergy's perspectives, personal and profession policies, and counseling methods affect their relationship with couples entering interfaith marriages.

Gender as an Initial Bias

Ministers frequently assumed the woman to be the Christian when referring to an interfaith couple. This raises two intriguing questions for additional research regarding 1) whether or not women actually are more likely to marry outside their faith compared to men of their same religion, and 2) whether or not women are more likely to receive premarital counseling than their male counterparts in the first place. Perhaps if women are more likely to marry outside other boundaries, such as race, class, or political ideology, then they may possibly be more likely marry outside their religious boundaries as well.

However, the data provide grounds to question the motives of the gendered perceptions of ministers due to the fact 19 of the 23 clergy used gendered language. Does this disposition mean that ministers believe men will not marry someone outside their faith, or are at least less likely to, and why? In addition, how does the fact that males tend

to be viewed as the religious leader in families effect how families practice religion? Studies have found that among women, religion appears more salient to everyday activities, personal faith is stronger, commitment to orthodox beliefs is greater, and involvement in religious ritual and worship is more common than among men (Thompson 1991).

According to Thompson (1991), one school of thought argues that women are more religious than men because of their different positions in society. Some have argued that people's positions and roles affect their religiousness, and thus gender differences in religiosity should reflect the fundamental division of labor by gender (Glock et al. 1967, Durkheim 1897). In many societies, the division of labor has created gendered institutions, which have helped to differentiate men's and women's social experiences. Religious and family areas were feminized and separated from the mainstream (Douglas 1977), despite the fact that both institutions were male-dominated in their organizational hierarchy (Ruether 1974).

In contrast, the workplace and the economy have become the "establishment" and have developed a masculinized character: tough, stoical, and competitive (Tolson 1977). The degree to which institutions actually possess these characteristics is less important than the fact that they are perceived this way. Women's greater religious commitment and participation in church activities are thus viewed as congruent with their lives (Roof 1978), particularly with the communal emphasis of the mother/homemaker roles (Yinger 1970), and incompatible with full-time work force participation and involvement in the provider role (Luckmann 1967; de Vaus and McAllister 1987), despite the increasing

involvement of women at all levels in the work force.

Females are more willing to perceive a problem and to decide to seek help from professionals in general for physical symptoms and also for general psychiatric symptoms (Bringle and Byers 1997). Gender differences in seeking marital counseling have been found in some studies also (Beck and Jones 1973; Campbell and Johnson 1991). Guillebeaux, Storm, and Demaris (1986) found that men seemed either unaware of problems or only sought help as a last resort when a problem became serious.

On one hand, the clergy interviewed indicated that women in interfaith marriages may be religiously involved in that they would attempt to persuade their partner seek the counsel of a minister, therefore elevating the salience of religion for women. On the other hand, if women in these couples are the Christians, then how would Christianity's influence on the family change? It is extremely important to note that not only was the issue of having a God-centered household repeatedly reinforced as significant to the success of a family, but Christianity has a long tradition of placing the man at the spiritual head of the household in terms of decision making and spiritual leadership. If this is the understanding of clergy, they may believe that women do not have as much influence of the practiced religion in the home. Since clergy are already resistant to interfaith marriage, they may be even more resistant given their assumptions of women marrying out as well as the influence of women on the family's religious participation.

The idea of interfaith marriage may be ideologically opposed to the ideals of Christianity from the perspective of clergy. In addition, if many are assuming that the Christian is a woman, they may also be assuming that a woman will have less influence

over familial religious participation. This may reflect an overt prejudice towards women in that they need, from the perspective of many clergy, a mate and are even willing to take a non-Christian husband to assure they are not alone, as shown in Chapter Five. In addition, women are not seen as being in a position of authority when it comes to the religious orientation of a family, and their willingness to take a non-Christian mate, according to the clergy interviewed, may signify lower levels of Christian commitment in the clergy's eyes. Nevertheless, women typically have higher levels of religiosity than men (Stark and Finke 2000), and are more likely to continue practicing religion after a marriage, either by divorce or widowhood (Thompson 1997).

If women in interfaith marriages really are seeking pastoral counseling more than men, they may feel less comfortable in their church than their male counterparts due to the high level of resistance to interfaith marriage from clergy. These presumptions could affect the delivery, substance, and effectiveness of counseling as well as the likelihood of women continuing to participate in a religious organization after entering an interfaith marriage. In fact, the resistance and rejection of interfaith marriage shown by the clergy in the current study suggests that not only did the clergy present gendered assumptions about women in interfaith marriages, but also repeatedly questioned the faith of those in interfaith marriages. In other words, many of the clergy did not believe that those in interfaith marriages, and specifically the Christian person in the marriage, was serious about their own faith, and even when the Christian in the marriage was a woman. The level of resistance and rejection of interfaith marriage by many of the ministers would mostly not be encouraging for female church members, especially if their commitments

to a Christian lifestyle for their family are considered weak.

