

**SEXUAL CHALLENGES (KHAEDU DZA VHUDZEKANI) AFFECTING VHAVENDA DIVORCEES IN A CHURCH CONTEXT: REFLECTION ON A CASE STUDY OF CARE AND COUNSELLING WITHIN THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA IN THE VHEMBE DISTRICT**

Mulovhedzi T.P., Masoga M.A. and Mudau, Z.D.\*  
University of Venda, South Africa

**Abstract**

*The main aim of this article is to explore the sexual challenges (khaedu dza vhudzekani) divorcees face as they relate to pastoral care and counselling in the church. The objectives of the study were (1) to identify and describe the sexual challenges of divorcees as they relate to pastoral care and counselling in the Reformed Churches of South Africa within the Vhembe District, and (2) to contribute towards the development of an African-orientated approach to pastoral care and counselling to support the Vhavenda divorcees with challenges (khaedu dza vhudzekani) after the pain of divorce and this challenge affects their faith and their practical lives. This study argues that caring and counselling for divorcees should be one of the primary missions of the church. The case study involved believers who are members of the Reformed Churches of South Africa: Synod Soutpansberg, particularly the churches that minister to the Vhavenda people in the Vhembe District Municipality in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. The research employed a qualitative method, with triangulation of data as a method to validate the data collection. The findings of this study show that divorcees experience many sexual challenges, and that Reformed pastors are not doing enough to address those challenges. The findings and recommendations of the study could be useful in guiding pastors in providing pastoral care and counselling to divorcees. The article proposes a new approach of supporting church members who divorcees and who are experiencing sexual challenges.*

---

\* **Takalani Peter Mulovhedzi** holds a doctorate in Pastoral Theology from the University of Venda and he is a Pastor in the Reformed Church of South Africa. His research interests lie in Pastoral Theology, Counselling and African Theology. E-mail: [mulovhedzipeter@gmail.com](mailto:mulovhedzipeter@gmail.com).

**Mogomme Alpheus Masoga** is an *alumnus* of the University of the Free State (UFS). Currently, he is appointed as Research Professor in the School of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Venda. His research interests range from Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Education to the promotion and protection of Religious, Linguistic, and Cultural Rights of Communities. He is the former Editor of the Development Southern Africa Journal at the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), former Social and Institutional Specialist and Senior Researcher at the DBSA. E-mail: [Alpheus.Masoga@univen.ac.za](mailto:Alpheus.Masoga@univen.ac.za).

**Zwo D. Mudau** obtained his PhD from the University of Venda, School of Human and Social Sciences in the Department of African Studies. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA) and is currently employed as police chaplain in the South African Police Service (SAPS). His research interests are Pastoral responses to police killings and counselling to families affected by police killings. Contact email: [MudauZ@saps.gov.za](mailto:MudauZ@saps.gov.za)

## Introduction

Divorce is one of the most painful and traumatic experiences that one can experience. In this article, the Vhavenda people who are divorcees are the subjects of this study. The emotional, psychological, physical and sexual scars borne by divorcees may at times be irreparable. One of the challenges that divorcees have to face is what is called *khaedu dza vhudzekani* (sexual challenges) in Tshivenda. Divorcees continue to be normal people with sexual needs, which they have to address in one way or another. Divorce, *thalano* in Tshivenda, is becoming more common among families in the rural Vhembe District Municipality, which is in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. Family and magistrates' courts are being flooded with divorce filings, which is a clear indication of the rise in the divorce rate among the Vhavenda people of the Vhembe District Municipality. This study considered divorcees who are members of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA). The statistics reveal that there were 105 divorced individuals in 11 congregations of the RCSA at the time of the study, comprising younger and older people. The breakdown of the divorce statistics in these congregations during 2014–2015 were: De Hoop – 14 divorcees; Fundudzi – 13 divorcees; Musina – 2 divorcees; Mutale – 2 divorcees; Mutshedzi – 9 divorcees; Mutshundudi – 18 divorcees; Mvudi – 6 divorcees; Niani – 15 divorcees; Nzhelele – 2 divorcees; Vhumbedzi – 16 divorcees, and Tshitandani – 6 divorcees. The statistics above show that divorce is a great challenge within the RCSA and it requires pastoral care and counselling. This sad state of affairs also affects Christian families. Whether acceptable or not, the divorce rate among Christians is also very high.

