

**EVALUATING THE PREMARITAL COUNSELLING IN UNITING REFORMED CHURCH
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (URCSA) CHURCHES IN THE NORTHERN SUBURBS OF
CAPE TOWN IN LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated Christian premarital counselling programmes within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles. The study found that ministers valued premarital counselling in preparing couples spiritually, emotionally, and practically. However, the evaluation revealed inconsistencies in the structure and theological depth of premarital counselling within the URCSA churches, with content mainly shaped by individual ministers' approaches or couples' specific needs. The researcher employed a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design to guide the study. Osmer's four core tasks served as a framework to address the practical and pastoral challenges through the lens of Christian theological principles. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with both ministers and married couples, which affirmed the significance and effectiveness of premarital counselling. The findings highlighted the need for a generic Christian premarital counselling programme, supported by theological principles and informed by literature.

Keywords: Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), Christian premarital counselling programmes, generic, ministers, Christian theological principles, qualitative research approach, Osmer's four core tasks, exploratory design, inconsistencies, married couples

DECLARATION

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Exact wording of the title of the dissertation as appearing on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

03 OCTOBER 2025

DATE

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

God instituted marriage, which is viewed as a sacred and lifelong covenant. Fowler (2007) noted that marriage, the first institution established by God, holds the highest significance. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, thereby established the necessity of marriage and family. The researcher's experience as a Christian premarital counsellor involved providing guidance supported by Christian theological principles, which helped couples navigate the sacred journey of marriage. Premarital counselling, an integral component of pastoral care, provided a safe and confidential environment within the church for engaged couples to explore their aspirations and concerns. As part of this process, various topics were addressed to equip couples for a healthy and enduring marriage. These included (but were not limited to) the reasons for marriage, communication, and conflict resolution. Hopler (2023) emphasised that church leaders who provided pastoral care, such as marriage counselling, exemplified the tangible manifestation of God's love, assisting individuals in finding a stronger sense of purpose and setting meaningful goals. This study aimed to evaluate Christian premarital counselling within the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in light of Christian theological principles. The research intent was not only to benefited churches but also strengthened the marriages of Christian couples by integrating these principles with the expectations of a God-designed marriage, as they prepared to embark on their marital journey.

The decision to conduct this research was motivated by the researcher's belief that God-centred marriages can transform lives, as well as a desire to guide and support engaged couples. Furthermore, this study will equip ministers with supportive Christian theological principles to enhance their premarital counselling efforts. The researcher is a member of the URCSA, well-versed in its doctrine, actively engaged in the faith community, and has convenient access to the participants. Moreover, the researcher was further supported by resources, including evaluations of Christian premarital counselling programs used by ministers. The study utilised an empirical component that employed a qualitative research approach, which involved gathering data through semi-structured interviews with URCSA ministers and two selected married couples from the respective URCSA churches.

The research was guided by Osmer's methodology for practical theology. Osmer (2008, p. 4) identified four core tasks of practical theology: the descriptive-empirical task (priestly listening), the interpretive task (sagely wisdom), the normative task (prophetic discernment), and the pragmatic task (servant leadership). These tasks were applied in this research study.

1.2 Background to the research

Divorce rates in South Africa had risen significantly in recent years. According to Stats SA, the most recent divorce data released on 23 February 2023, indicated that 18,208 divorces were finalised in 2021, representing a 13.1% increase from the 16,097 divorce cases recorded in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2021, p. 6). It was therefore apparent that divorces amongst the population in South Africa were a reality amongst married couples. As Reynolds (2021) argued, marriages were facing a crisis within the church. Despite the alarmingly high divorce rates among believers, the widely discredited notion that Christians were as likely to divorce as non-Christians continued to receive acceptance. Furthermore, Lee (2000, p. 4) emphasised that marriages were under siege, and those who did marry found it increasingly challenging to remain together. As Piper (2018, p. 8) noted, the more issues couples could discuss and resolve before marriage, the better their chances of success. Fillis (2023, p. 6) emphasised that Christian premarital counselling was essential for helping couples navigate the challenges and complexities of married life. Keeter (2016) highlighted that premarital counselling provided an opportunity to cultivate a lifelong relationship, benefiting not only the couple but also the church and, ultimately, the glory of God. Therefore, churches that considered offering premarital counselling could have assisted couples in developing a healthy marital relationship. Salley (2022) pointed out that traditional Christian premarital counselling programmes primarily focused on ensuring couple satisfaction after marriage; however, there was a significant gap in research regarding the impact of integrating Christian values into these programmes. Eghan (2021) stated that scripture did not mention the terms courting or dating, nor did it address premarital relationships. Followers of Christ were provided with essential Christian theological principles that should have been applied to all aspects of their lives, including relationships before marriage. Despite differing opinions on Christian premarital counselling, it was considered crucial for guiding couples into marriage. Pauw (2022) identified common reasons for divorce in South Africa, including financial stress, infidelity, communication

problems, cultural and religious differences, domestic violence, substance abuse, and a lack of intimacy and emotional connection. Additionally, Beeke and La Belle (2016, p. 1) highlighted that the biblical foundation of marriage, once a sacred union, was being challenged by societal changes, emphasising the urgent need to uphold its original, God-given design as a cornerstone of faith and family life. Consequently, this research aimed to evaluate premarital counselling programmes in URCSA churches located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles, and to explore whether the expectations and concerns related to these programmes were supported by those Christian theological principles through an exploratory study. Brown (2024) noted that the Bible taught that Adam and Eve, as husband and wife, were created in God's image and were intended to reflect that image. Marriage was designed to model and demonstrate God's glory to all of creation. Therefore, it was essential to provide couples with guidance regarding the sanctity of marriage.

As part of this study, topics were identified from the literature for discussion with engaged couples before marriage, all of which are supported by Christian theological principles. These topics included (but were not limited to) reasons for marriage, marital expectations, communication, conflict resolution, finances, marriage roles and responsibilities, adultery or infidelity, and sexual intimacy were explored from a biblical context. According to Mailhot (2019), Genesis 2:18-24, New International Version (NIV), *"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So, the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.' That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh,"* was the foundational passage in the scriptures regarding marriage. God had created and instituted marriage for His unfallen creation, with the foundation of the understanding of marriage being that, in it, the husband and wife became one flesh. This Scripture had been regarded as foundational by the biblical authors, as reflected in Matthew

19:4–6 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate,” and Ephesians 5:28–32. “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.” Thus, the importance of marriage from a biblical perspective should be discussed with engaged couples planning to get married. As a practising Christian involved in premarital counselling, the researcher gained first-hand experience of the difficulties couples faced when adjusting to married life, as well as the importance of addressing marital issues that could lead to problems in their marriages. Also, it was noted that couples had not participated in premarital counselling before marriage, as no formal programme had been available. Consequently, the evaluation of premarital counselling programmes within URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in light of Christian theological principles, was conducted to provide greater insight and guidance regarding their effectiveness.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Christian marriage counselling. According to Tan (2008, p. 283), marital counselling was the “core approach” to family change. Furthermore, marital counselling had no single founder, but key figures and approaches in this area included Salvador Minuchin, the founder of the structural approach, and Jay Haley and the Milan group, who developed the strategic approach. This study employed the strategic approach, referred to as Jay Haley’s theory, as noted by Pilongo (2023). This approach focused on problem-solving and finding solutions within the premarital counselling program. According to Clarke (2023), Imago Therapy, also known as Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT), was a method developed by Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt in the late 1970s. It aimed to transform conflicts within relationships into opportunities for healing and growth. The therapy was inspired by the clinicians’ own experiences with divorce and their search for evidence-based support in understanding relationship

dynamics. This approach, according to Beukes (2013, p. 104), equipped engaged couples to navigate through marital challenges and ensured a healthy marriage. Imago therapy aimed to allow the couple the opportunity to create a dialogical dynamic where the couple grew and allowed each other to be different. Therefore, each engaged couple was unique, and consequently, the minister utilised the premarital counselling to assist and guide the engaged couple to discuss the marital relationship and find solutions. This approach to problem-solving and solution-finding was applied when evaluating the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes, as it combined practical problem-solving strategies with an understanding of the underlying structure of the marital relationship. By integrating Christian theological principles, the minister was able to assist couples in addressing specific issues, strengthening their relationship, and growing closer to each other and God. The Christian premarital counselling programme was therefore considered a component of practical theology, aimed at helping engaged couples in the church to avoid marital problems.

The core theory for this study was pastoral care, which was a sub-discipline within practical theology, a ministry of support to church members. Peña (2020) explained that practical theology is a useful and relevant discipline that provided professional skills for effective ministry, rather than just theological knowledge, to enhance ministering effectiveness. Pastoral care had always been important in the Christian community, as stated by Wainwright and Lindberg (2024), to meet the needs of all individuals based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, as reflected in Matthew 25:35 - 36, *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me”*, where Jesus was praised for his compassionate and caring nature. According to Hopler (2023), the meaning of pastoral care was the provision of essential services by a church leader, such as a pastor, to address the most pressing needs of individuals. Furthermore, Merton (2024) emphasised that pastoral care entailed the provision of support and guidance to help individuals in the community who were experiencing difficulties, focusing on healing, reconciliation, and sustaining through counselling and prayer. Minter (2023) emphasised that ministers needed to be actively involved in church pastoral care, as it was crucial to maintain their connection to the body of Christ and aid their church's growth in faith. Additionally, pastoral care is needed to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. In this context, the Christian premarital

counselling programme aimed to improve ministerial effectiveness towards engaged couples by preparing and guiding them for marriage based on Christian theological principles. According to Köstenberger (2003), biblical theology concerns the theology of the Bible and its writers. It reflects their belief in God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the revelation of God's will in human history through scripture. Biblical theology, in this regard, evaluated the premarital counselling programme by applying Christian theological principles that assisted both the minister and the engaged couple in making decisions consistent with Christian values. Furthermore, the use of biblical theology in the URCSA churches' premarital counselling programme, as considered in this research study, prepared couples for a Christian-based marriage. Biblical theology, therefore, involved the application of Christian theological principles. The inclusion of these principles was evaluated under the topics identified in the Christian premarital counselling programme to provide couples with meaningful guidance grounded in Christian values.

1.4 Key concepts

The key concepts for this study are detailed below:

Christian premarital counselling

Saroyan (2023) indicated that Christian premarital counselling was a type of counselling designed for engaged couples of the Christian faith who were planning their wedding. It focused on assisting these couples in laying a solid foundation for their marriage based on biblical principles and values. Additionally, Williams (2023b) stated that Christian premarital counselling was intended to prepare couples for marriage while keeping their Christian faith in mind, preparing them for the challenges and rewards of marriage.

Divorce

The word divorce, as stated by Emery (2013), was the legal dissolution of a married couple's marriage and the dissolution of their matrimonial bond. According to Noeder (2023), a divorce occurs when two married individuals decide to end their marriage or live separately.

Biblical foundation of marriage

According to Mailhot (2019), *Genesis 2:18-24*, “*The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’.* Now the Lord God had formed out of

the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So, the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.' That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh," was the foundational passage in Scripture, stating that God had created and officiated marriage for His unfallen creation, forming the basis of our understanding of marriage. Additionally, Ash (2024) emphasised the biblical view that marriage was a voluntary, sexual, and public social union between a man and a woman from different families, aimed at serving God.

Premarital counselling

Premarital counselling, according to Su (2020), referred to a form of therapy that assisted couples in defining goals for their relationship, moving forward in their relationship, and resolving obstacles before committing to marriage. Gupta (2023) defined premarital counselling as a form of couples therapy that assisted couples in preparing for marriage.

Church

The term 'church,' according to Fairchild (2019), was translated from the Greek term *ekklesia*, meaning 'an assembly' and 'to call out' or 'the called-out ones.' This concept was a place for religious activities and fellowship, representing unity, faith, and faithfulness to God. Accordingly, Williams (2018) stated that a church was a public worship facility commonly defined as a building since many people referred to a church as an organisation.

Cultural diversity

According to deBara (2023), the term 'cultural diversity' referred to a wide range of characteristics or groups, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, language, gender, age, disability, and socioeconomic status. Chilton (2022) defined cultural diversity as a concept that was widely recognised as a key component of multiculturalism.

Clergy

The word 'clergy,' according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2024), could be defined as the religious leaders whose job was to serve the needs of their religion and its members, which included priests, ministers, and rabbis. Additionally, Vocabulary.com (2024) defined the term 'clergy' in the Christian church as the complete class of religious officials, including priests, pastors, bishops, and beyond.

Culture

As defined by Lartey (2003, p. 31), culture was how a group of people created a unique way of living and gave their material and social experiences an 'expressive form.' The word 'culture,' according to McKelvie and Pappas (2022), meant the unique characteristics and knowledge of a specific group, including language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and the arts.

Perpetuity

According to Jacobson (2016), the word 'perpetuity' could be defined as usually applying to a transfer of rights or clauses that survived contract termination. Wyrsh (2023) referred to the term 'perpetuity' as a type of annuity that continued for an infinite number of years.

1.5 Preliminary literature review

According to Eghan (2021), the scripture did not mention the term premarital relationship, but as followers of Christ, it provided crucial principles that should have been applied to all aspects of life, including relationships before the marriage covenant. Biwul (2023, p. 174 - 175) stressed that ministers faced challenges in pastoral care and counselling related to marriage, with an increase in abuse, separation, and divorce in modern marriages, even in Christian ones, and couples who had previously received premarital counselling often faced difficulties. Adzonie and Dabone (2021, p. 10) argued that Christian married couples had a negative perception of the effectiveness of premarital counselling and believed that the church should have been more proactive in providing premarital counselling. This would have adequately prepared Christian marriages on a biblical foundation, and ministers in the church had to acknowledge the importance of Christian premarital counselling. Additionally, Williams (2023a) emphasised that Christian premarital counselling aimed to prepare

couples for marriage while keeping their Christian faith in mind, preparing them for the challenges and rewards of marriage. Furthermore, Waddle (2024) stressed three biblical foundations of marriage, laying the groundwork for an amazing relationship that could withstand the worst challenges. Firstly, a commitment to Jesus Christ was the firm foundation of marriage. Secondly, a commitment to sacrificial love and the importance of husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for them by presenting the church as radiant, holy, and blameless. Thirdly, a commitment to submissive love was not only for wives. While submission often provoked resistance in wives, as seen in Eve's first temptation in Eden, based on Adam's warnings from God in the book of Genesis. Seemingly, each of these three biblical foundations might have played an important role in counselling to build a marriage that would please God and be a lasting marriage through faithful submission to God and one another. Lane (2024) indicated that premarital counselling played an essential role in fostering oneness amongst couples. Premarital counselling helped prepare for marriage, as indicated in Proverbs 24:27: *"Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and then, build your house."* Murray (2006, p. 69) stressed that clergy were the most common providers of premarital counselling, although members of other professional groups also offered premarital counselling. Keeter (2016) believed that premarital counselling was a valuable opportunity to invest time and love into something that could potentially lead to a lifelong relationship. Engaged couples should have taken full advantage of it for their benefit, the benefit of the church, and, most importantly, for the glory of God. Additionally, Klassen (1981, pp. 32–40) emphasised that the church's history of involvement in counselling attested to its need for premarital counselling. He observed that the impetus for premarital counselling in the church appeared to be both sociological, given the large number of troubled marriages in society, and theological, given the Bible's high regard for the institution of marriage. Similarly, Fenton (2023) highlighted that cultural and religious differences often created challenges in relationships due to couples' unique values, beliefs, traditions, and expectations. Thus, the church's history underscored the need for Christian premarital counselling, particularly in addressing the sociological and theological factors contributing to troubled marriages and divorces.

1.6 Problem statement

According to Barlow (1999, p. 3), many churches lacked premarital counselling instruction, which highlighted the need for a new proactive model aimed at fostering strong marriages instead of mending broken ones. Additionally, Bricker (2023) emphasised that issues in marriage had become common over time. Therefore, marital problems negatively affected marriages and impacted families. Seager (2014, p. 1) indicated that it was unfortunate that the entry of sin into the world had ruined marriage, just as it had the rest of creation.

The divorce rates in South Africa have risen significantly in recent years. According to the South African Department of Statistics, Stats SA (2023), marriages had become less common, people were marrying later, and unmarried couples were increasingly choosing to live together rather than marry. Some statistics reflected those 106,499 marriages occurred in 2021, compared to 161,112 in 2012, with Gauteng accounting for 24.9% of civil marriages registered in 2021 and the Northern Cape making up the lowest at 3.0%. Furthermore, Stats SA explained that South African divorce data were divided into two categories, population and year of divorce. In 2021, black couples had the highest number of divorces, a pattern that had persisted throughout the preceding years (2012–2021). Additionally, according to Stats SA (2021, p. 6) of the 18,208 divorces issued in 2021, the black African population group received 50.4% (9,175), followed by whites 20.1%, (3,652), coloured with 17.6%, (3,202), Indian or Asian with 4.8%, (881), and mixed population groups 2.7%, (449). Therefore, divorces among the population in South Africa were common.

Okeyo Okello et al. (2020, p. 13374) indicated that amongst the issues at hand were the inadequacy or lack of Christian premarital counselling programmes, which undermined the Christian doctrine of marital perpetuity. Christian premarital counselling programmes could have significantly impacted Christian family stability. Brown (2022) emphasised that Solomon had said in Proverbs 11:14, *“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure,”* which implied that people with wisdom, knowledge, and walking in Christ should have been sought to assist in guiding the engaged couples. Marriage has been important, and couples should have tried to stay true to their marriage commitment, “till death do us part.” Green (2020) emphasised the importance of how churches handle premarital counselling. Some churches provided counselling sessions or premarital counselling, while others provided counselling through older couples. Therefore, there was

a need to evaluate the Christian premarital counselling programmes in the URCSA, in light of Christian theological principles, to determine their efficacy.

1.7 Main research questions

Was the premarital counselling programme in the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town effective in light of Christian theological principles?

1.8 Sub-questions

The following four sub-questions served as the foundation for evaluating and completing the research objectives:

- Were the current topics used in the URCSA church for Christian premarital counselling programmes relevant?
- What topics made a counselling programme effective?
- Could Christian premarital counselling serve as an intervention to mitigate against potential divorce?
- What Christian theological themes should have been present in a premarital Programme?

1.9 Aim and objectives

This research aimed to evaluate the premarital counselling in Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles for marriage.

The objectives of the study were:

- To determine if the current topics used in the URCSA church for Christian premarital counselling programmes were relevant.
- To determine what topics made a counselling programme effective.

- To determine if Christian premarital counselling could serve as an intervention to mitigate against potential divorce.

1.10 Research Methodology

1.10.1 Defining the Roadmap

Osmer's model of practical theology was applied to this research study. Smith (2020, p. 99–112) indicated that the model consisted of four core tasks, namely, descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. These tasks were discussed individually below with reference to the research study:

1.10.1.1 Descriptive-empirical task (What is going on?)

The researcher, a church member and former Christian premarital and marriage counsellor of the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA), identified the need for and the lack of guidance on marital expectations amongst couples.

1.10.1.2 Interpretive task (Why was this going on?)

The researcher identified that there was a lack of spiritual guidance for couples based on Christian theological principles, since couples often sought spiritual guidance and support as they prepared for marriage.

1.10.1.3 Normative task (What ought to be going on?)

The researcher identified that there was an absence of a deep commitment to biblical truth that determines God's will for engaged couples to build thriving, Christ-centred marriages within the church community.