State Program Association

In addition to the prevalence of gendered responses, another unanticipated finding from the current study was the use of state funded and structured premarital programs by conservative groups. The implementation of state programs by conservative groups is an excellent example of successful marketing techniques. Conservative groups have a history of seeking to implement and use legislation to influence social trends in the U.S. Issues like abortion, capital punishment, severity of sentences, and drug policy have all been engaged by conservative advocacy groups over the past several decades (Hoover and Dulk 2004).

The research literature reports a dramatic increase in the level of legal activism by conservative Christian organizations in the USA (Den Dulk and Krishnan 2001; Ivers 1998). The state program Two-Gether in Texas provides pre-marital preparation courses to aid in the prevention of divorce, and it has proved a successful technique for creating continuity among conservative Protestants.

The utilization of existing secular social institutions, like state government, may have aided in the success of conservative Protestants' ability to recruit new members. Such groups are often seen as not being accommodating to the surrounding secular culture. Nevertheless their high demands help maintain in-group commitment and loyalty. Also, because of their distinctive ideology and strict moral code, these organizations are also the most visible to couples that either do not regularly practice or do not belong to a particular congregation. When seeking out a facility that offers a

program with a considerable discount on marriage licenses as well as free pre-marital counseling, the conservative Protestant groups are by far the most easily accessible of these faith-based organizations. In addition, many non-denominational churches that are typically conservative do not carry the restrictive stigma of specific denominational identities, and therefore may be more easily approached by potential congregants who are reluctant to receive counseling from an established denomination with a known ideology that they do not accept.

By using existing social structures, conservative groups can maintain their desired level of autonomy and independence while simultaneously providing homogeneity among a like minded population. The decision to use a state-sponsored counseling program in itself reinforces autonomy in that even though the curricula are required to cover specific material, each organization is able to tailor the program individually to meet the needs of their congregants and of couples anticipating marriage. Further study on the connection between conservative Protestant organizations and state funded premarital programs is needed. An extensive content analysis of the material and political origin would be of great use; however this is beyond the scope of the current study.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Studies that focus on clergy and the notion of interfaith marriage are extremely limited, and therefore this study was aimed at exploring the topic among Christian clergy in general. The current study is also exploratory in nature due in part to the lack of extensive research literature on the subject. There are several limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. The small sample size does not allow for generalization to the

population of all clergy who perform interfaith marriages and counseling. In addition, the current study focuses only on Christian ministers, partially due to the lack of an ample number of other religious organizations in the area. Although other, non-Christian, organizations do exist in the area, the number and variation among those groups is very low. In most cases, only one or two churches, temples, mosques, or other such establishments are present. In addition, the focus on various Christian groups was important and appropriate due to the degree of differentiation among denominations and the resources available for the study. It should be noted once again that the setting for this research project was highly conservative in terms of dominant religious orientations as well as general social and political ideologies. It would be interesting to investigate whether the patterns discovered in this context would also be observed in more heterogeneous communities. In particular, such future research should explore whether patterns of resistance to interfaith marriages would differ in communities with substantial proportions of adherents of non-Christian religious orientations (such as Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu, for example) in the population.

Further research is required to establish 1) how interfaith couples feel about seeing ministers, 2) how frequently they turn to ministers for this type of counseling, and 3) how clergy nationwide feel about the notion of interfaith marriage and how they believe they should deal with this issue. Interfaith marriages are increasing, and if churches and clergy want to keep those members and those members' children in the church they will have to become more familiar with the topic and understand better the dynamics of interfaith relationships. The oppositional approach, which was seen by the

vast majority of the sample, is probably a less effective way of dealing with interfaith couples. Due to susceptibility of those in interfaith marriage to decreased religious participation, it is important for religious leaders to encourage interfaith couples to try to maintain a consistent level of participation or these individuals may very well be lost to church life and the benefits it can provide in their personal and family lives.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interfaith Marriage Counseling: Practices and Policies among Religious Advisors

Subject # _____

1. Do you perform weddings and pre-marital counseling?

Yes _____ No _____

2. Do you require or recommend counseling by you before agreeing to perform a wedding?

Yes _____ No _____

a. If Yes, how many sessions do you require or recommend?

3. How would you describe the counseling process you give to couples?

a. How important is religion in a marriage?

b. In counseling, do you incorporate specific issues regarding religious faith?

Yes _____ No _____

*If yes, can you elaborate on these issues?

c. Do you pray with the couple? Yes _____ No _____

*If yes, what do you pray about?

d. Do they complete a questionnaire? Yes _____ No _____

*If yes, what types of questions do you ask? For what purposes do you use the questionnaire?

e. Do you give them any assignments or reading material? Yes _____

No _____

*If yes, could you give some examples?

f. Do you talk with either of them separately? Yes_____ No_____

*If yes, what is typically discussed during this time? Why?

g. Are there differences, in the counseling you provide, if one of the parties is not a member of your congregation (parish)? Yes_____

No_____

*If yes, could you describe the differences?

h. Are there variations in the counseling you provide based on your preliminary assessment or your knowledge of the couple? Yes _____

No_____

*If yes, could you give some examples?