When divorce occurs in a family, it is usually traumatic and painful. When the process has been completed, those involved come to grips with the reality of what divorce means. They often ask whether they are allowed to remarry or not, and they have questions about the sexual challenges they have to endure. This study seeks to investigate the particular sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that the divorcees face. The first section of the article is background of the study. This is followed by the problem statement. The third section provides a detailed description of the theoretical framework. The discussion subsequently moves to the methodology and the data collection, followed by the data analysis. The article closes with research findings, recommendations and a conclusion.

### 1. Background

Before sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) can be investigated, it is good to first look at the Vhavenda people of the Vhembe District where the Reformed Churches of South Africa provide pastoral care and counselling to all church members (including divorcees who are facing *khaedu dza vhudzekani*). The identity of the Vhavenda people of Vhembe District is of crucial importance. It is therefore important to reflect on their historical background, their culture, social structures and be-

lief systems. It is, however, not the purpose of this article to provide an exhaustive description of the Vhavenda people, but it is good to have a broad overview to understand their historical background and cultural traits.

The Vhavenda people of the Vhembe District belong to the Vhavenda tribe, one of the Bantu peoples of South Africa. At the time of their encounter with the mission of the RCSA, the Vhavenda people of Vhembe District occupied the territory of the Soutpansberg in the Northern Transvaal. The area that they occupied stretched up to the Limpopo River in the North, the National Kruger Park in the east, Gazankulu (the Bantustan of the Tsonga-speaking people) in the south and south-east and the Bahanawa people in the west (Bunnet-Van Tonder, 1987, p. 1).

The geographical areas occupied by the Vhavenda people of Vhembe District can be divided into three main areas, namely western, eastern and southern Venda (Van Warmelo, 1935, pp. 117-121). The western part of Venda includes among others the Kutama, Mashamba, Mashau, Mphephu, Sinthumule, Nthabalala and Mulima clans. The southern Venda includes among others the Tshimbupfe, Davhana and Masia clans. The eastern Venda include among others the Tshivhase, Mphaphuli, Thengwe, Khakhu, Rambuda, Mugivhi, Lwamondo, Tsianda and Tshakhuma clans (Van Warmelo, 1935, pp. 117-121).

**Marriage and divorce:** Marriage among the Vhavenda tribe is regulated by a complexed legal and social system, the chief feature of which is the transfer of a bride's price (*thakha*) from the family of the man to the family of the woman. Since most of the Vhavenda people are polygamist, the bride's price for the most senior wife would be referred to as 'dzekiso'. The wife is referred to as *musadzi wa dzekiso*, meaning "bride's price wife". She is the one who would give birth to the next chief. In addition, it is taboo to marry from one's lineage (Lestrade, 1950, p. XII; cf. West, 1976, pp. 90, 91). The *musadzi wa dzekiso* is not always the first wife, but the wife given to the son by her father.

**Divorce:** Divorce is unusual (Phaswana 2000, p. 17). A man cannot return his wife to her parents and receive compensation unless she had had several abortions, had committed incest, had become a habitual adulteress or thief, or had been designated a witch. In the Vhavenda culture, divorce is usually associated with a bad or dirty life. The non-harmonious treatment of divorcees, including *mbuyavhuhadzi* (female divorcee who returns to her parents as a child in the house), may be caused by ancestors, spirits, witchcraft, or other people. The Vhavenda people of Vhembe District consult the *vho-maine* (herbalist) or *zwigoma-mutanda* (traditional healers) for a support, which usually includes the slaughter or sacrifice of animals to appease the angered ancestors.

**Divorce among Vhavenda Christians:** The researcher managed to study divorce files dating back to 1979 when Venda became independent from the old South Africa to 1999, after re-incorporation. They show that nine out of ten of those who married and who had been divorced, were Venda Christians. Second, 27, or 5%, of all married persons who responded to the question “Have you at any stage thought of divorcing him/her?”, said “Yes” whereas, 72, or 5%, said “No”. This finding suggests that the rate of divorce is high among Venda Christians. Eighty-five per cent of all respondents were Venda people, and 77% of these were Christians.