1.10.1.4 Pragmatic task (How might we respond?)

The researcher identified the need for the evaluation of premarital counselling in URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles. An appropriate response to the current programmes was determined through the engagement with the literature review and the data collected through the empirical research.

1.11 Research design

This study was conducted using an exploratory research approach as defined by Denison (2023), who described exploratory research as a method without testing a specific hypothesis and gaining a broader understanding of the topic before confirming it. Exploratory research assisted the researcher in planning interviews with the minister and the two selected married couples of the respective URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. This enabled the researcher to learn more about the expectations and concerns related to their respective Christian premarital counselling programmes. Furthermore, the researcher sought the participants' opinions and views as part of evaluating the premarital counselling programmes. This involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the minister and two selected married couples of the respective URCSA churches. The reason for selecting this participant sample was because of the minister's experience and knowledge of providing Christian premarital counselling in their respective church. Furthermore, the married couples who participated in the premarital counselling programme offered insightful information that assisted the researcher in evaluating the effectiveness of the program. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample were discussed further in the research methods (section 1.12).

1.11.1 Research paradigm

The purpose of the study was to determine and evaluate the effectiveness of the premarital counselling within the URCSA churches and whether it was based on Christian theological principles. The main research question was to evaluate whether the current topics used in Christian premarital counselling programmes employed by ministers were effective; additionally, could the Christian premarital counselling serve as an intervention to mitigate against any potential divorce? Finally, were the ministers of the Christian premarital counselling programmes equipped with the necessary tools to assist engaged couples in overcoming and mitigating any obstacles in their marriage? This research study investigated real-world issues associated with premarital counselling through semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions.

1.11.2 Research approach

The researcher used qualitative research. As indicated by Creswell (2009, p. 23), qualitative research is a method used to understand the meaning that individuals or

groups attach to social or human issues, involving questions, data collection, inductive analysis, and the researcher's interpretation of the data. Semi-structured interviews with the URCSA ministers and two selected married couples were used to gather qualitative data for this study. A semi-structured interview, as stated by Doyle (2024), was an interview where the interviewer prepared a list of questions but did not necessarily ask all or discuss them in a specific order and may also have included a general list of topics to be addressed. Thus, a semi-structured interview maintained consistency with set questions while providing the flexibility to obtain the participants' viewpoints. However, this provided the researcher the opportunity to pose set questions while also probing deeper into the ministers' and married couples' perspectives and responses. Engaging with the ministers and the two selected married couples using a qualitative approach enabled direct contributions to the process of evaluating the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes.

A: Type of interview: Semi-structured interview with the minister:

The following questions were asked during the interview with the minister to evaluate the topics contained in their Christian premarital counselling programme in light of Christian theological principles:

- 1) Does the church have a premarital counselling programme?
- 2) How many topics does the programme have?
- 3) Why have these topics been chosen?
- 4) Are all these topics supported by the Christian theological principles?
- 5) What is the minister's opinion on the topics supported by the Christian theological principles?
- 6) What is the minister's opinion on the effectiveness of the programme for engaged couples?

B: Type of interview: Semi-structured interview with the married couple:

The following questions were asked during the interview with the two selected married couples to evaluate the topics contained in their Christian premarital counselling programme in light of Christian theological principles:

- 1) Which significant lessons from premarital counselling helped develop your marriage?

- 2) How did the counselling assist you in better understanding each other's expectations, handling of conflict, and ways to communicate?
- 3) What are the negative aspects of the premarital counselling program?
- 4) How did premarital counselling equip you for spiritual growth and foster unity in your marriage?
- 5) Despite the guidance provided, did you find it challenging to maintain shared faith practices like prayer or worship?

1.12 Research methods

1.12.1 Selection of participants

Convenience sampling was used for this study since it made participant engagement easier. Simkus (2023) indicated that convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that collects data from an easily accessible group of people, not because they are representative of the entire population, but because they are most easily accessible to the researcher. The sample selection for this research study was 12 ministers and 24 married couples of the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. The following inclusion criteria for the sampling selection were applied: The ministers were ordained, they had theological expertise and background, ministerial training, and were leading the church concerning pastoral care. The category of the minister participants was between 44 and 60 years old. The married couples were members of the URCSA. The category of the married couple participants was between 25 and 55 years old (but not limited to). Patino and Ferreira (2018) referred to inclusion criteria as the essential features of a target population that researchers used to answer questions. The following exclusion criteria for the sampling were applied: Scribes and laypersons of the congregation were excluded from the sampling selection, as they did not possess the required experience and qualifications. As the authority in the church, the minister has a good understanding of the congregation members and their needs. All ministers younger than 25 years old were excluded from this study, as they were considered not to have substantial experience in evaluate long-standing marital practices effectively. The URCSA churches were easily accessible, and the church ministers were involved with the engaged couples during premarital counselling. In addition, the unmarried couples from the URCSA churches, as well as married couples from other church denominations, were excluded from this research study.

The interviews were conducted either at the respective church with the minister and married couples or via electronic platforms such as Microsoft Teams to obtain information regarding their Christian premarital program. It made interaction easier, and it established relationships between the researcher, minister, and married couples. The responses to these questions from the various churches interviewed were assessed by Atlas.ti 25 to refine and ultimately to draw conclusions from the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes.

1.12.2 Data collection

Data collection was conducted as outlined by Paredes (2023), utilising a variety of techniques to gather accurate information that addressed the research questions. According to Doyle (2024), a semi-structured interview involves the interviewer preparing a list of questions, though not necessarily asking all of them or following a specific order; it may also include a general list of topics to be discussed. For this study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the respective minister and two selected married couples, either in person at the congregation or via electronic platforms such as Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. The information obtained was used to support and evaluate the Christian premarital counselling programmes implemented in the URCSA churches in light of Christian theological principles.

1.12.3 Data analysis

The researcher analysed the data obtained from semi-structured interviews. The analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti 25, which facilitated the visual representation of data through graphs and figures, accompanied by explanatory paragraphs detailing the findings.

a) Data collated from the interview:

- The data were analysed using graphical representations to illustrate the variation in the number of topics covered in the Christian premarital counselling programmes assessed by the researcher.
- The data were analysed using graphical representations to identify and highlight the common topics among the Christian premarital counselling programmes assessed by the researcher.

- Data were analysed through graphical representation to indicate how many of these topics were supported by or based on Christian theological principles.

1.13 Measures for trustworthiness

- **Credibility:** The sources of the literature referenced in this research study were obtained from reputable websites and established authors. Additionally, the data collected from the interviews, as discussed in Section 1.12, were sourced from ministers of established URCSA churches. This approach ensured that the evaluation of the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes was obtained from relevant and credible literature and data.
- **Transferability:** Existing Christian premarital counselling programmes from the literature and URCSA churches were compared alongside data obtained from semi-structured interviews to identify topics for inclusion in the Christian premarital counselling program. The findings of this research study could be utilised by URCSA churches to enhance their existing structured Christian premarital counselling programmes or by those identified as lacking structured Christian premarital counselling programmes. Therefore, the data and information gathered were transferable.
- **Dependability:** The researcher ensured that the Christian theological principles were interpreted and applied consistently through the evaluation of various Christian premarital counselling programmes. The data utilised was stored electronically with password protection.
- **Confirmability:** Given the exploratory research design and the qualitative approach employed in this study, the data were assessed with the necessary objectivity and neutrality.

1.14 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations were discussed by the researcher, as outlined by the University of South Africa (UNISA), in collaboration with the church minister and two selected married couples to obtain permission for conducting the research study. The UNISA participant information sheet and consent form were shared with the participants to establish trust, ensure their comfort, and protect their autonomy in deciding whether to participate. Barrow et al., (2022) indicated in the Belmont Report that three fundamental ethical principles for researchers are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. UNISA (2016, p. 4) states that the research ethics policy does not restrict or discourage researchers from conducting their work ethically and from safeguarding stakeholder rights. Permission was sought from the church's scribe and minister, as discussed in the "Research approach" section. Edwards (2018, p. 113) explained that individuals who provided their consent had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without needing to provide a reason, and they could expect the same level of care regardless of their decision. Therefore, the researcher informed participants that their involvement was voluntary and that there would be no penalties for choosing not to participate. According to UNISA (2021, p. 7), hard copies of data could be stored by the researcher for five to ten years for future research or academic purposes. All interview data were stored on a password-protected personal computer. The duration of data storage depended on the scope of the research project and any potential future academic use. For this study, there were no foreseeable risks of harm or adverse effects to the participants or the researcher.

1.15 Possible limitations and delimiters of the study

The scope of this study was confined to nine URCSA churches located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. This limitation was due to the researcher being a member of the denomination, which provided familiarity with its doctrine and facilitated easy access to participants. Furthermore, the researcher restricted the data collection to the church minister and two selected married couples from each respective church. Shah (2019) identified two types of biases: participant bias and researcher bias. Participant bias occurs when respondents provide answers based on what they perceive to be acceptable rather than expressing their genuine feelings, resulting in a skewed outcome. This bias can stem from the participants' subjective views during the interview, potentially influencing their agreement or disagreement with the proposed topics. While bias was anticipated during the interviews

with the ministers and the selected married couples who might have presented the programme as effective, the researcher remained objective throughout the study to uphold positive relationships with the participants. Additionally, the researcher prioritised professionalism and integrity in the information-gathering process.

1.16 Chapter Divisions

Chapter 1: The relevance and purpose of this study were to evaluate premarital counselling in URCSA churches located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in light of Christian theological principles. This evaluation aimed to assist and guide engaged couples as they prepared for marriage. Additionally, the chapter emphasised the importance of assessing the Christian premarital programme to identify topics that would be incorporated into the counselling programme.

Chapter 2: The literature review focused on specific Christian theological principles and topics that could be utilised in Christian premarital counselling programmes.

Chapter 3: This chapter focused on empirical research. Data collection and sampling strategies were employed in the investigation. The research was conducted through interviews and data analysis. The collected data were examined using various methods, including figures and charts.

Chapter 4: This section provided a detailed discussion on identifying the topics and evaluating the premarital counselling within the URCSA that can be utilised during counselling sessions, based on the data obtained.

Chapter 5: This chapter discussed the implementation and assessment of the counselling programme within the context of the URCSA church, with particular emphasis on the minister's role in leading premarital counselling sessions.

Chapter 6: This chapter provided the conclusions and recommendations based on the evaluation of the respective Christian premarital programmes of URCSA churches in light of Christian theological principles.

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

To achieve the aims and objectives of this research study, as detailed in Chapter 1, the researcher discussed key terminology in Chapter 2 to differentiate between the various terms used throughout the study. The distinctions between premarital counselling, Christian premarital counselling, and the church's role in facilitating a supportive environment for counselling were further explored. Additionally, the researcher outlined the beneficial impact of a Christian premarital counselling programme and its significance. Furthermore, a comparison of topics from various Christian premarital counselling programmes, both globally and locally, were provided, with key conclusions drawn.

2.1.1 Premarital counselling

Premarital counselling, according to Gupta (2023), equipped couples by preparing them for marriage through discussions on key issues ranging from finances to children, ensuring they shared a mutual understanding. Green (2015) stressed that couples vary in their approach to premarital counselling; some sought it willingly, others participated reluctantly, and some rejected it altogether. Furthermore, churches differed in their requirements, with some mandating formal counselling, while others provided minimal guidance or focussed solely on the ceremony. According to Piper (2018, p. 8), addressing key issues before marriage was significant, as neglecting to do so can create challenges that jeopardise the relationship. Moeti et al. (2024) noted that most churches required couples planning to marry to undergo premarital counselling based on Christian or theological principles. Although opinions on premarital counselling vary, it remained crucial for guiding couples into marriage. As Savra (2022) stated, premarital counselling was highly encouraged, as it could reduce the risk of divorce and foster a more fulfilling and understanding relationship. Therefore, addressing potential challenges and future conflicts in advance helped couples build a strong foundation for a lasting and harmonious marriage.

2.1.2 Christian premarital counselling

According to Pace (2023), Christian premarital counselling was similar to marital and family counselling; however, its key distinction lied in the incorporation of biblical teachings to prepare couples for marriage. Additionally, William (2023) emphasised that Christian

premarital counselling, a type of counselling created especially for this purpose, aimed to prepare engaged couples for the challenges and benefits of marriage while maintaining their Christian faith. Consequently, Leopold and Therapy (2025) highlighted that Christian premarital counselling was essential for fostering stronger bonds amongst couples, preparing them for a long and happy marriage, and assisted them in aligning their future union with God's will and purpose. According to Page (2018), Christian premarital counselling encompassed many topics typically covered in premarital counselling, emphasising the importance of "being Christlike," which involved unconditional love, loving one's neighbour as oneself, treating others as one would like to be treated, and extending grace and mercy. Brant (2025) emphasised that Christian premarital counselling, specifically designed, may vary depending on the facilitator of the sessions. However, certain elements were commonly included. Firstly, many sessions began with a prayer, followed by a shared reading of the Bible. Secondly, participants were introduced to one another and allowed to share their testimonies of Christian faith and their involvement in the church. Lastly, the discussion centred on their reasons for seeking counselling and the specific areas they wished to focus on.

2.1.3 Christian marriage

A Christian marriage, as described by Visser (2025), was established and functioned based on biblical principles. It was a union between one man and one woman, as stated in Genesis 2:24 *"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh"* and Matthew 19:4–5 *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'". Furthermore, biblical principles indicated that in a Christian marriage, there was no place for polygamy or same-sex unions, as marriage was a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. Brooks (2015) argued that Satan despised marriage, particularly Christian marriages, because they served as a powerful representation of Christ's relationship with the church as stated in Ephesians. 5:32–33, "This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband". By embodying the gospel through their union, believers testified to God's truth. For this reason, Satan sought to undermine and destroy Christian*

marriages, as doing so weakened their witness of Christ to the world. According to Burrell (2022), God established marriage from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, the first human beings, based on a covenant promise. Furthermore, a Christian marriage involved three key aspects: leaving one's family, uniting with one's spouse, and becoming one flesh. Harrington (2020) explained that Christian marriage served as a significant symbol of God, inviting believers to a deeper understanding of His nature and His relationship with humanity. Zhenglong (2024) emphasised that in Christian belief, marriage was a sacred covenant, not only a commitment between two people but also a relationship with God, reflecting love, loyalty, respect, and the cherishing of each other's souls. According to Lepine (2013), the valuable qualities of a Christian marriage were its unique purpose and love, which believers could not create on their own. These qualities were only possible through the transformative grace of God in their lives. When this transformation occurred, it became evident to the world, setting their relationships apart.

2.1.4 Pastoral care

Pastoral care, as defined by Edwards (2024), involved offering love and support to individuals during life's transitions, recognising the need for assistance from others in their walk with the Lord. In addition, Walker (2022) emphasised that God's people had to remember that pastoral care was indeed an eternal matter. God utilised pastoral care to create a lasting impact on the lives of devoted disciples of Christ. According to Kelcourse (2018, p. 1), the implementation of pastoral care involved a ministry practice that addressed the psychological and theological needs of individuals and faith communities. Hauerwas (2019) argued that pastoral care was not solely the responsibility of the ordained minister or pastor; rather, it was a collective effort involving the entire church, even though the responsibility for caring for one another often seemed to rest primarily on the clergy. Additionally, Malphurs (2025) emphasised that certain church ministries were better suited for providing pastoral care than the pastor, who might not have possessed gifts in this area. For instance, small group ministries offered direct pastoral care to members, while larger churches made it challenging for pastors to visit and care for every individual. Consequently, Nieuwhof (2025) highlighted that pastoral care served the congregation, but if a pastor was not attentive, it could lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Lartey (2003, p. 26) explained that pastoral care reflected a profound concern for what it meant to be human. Furthermore,

pastoral care pertained to the overall well-being of the individual, while counselling provided a means of support.

2.1.5 The church

According to Williams (2015), the church provided premarital counselling as a prerequisite for its members planning to marry, offering three key elements that could enhanced its support for engaged couples. Firstly, couples were encouraged to spend a significant amount of time with the pastor, a mentoring couple, or a church leader. Secondly, engaged couples were advised to interview married couples in the church about areas where they had witnessed the impact of God's hand in their marriages. Lastly, premarital counselling presented an excellent opportunity to increase Bible reading, both individually and as a couple. Furthermore, Jones (2024) argued that the church should provide premarital counselling to engaged couples so they could focus on a biblical understanding of marriage, avoid potential pitfalls, and acquire the tools necessary to strengthen their relationship. Marriott (2024) asserted that churches often overlooked the significance of marriage in promoting the well-being of their communities and congregations. He emphasised the need for churches to actively foster environments where the biblical importance of marriage was both celebrated and reinforced. Similarly, Robbins (2015) noted that it was common for churches to require couples to participate in premarital counselling before their wedding ceremony, recognising the decline in society's respect for the sanctity of marriage. Furthermore, Spencer (2022) highlighted the importance of churches encouraging couples to uphold their vows and emphasised that the church had a responsibility to provide ongoing support and guidance, particularly during the more challenging aspects of marriage.

2.1.6 Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity, as noted by Bandhan (2025), presented several challenges, including language barriers, differences in social norms, and varying expectations regarding marriage. Satow (2020) further emphasised that cultural diversity had been a source of stress for couples, as they might have differing rituals, traditions, and holiday observances. Additionally, disparities in perspectives on gender roles, family dynamics, parenting, and other significant issues could have exacerbated challenges within the relationship. Bandhan (2025) asserted that understanding cultural diversity in marriage could be both rewarding and challenging, as each culture possessed its unique traditions, principles, and beliefs,

creating a rich tapestry of experiences. Moreover, sharing lives with individuals from different cultures fostered an appreciation for their differences. Adams (2021) highlighted that while marriages characterised by cultural diversity faced challenges, Christ and the message of the Cross possessed the power to bridge these cultural divides. Moon (2024) emphasised that the biblical foundation for cultural diversity was rooted in Genesis 1:27, *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”*, which stated that humanity was created in God's image, thereby underscored the inherent worth of every individual. Consequently, Mahoney (2019) asserted that as Christians, we were united in Jesus Christ, irrespective of gender, race, or culture, rather than concentrating on societal differences. Therefore, embracing cultural diversity and engaging in these discussions could strengthen a couple's marriage. Qualls (2021) posited that valuing cultural diversity enriched a marriage. This approach also represented a generational commitment to bridging the racial divide, with ongoing dialogue in a marriage as a vital component of parental oversight while promoting diversity for the next generation.

From the above, it was evident that understanding the various factors to be considered was crucial, particularly the role of the church in conducting or implementing a Christian premarital counselling program.

2.2 Christian premarital counselling programme

According to Lee (2020), a Christian premarital counselling programme provided couples with the support they needed to build a strong and lasting marital relationship. Hollified (2021, p. 5) emphasised that biblical scriptures and examples should be incorporated into a high-quality Christian premarital counselling programme. Furthermore, Matsepe (2024, p. 74) noted that Christian premarital counselling programmes were designed to assist and guide engaged couples in establishing a biblical foundation and perspective for their marriage. Udofia et al. (2021, p. 8) highlighted that these counselling programmes for prospective couples were offered in various formats, including conferences, workshops, individual and couples counselling, online courses, and publications. Although not all clergy members possessed professional counselling training, most received training through their religious institutions. Flowers (2018, p. 1) emphasised that the premarital counselling programme was essential, as it fostered trust and confidence in the minister or counsellor, thereby enhancing couples' appreciation for future support in their marriage. Additionally, Kirkwood (2024) highlighted that the premarital counselling programme should address

topics such as sexuality, finances, marital responsibilities, spiritual guidance, and family background. Furthermore, it was vital to include prayers for the couples, with the belief that the premarital counselling programme would help them prepare for a lifetime of committed Christian marriage. Finnis (2025) indicated that Christian premarital counselling programmes equipped couples with the necessary skills, techniques, and resources to support their marriage. Moreover, these programmes also helped couples better understand and navigate potential challenges they might encounter.