4. In the past 3 years, how many weddings have you performed involving those with different faiths? _____

a. How many pre-marital counseling sessions have had those with different faiths? _____

5. Would the counseling you provide differ for interfaith couples? Yes_____ No_____

*If yes, what would be different?

a. Do you or would you discuss in detail the effects of different religious orientations on marriage? Yes____No _____

*If yes, to what extent do you discuss these differences?

6. Do you think an interfaith couple might feel deterred from receiving counseling with a minister or priest (clergy)? Yes_____ No_____
- *If yes, under what circumstances?

7. How do you or would you manage the ceremony to accommodate the wishes of an interfaith couple?
 - a. What are some examples of how you have done this?

8. Does your church have any specific policies or guidelines you are expected to follow with regard to interfaith marriages? Yes_____ No_____
- a. If yes, could you describe these policies or guidelines?

- b. If no, do you have any personal guidelines you follow?

9. If yes to Question 8, do you agree or disagree with these policies and guidelines. Yes_____ No_____
- a. How might they affect your practices with regard to premarital counseling and arranging the wedding itself?

10. What is the policy and general practice of your church with regard to divorce?

For the next few questions, I will be asking you to provide your initial answers on a four-point scale 1 being Yes, definitely, 2 being Yes, probably or possibly, 3 being No probably not, and 4 being No definitely not. Please feel free to elaborate in any way you feel compelled.

11. Do you think an interfaith marriage can be as successful as a same-faith marriage?
 - 1) Yes definitely_____
 - 2) Yes probably or possibly_____
 - 3) No probably Not_____
 - 4) No definitely not_____

a. Why is that?

12. From your experience, do you believe interfaith marriages are more likely to end in divorce than same-faith marriages?

1) Yes definitely____2) Yes probably or possibly____3) No probably Not____4) No definitely not____

a. Why is that?

13. Is it all right for a couple to live together outside of marriage?

1) Yes definitely____2) Yes probably or possibly____3) No probably Not____4) No definitely not____

a. Why or why not?

14. Do you believe that divorce is justified under some circumstances?

1) Yes definitely____2) Yes probably or possibly____3) No probably Not____4) No definitely not____

a. If yes, under what circumstances might it be justified?

b. If no, is the response based on church policy or personal opinion?

15. Do you consider divorce a sin? Yes _____ No_____

1) Yes definitely____2) Yes probably or possibly____3) No probably Not____4) No definitely not____

a. How do you think the members of your congregation would feel?

16. How long have you been a clergy member?

17. How long have you been at this church?

18. What is your title?
19. What size is your congregation?
 - a. What is typical attendance?
 - b. What is your membership size?
20. Did you have a different career before the church? What career did you have?
21. How old are you?
22. If unknown, what is your race/ethnicity (Only ask this question if not apparent from observation)?
23. What is your marital status?
24. If married, is your spouse of the same faith?
25. Do you have children? If yes, how many and what ages?
26. How would you feel if your child wanted to marry someone of a different faith?
27. Do you have anything else you would like to add about interfaith marriage that we haven't covered?

Now give the handout survey

Thank you very much for your participation, you were most helpful. Would you like a summary of the results when the study has been concluded?

Subject Number: _____

Please imagine if a member of your congregation sought your counsel because they were thinking of getting married to someone outside your congregation. Please indicate whether your initial attitude towards the success of the marriage by whether you would completely encourage, moderately encourage, slightly encourage, slightly discourage, moderately discourage, or completely discourage the union of one of your own congregation members to someone of each of the listed faiths.

Religious Denomination	Completely Encourage	Moderately Encourage	Slightly Encourage	Slightly Discourage	Moderately Discourage	Completely Discourage
<u>Catholic</u>						
Traditional						
Liberal						
Orthodox						
<u>Baptist</u>						
Southern Baptist						
American Baptist						
National Baptist						
Other Baptist						
Church of Christ (Campbell)						
<u>Methodist</u>						
United Methodist						
African Methodist Episcopal						
Other Methodist						
<u>Presbyterian</u>						
Presbyterian Church USA PCUSA						
Presbyterian Church of American (PCA – conservative)						
Cumberland Presbyterian						
Episcopal Church						

United Church of Christ						
<u>Pentecostal</u>						
Assemblies of God						
Church of God in Christ						
Nazarenes						
<u>Lutheran</u>						
Evangelical Lutheran						
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod						
Other Lutheran						
<u>Non-Denominational</u>						
Mega-Church						
Other (Independents)						
<u>Other</u>						
<u>Seventh Day Adventist</u>						
<u>Other Christian</u>						
<u>Unitarian Universalist</u>						
<u>Metropolitan Community Church</u>						
<u>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)</u>						
<u>Jehovah's Witnesses</u>						
<u>Judaism</u>						
Reform						
Conservative						
Orthodox						
<u>Islam</u>						
<u>Hinduism</u>						
<u>Buddhism</u>						
<u>New Age</u>						
<u>Agnostic</u>						
<u>Atheist</u>						