## **2. Problem statement**

Divorce is a social problem that affects people differently. It has both a psychosocial and spiritual impact on the lives of divorcees. The divorcees in the RCSA in the Vhembe District experience sexual challenges. During a Family Enrichment Conference held on 17 January 2014, many divorcees raised concerns with regard to how the church neglects discussion of their sexual challenges. Seventeen divorcees attended the conference. They mentioned that divorcees are not counselled and their sexual issues are not addressed. They feel that the church knows that human beings cannot run from sex, since it is a necessity, and a physical need. Yet the church regards divorcees as unfaithful people. The divorcees indicated that they do not get support from other church members and pastors and they therefore feel neglected. When divorcees feel isolated and neglected by the church, some lose interest in church matters. Some decide to join other churches that are more sympathetic to their situation, and others lose hope for the future. When divorcees do not receive support, it becomes difficult for them to cope with their situation. Pastors who fail to provide pastoral care and counselling to the divorcees, augment the challenges that the divorcees face. Some blame God for the loss of a marriage partner through divorce. Other divorcees engage in sexual relations that are contrary to God’s Word.

## **3. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for the study was largely taken from Graham Redding’s (2012) pastoral care model of shepherding through caring. The model is based on the biblical tradition’s presentation of God as the one who cures and cares for souls. The model shows ways in which the practice of the theory can be used to support divorcees. These ways include worship, prayer, healing, care, counselling, faith formation, discipline, and code of conduct, contexts of pastoral care, ministering to those who are in pain, and maintaining personal health and well-being. This model is appropriate for healing traumatised divorcees. The framework was derived from the Word of God and encourages people to follow biblical guidelines and God’s instruction in responding to their sexual challenges. The goal of the Word of God is to cure souls and save people’s lives. In Africa, this goal goes hand-in-

hand with the spirit of *ubuntu*, which is an Afrocentric theory. Afrocentricity can be defined as an approach centred or derived from African culture. It emphasises and promotes African culture and the contribution of the African to the development of western civilisation (Merriam Webster). *Ubuntu* calls us to believe and feel that your pain is my pain, and my wealth is your health. *Ubuntu* promotes the ability to move persons towards compassion for and service to others. The words *botho* or *ubuntu*, in the South African context, are derived from the Sesotho and Nguni languages respectively. The Tshivenda and Xitsonga languages also have derivatives of the concept. According to Shutte (2001, p. 2), *ubuntu* means “humankind”.

#### **4. Methodology**

The research followed a qualitative method with triangulation of data as a method to investigate the challenges of divorcees in the RCSA in the Vhembe District. The aim was to develop an Afro-sensed approach of pastoral care and counselling to support divorcees so that they may learn to cope with the pain of sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*). The method was employed to answer the research questions. The study gave insight into real-life situations and allowed the researcher a meaningful understanding of the challenges divorcees face (Merriam, 1988:6). This method helped the researcher explore and understand a central phenomenon. The researcher asked participants general questions and collected the detailed responses. The methodology explained the research design, population, sampling, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis. The data collected during interviews were transcribed, and coding was done by highlighting substantive statements on each transcription. Thereafter, the codes were sorted into different categories. The themes that emerged were the sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that divorcees mentioned; how divorcees react to the sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that are caused by the loss of a marriage partner through divorce; divorcees’ coping strategies; and divorcees’ hopes for the future.

#### **5. Data collection**

Data were collected by means of individual interviews. Interviews were recorded and the researcher made field notes. The data were analysed by identifying themes and sub-themes. Findings reveal that many divorcees experienced sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that need to be answered by reformed churches. Triangulation was done by doing face-to-face interviews, observation and consulting field notes to seek a deeper or fuller understanding of what participants mean. Thirty interviews were done at participants’ homes. One central question was asked: “**What sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) do you experience as a divorcee that relate to pastoral care and**

**counselling in the RCSA in Vhembe District of Limpopo?”** Participants were free to use any language in which they could communicate comfortably. They talked freely and openly.