The following section presented a comparison of various Christian premarital counselling programmes observed in three contexts: 1) globally, 2) within other denominations in South Africa, and 3) observations made in the URCSA churches located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, all in light of Christian theological principles.

2.3 Comparison of Christian premarital counselling programmes

This section aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the typical content of Christian premarital counselling programmes used globally, in comparison to those employed locally, in light of Christian theological principles. The local aspect was further examined concerning the content of Christian premarital counselling programmes utilised in other denominations in South Africa, as well as those used in the URCSA located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. Common topics from each section (outlined below) were identified to compile and present a list of topics deemed important as part of a premarital counselling programme, based on the literature review conducted.

2.3.1 Christian premarital counselling programmes used globally

It was observed that there were no significant differences between the topics presented in Christian premarital counselling programmes used globally and those used locally. Table 1 below provided a comparison of various Christian premarital counselling programmes utilised globally:

Author	Topics with biblical scripture
Ron Green [1]	1) Jesus is the centre of your life: Matt 22:37-39 and Rom 8: 31-32 2) Love with Jesus as the centre: 1 Cor 13: 1- 7 3) Problem solving 4) Roles and Expectations: 1 Peter 3: 1, 7 and 1 Peter 2:21 -24 5) Communication 6) Finances 7) Community with Jesus as the centre 8) Intimacy
Howard-John Wesley [2, pp. 4 - 45]	1) Introduction 2) The five biblical principles of Godly marriage: Gen 2:24 – 25, Eph 5:22 -23, Heb. 13:4, Eph 4:32, 1 Cor 13:5 3) The Love Bank: Gen 3:1- 6, 1 Cor 11:3, Joh 4:34, Luke 22:24 and 1 Tim 2: 12 – 14 4) Love Buster and The Seven Deadly Sins 5) Communication and Conflict: Amos 3:33, Pro 18:17, 1 Peter 3:8,9 6) Wrap-up and review
Bryan Stoudt (Stoudt, 2024)	1) Your spiritual foundation 2) Your families of origin 3) The meaning of marriage 4) Your spiritual intimacy 5) Your communication 6) Your conflict 7) Your view of money

	8) Your future 9) Your physical intimacy and sexual history 10) Your mission and service together
Angie Wright [3]	1) A- Two becoming one: Matthew 19:6 B- Love is spoken here: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 C- The freedom of forgiveness: Colossians 3:13 2) A-Christ at the centre of your marriage: Ephesians 5:25,28-30 B-Developing at Intentional Marriage: Philippians 4:19 and John 15:11 C-Finding the Sweet Spot in your Relationship: Genesis 2:24 3) A-Personality Differences: B-Differences between Men and Women C-Love languages: Genesis 2:24 4) A-Extended Family B-Communication C-Resolving Conflict 5) A-Emotional Intimacy B-Physical Intimacy C-Affair proofing your marriage

Table 1: Comparison of global Christian premarital counselling programmes

Furthermore, as indicated in Table 1 above, it could be further observed that some topics in the respective programmes referenced Christian theological principles (Green, 2020;

Wesley, 2019; Wright, 2003), while others did not reference any (Stoudt, 2024). Common topics identified among these programmes included the following:

- What is a Godly marriage
- Conflict resolution
- Communication
- Finances
- Sexual intimacy

2.3.2 Christian premarital counselling programmes used in other denominations

As discussed in section 2.3.1, there were no significant differences in the topics presented in the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes used locally (in other denominations) compared to those used globally. Table 2 below presented a comparison of various Christian premarital counselling programmes utilised locally across different denominations.

Denomination	Topics with biblical scriptures
Common Ground church, Rondebosch [4]	1) Communication 2) New families 3) Romance and Love Languages 4) Vision for your Marriage 5) God's design for marriage 6) Sex and Intimacy 7) Finance 8) Guest Panel discussion 9) Myths, desires and expectations 10) Dealing with Conflict 11) Dealing with the past

Catholic Engaged Encounter [5]	1) Financial management 2) Family planning and raising children 3) Intimate relationships and sexuality 4) Relationships with extended family 5) Maintaining friendships 6) Role of faith and religion in married life together
NewDay Church [6]	1) And do I understand my partner? 2) Handling finances? 3) Communicating about intimacy? 4) Handling Conflict? 5) Expectations? 6) Team? 7) Money?
Die Akker Christelike Church [7, pp. 1 - 73]	1) Why am I getting married? 2) Headship and Submission Genesis 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 5 3) Needs and Expectations 4) Communication and conflict resolution Luke 6: 37-42, Ephesians 4: 26-29, Proverbs 15:1 and 29:11 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 5) Appreciating our differences: 6) Finances, in-laws and Sex: Proverbs 5:18-19, Galatians 5:16, 1 Corinthians 7:5

Table 2: Comparison of local Christian premarital counselling programmes

From Table 2 above, it was evident that not all churches referenced Christian theological principles in their respective programmes (Die Akker Christelike Church, 2018, pp. 1–73). Specifically, the programmes of Common Ground Church, Rondebosch (2025), Catholic Engaged Encounter (2025), and NewDay Church (2025) lacked support from any Christian theological principles.

Common topics amongst the above respective programmes were identified and were as follows:

- Finances
- Sexual intimacy
- Family or In-laws
- Expectations

2.3.3 Christian premarital counselling programmes used in URCSA churches in the northern suburbs

Each URCSA church in the northern suburbs of Cape Town had implemented its own distinct Christian premarital counselling programme. None of these URCSA churches had adopted a generic Christian premarital counselling programme for use across all churches. Instead, the minister utilised a programme that was individually structured for each engaged couple, which was guided by Christian theological principles. The common topics identified from the data collected from the above respective programmes were as follows:

- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Finances

Moreover, a comprehensive evaluation of the data obtained from the Christian premarital programmes of the URCSA in the northern suburbs of Cape Town is presented in Chapter 4. The next section, presented a final list of common topics deemed important for a premarital counselling program, based on the literature review conducted in section 2.3.

2.4 Common topics and Christian theological principles for marriage

From section 2.3 above, the following common topics were extracted from various Christian premarital counselling programmes.

- Reason for marriage
- Marital expectations
- Marriage roles and responsibilities
- Effective communication
- Conflict resolution
- Marital unfaithfulness
- Finances
- Sexual intimacy

It was further observed that not all the common topics identified in the Christian premarital counselling programmes had been supported by Christian theological principles. A Christian premarital counselling framework was therefore expected to be grounded in theological principles that supported and informed each topic. Accordingly, the researcher had identified Christian theological principles corresponding to each of the commonly addressed topics, below, that included relevant biblical scriptures and their contextual interpretations.

2.4.1 Reason for marriage

Genesis 2:24 New International Version (NIV) "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh"

Piper (2018, p. 51 - 52) explained that the rationale for marriage was rooted in *Genesis 2:24, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh"*, which described marriage as a sacred relationship founded on commitments that endured as long as both partners lived. Furthermore, Chapman (2015, p. 1) noted that the question, the reason for marriage, was posed to couples, and many of their responses included companionship, intimacy, love, providing a home for their children, social acceptance, economic benefits, and security, each of which held significant importance. Additionally, Kislev (2022) indicated that while there were numerous reasons why individuals chose to marry, he emphasised the most common motivations: love, companionship, security, children, social norms, and religious beliefs. According to San Martino (2021), the reasons for marriage, whether influenced by parents, friends,

aspirations, or portrayals in television and film, did not always align with reality, potentially creating a gap between expectations and the actualities of daily life. Consequently, Wright (2003) argued that these motivations were unique to having a partner who would always love you unconditionally, support you during challenging times, and celebrate your successes. Werner (2018) referred to *Genesis 2:24*, “*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*”, as defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, the only form of marriage that aligned with God's revealed plan for humanity. Moreover, the purpose of marriage was to establish a sacred relationship in which a man and a woman became one flesh after leaving their parents.

As stated by Platt (2018), a man and a woman were united to become one flesh, and God's design for marriage was for both the husband and wife, as well as their children, to flourish. According to Cachila (2018), many couples overlooked the significance of marriage as described in *Genesis 2:24*, “*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*”, which highlighted the need for a comprehensive understanding of God's concept of marriage. He offered the following insights: Firstly, single men became fully independent of their parents after marriage, focusing on their relationship with their spouse and not returning to their parents. This shift in priority could lead to resentment or conflict if not properly managed. Secondly, a husband and wife had to prioritise each other in marriage, working toward unity in all aspects, including finances and responsibilities, by making decisions collaboratively despite their differences. This approach ensured a harmonious and interdependent marriage. Lastly, it was essential to prioritise one's relationship with one's spouse, even while raising children. Failing to do so might result parents exerting control over the relationship. Thus, the marital bond should be prioritised above other relationships and protected from manipulation, especially from those with ulterior motives.

2.4.2 Marital expectations

Ephesians 5:22–28 (NIV) “*Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle*

or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." According to Griego (2020), the biblical passage in question had often been misunderstood; however, it did not implied that husbands should rule over their wives or that women were inferior. Instead, it reflected a biblical theme of a hierarchy ordained by God since creation. Harrington (2020) emphasised that the Apostle Paul had provided valuable insights into Ephesians 5, a chapter that had become less relevant in contemporary culture. While it had remained a common reading at weddings and had occasionally been cited in discussions about marriage, its popularity had declined due to its portrayal of distinct roles within marriage, particularly the expectation of a wife's submission to her husband. Furthermore, Miller (2023) noted that *Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord"*, had remained a challenging verse for personal application. As Cole (2017) pointed out, the Apostle Paul had emphasised that a wife's submission to her husband was an essential aspect of obedience to the Lord. In this context, Chambers (2019, p. 51) asserted that a wife should respect and honour her husband with much respect and admiration, and that God had created a deficiency in respect within the husband that only the wife could fulfil. Even when a husband made mistakes or made unwise decisions, it remained crucial for the wife to maintain her respect. According to Willis (2020), entering marriage with certain expectations could be a significant source of stress, particularly when those expectations were unclear, unspoken, or unhealthy. Furthermore, Beall (2024) noted that expectations could become problematic if couples did not consistently recognised them, as they were often unconsciously shaped by past relationships and experiences, making them difficult to identify or articulate. Gardner (2008) asserted that God had not created a spouse to be a perfect partner who flawlessly fulfilled all desires and completed one's life; rather, a spouse was intended to be a lifelong companion who fostered closeness and sexual expression in a secure, undemanding environment. Angel (2024) reflected on Ephesians 5, highlighted that the passage had emphasised a marriage relationship grounded in respect and affection. Additionally, Chambers (2019, pp. 52–53) emphasised that, as articulated by the Apostle Paul in *Ephesians 5:21 – 28 "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with*

water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself”, he had primarily addressed husbands while also highlighted the importance of a godly relationship between spouses. Paul had advocated for mutual submission to the Lord and one another, despite some wives’ objections. Furthermore, it had been noted that Ephesians had instructed both spouses to first submit to God and then to each other. Consequently, Merkle (2019) argued that submission did not implied inherent inferiority, as women were equal in value and worth to men, both created in God's image. According to Savchuk (2023), the Apostle Paul had indicated that a husband must first submit to Christ’s headship to be the head of the family and a blessing, stating, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, *Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”*. Additionally, Rainey (2021) emphasised that a wife demonstrated respect and honour toward her husband by valuing his opinions, wisdom, character, and dedication, as well as by considering his needs and values. According to Cook (2018), the Apostle Paul's instruction for husbands to love their wives was not merely a command but also a directive for living as a child of God. This instruction served as a reminder to believers of their new life in Christ, teaching them how to submit to Him and illustrating His love for humanity.

2.4.3 Marriage roles and responsibilities

1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV) “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”

According to Kemerer (2024), clearly defined roles and responsibilities were essential in a marriage. This encompassed various aspects, including who was responsible for specific domestic tasks, what each spouse expected from the other, and how these duties were divided or assigned. White (2024) emphasised that Christian married couples often sought God's presence at the centre of their relationships, but may feel confused about their roles and how to nurture a partnership that is pleasing to both them and God. According to Poston (2009), God had assigned distinct roles to men and women during creation, with the man tasked with tending the garden, as stated in Genesis 2:18: *“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”* The woman had been created to assist him. Although the creation had been deemed good and roles had been

established before the Fall, subsequent punishments had complicated these roles. The Bible, as noted by Sochor (2007), affirmed equal rights for men and women. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,”* and in Acts 10:34, *“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism.’”* However, this equality did not imply that men and women could not have different roles. Additionally, Reyna (2024) emphasised in Galatians 3:28, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* that in Christ, there was no gender distinction, and the significance of being part of the Kingdom of God was not based on gender, but rather on the unity of both men and women in Christ. Therefore, discussing the responsibilities and roles of a husband and wife before marriage was considered beneficial to the relationship. Furthermore, Clark (2024) emphasised three biblical responsibilities from the New Testament that served as guidance for husbands. First, in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, it stated, *“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?”* A man's responsibility was to exercise loving authority and be accountable to God for the well-being of his family, rather than imposing a harsh authoritarian role. Secondly, he was to treat his wife with understanding and honour, as stated by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:7: *“Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”* This highlighted that wives were co-heirs to the grace of life. Lastly, the responsibility of raising children was an ongoing process, as outlined in Deuteronomy 6:7: *“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up,”* and in Deuteronomy 11:19: *“and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.”* These verses emphasised the duty of raising children following God's ways. Additionally, Savchuk (2023) noted that marriages often encountered conflicts due to unconscious responsibilities that did not align with Scripture, leading to disagreements and disputes.

2.4.4 Communication

James 1:19- 20 (NIV) “Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters! Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God’s righteous purpose.”

Communication, as noted by Welder (2017), was essential for understanding and happiness in any relationship, including marriage. Chapman (2003, p. 2) identified communication as one of the most important aspects of fostering a growing marriage. Dy (2021) highlighted that when couples communicated effectively with their spouses, it enhanced their treatment of one another. Through open communication, they were able to forgive, listen, and place God at the centre of their marriages, thereby glorifying Him. It was evident that effective communication with one’s spouse was vitally important. Chapman (2003, pp. 38–39) emphasised that the Apostle Paul had stated in 1 Corinthians 2:11, *“For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”* Every woman had asked, *‘Who... knows the thoughts of a man?’*. The answer was that only “the man’s spirit within him” did. Paul conveyed that only an individual was aware of their own thoughts, and they could not read another person’s mind. As indicated by Brown (2015), the Bible taught extensively about communication because God, the author, was a communicator. He had created the heavens and the earth through communication, commanding, “Let there be light,” as stated in Psalm 91:1–4, *“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Surely, he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”* As explained by Louw (1993, p. 106), true communication occurred when two individuals ascribed greater meaning to their existence. Deep communication also involved recognising marriage as a shared calling and commitment, fostering a sense of togetherness in the presence of God. Rodgers (2024) emphasised that a marriage could not thrive until both the husband and wife learned effective communication skills. Furthermore, Jesus had provided married couples with God’s design for healthy communication, which was essential for nurturing strong relationships. Christ, known as the Word of God, exemplified masterful communication. According to Chambers (2019, p. 42), spouses often possessed different communication styles, which frequently served as the root of relational

issues. Consequently, Powell (2024) noted that poor communication in marriage could lead to various misunderstandings. Perz (2011) observed that anger could transform any conversation into an argument, and approaching discussions with anger was unwise. Singh (2016) asserted that couples had to express their emotions in a healthy manner to sustain a robust marital relationship, ensuring that anger did not obstruct communication. Brown (2015) highlighted the importance of speaking edifying words, referencing *James 1:19:20* *"Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters! Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose."* He further emphasised the necessity of cultivating the art of listening to enhance one's ability to engage attentively and effectively with one's spouse. Additionally, Powell (2024) noted that *James 1:19 – 20* *"Remember this, my dearest brothers and sisters! Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose"*, emphasised the importance of two-way communication, urging individuals to listen to God, understand His message, and remove the barriers that hinder their comprehension of His teachings in the Bible. Welch (2022) identified the first three of six obstacles that may obstructed effective communication between husbands and wives. Firstly, it was crucial to eliminate distractions that might have obstructed communication, such as children's fussing, work projects, shopping lists, social media, and television. Secondly, selecting the appropriate time for discussions was essential, as individuals tended to be less attentive when they were not at their best physically or emotionally, making it more challenging to connect, listen, and engage meaningfully in conversation. Factors such as hunger, worry, anxiety, sadness, exhaustion, or illness could have impeded focus and meaningful dialogue. Lastly, differing speaking styles and evolving communication methods could have posed challenges; however, if these differences impacted a relationship, it was vital to approach conversations slowly and patiently, as initial misunderstandings might have arisen.

2.4.5 Conflict resolution

Amos 3:3 (NIV) "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so"?

Marriage was a beautiful and sacred bond, as noted by Faith (2023), but it was not immune to conflicts. Such conflicts could arise from differences in opinions, expectations, and communication styles. Onyekachi et al., (2020) asserted that conflicts were common in human interactions. Furthermore, no husband-and-wife relationship was free from conflicts

and confrontations. Issues such as a lack of sexual discipline, insufficient sexual fulfilment, financial difficulties and poor communication could lead to discord in a marital relationship. Downs (2003, p. 24) stated that conflict was a common aspect of every marriage, often resulting in feelings of anger, sadness and regret. However, with proper handling of marital issues, couples were able to effectively resolve conflicts. Additionally, Abrahams (2024) emphasised that resolving conflicts often resembled untangling a tightly knotted rope, therefore, the first step in learning how to resolve any conflict was to understand what conflict truly was. Recognising the true nature of conflict was essential for developing effective resolution strategies. Poor communication, according to Mbwire (2020, p. 66), was the primary cause of marital conflicts and the approach taken significantly influenced how a married couple resolved these issues. Henry (2023) underscored the message of Amos 3:3 regarding the importance of unity in relationships, advocating for open communication, active listening, compromise to prevent disagreements, conflicts, potential dissolution and ultimately fostering harmony. Furthermore, Dennis (2024) highlighted that Christians could have benefited from Romans 12:18, as stated by the Apostle Paul: *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone,”* emphasising the importance of patience, humility and forgiveness in contributing to conflict resolution and peace-making in a godly manner. Baba (2022, p. 142) pointed out that since Christians believed in God, they might have felt that conflicts should not arise. However, this perspective was misguided and could lead to significant difficulties for Christians, potentially exacerbating the situation. According to White and Blue (2024), the world in which people lived was not perfect, it was a fallen world, as human nature often led individuals to prioritise their own interests and impose their desires on others. Therefore, Dodds (2022) stated that the Bible provided extensive guidance on how to address conflicts and how individuals should treat one another, as outlined in Matthew 18:15–20 *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”*, a frequently referenced passage amongst

Christians regarding conflict resolution. Additionally, according to Pritt (2023), the most effective way to manage marital conflict was through self-examination. This concept was echoed in 2 Corinthians 13:5, which stated: *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you, unless, of course, you fail the test?”*

2.4.6 Marital unfaithfulness

Matthew 5:27 -28 (NIV) “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart’.”