## **6. Data analysis**

Since the research conducted was qualitative, the researcher analysed data. The participants' views were grouped into different themes related to sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*). The following sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) were mentioned: the challenge of being accused of sexual immorality, loss of interest in sex, sexual identity, and the challenge of sexual pressure. Data were analysed by using these themes. The findings reveal that all the divorcees experienced some sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that should be addressed by churches.

This methodology was used to analyse the field notes and transcripts, including the written responses from participants. The same principle was applied when listening to the audio-recorded responses from participants and transcribing all responses into the written text. The transcription was done in English and Tshivenda. For the purpose of this study, all interviews were translated into English so that readers can understand the bigger picture.

## **7. Research findings: The sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) caused by divorce**

The research findings are discussed below. The findings are divided into different themes to create an understanding of the sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) of divorcees within the Reformed Churches of South Africa in the Vhembe District.

### **Challenge 1**

#### **The challenge of being accused of sexual immorality**

According to Grace Kimati, an African author from Kenya (1994, p. 41), one of the real difficulties that faces divorcees is how to live with unfulfilled sexual desires. Married persons have a natural outlet for this in marriage. Divorcees can only live with burning desires and must struggle to keep them caged. Sexual immorality affects every part of a human being: the spirit, emotions, conscience and mentality.

During the interviews, one female participant indicated that,

*“...church members regard me as person of immorality. Even my church pastor was also suspicious of my morality. For instance, a certain church pastor who was very suspicious of me as a divorcee saying that I was suddenly fell in love with another member of the church. When I got promotion at work, I was told that I obtained that promotion not because of my performance, but through sexual*

*intercourse. For me, I regard that statement as a curse. What made the situation more unbearable and painful to me is that church members wanted me to live alone.*

She later added that pastors' "wives usually say that they don't trust divorcees."

Some pastors indicated that the situation is made worse by men who take advantage of female divorcees, most of them with the intention of robbing them of the property left to them by their husbands.

## **Challenge 2**

### **The challenge of a loss of interest in sex**

One female participant indicated in her interview that,

*"I was discouraged by my husband who gave me six children, after he divorced me he told me that in bedroom I am not good, I am not sweet, I am like water, I am ugly. Those painful words from the mouth of my divorced husband made me to lose interest in sex and not to think to enter into another marriage; I concluded that I am not sweet. I will never please any man with my body. I began to think that something is wrong with me. I was very depressed."*

Another participant put it in this way:

*"I lost interest in sex. I've lost even interest in touch because of what happened before. Personally I lost interest."*

## **Challenge 3**

### **The challenge of sexual identity**

One male participant indicated:

*"After divorce, I had a fear of remarrying. I am no longer interested in marrying a wife."*

According to Redding (2012), sexual identity and relating sexually as a single person are issues that arise during the divorce process. It is often a period of initial disinterest. Sometimes hypersexual activity occurs as a way of re-establishing a sense of worth as a man or woman, or a way of coping with loneliness, or to seek revenge. The challenge is to reconcile one's beliefs and values with the single lifestyle.

#### Challenge 4

##### The challenge of sexual pressure

Retief (2000, p. 138) indicates that sex is a very powerful human drive. God has given it to us for our enjoyment and happiness. Because of its unique dynamic, it is given within the framework of a meaningful relationship, such as the commitment of marriage. Taking sex out of God-given boundaries and safeguards is to let loose one of the most powerful and destructive forces one will ever know. The irony is that sex is intended for our good. During an interview with a female participant, she stated that,

*“...as a divorcee who was divorced by a husband, in the beginning of divorce, because of the anger, sex never came to head, but as life goes on, she said, I started to feel sexual pressure. Sexual pressure was a very big challenge as a person who entered into marriage with this man for sex. As divorcee who is working, I was having sexual pressures at work, the irritation of coping with well-meaning matchmakers, uncertainty about how to behave with opposite sex. When my husband divorced me, I told myself that I will never enter into marriage with anyone else, but because of there is sexual pressure everywhere I go, I entered into a remarriage with the man I love. That is why I am a mother of triplets who were born in this new marriage. I glorify the name of God for comforting me with this new family where everything is going well.”*