According to White (2022), infidelity and adultery were prevalent and were severely condemned as sins in the Bible, with adultery mentioned forty-two times. Chukwuemeka (2023, p. 237) defined adultery as a consensual physical relationship between two individuals who were not married to each other, where at least one party was married to someone else with a living spouse. Additionally, MacBain (2002) described infidelity as a breach of a prior agreement between partners regarding their sexual or emotional exclusivity. However, perceptions of infidelity varied, some viewed it strictly as physical cheating, while others considered acts such as viewing pornography or engaging with erotic stimuli as violations of trust. According to White (2022), infidelity was not only a sin against one's spouse but also an attack on the sanctity of marriage. As stated in Matthew 5:27–28, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart’”* adultery, whether in heart or mind, was a sinful act, a violation of marriage, and an offense against God. Furthermore, Jesus Christ emphasised the importance of not only avoiding physical acts of infidelity but also controlling one's emotions and desires. The act of desiring someone other than one's spouse was considered equivalent to committing adultery in the heart. Lastly, infidelity was a sin against one's own body. Many individuals did not perceive sexual sin in this manner; however, the Bible clearly stated that it was indeed a sin against oneself. Additionally, Franca (2021, p. 2–7) highlighted that adultery, which had become a significant issue in society, spread more rapidly than many people could imagine and was nearly uncontrollable. Furthermore, as stated in the Old Testament, *“You shall not commit adultery,”* which God had declared as the seventh commandment, emphasised that adultery was a sin punishable by death. This underscored that God did not take adultery or any other

sin lightly, and people were to remember the penalties and punishments He had assigned to them. Moreover, Franca (2021, p. 7–8) used King David as an example of committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David had summoned her, they had engaged in an affair, and she had become pregnant. Additionally, Jackson (2024) emphasised that there was no parallel between the incident involving David and Bathsheba and modern-day adulterous affairs. While it was true that the king had committed adultery with Uriah's wife and had subsequently orchestrated her husband's murder, he had repented, as shown in 2 Samuel 12:13, *"Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."* and Psalms 32, *"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle, or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"*, his repentance was evident in his refusal to repeat his wrongful actions. Therefore, White (2022) emphasised that the root cause of these occurrences was sin, as humans had determined that fulfilling their own needs and desires was more important than obeying and glorifying God.

2.4.7 Finances

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV) "And God can bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work".

According to Njoku (2024), a biblical perspective on money in marriage could be extremely beneficial, as it placed a strong emphasis on communication, shared goals, and financial accountability. Furthermore, the Bible's timeless wisdom had endured for centuries because

it provided general guidelines that remained unaffected by societal changes and personal beliefs. Yesudasan (2025) indicated that, based on 2 Corinthians 9:8, *“And God can bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”*, believers were blessed and cared for as children of God. All their needs could be met through Christ, who was the Giver of all good things and the Owner of everything. Additionally, De Jong (2023, p. 1) emphasised the necessity of shifting our mindset from a “give me enough to survive” mentality to one that aligned with God’s word. This aligned with the apostle Paul’s assertion in 2 Corinthians 9:8, *“And God can bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”*, that God could provide us with all sufficiency in all things, without exception, so we might have an abundance for every good work. Beyer (2018) emphasised that the way we managed our finances and possessions was closely related to how we conducted our spiritual lives. Managing finances according to biblical stewardship principles drew us closer to Christ. This concept was effectively illustrated in the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14–30, *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ‘His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ‘The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more. ‘His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ‘Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So, I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ‘His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So, you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered*

seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest. 'So, take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have, will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' According to Tripp (2021), couples often disagreed on financial matters, a topic that was extensively addressed in the Bible. Money played a crucial role in daily life, conflicts over its management could arise, influencing every aspect of life in the world that God had entrusted to us. Olutunbi (2025) highlighted that unmanaged differences in couples' views and beliefs about money could harm a marriage, undermining the need for money to be used as a tool to strengthen the relationship and prevent chaos. Franck (2023) asserted that to be good stewards of what God had provided, we had to first cultivate a healthy relationship with money. Christians were called to be content with what they had at each stage of life, as instructed in Luke 14:28: *"Sit down and estimate the cost,"* and Matthew 6:24: *"You cannot serve God and money."* Hartkopf (2015, p. 5) emphasised the importance of being aware not only of one's own thoughts about money and its management but also of one's spouse's perspective on finances. Working in unity involved leveraging both partners' strengths. Therefore, Kovar (2023) stressed that finances played a crucial role in marriage, as they could either strengthen or weaken it. Furthermore, financial counselling was gaining popularity amongst couples seeking guidance on effective money management. Recognising the importance of financial management was the first step toward building a stable financial foundation.

2.4.8 Sexual intimacy

1 Corinthians 7:2 - 5 (NIV) "But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his wife, and each woman with her husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control".

Chapman (2003, p. 35) emphasised that God had designed marriage to be the most intimate of all human relationships. According to Warren (2020), sex was a significant topic of discussion, as human sexuality was inherently connected to spirituality. Furthermore, the Bible addressed this subject extensively and consistently emphasised that sexual intimacy between a husband and wife was an essential component of marriage. Hunt (2023) stressed the importance of avoiding sinful actions that could separate individuals from God and from one another. God had commanded spouses to fulfil each other's need for sexual intimacy, as stated by the Apostle Paul in *1 Corinthians 7:2–5*, *“But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his wife, and each woman with her husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”*. Additionally, Dunham (2020) explained that misinterpretations of *1 Corinthians 7:2–5*, *“ But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his wife, and each woman with her husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”*, had led to the belief that husbands possessed unrestricted rights to sex within marriage. This notion contradicted God's design for sex, which emphasised mutual respect over ownership. Furthermore, Carson (2019) highlighted that the Apostle Paul had focused on the concept of deprivation when discussing sexual frequency in marriage, shifting the emphasis from personal desire to the needs of one's spouse. While couples often based intimacy on individual preferences, Scripture redirects attention toward honouring God and fulfilling one's spouse. Therefore, Wilson (2014, p. 7) noted that sex was designed by God as a spiritual bond that united two lives as one in marriage. Moreover, marriage involved learning to cultivate intimacy and connection, where simple gestures like a hug or kiss could ignite love at the right moment. According to Carpenter (2019), intimacy within marriage was a beautiful and special way for spouses to share themselves

completely. Furthermore, marital intimacy extended beyond the physical realm, serving to strengthen love, devotion and spiritual connection. True marital intimacy prioritised mutual joy and fulfilment over self-centred desires, fostering a deeper bond. Therefore, Taylor (2017) argued that intimacy in marriage required vulnerability, as it involved openly sharing emotions and experiences. Encouraging open discussions, including those about the sexual relationship, fostered a deeper connection and understanding between spouses. According to Kimberling (2025), true intimacy in marriage transcended expectations, necessitating a profound emotional, physical, mental and spiritual connection. The Book of Genesis described Adam and Eve as naked and unashamed complete trust and openness, where they freely expressed their desires, feelings, and needs without fear or barriers.

2.5 Conclusion

From the literature review conducted, it was observed that various factors had to be considered, including the role of the church in conducting or implementing a Christian premarital counselling programme. Christian premarital counselling programmes were designed to provide couples with guidance and support for their future marriage. A key distinction that separated Christian premarital counselling from other counselling programmes was the incorporation of Christian theological principles. Christian premarital counselling programmes were compared both globally and locally. It was observed that not all topics covered in these premarital counselling programmes were supported by Christian theological principles. Furthermore, it was observed within the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town that some ministers had implemented counselling sessions supported with Christian theological principles. Additionally, it was noted that no formal programmes existed across the URCSA church in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

In conclusion, common topics were extracted from various Christian premarital counselling programmes as detailed in section 2.4. These topics, with respective supportive Christian theological principles, will be used as a basis against which the URCSA church's Christian premarital counselling programmes will be evaluated in Chapter 4.

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlined the research methodology and design employed in the study. It also adopted a qualitative research approach and provided details regarding the sampling method, target population, data collection and analysis procedures. These procedures focused on collecting empirical data through a semi-structured interview method to evaluate how the programme prepared engaged couples for marriage in light of Christian theological principles. Furthermore, the chapter presented Osmer's four core tasks of practical theology: descriptive-empirical task, interpretive task, normative task and pragmatic task, which served as a roadmap for the study. Additionally, the chapter addressed the ethical considerations that emerged during the research process, ensuring the study was conducted with integrity and that the required confidentiality protocols were followed.

3.2 The Roadmap

3.2.1 Osmer's four tasks for practical theology

This research study aimed to evaluate Christian premarital counselling in URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles. To achieve this, the study applied Osmer's four core tasks of practical theology as a guiding framework, enabling churches to address the everyday challenges of premarital counselling from a Christian theological perspective. According to Wellis (2015), Osmer's practical theology comprised four core tasks that were interconnected in a hermeneutic circle and were approached in varying sequences by different theologians. Furthermore, Smith (2020, p. 100 – 110) pointed out that these four core tasks, as Osmer had delineated, included descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks (refer to Figure 1 below). Additionally, Osmer (2008, p. 4) introduced four questions that constituted a framework for practical theological interpretation. These questions guided the research and the process of answering key aspects of the situation: (1) What was going on? (2) Why was this going on? (3) What ought to have been going on? and (4) How might we have responded? A semi-structured interview, guided by an interview schedule, was conducted with URCSA ministers (Appendix C) and two selected married couples from the respective church (Appendix D). These interviews assisted the researcher in applying the practical theological tasks.

Therefore, the following four sub-questions were used as the foundation for evaluating and achieving the research objectives:

- Were the current topics used in the URCSA church for Christian premarital counselling programmes relevant?
- What topics made a counselling programme effective?
- Could Christian premarital counselling serve as an intervention to mitigate against potential divorce?
- What Christian theological themes should have been present in a premarital programme?

An outline of these four core tasks and their implications was discussed below:

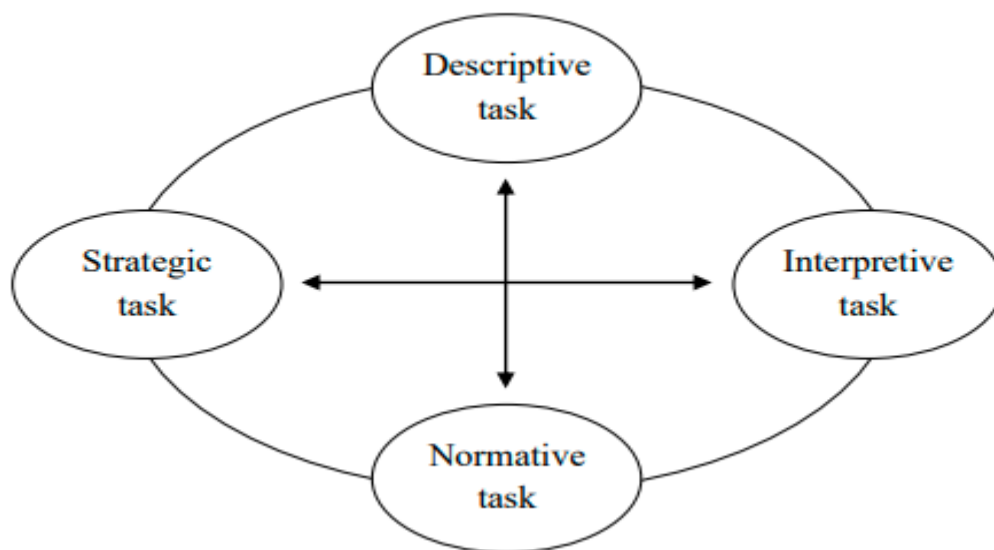


Figure 1: Smith (2020, p. 101) Relationship amongst the four tasks

3.2.1.1 Descriptive-empirical task: Priestly listening - (What was going on?)

According to Osmer (2008, p. 33), congregational leaders gathered information about situations to answer the question, 'What is going on?' a question that formed the core of the descriptive-empirical task for those engaged in practical ministry. This phase of the research aimed to evaluate the current state of Christian premarital counselling within URCSA churches. A qualitative research approach was proposed, employing semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide (Annexures C and D). Osmer (2008, p. 24)

described this process of gathering empirical data through attentive engagement as 'priestly listening.' This process aimed to listen closely to participants' experiences in preparation for evaluating the Christian premarital counselling programmes in light of Christian theological principles. These interviews were conducted with participants from nine URCSA churches, including two selected married couples from each church who had previously participated in Christian premarital counselling. The analysis of the responses to these respective interview guides is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2.1.2 Interpretive task: Sagely wisdom - (Why is this going on?)

According to Osmer (2008, p. 4), the interpretive task involved the use of both art and science to explain the reasons behind the dynamics and patterns that occurred. The focus of this phase of the study was to examine whether the Christian premarital counselling practices in URCSA churches had been structured to address marital issues using Christian theological principles grounded in Scripture, thereby supporting engaged couples in their marital preparation. To accomplish this, the researcher aimed to obtain empirical data by interviewing URCSA ministers and two selected married couples from each respective church. The interpretive task was designed to explore potential reasons for the emergence of certain patterns and dynamics within the nine selected URCSA churches. It further aimed to investigate how such practices may have influenced marriage preparation and whether they appeared to align with biblically based Christian theological principles. The researcher intended to use the collected data to identify possible underlying causes, ultimately laying a foundation for theological reflection. The analysis of the influential factors for marriage preparation is further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2.1.3 Normative task: Prophetic discernment - (What ought to be going on?)

The normative task, as described by Osmer (2008, p. 4), which asked, "What ought to be going on?", involved learning from best practices and applying theological principles to specific ministry contexts. In this research study, the normative task aimed to explore how Christian premarital counselling programmes in URCSA churches ought to have functioned by engaging with biblical truth, Christian theological principles and relevant literature, in anticipation of insights that would later be gained from the empirical investigation. In essence, the normative task, rooted in prophetic discernment, sought to establish a theological framework to guide premarital counselling within the URCSA context. The

learning from best practices through the literature review, as conducted in Chapter 2, guided the content of Christian premarital counselling programmes.

3.2.1.4 Pragmatic task: Servant leadership – (How might we respond?)

According to Osmer (2008, p. 4), the pragmatic task identified action plans that could positively impact situations and when implemented, initiate reflective discussion. In this research study, the pragmatic task was intended to encourage each URCSA church to consider how best to address topics in premarital counselling while adhering to Christian theological principles. It also aimed to gather information from participants on how premarital counselling practices aligned with these principles. The literature, together with insights expected from the forthcoming empirical research, was anticipated to inform an appropriate response to current practices and to guide recommendations for improving premarital counselling. This task aimed to explore how URCSA ministers prepared engaged couples for marriage through theologically grounded approaches.

Drawing on the findings outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, Chapter 6 presented conclusions and recommendations that were aimed at improving the Christian premarital counselling programmes for engaged couples.

3.3 Research design

This study employed the exploratory research approach defined by Denison (2023), who described it as a method for gaining a broader understanding of a subject without testing a specific hypothesis. Thus, a qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, as the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with ministers of the URCSA and two selected married couples of the respective church. The exploratory nature of the research aimed to assist the researcher in conducting these semi-structured interviews. The reason for selecting this participant sample stems from the ministers' extensive experience and knowledge in providing Christian premarital counselling. Furthermore, the study aimed to gather the opinions and views of URCSA ministers and the two selected married couples to evaluate these respective Christian premarital counselling programmes against the topics identified in Chapter 2. In alignment with the intended research design, it was anticipated that feedback from married couples who had participated in Christian premarital counselling would provide valuable insights for evaluating the programme's effectiveness. The study aimed to investigate whether topics such as reasons for marriage, communication, conflict

resolution, financial management and sexual intimacy had been consistently addressed within Christian premarital counselling sessions based on Christian theological principles. Moreover, it was expected that participants' responses might have underscored the perceived significance of Christian premarital counselling before marriage. The evaluation of the data is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.4 Population and sampling

3.4.1 Population

According to Kumar (2024), a population referred to the entire group of people or elements from which a researcher wanted to draw conclusions. The ministers of the respective URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, along with two selected married couples from the respective churches, were selected to participate in the research study.

3.4.2 Sampling method

Alex (2024) explained that convenience sampling, also referred to as opportunity or availability sampling, involved selecting participants based on their accessibility. Convenience sampling was employed in this study due to the researcher's membership in the URCSA denomination and residence in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, which facilitated access to participants. This increased accessibility to URCSA ministers and two selected couples from the respective churches in the northern suburbs, thereby promoting participation.

Furthermore, the researcher had planned to interview twelve URCSA ministers from the northern suburbs of Cape Town. Three of the identified URCSA churches were vacant and were served by tentmakers. According to Siemens (2025), tentmakers were Christians engaged in missions who supported themselves through secular employment while also participating in evangelism. They worked in various professional fields while ministering at minimal or no expense to the church. Therefore, the tentmakers did not comply with the inclusion criteria for ministers (as described in this research study); hence, the total number of URCSA churches that formed part of this research study was reduced to nine. Additionally, one of the ministers served as a consultant for four of the nine identified URCSA churches. However, the consultant was an ordained minister and complied with the inclusion criteria (as described in this research study).

3.4.3 Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria, according to Patino and Ferreira (2018), were key elements of the target population, such as demographic, clinical and geographic characteristics, used by researchers to answer research questions. As indicated, ministers and married couples from the URCSA churches were selected for this study. The ministers were chosen as they were ordained and had theological expertise and a background in ministerial training for married couples. Additionally, the respective ministers led the churches and were respected for providing pastoral care. The age category for the minister participants was between 44 and 60 years.

The two selected married couples who participated in the study were members of their respective URCSA churches. All engaged couples planning to marry within the URCSA church were required to attend premarital counselling before their wedding. Consequently, it was challenging to find married couples who had not undergone premarital counselling through the church. The age range for the married couple participants was between 25 and 55 years. As a result, only the responses from married couples who had undergone premarital counselling within their respective URCSA churches were evaluated for this research study.

3.4.4 Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria, as stated by Gross (2023), included other issue features that were either known or strongly anticipated to influence the results. Scribes and laypersons from the respective URCSA church were excluded from the sampling since they did not possess the required experience and qualifications. Additionally, all ministers under the age of 25 were excluded from the research study, as they were considered not to have had substantial expertise to evaluate long-standing marital practices effectively. Furthermore, unmarried couples from the respective URCSA church and married couples from other denominations were also excluded from this research study.

3.5 Research approach

The researcher employed a qualitative research approach, involving participants and respondents. As indicated by Creswell (2009, p. 22), qualitative research was a method used to understand the meaning of individuals or groups attached to social or human issues. It involved posing questions, collecting data, conducting inductive analysis and interpreting

the data. In the context of this research, a qualitative approach was conducted through semi-structured interviews with URCSA ministers. Engaging with the ministers using a qualitative approach allowed for direct contributions to the evaluation of the Christian premarital counselling programme.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to Salomão (2023), a semi-structured interview was a qualitative research approach that merged structured and unstructured interviews. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to prepare a list of questions to direct the dialogue with the participants, allowing adaptability for further questions centred on the participants' responses. It was planned for the interviews to be conducted at the minister's place of comfort. Ministers who participated in in-person interviews were scheduled for approximately an hour and a half each. These interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, as the selected URCSA ministers were primarily Afrikaans-speaking. The researcher had to translate all interview guide answers into English. No recordings were made; instead, written notes were taken by the researcher while the minister completed the interview guide (Appendix B) during the interviews for data collection. Additionally, certain ministers were unable to attend the in-person interview due to other commitments, including meetings and church duties. Consequently, the interview was conducted in written format, with ministers responding to the interview guide questions and sending the completed responses to the researcher via email. This written interview was conducted at their convenience. These interviews with the ministers aimed to gain insight into how URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town conducted their respective Christian premarital counselling programmes in light of Christian theological principles. Additionally, it was observed that the two selected married couples from the respective URCSA churches had preferred a written interview over an in-person interview due to personal reasons. The interview guide, which had been emailed to the selected married couples (Appendix C), was completed entirely in English and returned to the researcher. These questions aimed to determine whether the Christian premarital counselling programme had been adequate for marriage.

The purpose of the questions directed at the respective URCSA ministers were to obtain detailed information about the Christian premarital counselling programmes offered at the respective churches.

- 1) How many topics does the programme have?
- 2) Why have these topics been chosen?
- 3) Are all these topics supported by Christian theological principles?
- 4) What is the minister's opinion on the topics supported by Christian theological principles?
- 5) What is the effectiveness of the programme for engaged couples?

Furthermore, the following questions were directed to two selected married couples to evaluate the topics offered in their respective URCSA Christian premarital counselling programme in light of Christian theological principles.

- 1) Which significant lessons from premarital counselling helped develop your marriage?
- 2) How did the counselling assist you in better understanding each other's expectations, handling conflict, and ways to communicate?
- 3) What were the negative aspects of the premarital counselling programme?
- 4) How did premarital counselling equip you for spiritual growth and foster unity in your marriage?
- 5) Despite the guidance provided, have you found it challenging to maintain shared faith practices like prayer or worship?

3.5.2 Data collection

Data collection, according to Kabir (2016, p. 202), involves systematic gathering and measurement of variables to answer research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with consent obtained from the minister and the two selected married couples from their respective URCSA churches, using the interview guides (Appendices B and C), the consent forms (Appendices D and E) and the participant information sheet (Appendices F and G), were outlined, clarified and discussed with the ministers and married couples before data collection.

Moreover, some ministers were interviewed in person by the researcher to complete the interview guide. The ministers who completed the interview guide via email participated in a written interview, during which the researcher sent the questions through the university email account and requested responses in the body of the email. Furthermore, the researcher

contacted the married couples telephonically after obtaining permission from the URCSA minister. During these calls with married couples, the researcher explained the purpose of the telephone contact and sought consent to participate in the interview. Additionally, most of the married couples preferred to take part in written interviews scheduled at their convenience, mainly due to work-related and personal commitments. To accommodate this preference, the researcher opted for a flexible and accessible method of communication. The researcher utilised the official university email account to distribute the interview guide to the married couples who participated.

3.5.3 Data analysis

The data analysis for this research study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with URCSA ministers and married couples from the respective church. According to Richmond (2006, p. 13), data analysis involved using data or information to support the objectives, strategies and activities of a programme. The collected data, including handwritten notes and email responses from the interviews, were transcribed into Microsoft Word and stored as transcripts on the researcher's computer. These transcripts were subsequently uploaded to Atlas.ti 25 on a password-protected computer.

The data enabled the researcher to compare the Christian premarital counselling programmes to the topics presented to married couples, supported by Christian theological principles, thereby facilitating analysis through Atlas.ti 25. To ensure participant confidentiality, their names were replaced with participant identifiers rather than denominational details or the married couples' names. Moreover, the participants' responses to the interview guide were uploaded to Atlas.ti 25. Data analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti 25 to visually represent the findings through graphs and figures.

Soretto (2020) explained the following regarding the importance of using Atlas.ti:

The software Atlas.ti offers a potential method for data analysis by eliminating manual tasks, storing every relevant detail in one location, and offering data management security. Researchers can investigate advanced methods and spend more time on data analysis as a result. The software does not automatically analyse data; instead, the researcher must continue to exercise critical analysis throughout the study.

The data that was analysed from the results obtained from the participants (ministers and married couples) is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting the study with the participants. The researcher followed the Policy of Research Ethics of the University of South (2016, p.1 - 32) when conducting the study that the participants would be equitably treated. Additionally, the researcher aimed to maintain professionalism and integrity when obtaining information from the participants. The informed consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were discussed in detail below regarding how this has guided the researcher.

3.6.1 Informed consent

The researcher was guided by section 3.3 of the ethics policy regarding informed consent, which is stated as follows:

Consent should be provided by participants in writing, preferably with their signature. In response, they ought to get written materials that thoroughly explain the research, including possible risks.

The researcher utilised the consent forms (Appendices D and E) throughout the study's phases with the URCSA minister and the two selected married couples, seeking their consent to participate in this study to maintain integrity and confidentiality. According to Israel and Hay (2011, p. 23), informed consent was a process where the researcher provided information sheets to potential participants, explaining the study's nature, and obtaining their voluntary consent, which was documented and signed by the participant. The researcher informed the participants about the nature of the study for their participation, and that the participants granted their consent to the researcher to conduct the study with the participants.

3.6.2 Confidentiality anonymity

The researcher was guided by the ethical policy as outlined in Research Ethics 3.6.2 (b):

The participants' right to confidentiality, privacy and anonymity became further important in such cases because they were unclear of the actual objectives or goals for which they were providing information.

The researcher assured the participants that all information provided would be dealt with in confidentiality and anonymity, meaning that all personal information, such as contact details, the name of the congregation, email address and names of participants, would be kept

private and nobody would have access to the data besides the researcher and supervisor. Additionally, to protect participants' details, their names had been assigned with participant identifiers rather than using denomination details or the names of married couples. This measure was part of ensuring confidentiality and safeguarding true identities throughout the data analysis. Therefore, each of the nine churches had been assigned a participant number (1 – 9). Similarly, every married couple had received a participant number corresponding to their respective church (1.1 – 9.1). Tables 3 and 4 below provide a summary of the participant identifiers for the URCSA ministers and married couples.

Participant identifier	Gender	Role	Church location	Additional notes
Participant 1	Male	URCSA minister	Church 1	-
Participant 2	Male	URCSA minister	Church 2	-
Participant 3	Female	URCSA minister	Church 3	-
Participant 4	Male	URCSA minister	Church 4	-
Participant 5	Male	URCSA minister	Church 5	-
Participant 6 – 9	Female	URCSA minister (Consulent)	Church 6	Minister is a consulent for four of the nine identified URCSA churches

Table 3: Summary of the participant identifiers: URCSA minister

Note: URCSA minister participants were between 44 and 60 years old.

Participant identifier	Role	Church location	Marital status
Participant 1.1	Married couple	Church 1	Married
Participant 1.2	Married couple	Church 1	Married
Participant 2.1	Married couple	Church 2	Married
Participant 2.2	Married couple	Church 2	Married
Participant 3.1	Married couple	Church 3	Married
Participant 3.2	Married couple	Church 3	Married
Participant 4.1	Married couple	Church 4	Married
Participant 4.2	Married couple	Church 4	Married
Participant 5.1	Married couple	Church 5	Married
Participant 5.2	Married couple	Church 5	Married
Participant 6.1	Married couple	Church 6	Married
Participant 6.2	Married couple	Church 6	Married
Participant 7.1	Married couple	Church 7	Married
Participant 7.2	Married couple	Church 7	Married
Participant 8.1	Married couple	Church 8	Married
Participant 8.2	Married couple	Church 8	Married
Participant 9.1	Married couple	Church 9	Married
Participant 9.2	Married couple	Church 9	Married

Table 4: Summary of the participant identifiers: URCSA married couple

Note: Married couple participants were between 25 and 55 years old.

3.7 Conclusion

With reference to the sections discussed above, the framework as displayed formed the basis of the study's data collection. By utilising a qualitative methodology and incorporating Osmer's practical theological tasks, the study's research structure supports the research investigation and evaluation of the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes offered by the churches. Semi-structured interviews with ministers and married couples facilitated the collection of significant empirical data, of which a summary was provided, including how the identifiers were assigned in the research study, which will enable the data analysis in Chapter 4. Ethical considerations were addressed throughout, ensuring the validity and integrity of the research process. The next chapter will outline the presentation of the empirical findings and the detailed analysis of the data obtained.

4. CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from data collected through semi-structured interviews with nine ministers from the URCSA church and eighteen married couples from their respective churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. A summary of the research observations based on data gathered from both ministers and married couples is provided, offering valuable insights into the Christian premarital counselling programmes conducted by URCSA church ministers. Interview guides for the ministers (see Appendix B) and married couples (see Appendix C) were utilised to facilitate and support the interview process. Employing a qualitative research approach, the primary objective was to evaluate the Christian premarital counselling programme in light of Christian theological principles as practised in the respective churches. The researcher used Atlas.ti 25 as a software tool for processing the collected data and conducting in-depth analysis. Additionally, a brief background and description of the use of Atlas.ti 25 was provided, along with an explanation of how the software organised the findings into codes, themes, and quotations that emerged from the data.

4.2 Research observations from URCSA ministers

The research observations were derived from the collected data aimed to evaluate the practical implementation of Christian premarital counselling programmes at URCSA churches, in light of Christian theological principles. A detailed analysis of the data will be presented in Section 4.3. The researcher gained valuable insights into the practical application of the Christian premarital counselling programmes within the specific church context. The following observations were made based on the data collected from the participants:

- Each minister offered their own Christian premarital counselling programme, which covered various topics for engaged couples.
- None of the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs utilised a generic Christian premarital counselling programme as a common framework across their churches.

- Some ministers provided Christian premarital counselling that was specially tailored to the unique needs of each engaged couple, utilising selected topics.
- Some topics in Christian premarital counselling programmes were not supported by Christian theological principles.
- Some Christian premarital counselling programmes were offered, with the topics organised into sessions that lacked supportive specific Christian theological principles.
- Several ministers addressed general themes related to marriage, without identifying specific topics or supportive Christian theological principles.

4.3 Data analysis using Atlas.ti 25

According to Herbst et al. (2024, p. 3), Atlas.ti was developed by Thomas Muhr in the 1980s at the Technical University of Berlin as a tool to facilitate the organisation, coding and analysis of substantial research data and large volumes of qualitative textual information. For this research study, and in line with the purpose, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, using a qualitative approach involving nine URCSA ministers and eighteen married couples to evaluate the Christian premarital counselling programmes in the respective URCSA churches in light of Christian theological principles. The interview guide questions, which were discussed with and answered by the URCSA ministers and married couples from the respective churches, were typed into Microsoft Word documents and saved as transcripts. In this context, the transcripts were marked with participant numbers (1–9) for the URCSA ministers, and numbers (1.1–9.1) for the married couples linked to the respective URCSA churches, for ease of reference of the analysed data and also to keep their identities private (i.e. Participants 1.1 and 1.2 were the married couples of the respective URCSA church minister, Participant 1. Similarly, Participants 2.1 and 2.2 were the married couples of the respective URCSA church minister, Participant 2. These transcripts were then imported into Atlas.ti 25 for analysis, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 below. Atlas.ti 25 has been found instrumental in ensuring accuracy and enabling a

comprehensive evaluation of the data, allowing for exploring emerging relationships and themes. As explained by Ñañez-Silva et al. (2024, p. 3), the software tool Atlas.ti streamlines the processing and interpretation of qualitative data by enabling researchers to identify links, themes, and patterns within large data sets. Following this, the software facilitated the efficient coding of the semi-structured interview transcripts in this study, provided structuring tools and supported a thorough and clear evaluation of the evolving data, ensuring that all aspects of the study were assessed.

Show documents in group Interview with URCSA ministers				
ID	Name ^	Media Type	Location	Groups
 D 1	Participant 1	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 2	Participant 2	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 3	Participant 3	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 4	Participant 4	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 5	Participant 5	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 6	Participant 6	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 7	Participant 7	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 8	Participant 8	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]
 D 9	Participant 9	Text	Library	[Interview with URCSA ministers]

Figure 2: Participant numbers in Atlas.ti 25 represented URCSA ministers.

Show documents in group Interview with married couple				
ID	Name ^	Media Type	Location	Groups
 D 1	Participant 1.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 2	Participant 1.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 3	Participant 2.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 4	Participant 2.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 5	Participant 3.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 6	Participant 3.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 7	Participant 4.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 8	Participant 4.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 9	Participant 5.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
 D 10	Participant 5.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]

D 11	Participant 6.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 12	Participant 6.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 13	Participant 7.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 14	Participant 7.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 15	Participant 8.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 16	Participant 8.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 17	Participant 9.1	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]
D 18	Participant 9.2	Text	Library	[Interview with married couple]

Figure 3: Participant numbers in Atlas.ti 25 represented married couples

4.4 Data analysis – response from URCSA minister

The data obtained from URCSA ministers in the northern suburbs of Cape Town during semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into the conduct of Christian premarital programmes for engaged couples in their respective churches. The coding framework used for analysing the participants' responses was developed in Atlas.ti 25 to support thematic analysis. Although the descriptions provided by the participants varied, their responses could only be effectively captured and interpreted by assigning specific codes. To ensure that only the most significant, accurate and analytically relevant themes were preserved, the themes were filtered based on their relevance. This phase enhanced the accuracy and coherence of the results, particularly as the study aimed to illustrate similar experiences or ideas, particularly regarding URCSA ministers' opinions on Christian premarital counselling based on the interview questions discussed. According to the context memo created in Atlas.ti 25 during the coding process, several themes consistently emerged from the URCSA ministers' responses. These themes included: (1) the importance of marriage, (2) the role of counselling, (3) topics discussed, (4) the relationship and (5) the couple's needs, as illustrated in Figure 4 below. The frequency and consistency with which ministers referred to these areas indicated their significance. Consequently, these themes were identified as central to understanding the nature and goals of premarital counselling within the URCSA context.

Concept	Count	Noun Phrases
marriage	51	"marriage (28)" "the marriage (3)" "their marriage (2)" "a christian marriage (1)" "a proposed marriage (1)" "biblical marriage advice (1)" "each pastor/marriage confirmer (1)" "especially marriage counsellor (1)" "intended marriage (1)" "marriage couples (1)" "marriage enrichments (1)" "marriages (1)" "proposed marriage couples (1)" "religious marriage officer (1)" "second or third marriages (1)" "the emphasised marriage (1)" "the marriage ceremony (1)" "their initial marriages (1)" "their marriages (1)" "what marriage entails (1)" "your marriage (1)"
couple	43	"the couple (15)" "the couples (12)" "couples (8)" "the couple's needs (2)" "a couple (1)" "all couples (1)" "every couple (1)" "marriage couples (1)" "most couples (1)" "proposed marriage couples (1)"
relationship	33	"the relationship (11)" "relationship (7)" "a healthy and well balanced relationship (5)" "a healthy relationship (5)" "e.g. extramarital relationships (1)" "primary relationship (1)" "sexual relationship (1)" "the love relationship (1)" "their relationship (1)"
topic	25	"these topics (6)" "topics (6)" "the normal challenging topics (4)" "the topics (4)" "5 topics (1)" "all these topics (1)" "all topics (1)" "the aforementioned topics (1)" "these counselling topics (1)"
counselling	19	"the counselling sessions (3)" "a christian premarital counselling (1)" "a christian

Figure 4: Themes of relevance as identified from Atlas.ti 25

Furthermore, Figure 5 below illustrated the themes from Atlas.ti 25 that were mentioned by only one or two ministers, resulting in an insufficient frequency to establish their relevance or representativeness in the evaluation of the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes. Although the responses were intriguing, they were not deemed useful for the evaluation of the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes. These themes included: (1) a Reformed perspective, (2) the use of personal programmes, (3) insights from a couple's experience, (4) the involvement of each marriage confirmer and (5) the use of self-developed materials. Themes that were mentioned but not reflected elsewhere were set aside to maintain thematic cohesion.

Christian	2	"a christian or reformed point (1)" "sound calvinistic christian doctrine (1)"
programme	2	"his/her own programme (1)" "the programme (1)"
experience	2	"a different word experience (1)" "my experience (1)"
pastor	2	"a congregational pastor (1)" "each pastor/marriage confirmer (1)"
material	2	"a premarital counselling material (1)" "materials (1)"

Figure 5: Themes of insufficient frequency as identified from Atlas.ti 25

As a result, it was observed that the responses from the respective ministers indicated both differences and similarities in the Christian premarital counselling programmes conducted at their respective churches within the URCSA context. These observations highlighted significant patterns regarding premarital counselling and its alignment with Christian

A. Premarital counselling framework

4.5.1 Does the church have a premarital counselling programme?

Responses to the above question are illustrated in Figure 7 below, which features a bar chart extracted from the Code Manager in Atlas.ti 25. These bar charts have been included for all the respective questions discussed below. Additionally, the bar chart presented the responses from the ministers in descending order, with Participant 1 providing the top response and Participant 6 through 9 (URCSA church ministers serving four respective churches as consulents) providing the last responses.



Figure 7: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 1

Figure 8 displayed an Excel bar chart that compared the number of URCSA churches with a formal premarital counselling programme to those without one.

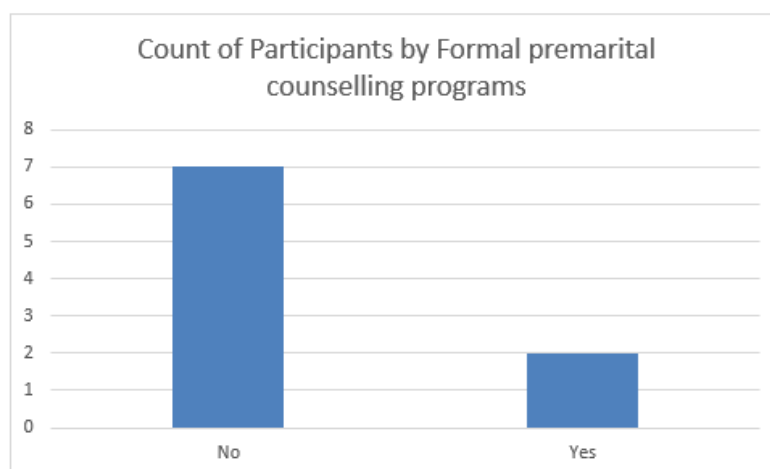


Figure 8: Counts of participants by formal Christian premarital counselling programmes

From Figures 7 and 8, it is evident that 7 out of the 9 URCSA churches lack a formal premarital counselling programme. The participants without a formal programme utilised their own premarital counselling materials. Furthermore, these ministers relied on personal or customised counselling tailored to the specific needs of the engaged couples, rather than adhering to a formal programme.

4.5.2 How many years have you been involved in premarital counselling with the congregation?



Figure 9: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 2

Figure 10 below depicts an Excel bar chart illustrating the number of years of premarital counselling experiences amongst the respective URCSA church ministers.