Another participant put it in this way:

*“The life after divorce is difficult, because the challenge of sex is there. What I see after divorce, spent four to five years without having sexual intercourse with a man. I think being divorced traumatised me a lot. After divorce, I decided not to get into sexual intercourse. While I was still in my marriage, that situation of not having sex while sleeping with a husband in the same bed, inside one blanket, is like it traumatised me so that I cannot able to get a new man.”*

Yet another participant said:

*“My sexual pressure was too much. After divorce, I used to do masturbation as a way of relieving my sex desire. I experienced that this thing is very painful, because I felt that in the moment of ejaculation without a wife, it was so painful. It is not a good habit. This made me to think of getting into another marriage.”*

Participant number 16 put in this way:

*“Because of a lack of church support, I ended up having an affair with somebody else’s wife.”*



According to Retief (2000, p. 74), many women and men continue to sleep with their ex-partners, ex-husbands or ex-wives. Retief (2000, p. 129) emphasises that a divorce does not automatically switch our sexual desires off. They are still very much alive, and for most divorcees, they constitute an enormous problem. As a result, many divorced people continue to sleep together or engage in other sexual relationships. Retief (2000, p. 162) continues to say that “sexual pressure at work, the irritation of coping with well-meaning matchmakers, uncertainty about how to behave with the opposite sex and, in some circles, the social prejudice against singles raise an important question: how do I respond as a single person? You may be single through no choice of your own, and may feel unsure as to how to respond in certain circumstances.”

One participant put things this way:

*“After divorce, I continued to have sexual intercourse with many men; I didn’t have sexual pressure. It was not easy for me to abstain from sex.”*

Another participant admitted:

*“I am divorced, but as an African man I have a woman whom I sleep with, because I feel that I cannot cope without a wife.”*

Another male participant provided the following view:

*“The issue of sex contributed a lot to the fall of my marriage. I don’t know why my wife saw things in that way of not taking sex seriously. She used to give me sex once a week, or once after two weeks, or once after three weeks. In the night when we went to sleep in one bed, she used to sleep with her own blanket, and mine I have my own. Sexual pressure was there before divorce. After divorce, I felt that I cannot cope being alone, I still felt a very serious sexual pressure, that is why I decided to get into another marriage “remarriage”.*

## **Challenge 5**

### **The challenge of not practicing sex outside marriage, especially with your former spouse**

In this regard one male participant indicated that,

*“...it is difficult for him not to practice sex outside marriage; he has a wife that satisfies him sexually. But he feels guilty because of knowing the biblical truth that sex is to be done in the marriage. He said that sex outside marriage confuses three areas of my life – my status, my children and my new relationship.”*

Retief (2000, p. 136) confirms what the above participant said. He states that if you practice sex outside of marriage, especially with your former spouse, you become confused because, although you are divorced, the break is not final. Feelings of guilt are created and perpetuated. You feel that your ex-spouse is still your partner and you have no chance of adapting to your new situation. Your children may have lived through a traumatic time. Retief (2000, p. 136) continues by saying: "A post-divorce sexual relationship with the marriage partner is often accompanied by uncertainty and depression because of the instinctive feeling that something is wrong. Even if the divorce is not yet final, it is foolish to allow the privileges of marriage without the responsibilities."

### **The meaning of pastoral care and counselling**

**Pastoral care:** The purpose of pastoral care is to respond to the needs of all members of God's community, including divorcees who are experiencing sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*), so that all can live a full and abundant life. Pastoral care involves caring that is motivated by the love of God (Deuteronomy 6:5); love of one's neighbour (Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:37-39) and caring for strangers. Pastoral care as a ministry is not only provided by ordained pastors, but also by the whole Christian community (Waruta & Kinoti, 1994, p. 6). Pastoral care ministry involves concern for the personal and social well-being of God's community, including divorcees, on issues of physical, psychological and social health. According to Clebsch and Jackle (1964, p. 4), pastoral care "... consists of helping acts done by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons, whose troubles arise in context of ultimate meanings and concerns. Pastoral care ministry sees the caring Christian as a shepherd (Psalms 7; 52; 23) or guide. The role embraces an duty to protect, encourage and mentor, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the sick, visit prisoners and restore the faith of the broken souls (Matthew 25:36)."