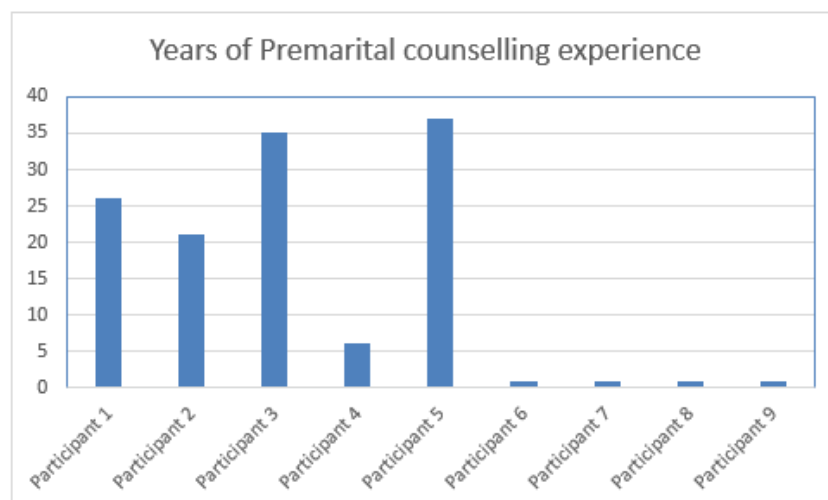


Figure 10: Years of premarital counselling experience

Figures 9 and 10 demonstrated that the durations of Christian premarital counselling provided by the respective URCSA church ministers ranged from 11 months to 37 years, reflecting a wide spectrum of experience levels amongst the participants. Notably, Participant 5 had the most extensive experience, totalling 37 years, while Participant 6 through 9 had the least, with only 11 months at the respective church, due to the short tenure of the minister. Additionally, the minister had previously served in another denomination outside of the URCSA for 10 years.

4.5.3 How many topics does the programme have?



Figure 11: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 3

Figure 12 below illustrated an Excel bar chart that displays the number of topics, sessions, and questions included in the Christian premarital counselling programmes of the respective URCSA churches.

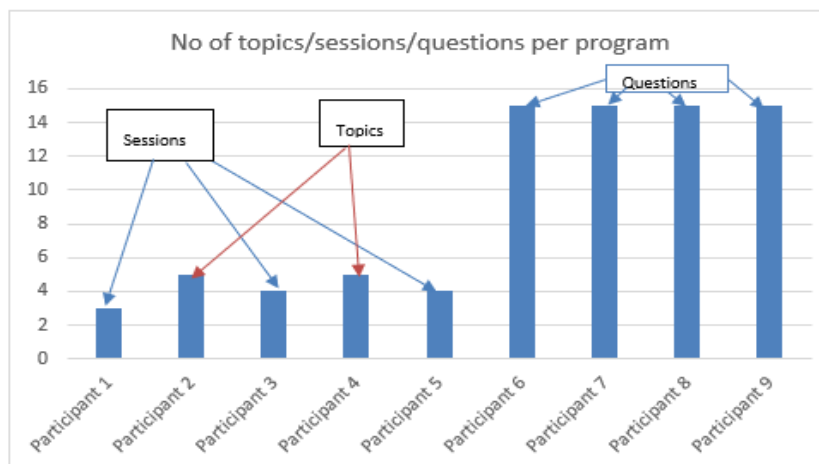


Figure 12: Number of topics/sessions/questions per programme

From Figures 11 and 12, it was evident that out of the nine URCSA church ministers interviewed, five participants provided specific details regarding the number of sessions or topics covered in their Christian premarital counselling programmes. Participant 1 reported that the programme consisted of three sessions, tailored based on a premarital counselling questionnaire completed by the engaged couples. Participants 2 and 4 indicated that their programmes encompassed five distinct topics, while Participants 3 and 5 indicated that their counselling programmes comprised four sessions. Participant 6 through 9 mentioned that the number of questions varied depending on the engaged couple, typically totalling around fifteen questions. Although there was a distinction between the topics, sessions, and questions, it was clear that most programmes involved three to five organised discussions during the counselling process.

Table 5, below, outlined some of the observed topics discussed by the respective URCSA ministers.

Participant	Topics
Participant 1	No specific topics were provided
Participant 2	- The Institution and purpose of marriage - What are the things that help you build your marriage and be able to understand your partner better? - Things that cause possible marital problems - Triangle relationship - Forgiveness and Deliverance
Participant 3	- Orientation session focusing on Premarital understanding. - Motivation for intended marriage - Knowledge of yourself, personal background and compatibility. - Communication and Conflict management in marriage. - Sexuality in marriage - Interest and hobbies
Participant 4	- Communication - Managing expectations and compromise

	• Conflict resolution • Handling finances • Spiritual practices
Participant 5	• No specific topics are provided
Participant 6	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
Participant 7	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
Participant 8	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
Participant 9	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances

	• Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
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Table 5: Topics discussed by the respective URCSA ministers

From the data presented in Table 5, it was observed that the topics discussed in the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes whether formal or informal, included 'purpose of marriage', 'marital expectations', 'communication', 'conflict management', 'finances', and 'sex'. It is important to note that not all these topics were covered in every Christian premarital counselling programme, indicating a gap based on the literature review conducted in Chapter 2.

4.5.4 Why have these topics been chosen?



Figure 13: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 4

From Figure 13 above, it was evident that the data collected from the responses of the respective URCSA ministers to the question, 'Why have these topics been chosen?' revealed a common focus on the necessity and practical relevance of the chosen topics. As noted by Participant 1, the topics were selected based on the couple's return questionnaire, which suggested a needs-based strategy designed specifically for engaged couples. Participant 2 emphasised a theological basis for topic selection by underscoring the biblical and ethical foundations during counselling. Additionally, Participant 3 highlighted that these topics reflect common marital difficulties that couples often encounter and are frequently the root causes of divorce; therefore, addressing them was considered essential. Furthermore, Participant 4 underscored the significance of these topics in both the practical and spiritual

dimensions of married life. Participant 5 introduced the narrative pastoral approach, which utilised guided storytelling to help couples gain a deeper understanding of themselves while fostering emotional and spiritual development. Participant 6 to 9 indicated that these topics are important due to the challenges and specific needs that may arise from discussion during premarital counselling.

4.5.5 During your experience, how effective do you find the premarital counselling programme in preparing couples for marriage?



Figure 14: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 5

From Figure 14 above, the data analysis of responses from URCSA ministers reveals a generally positive perception of the programme's impact, whether formal or informal.

B. Theological perspective

4.5.6 Are all these topics supported by the Christian theological principles?



Figure 15: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 6

Figure 16 below presented an Excel bar chart illustrating the number of topics, sessions, and questions provided, all supported by Christian theological principles.

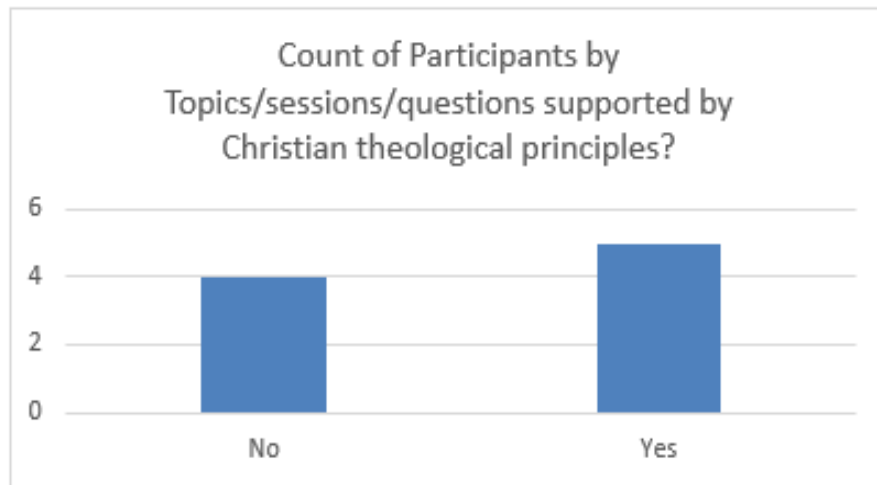


Figure 16: Number of topics, sessions, and questions supported by Christian theological principles per programme

From Figures 15 and 16, it can be observed that five out of the nine URCSA church ministers confirmed that all their topics, sessions, or questions were supported with Christian theological principles. The data indicated that the majority of URCSA church ministers in the northern suburbs of Cape Town consider it important and necessary to support their respective Christian premarital counselling programme sessions or topics with Christian theological principles.

4.5.7 What is your opinion on the topics supported by the Christian theological principles?

Codes	
giving biblical guidance for their marriage	1
It was beneficial, provided with biblical marriag...	1
Christian marriage is not seperated from origin...	1
Adapt and transform to give focus their marital...	1
It creates happy families in the church	1
It explore their own personal spiritual beliefs	4

Figure 17: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 7

From Figure 17 above, the analysis of URCSA ministers' responses revealed that the topics or sessions discussed were consistently supported with Christian theological principles, with biblical guidance applied to real-life issues. This finding underscored the importance of theology in contemporary pastoral practice and illustrated how Scripture continued to provide meaningful support for the challenges faced by couples.

4.5.8 Are there any specific Bible passages that you perpetually discuss in the programme? If so, which ones and why?



Figure 18: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 8

As shown in Figure 18, all participants indicated that the Bible was indeed used to support the topics or sessions discussed in their respective counselling sessions; however, no specific verse was consistently utilised, as it varied according to the needs of the engaged couples. The data demonstrated that, although the application of specific Christian theological principles varied from session to session, Scripture remained a significant and adaptable resource in shaping the subject matter and objectives of Christian premarital counselling programmes.

4.5.9 How well do you think these passages help couples in counselling?



Figure 19: URCSA ministers' responses to interview question 9

From Figure 19 above, it was evident that the sessions were customised to meet the unique needs of each couple, and the biblical passages discussed effectively addressed those specific concerns. This highlighted the positive impact the use of Scripture had on couples as they prepared for marriage. Additionally, it helped couples assess their compatibility, readiness, and understanding of God's expectations for a successful marriage.

4.6 Overall findings of data collated from URCSA ministers

In summary, the observations discussed above revealed that the responses from URCSA ministers suggested that Christian premarital counselling programmes were regarded as valuable and effective preparation tools for engaged couples. Furthermore, the responses indicated that Christian theological principles, whether general or tailored, were perceived as essential resources that guided couples spiritually, emotionally, and practically in their preparation for marriage. The data showed that URCSA church ministers in the northern suburbs of Cape Town had an average of 21 years of experience in conducting Christian premarital counselling. However, despite their extensive experience in this area, there was no generic programme in place.

Although the responses were insightful, it was noted that the topics, sessions and questions were primarily based on the needs of the engaged couples or the experiences of the respective ministers in conducting Christian premarital counselling. It was important to highlight that not all the topics identified in Section 4.5.3 were included in their respective

Christian premarital counselling programmes. This observation highlighted a gap identified in comparison to the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. Furthermore, it indicated a lack of comprehensive guidance regarding the topics to be included in Christian premarital counselling programmes for URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

The data underscored the importance of having common topics, sessions, and questions that supported Christian theological principles, as this approach provided engaged couples with biblical guidance to navigate marital challenges. Only 2 of the 9 URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town offered a Christian premarital counselling programme, which highlighted the lack of a formal premarital counselling initiative within URCSA churches. Furthermore, the data confirmed that Christian premarital counselling, supported by theological principles, was essential for preparing engaged couples for God's design for marriage. Also, it was noted that all the URCSA church ministers in the northern suburbs of Cape Town regarded the Christian premarital counselling programme as not only beneficial but also crucial for fostering successful marriages. These findings were further evaluated in Chapter 5 by comparing it to the common topics and Christian theological principles for marriage as discussed in the literature review of Chapter 2.

4.7 Research observations from married couples

The research observations gathered from the collected data were intended to support the evaluation of Christian premarital counselling programmes in light of Christian theological principles as presented by the URCSA minister. The analysis of the data will be discussed in detail in Section 4.8. The researcher gained valuable insight into how these Christian premarital counselling programmes were experienced in practice by married couples within their respective churches. The following observations were drawn from the data collected from the participants:

- Most of the married couples indicated that the common topic of 'communication' was important, as it provided them with valuable insight into how to communicate effectively.
- Some couples felt that the limited time allowed for counselling reduced their engagement and discussion of Christian theological principles, with certain topics

receiving more attention than others during the Christian premarital counselling sessions.

- Most of the couples found the Christian premarital counselling programme very useful.
- Attending the premarital sessions was challenging due to busy schedules and daily responsibilities, but it was worthwhile, as it provided the married couples with valuable guidance.
- Certain married couples found it difficult to sustain a consistent, shared faith and set of beliefs.
- Married couples valued the Christian theological principles discussed during the counselling sessions and recognised its importance for marriage.

4.8 Data analysis – responses from married couples

Due to practical and contextual constraints, it was not always possible to obtain data from two married couples from each of the respective churches. Firstly, participation was voluntary, and some couples either declined to participate or were unavailable during the data collection period due to personal, work-related, or family commitments. Secondly, in certain cases, church leadership limited access to married couples, prioritising availability. As a result, these factors caused a decline in the number of married couples available for data collection, lowering the total from eighteen to eight married couples across the respective churches. Despite these challenges, the data gathered provided valuable and diverse insights, which were deemed sufficient for the research objectives and thematic analysis.

The data collected from married couples through semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into the Christian premarital counselling programmes offered by their respective ministers. Consequently, the coding framework used to analyse the participants' responses was developed in Atlas.ti 25 to facilitate thematic analysis. Although the responses of the married couples varied, their perspectives could only be effectively

captured and interpreted through assigning suitable codes within the software. To ensure that only the most significant, accurate and analytically relevant themes were preserved, the themes were filtered based on their relevance. This phase enhanced the accuracy and coherence of the results, particularly as the study aimed to illustrate similar experiences and ideas, specifically regarding married couples' responses to Christian premarital counselling offered at their respective churches, based on the interview questions discussed. According to the context memo (Figure 20, below) created in Atlas.ti 25 during the coding process, several themes consistently emerged from the married couples' responses. These themes included: (1) premarital counselling, (2) marriage preparation, (3) discussion topics, (4) challenging times and (5) the importance of communication, as illustrated in Figure 20. Thus, the frequency and consistency with which married couples referred to these areas indicated their significance.

Concept	Count	Noun Phrases
counselling	40	"premarital counselling (12)" "the counselling (11)" "the counselling sessions (5)" "the premarital counselling program (3)" "the counselling session (2)" "the counselling topics (2)" "counselling (1)" "our counselling sessions (1)" "our premarital counselling (1)" "the counselling program (1)" "the premarital counselling (1)"
marriage	29	"our marriage (13)" "marriage (8)" "a happy marriage (1)" "a healthy marriage (1)" "a marriage (1)" "a strong and healthy marriage (1)" "marriage preparation (1)" "that marriage (1)" "the marriage (1)" "what marriage (1)"
topic	20	"the topics (6)" "important topics (2)" "the counselling topics (2)" "a topic (1)" "certain key topics (1)" "each topic (1)" "essential topics (1)" "many topics (1)" "the main topics (1)" "the spiritual topics (1)" "these topics (1)" "this topic (1)" "topics (1)"
time	17	"time (4)" "challenging times (3)" "times (2)" "trying times (2)" "a one-time program (1)" "a suitable time (1)" "both good times (1)" "hectic times (1)" "our time (1)" "time constraints (1)"
session	14	"the counselling sessions (5)" "the counselling session (2)" "a follow up session (1)" "follow-up sessions (1)" "our counselling sessions (1)" "our sessions (1)" "sessions (1)" "the session (1)" "the sessions (1)"
communication	14	"communication (8)" "open and honest communication (2)" "each other's expectations- communication (1)" "open communication (1)" "our important

Figure 20: Themes of relevance as identified from Atlas.ti 25

Furthermore, Figure 21 below illustrated the themes identified in Atlas.ti 25 that were mentioned by married couples. However, these themes did not occur with sufficient frequency to establish their relevance for the evaluation of the Christian premarital counselling programme. Although the responses were intriguing, they were not deemed useful in the evaluation of the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes. The themes included: (1) effort, (2) individuality, (3) advice, (4) emotions, and (5) judgment.

Themes that were mentioned but not reflected elsewhere were set aside to maintain thematic cohesion.

effort	2	"continual effort (1)" "efforts (1)"
individual	2	"an individual (1)" "two individuals
advice	2	"great advice (1)" "the advice (1)"
emotion	2	"our emotions (2)"
judgment	2	"judgment (2)"

Figure 21: Themes of insufficient frequency as identified from Atlas.ti 25

Furthermore, during the analysis, the researcher observed that certain key issues related to Christian premarital counselling were consistently raised by participants, as indicated by the language and frequency of key concepts throughout the data set. The purpose of this section was to identify shared ideas or recurring themes that may have been overlooked when examining each code in isolation. To support this analysis, the Word Cloud tool in the Code Manager of Atlas.ti 25 (see Figure 22 below) was utilised to visually enhance the interpretation of the coded data. The concepts that appeared most frequently in the responses of married couples were highlighted in this graphical representation, providing a concise yet informative summary of the common themes. By emphasising key terms such as 'us', 'counselling', 'marriage', 'premarital', 'topics' and 'communication', the Word Cloud visually reinforced the main concepts that emerged from the data. This approach facilitated a more logical and grounded assessment of the married couples' viewpoints by supporting the thematic analysis and ensuring that the developed codes aligned with the language used by the participants.



Figure 22: Represented concepts from the Word cloud tool Atlas.ti 25

4.9 Interview questions and responses of married couples

The responses from the married couples to the interview guide questions were analysed by the researcher using Atlas.ti 25 through coding, which resulted in the following outcomes. The subsequent sections summarised the responses of the married couples to the interview questions.

A. Premarital counselling framework

The responses to these questions were presented in a bar chart extracted from the Code Manager in Atlas.ti 25. Bar charts were included for all the respective questions discussed. Additionally, the bar chart displayed the responses from the married couples in descending order, with the top response attributed to Participant 1.1 and the bottom response to Participant 5.1.

4.9.1 Which significant lessons from premarital counselling helped develop your marriage?



Figure 23: Married couple responses to interview question 1

As illustrated in Figure 23 above, the responses from married couples indicated that the information provided in Christian premarital counselling on managing communication within their marriages was valuable. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of open and honest communication as the foundation for establishing a stable and lasting marriage.

4.9.2 How did the counselling assist you better to understand each other's expectations, handling of conflict and ways to communicate?



Figure 24: Married couple responses to interview question 2

From Figure 24 above, the couples indicated that premarital counselling had equipped them with essential knowledge and practical skills necessary for fostering a healthy marriage. Additionally, they appreciated having a structured and safe environment to express their expectations and explore their values, objectives, roles and responsibilities within the marriage. The effectiveness of communication emerged once again as a central theme, with couples highlighting the importance of open dialogue, discussing significant matters, and learning how to resolve conflicts effectively.

4.9.3 Describe a time when the guidance from the premarital counselling helped you work through a challenging situation in your marriage.



Figure 25: Married couple responses to interview question 3

From Figure 25 above, the participants' feedback demonstrated that premarital counselling had been beneficial in helping them handle real-life challenges such as health issues, joint decision-making and family trauma. Communication was seen as a helpful tool to mitigate misunderstandings and emotional tensions, providing valuable means for resolution and resilience in marriage.

4.9.4 What were the negative aspects of the premarital counselling programme?



Figure 26: Married couple responses to interview question 4

From Figure 26 above, it was evident that many married couples reported no negative aspects of their experience. Overall, participants indicated that they had a positive experience during the Christian premarital counselling, despite some concerns, such as the short duration of the counselling programme, discomfort in discussing personal issues, and limited in-depth discussions.

4.9.5 Based on your experience as a married couple, how effective do you feel the premarital counselling programme has been?

Codes	
Christian premarital counselling was very effect...	1
Highly effective laid a strong marital foundation	1
It has been moderately effective, real-life scenar...	1
It is highly effective	1
It was essential, learned that two individuals be...	1
It was extremely productive	1
To better understand one another as married co...	1
Very effective, making time to communicate ov...	1

Figure 27: Married couple responses to interview question 5

From Figure 27 above, it is evident that the Christian premarital counselling conducted by URCSA ministers have been generally viewed as highly beneficial, effective, and successful in establishing a strong foundation for marriage. The married couples indicated that the counselling helped them better understood each other and approached their relationship as a unified partnership.

B. Theological perspective

4.9.6 What is your opinion on the topics that were discussed during the counselling?

Codes	
Did not discuss many topics, but one discussed...	1
It taught us to put Jesus Christ first in our marri...	1
It was important, provided a solid foundation f...	1
The topics covered were important	1
Topics addressed all of the marital challenges	1
Topics was relevant, practical and well-balanced	1
Topics were helpful	1
Topics were important, felt follow up sessions is...	1

Figure 28: Married couple responses to interview question 6

Figure 28 above, the feedback from married couples suggested that the common topics covered during the Christian premarital counselling had generally been perceived as

important, relevant and practical. Many couples found the session content well-balanced and helpful in addressing real marital challenges. Furthermore, while some participants indicated that not all common topics had been discussed, they acknowledged that the common topics covered had been meaningful and impactful. One couple had emphasised the importance of placing Jesus Christ at the centre of their marriage, indicating that the spiritual aspect of the counselling had been foundational.

4.9.7 How did the premarital counselling equip you for spiritual growth and foster unity in your marriage?

Codes	
As a young married couple, not as regular as w...	1
Commitment, but as a spiritual covenant with...	1
It was important to centre our marriage around...	1
Praying together, strengthened our marital relat...	1
Spirituality unity was important	1
To align our values, strengthen our faith together	1
To reflect on our own spritual growth	1
To start by parying for each other more	1

Figure 29: Married couple responses to interview question 7

In Figure 29 above, it was observed that the participants' responses showed the importance of spirituality in their marriages. Many married couples considered their union as a spiritual covenant with God at its centre, in addition to a commitment to one another. It was further observed that praying together was important in the participants' marriage, aiding their closeness as a couple and fostering spiritual harmony.

4.9.8 How much did these topics help as a married couple?

Codes	
Challenging times, we often talk about our cou...	1
Gave the necessary guidance on how to handle...	1
It helps us resolve conflict better and communi...	1
It provided with a strong marital basis	1
Provided practical tools and insight	1
The topics helped us to reflect on ourselves	1
Topics helped to compromise	1
Topics provided guidance and helpful	1

Figure 30: Married couple responses to interview question 8

From Figure 30 above, the married couples' feedback revealed that the Christian premarital counselling had provided them with useful advice, practical tools and a solid foundation for navigating married life. It was observed that the sessions or topics had improved their ability to manage marital difficulties, particularly in areas such as communication and personal growth.

4.9.9 Despite the guidance provided, have you found it challenging to maintain shared faith practices like prayer or worship?

Codes	
No, both from religious background Jesus the c...	1
No, we have not found it challenging	1
No, we share the same faith and spiritual beliefs	1
Not at all, same church and youth	1
Yes, because of hectic times difficult to sustain...	1
Yes, made it difficult to have a strong faith or ev...	1
Yes, sometimes	1
Yes, we have	1

Figure 31: Married couple responses to interview question 9

From Figure 31 above, it can be observed that the married couples have varying experiences regarding shared faith and beliefs. For some married couples, it was evident

that they did not find this area challenging, as both partners came from religious backgrounds, shared the same faith, attended the same church and placed Jesus at the centre of their relationship. Furthermore, other married couples acknowledged difficulties in maintaining regular shared spiritual practices due to busy schedules and life demands, which occasionally affected their ability to sustain a strong faith or engage in consistent prayer together.

4.10 Overall findings of data collated from married couples

From the above data, it was observed that the common topic of 'communication' was regarded as the most significant factor contributing to the development of marriages amongst married couples. This aligned with the common topics identified as important for discussion in the Christian premarital counselling programme, as indicated in the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. Furthermore, Christian premarital counselling was generally well received and considered very useful by all married couples. As a result, it reiterated the importance of Christian premarital counselling. Additionally, the findings demonstrated and supported the usefulness of Christian premarital counselling in URCSA churches and highlighted the importance of allowing sufficient time for in-depth discussions on common topics. Christian premarital counselling was considered necessary, fruitful and important by all married couples. They viewed the common topics covered during the counselling sessions with their respective ministers as important, relevant and practical, although some indicated that not many such topics were discussed. Although all married couples acknowledged and valued the spiritual guidance provided in the premarital counselling, only one couple expressed a desire to place Jesus Christ at the centre of their marriage, particularly in their marital relationship. Furthermore, some married couples reported that the scope of the common topics covered during their sessions was either too limited or too brief.

These observations highlighted the need for a generic Christian premarital counselling programme, with common topics supported in Christian theological principles, to be presented by all ministers within practical time frames, allowing for sufficient engagement. Although Christian theological principles were considered important in marriage by all married couples, there was a lack of in-depth theological discussion in some of the counselling programmes. As a result, the need emerged for the common topics in the counselling programme to be supported by Christian theological principles, guiding couples

through the Bible and enriching their spirituality and covenant with God. Additionally, it was observed that the common topics provided insight into handling the complexities of real-life relationships, encouraged self-reflection and promoted compromise between couples.

Based on the above findings, the assessment of the Christian premarital counselling programme will be discussed in Chapter 5, including how the counselling programme is proposed to be used within the context of the URCSA church, particularly when leading premarital counselling sessions.

5. CHAPTER 5: ASSESSMENT OF URCSA COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES

5.1 Introduction

This chapter evaluated the URCSA Christian premarital counselling programmes by analysing the empirical data collected. The primary objective was to assess the relevance of the common topics covered in the Christian premarital counselling programmes within URCSA churches located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in comparison to the list of common topics as identified in a premarital counselling programme based on the literature review conducted in Section 2.3. Special attention had been given to the underlying Christian theological principles associated with these common topics as discussed during the counselling sessions. Additionally, this chapter explored the usefulness of premarital counselling, as reflected in the responses and experiences of married couples who had participated in such sessions. Furthermore, the chapter examined the contextual application of these programmes within the life of the church, with a specific focus on the minister's role in premarital counselling.

5.2 Relevance of topics discussed by URCSA ministers

5.2.1 Common topics identified from Christian premarital counselling programmes

In the URCSA context, the content of Christian premarital counselling programmes, as discussed by all ministers, revealed a diverse range of common topics, some of which had been common across the respective programmes. These common topics were discussed in Section 5.2.2. It was observed that Participants 1 and 5 (two out of nine) had chosen not to specify any common topics, as their approach was tailored to the couple's specific needs and utilised their own premarital counselling resources, such as questionnaires and pastoral approaches. In contrast, the other participants (seven out of nine) had introduced a diverse range of common topics, which included: (1) forgiveness and deliverance, (2) triangular relationships, (3) orientation sessions focusing on premarital understanding, (4) spiritual practices, (5) self-awareness, personal background, and compatibility and (6) individual perspectives on having children or not. This diversity underscored the varied focus across different Christian premarital counselling programmes in URCSA churches. Additionally, it was noted that not all church ministers had addressed the same topics in their respective Christian premarital counselling programmes, as reflected in Table 7 below.

Participant	Topics
Participant 1	• No specific common topics were provided
Participant 2	• The Institution and purpose of marriage • What are the things that help you build your marriage and be able to understand your partner better? • Things that cause possible marital problems • Triangle relationship • Forgiveness and Deliverance
Participant 3	• Orientation session focusing on Premarital understanding. • Motivation for intended marriage • Knowledge of yourself, personal background and compatibility. • Communication and Conflict management in marriage. • Sexuality in marriage • Interest and hobbies
Participant 4	• Communication • Managing expectations and compromise • Conflict resolution • Handling finances • Spiritual practices
Participant 5	• No specific common topics are provided
Participant 6	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)

Participant 7	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
Participant 8	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)
Participant 9	• Conflict management • Union of marriage • Finances • Sex • Future-in-laws • Their individual perspective on having children or not / how • Hobbies (individuals / separate)

Table 6: Topics discussed by the respective URCSA minister

Due to the diverse range of topics, as indicated above, only the common topics from the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes were extracted for further assessment. These common topics included: (1) the purpose of marriage, (2) marital expectations, (3) communication and conflict, (4) finances, (5) sexual intimacy and (6) family dynamics. Each of these common topics is discussed in more detail in the following section:

5.2.1.1 The purpose of marriage

This common topic was addressed by Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (seven out of nine). Participants 2 and 3 emphasised the Christian theological principle found in Genesis 1:26–27 *“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,”* which the ministers discussed during premarital counselling. Participant 6, 7, 8, and 9 referenced another Christian theological principle from Genesis 2:24, *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh,”* which they also discussed during their counselling sessions. Both these scriptures were explored to highlight marriage as a divine gift from God. By drawing attention to these passages, the counselling aimed to reinforce the sacred nature of marriage and its intended lifelong commitment. Additionally, Participant 4 did not provide a specific Bible passage.

5.2.1.2 Marital relationship

It was noted that Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (seven out of nine) classified this common topic as important, emphasised Christian theological principles such as Ephesians 5:21–33

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body. “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband“,

along with Colossians 3:18–22

“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.” and 1 Peter 3:1–7, *“Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers”,*

to discuss with engaged couples to emphasise the importance of the marital relationship. It has been observed that marital relationships are recognised as an important common topic in preparing couples to navigate the realities of married life. Under this common topic, Participant 2, together with bible scriptures such as Ephesians 5:21–32, Colossians 3:18–22, and 1 Peter 3:1–7, discussed the relationship between a man, a woman, and children. Participant 3 referenced the bible scripture Ephesians 5:21–33 to describe the relationship between husband and wife as an expression or image of the love between God and His Church. Furthermore, Participant 6 to 9 also referenced Ephesians 5:21–33, using it to emphasised the importance of exploring the couple’s perspectives on marital relationships and the role their religious beliefs play in shaping those views. Thus, these passages provided a theological foundation that framed marriage as a mutual, loving, and respectful partnership, grounded in Christian doctrine.

5.2.1.3 Communication and conflict

Of the nine participants, only two Participants, 3 and 4, explicitly identified communication as an important common topic in the counselling programmes they described to the researcher. However, responses from the married couples indicated that communication was a significant focus during the sessions. These differences suggested that what ministers emphasised in their Christian premarital counselling programmes may not have fully aligned with what married couples found most helpful or important. Six out of the nine participants, specifically Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9, focused on conflict in their premarital counselling discussions. The omission of communication from some programmes represented a potential gap, as both communication and conflict resolution were essential skills for maintaining healthy marriages. Ministers who did not incorporate these common topics may have unintentionally overlooked the importance of these areas for engaged couples. Addressing both topics in depth enabled engaged couples to better anticipate and manage the challenges they might encounter in marriage.

5.2.1.4 Finances

The data collected from participants showed that only five out of nine participants, specifically Participants 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9, indicated that finances were addressed in premarital counselling; however, no specific Christian theological principles were used to support these discussions. The absence of Christian theological principles on this common topic suggested a potential gap in ensuring that financial guidance was rooted in a faith-based framework, which could help couples align their financial decisions with their spiritual values. Given that financial issues were a common source of marital stress, equipping couples with financial guidance supported by Christian theological principles and encouraging them to seek help from financial institutions were both considered important. Therefore, supporting couples as they planned their financial future was viewed as an essential component of premarital preparation.

5.2.1.5 Sexual intimacy

It was noted that five out of nine participants, specifically Participants 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9, considered discussions about sexual intimacy within marriage to be important for fostering a healthy and mutually fulfilling marital relationship. This common topic was examined from various perspectives, both theological and practical, within the framework of Christian

premarital counselling. Participant 3 highlighted “sexuality in marriage,” emphasised its theological significance, and referenced Christian theological principles in 1 Corinthians 7. *Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband, which speaks to the mutual responsibilities of spouses in the sexual relationship (vv-4-40).* In addition, Participant 6 through 9 addressed the topic more explicitly, focusing on practical realities that couples face regarding sexual expectations, boundaries, and communication. However, the depth and clarity with which this topic was discussed varied across the premarital counselling sessions. This inconsistency indicated a need for more structured content and stronger Christian theological support, advocating for a theologically supported yet pastorally sensitive approach to marriage preparation. Additionally, as sexual intimacy remained essential for marital satisfaction, it is important to ensure that it is addressed thoroughly and meaningfully within counselling programmes.

5.2.1.6 Family dynamics

It was observed that common topics such as future in-laws, the decision to have children, and personal hobbies reflected a broader understanding of marriage preparation. In this case, five out of nine participants, specifically Participants 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9, highlighted the importance of these topics. Discussions within the Christian premarital counselling programmes showed that ministers recognised the value of preparing couples not only for their internal marital relationship but also for external factors that could impact their marriage. Therefore, incorporating topics such as family dynamics, decisions about children, and hobbies in premarital counselling was viewed as beneficial in helping engaged couples anticipate and manage potential challenges. The common topics discussed above allowed the researcher to evaluate the relevance of these topics to those considered important based on the literature review conducted.

5.2.2 Comparison between common URCSA counselling programme and literature topics

Table 8 below presents a comparative summary of biblical references between the common topics identified in the Christian premarital counselling programmes of the URCSA and those considered important from the literature. Furthermore, the comparison included the common topics that were supported by Christian theological principles.

Common topics identified in the URCSA premarital counselling programme	Common topics considered important as part of a premarital counselling programme based on literature review
• The Purpose of Marriage Genesis 1:26 -27 (NIV) “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground...” Genesis 2:24 (NIV) That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh”	• Reason for marriage Genesis 2:24 (NIV) “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh”
• Marital relationship Ephesians 5:21-33 (NIV) “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives	• Marital expectations Ephesians 5:22-28 (NIV) “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour...”

should submit to their husbands in everything...” Colossians 3:18 – 22 (NIV) “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them...” 1 Peter 3:1-7 (NIV) “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives...”	
	• Roles and responsibilities 1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV) “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
• Communication No identified theological principles	• Communication James 1:19-20 (NIV) “Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters! Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God’s righteous purpose.”
• Conflict No identified theological principles	• Resolving conflict

	Amos 3:3 (NIV) “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so”?
	• Marital unfaithfulness Matthew 5:27- 28 (NIV) “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”.
• Finances No identified theological principles	• Finances 2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV) “And God can bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”.
• Sexuality in marriage 1 Corinthians 7 (NIV) “Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband...”	• Sexual intimacy 1 Corinthians 7:2 -5 (NIV) “But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his wife, and each woman with her husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.
• Family dynamics No identified theological principles	

Table 7: Summary comparison between URCSA's most common topics and the literature

From Table 8 above, it was observed that six out of the seven common topics identified in the URCSA Christian premarital counselling programmes were relevant based on the topics

that were considered important as part of a premarital counselling programme from the literature. However, not all the topics (i.e. “roles and responsibilities” and “marital unfaithfulness”) considered important from the literature were covered. Furthermore, it was observed that not all the identified common topics were supported by Christian theological principles, such as “communication”, “conflict”, “finances” and “family dynamics”. Lastly, it was important to observe and note that the married couples from the respective churches had not engaged with all the topics that were considered important for premarital counselling.

5.3 Theological principles from URCSA common topics compared to the literature

In comparison to the common topics identified as important in premarital counselling programmes based on the literature review, Christian theological principles were emphasised as foundational, providing a theological framework for engaged couples during their marriage preparation. As observed in Table 8 above, the empirical data collected from URCSA ministers revealed that not all common topics discussed in Christian premarital counselling programmes were supported by specific theological principles. Common topics such as finances, conflict, communication and family dynamics lacked theological principles. Furthermore, the literature provided Christian theological principles for communication and conflict, and drew from James 1:19–20: *“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires,”* and Amos 3:3: *“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* These biblical passages emphasised the importance of patience and self-control in communication, as well as the need for agreement and unity within the marital relationship. Additionally, 2 Corinthians 9:8 *“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*, highlighted God’s provision and blessing concerning finances. The omission of these theological principles highlighted the need for explicit identification of relevant theological principles that are important for the spiritual guidance of engaged couples during their Christian premarital counselling journey. Notably, common topics that were supported by theological principles aligned well with the theological principles identified in the literature.

5.4 Usefulness of premarital counselling: married couples' responses

5.4.1 Responses to interview guide questions (premarital counselling)

The usefulness of Christian premarital counselling was affirmed by all participating married couples. Their responses, gathered through semi-structured interviews based on the interview guide questions (Appendix C), were summarised in Figure 1 below to demonstrate the usefulness of premarital counselling in supporting married couples in navigating both everyday challenges and significant relational decisions within their marriages.

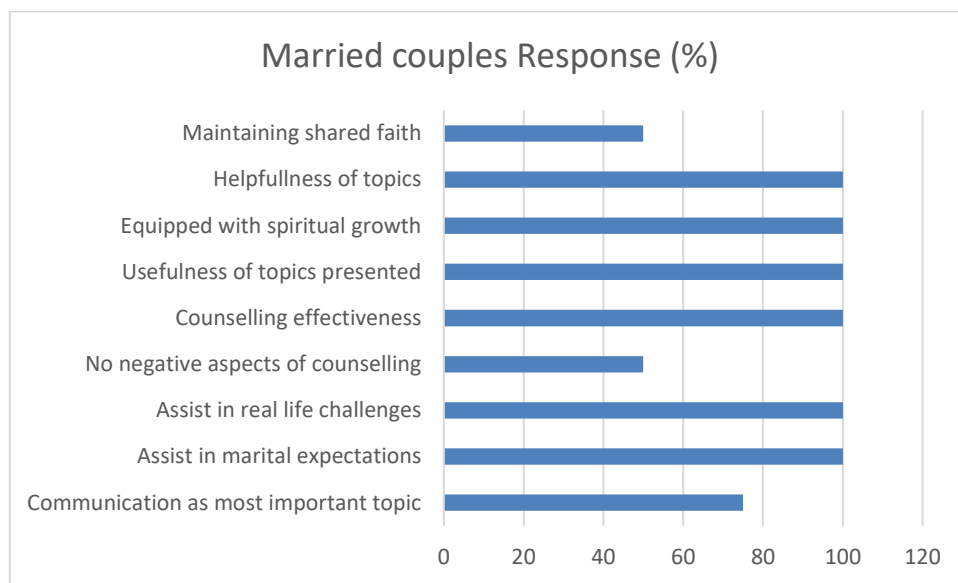


Figure 32: Summary responses from all married couples

Referring to Figure 32 above, it was observed that all married couples found the topics discussed during the premarital counselling very useful. These interview questions included: (1) the helpfulness of the topics for married couples, (2) the role of counselling equipping spiritual growth and fostering unity in marriage, (3) the usefulness of the topics presented, (4) the overall effectiveness of counselling, (5) assistance with real-life issues and (6) support in managing marital expectations. Furthermore, four of the eight participants (50%) reported challenges in sustaining shared faith practices, such as prayer and worship. This difficulty highlighted the complexities of integrating personal beliefs within a marital partnership between husband and wife. Therefore, to address the faith-based issues that married couples faced, the respective URCSA ministers were encouraged to provide more personalised guidance that acknowledged individual spiritual journeys while fostering shared practices.

Additionally, four of the eight participants (50%) reported no negative aspects of the counselling, while two of the eight married couples (25%) indicated that the range of topics covered during their sessions was either too limited or too brief. One participant (12.5%) expressed discomfort in discussing personal issues, and another (12.5%) indicated time constraints due to work commitments. Lastly, the topic of communication was considered the most important topic (75%) amongst those presented in the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes.

The usefulness of the common topics (as discussed in Section 5.2) was evaluated based on the responses of married couples in the following section.

5.4.2 Responses to interview guide questions (common topics)

Table 9 below indicated the responses from married couples regarding the usefulness of the common topics covered in the URCSA ministers' Christian premarital counselling programmes.

Common topics	Common topics that were useful for the married couple (%)
Purpose of marriage	25%
Marital relationship	25%
Communication	75%
Conflict	40%
Finances	50%
Sexual intimacy	40%

Table 8: Common topics that were useful for the married couple

From Table 9 above, the most useful common topic was communication (75% of the couples). This indicated its central role in fostering understanding and connection within marital relationships. Finances were identified as the second most useful common topic, reported by 50% of the couples, followed by conflict resolution and sexual intimacy, each

mentioned by 40% of the couples. The purpose of marriage and the nature of the marital relationship were the least useful discussed common topics, noted by only 25% of the couples. This suggested that while these foundational concepts were acknowledged, they were not emphasised to the same extent as more practical relational skills. These findings underscored the importance of addressing both interpersonal skills and theological foundations in premarital counselling. In this context, all married couples regarded the Christian premarital counselling process as an essential part of their journey before marriage. This strongly affirmed the relevance and value of Christian premarital counselling within the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

5.5 Conclusion

The data collected from married couples in the respective URCSA churches indicated that the Christian premarital counselling provided by the ministers was highly beneficial for marriages. According to Jibiliza (2021, p. 1), the pastor, priest, or minister played an important role in the church, providing spiritual guidance and leadership for its mission. Pastoral care and counselling helped fulfil the spiritual and social responsibilities of the church's shepherd and leader. The role of the URCSA minister in providing premarital counselling to engaged couples was important. The minister, as the church's leader, provided spiritual guidance to help engaged couples establish a biblical foundation for their marriage.

Although a structured Christian premarital counselling programme for engaged couples featuring a set of common topics supported by Christian theological principles was not implemented by the respective church ministers, they were able to provide Christ-centred teaching on marriage. All married couples indicated that the guidance they had received from the minister helped them approach marriage with realistic expectations. The role of the minister in conducting premarital counselling for engaged couples was to create a safe environment where couples could openly discuss their fears, hopes, and core values regarding marriage. In addition to scriptural teaching on marriage, the minister incorporated prayer, scripture reading and spiritual reflection into the counselling process to help couples prepare for marriage. The URCSA minister's responsibility in premarital counselling was a pastoral calling to prepare couples for a God-honouring union, one that went beyond the premarital counselling process itself. In some instances, married couples emphasised that

the relationship continued beyond the wedding, as the minister remained in contact with them.

Based on the assessments presented in Chapter 5, the overall conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 6 regarding the evaluation of Christian premarital counselling programmes offered in URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, based on Christian theological principles.

6. CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the evaluation conducted on the Christian premarital counselling programmes of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, in light of Christian theological principles.

6.2 Revisiting the research problem

As identified in Chapter 1, the inadequacy or absence of premarital counselling programmes within churches, specifically the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, compromises the Christian theological doctrine of marital perpetuity. This deficiency necessitated an evaluation of such programmes, with particular attention to their content and alignment with Christian theological principles.

6.3 Revisiting the literature review

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 further delineated common topics deemed essential for inclusion in a Christian premarital counselling programme, each supported with Christian theological principles. These identified common topics served as the evaluative framework for evaluating the premarital counselling programmes of the URCSA in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. The research revealed a lack of alignment amongst the participating churches, as not all common topics, sessions, and questions were supported in Christian theological principles.

It further indicated significant variation in how these elements were addressed across the respective churches. Moreover, no generic Christian premarital counselling programme existed within the participating URCSA churches, instead, the content was largely shaped by the needs of engaged couples or the individual experiences and knowledge of the ministers. Such inconsistency may have resulted in insufficient preparation and limited theological depth in the application of Christian principles to couples across the respective churches.

These findings highlighted the need for a generic programme that incorporates common topics supported by Christian theological principles. Such a programme should be facilitated by ministers within practical time frames to ensure meaningful engagement. Although the

effect of premarital counselling on divorce rates was not specifically evaluated in this study, feedback from a URCSA minister suggested that couples who received such counselling generally reported positive experiences, with the majority remaining married.

Key aspects of Christian premarital counselling were evaluated, including its importance and theological effectiveness within the URCSA churches. The findings indicated that both ministers and married couples affirmed the relevance of the common topics used in URCSA premarital counselling. According to the ministers, these common topics were designed to effectively prepare engaged couples for marriage.

Furthermore, married couples in this study regarded the common topics as important to assist and guide them during their marital journey as husband and wife. This confirmed the relevance of the content covered, emphasising the importance and validity of Christian premarital counselling within URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

Additionally, common topics that made the counselling programme in the respective URCSA churches effective, whether formal or informal, included the 'purpose of marriage', 'marital expectations', 'communication', 'conflict management', 'finances', and 'sex'. However, it was important to note that not all these common topics were covered in Christian premarital counselling programmes of the respective URCSA churches.

Furthermore, it was also noted that not all the common topics were presented in the respective Christian premarital counselling programmes when compared to the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. Additionally, the topic of communication was regarded by all married couples as the most effective in improving their marriage.

Findings further revealed that Christian premarital counselling had the potential to serve as a meaningful intervention to reduce the risk of divorce. While this study did not specifically assess the impact of premarital counselling on divorce rates, the married couples who participated generally viewed their experiences with Christian premarital counselling positively. Ministers who had facilitated premarital counselling and officiated the marriages were encouraged to observe and maintain ongoing contact with the couples to support their relationships and help prevent potential divorce.

Lastly, it can be concluded that the following common topics and supportive Christian theological themes, as indicated in the literature review conducted in chapter 2, should be

considered for incorporation into the premarital counselling programme to effectively prepare engaged couples for marriage.

These include:

- The purpose of marriage, as outlined in Genesis 2:24;
- Marital expectations, based on Ephesians 5:22–28; and
- Marriage roles and responsibilities, as described in 1 Timothy 5:8.
- Communication, supported by James 1:19–20,
- Conflict resolution, drawn from Amos 3:3.
- Marital unfaithfulness, supported by Matthew 5:27–28,
- Responsible management of finances, based on 2 Corinthians 9:8.
- Sexual intimacy, as taught in 1 Corinthians 7:2–5, formed an essential part of the counselling content.

Including these theological themes would provide a holistic and biblically supported foundation for couples entering into marriage within a Christian context.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study were based on the availability of participants, who were limited by their work or church commitments and their willingness to participate. The researcher had to reduce the sample to nine URCSA churches and eight married couples located in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, as discussed in chapter 4.

6.5 Future Research Opportunities

Based on the empirical findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, several future research concepts have emerged from the study.

Firstly, further research should explore the extent to which Christian theological principles have been integrated into existing premarital counselling programmes and whether gaps in theological depth have affected marital outcomes.

Secondly, the long-term impact of premarital counselling on marital satisfaction and stability across a broader range of URCSA churches and other denominations should be further investigated.

Thirdly, further research is needed on the effectiveness of specialised training for ministers in premarital counselling and how such training has contributed to consistency and quality in programme delivery.

These potential research studies could further support the findings of this study and contribute to a more comprehensive evaluation of Christian premarital counselling within the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

From the above conclusions, the following recommendations were proposed to enhance the implementation and evaluation of Christian premarital counselling within the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

6.6 Recommendations

6.6.1 A generic premarital counselling programme

Based on the conclusions of this research study and in light of the identified inconsistencies in Christian premarital counselling practices within URCSA churches, it is recommended that a generic Christian premarital counselling programme be developed and implemented across all churches. This programme should ensure both doctrinal integrity and contextual relevance, enabling ministers to provide theologically based and practically applicable premarital counselling. The primary aim of this programme would be to equip ministers with a consistent framework and biblically based structure for delivering Christian premarital counselling that addresses both spiritual foundations and the real-life challenges commonly faced by married couples.

6.6.2 Core common topics

The core common topics identified in the literature review are closely aligned with those raised by participants during the empirical phase in Chapter 4. These common topics, supported by fundamental Christian principles, are essential for assisting engaged couples in preparing for marriage. Accordingly, it is recommended that the proposed Christian premarital counselling programme include the following core common topics, each supported by Christian theological principles: (1) the purpose of marriage in *Genesis 2:24*, “*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*”, (2) marital expectations in *Ephesians 5:22–28*, “*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is*

the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”, (3) roles and responsibilities in 1 Timothy 5:8 “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”, (4) communication in James 1:19–20 “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”, (5) conflict resolution in Amos 3:3 “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”, (6) finances in 2 Corinthians 9:8 “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”, (7) marital unfaithfulness in Matthew 5:27–28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” and (8) sexual intimacy in 1 Corinthians 7:2–5 “But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Each topic should be reinforced with relevant theological insights, practical examples, and interactive worksheets to encourage meaningful reflection and engagement amongst engaged couples.

6.6.3 Ministerial training

It is recommended that ministers be equipped with regular training workshops on the Christian premarital programme to ensure they are theologically equipped and contextually aware when applying the generic counselling programme effectively. These training initiatives would help standardise delivery across churches while respecting each

congregation's unique pastoral context. The implementation of such a programme is expected to enhance consistency, quality, and depth in Christian premarital counselling practices, while also ensuring that the spiritual, emotional and practical needs of couples are addressed through a Christ-centred and holistic approach.

6.6.4 Ongoing pastoral care

It can be further recommended that ministers maintain pastoral involvement in the lives of couples beyond their wedding day. Several married participants emphasised the importance of ongoing guidance, highlighting the lasting impact of ministers who remain engaged after marriage. This recommendation suggests that ministers should intentionally cultivate a supportive environment during premarital counselling, where couples feel comfortable expressing their hopes, fears and core values.

6.6.5 Evaluation of marital readiness

Lastly, it can be recommended that ministers evaluate engaged couples' preparedness and readiness for marriage as a fundamental part of the premarital counselling process. The evaluation must concentrate on determining the engaged couple's relationship, spiritual and emotional preparedness to enter into a lifelong marital commitment, rather than just evaluating their completion of counselling sessions. To gain insight into the couple's understanding of biblical marriage principles, communication, conflict resolution abilities and shared values. This approach may involve informal interviews, self-evaluation questionnaires and introspective discussions. In addition to giving the couple insightful feedback on their areas of strength and development, assessing marital preparedness also allows ministers to provide focused support where gaps are found.

6.7 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the application of Osmer's four core tasks have successfully guided the evaluation of the URCSA Christian premarital counselling programmes in the northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles. The literature review of both local and global Christian premarital counselling programmes enabled the identification of core common topics for Christian premarital counselling. These common topics were used as a comparison tool against which the URCSA Christian premarital counselling programmes were evaluated. Data collection through semi-structured interviews and

assessment using Atlas.ti 25 helped identify the key aspects and gaps within the current Christian premarital counselling programmes in the respective URCSA churches.

Although the study revealed inadequacies and inconsistencies in the presentation of premarital counselling programmes in the URCSA churches in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, the study showed that Christian premarital counselling was both valued and essential for preparing engaged couples for marriage. These inadequacies and inconsistencies were identified as a lack of alignment amongst the participating churches, as not all common topics, sessions, and questions were supported in Christian theological principles, and significant variation existed in how these elements were addressed across the respective churches. Moreover, no generic Christian premarital counselling programme existed within the participating URCSA churches.

The study further confirmed that the identified core common topics supported with Christian theological principles, such as the purpose of marriage, marital expectations, communication, conflict resolution, finances, marital unfaithfulness and sexual intimacy, were essential in building a Christ-centred marriage. It also highlighted the importance and requirement of developing a generic Christian premarital counselling programme, supported by Christian theological principles, for URCSA churches. This will ensure consistent, biblically prepared marriages for engaged couples across churches. This approach would support engaged couples emotionally, spiritually and practically for marriage.

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Appendix A. Ethical Clearance Certificate



College of Human Sciences_CREC

Date 18/12/2024

Dear Mrs Alicia Veronica Fillis

Decision: Ethics Approval from 18 December 2024 to 17 December 2025

NHREC Registration # (Rec-240816-052)
Ref # 4672
Name Mrs Alicia Veronica Fillis
Student # 51950502

Researcher: Mrs Alicia Veronica Fillis

51950502@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Cape Town

51950502@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0844138878

Supervisor: Prof Garth Aziz azizg@unisa.ac.za

Evaluating the Premarital Counselling in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) Churches in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town in Light of Christian theological principles

Qualification: MTh

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences_CREC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **medium-risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Human Sciences_CREC on **18 December 2024** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Human Sciences_CREC.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013, Children's Act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**17 December 2025**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured. "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle

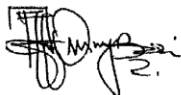
Note

The reference number 4672 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee

Kind regards,



Prof Khatija Khan
Chair of College of Human Sciences_CRECE
E-mail: khankb@unisa.ac.za



Professor Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Human Sciences_CRECE
E-mail: onyanob@unisa.ac.za

Appendix B. Interview guide questions for URCSA Ministers



Ethics clearance reference number # 4672

Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Premarital counselling framework

- 1 Does the church have a premarital counselling program?
- 2 How many years have you been involved in premarital counselling within the congregation?
- 3 How many topics does the program have?
- 4 Why have these topics been chosen?
- 5 During your experience, how effective do you find the premarital counselling program in preparing couples for marriage?

B. Theological perspective

- 6 Are all these topics supported by the Christian theological principles?
- 7 What is your opinion on the topics supported by the Christian theological principles?
- 8 Are there any specific Bible passages that you perpetually discuss in the program? If so, which ones and why?
- 9 How well do you think these passages help couples in counselling?



Appendix C. Interview guide questions for married couples



Ethics clearance reference number # 4672

Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MARRIED COUPLE

A. Premarital counselling framework

- 1 Which significant lessons from premarital counselling helped develop your marriage?
- 2 How did the counselling assist you better to understand each other's expectations, handling of conflict, and ways to communicate?
- 3 Describe a time when the guidance from the premarital counselling helped you work through a challenging situation in your marriage?
- 4 What were the negative aspects of the premarital counselling program?
- 5 Based on your experience as a married couple, how effective do you feel the premarital counselling program has been?

B. Theological perspective

- 6 What is your opinion on the topics that were discussed during the counselling?
- 7 How did premarital counselling equip you for spiritual growth and foster unity in your marriage?
- 8 How much did these topics help you as a married couple?
- 9 Despite the guidance provided, have you found it challenging to maintain shared faith practices like prayer or worship?



Appendix D. Consent form for URCSA Ministers



Ethics clearance reference number # 4672

Research permission reference number: NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable)

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified

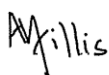
I agree to participate in a semi-structured interview, which will be recorded

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement

Participant Name & Surname (please print)

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname Alicia Fillis

Researcher's signature 

Date February 2025



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Appendix E. Consent form for married couples



Ethics clearance reference number # 4672

Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

We, _____ (participant names), confirm that the person asking our consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable)

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified

I agree to a semi-structured interview

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement

Participant Name & Surname _____ (please print)

Participant Signatures _____ Date _____

Researcher's Name & Surname Alicia Fillis

Researcher's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Fillis".

Date February 2025



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Appendix F. Participant information sheet for URCSA minister



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: # 4672

Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

February 2025

Title Evaluating the premarital counselling in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) churches in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles

Dear Rev

My name is Alicia Fillis, and I am conducting research under the supervision of Prof Garth Aziz, a professor in the Department of Philosophy, Practical & Systematic Theology, as part of my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study titled Evaluating the Premarital Counselling in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) Churches in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town in Light of Christian Theological Principles.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the study is to (1) to evaluate the premarital counselling in URCSA churches in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles for marriage.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are being chosen to participate in this study because, as a minister, you have valuable insights and experiences related to premarital counselling within the URCSA, which are essential for evaluating its effectiveness in light of Christian theological principles.



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WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves conducting semi-structured interviews with ministers and married couples to gain insights into the Christian premarital counselling program of the respective URCSA churches. Participation is expected to take place between February 2025 and July 2025, with each interview lasting approximately one and a half hours.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this research study is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Participating in this research study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Please note that once you have participated in the questionnaire and engaged in the interview, you won't be able to withdraw.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This research study will not only benefit churches, but also aim to enrich each Christian couple's marriage with Christian theological principles and the expectations of a God-designed marriage as they take the next steps toward marriage. Their participation and feedback will help evaluate the effectiveness of the premarital counselling program.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The only potential inconvenience or discomfort for you as a participant is the time required to take part in the interview. There are not any possible or reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to the potential participants. If there is any risk of other participants being involved in the research, we will notify the appropriate department at Unisa and take the necessary steps to mitigate the risk or its consequences. If any psychological injury or harm resulting from the study occurs, we will arrange for psychological or pastoral support.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?



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Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give

Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and or conference proceedings

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your questionnaire answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme after five years.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Taking part in this study, no payment or incentive benefits will be received.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Ethics clearance reference number # 4672 and Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052), Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.



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HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Mrs Alicia Fillis on 0844138878 or 51950502@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact 0844138878 or 51950502@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof Garth Aziz, azizg@unisa.ac.za, 012 429 6450. Contact the research ethics chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee Chairperson, Prof KB Khan, khankb@unisa.ac.za, 012 4298210 if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you



Mrs Alicia Fillis



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Appendix G Participant information sheet for married couple



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: # 4672

Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052)

February 2025

Title Evaluating the premarital counselling in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) churches in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles

Dear URCSA Participating Married Couple

My name is Alicia Fillis, and I am conducting research under the supervision of Prof Garth Aziz, a professor in the Department of Philosophy, Practical & Systematic Theology, as part of my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study titled Evaluating the Premarital Counselling in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) Churches in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town in Light of Christian Theological Principles.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the study is to (1) to evaluate the premarital counselling in URCSA churches in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town in light of Christian theological principles for marriage.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because, as a URCSA married couple, you have valuable insights and experiences related to premarital counselling within the URCSA, which are essential for evaluating its effectiveness in light of Christian theological principles.



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WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves conducting semi-structured interviews with married couples to gain insights into the Christian premarital counselling program of the respective URCSA churches. Participation is expected to take place between February 2025 and July 2025, with each interview lasting approximately one and a half hours, either in person or via electronic platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this research study is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Participating in this research study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Please note that once you have participated in the interview and engaged in the interview, you won't be able to withdraw.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This research study will not only benefit churches, but also aim to enrich each Christian couple's marriage with Christian theological principles and the expectations of a God-designed marriage as they take the next steps toward marriage. Their participation and feedback will help evaluate the effectiveness of the premarital counselling program.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The only potential inconvenience or discomfort for you as a participant is the time required to take part in the interview. There are not any possible or reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to the potential participants. If there is any risk of other participants being involved in the research, we will notify the appropriate department at Unisa and take the necessary steps to mitigate the risk or its consequences. If any psychological injury or harm resulting from the study occurs, we will arrange for psychological or pastoral support.



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WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give

Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and or conference proceedings

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your questionnaire answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme after five years.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Taking part in this study, no payment or incentive benefits will be received

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Ethics clearance reference number # 4672 and Research permission reference number NHREC Registration # (Rec – 240816 – 052), Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.



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