This article reveals that the sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) that Vhavenda divorcees who are church members in the RCSA face, require pastoral care. From the African perspective, Msomi (1992, p. 12) sees pastoral care as "a quest for liberation of the person...as well as the passionate zeal that others be liberated in Christ in their own context, instead of being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own". For Mucherera (2001, pp. 17-18), pastoral care should speak and respond to the daily sufferings of people.

In Africa, pastoral care focuses on guidance and human well-being. It seeks out traditional resources that respect human dignity (Phaswana 2008, pp. 4-5). The aim of pastoral care in an African context is to care for the well-being of others and for the self. As Phaswana (2008, p. 4) says, in Africa "members of the community are culturally obligated to care for each other." Hence, in an African context,

children and adults are given guidance on ways in which they should care for others and for themselves. One famous Tshivenda proverb expresses this as follows: “*Muthu ndi muthu nga vhanwe vhathu*” – “a person is a person because of other people”. Mbiti (1969, pp. 108-109) puts it as follows: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”

**Pastoral counselling:** According to Maldonado (1990, p. vi), pastoral care is a helping and supportive service offered by ordained pastors or trained lay persons in the church to assist people in difficult situations with the process of finding better alternatives and making their own best decisions. The researcher agrees with Maldonado because even the RCSA church order acknowledges that pastoral care and counselling is there to help and to support someone who is in a difficult situation (2003, p. 12). Clinebell (1984, p. 26) defines pastoral counselling as the utilisation of a variety of healing or therapeutic methods to help people handle their problems and crises and, thus, experience healing of their brokenness. He sees pastoral counselling as a reparative function needed when a person’s growth is seriously jeopardised or blocked by crises. People need pastoral care at some point during their lives. However, they may need pastoral counselling at times of severe crisis. It is the opinion of the researcher that pastors, as healers, should provide assistance, guidance and care to divorcees because they are in need of effective pastoral counselling to cope with their situation. Masamba ma Mpolo and Kalu (1985, p. 13) say that pastoral care and counselling are essential parts of liberation, healing and of the ministry of the Christian. Ministers should play the role of restoring well-being in the divorcees’ life of pain. Pastors of the RCSA in the Vhembe District should know that it is their responsibility to renew the lives of those divorcees who are experiencing sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*). The RCSA’s church order states that pastoral counselling is a pastor’s task, so pastors must not stand by waiting for people to request a counselling session (Vorster, 2003, p. 32). Their task must be pro-active and should include a guidance perspective as well.

### **Recommendation and conclusion**

According to Mashau (2008, p. 85), the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a rise in divorce rates throughout the world. When one examines world statistics on divorce, one of the most noticeable things is that the divorce rate is on the increase. Divorce has become a household word throughout the world. Men and women enter into and leave marriages like never before. Marriage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can therefore be typified as a matter of trial and error. That is why there is also a growing culture of people moving in and living together as husband and wife instead of courting as they should. If it works, they consider committing themselves to getting married, but if it does not work out, one of them moves out without them experiencing the pain

of divorce. This investigation of the sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) of divorced Vhavenda people who are church members of the RCSA in the Vhembe District, reminds us that divorce is real in the churches of our times.

All divorcing parents, those who are experiencing sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*), and those who are seeking remarriage, need education, counselling and mediation. This kind of support should be given by people who have been trained to do so. Another helpful mechanism that can remedy the situation is to create support groups to help those who are still mourning after going through a divorce, those who are divorced, and those who have remarried respectively. Support groups should also be created for those who opt to remain single after divorce.

Divorcees must be assured that there is life after divorce. From a pastoral care and counselling perspective, we can suggest the following things that one who is also experiencing sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) can do after divorce: After divorce one can decide to stay unmarried and focus on serving the Lord without having to deal with marriage issues. In this case, if one has children from a previous marriage, one can focus one's energy on ensuring that the children get all the possible guidance and help that they can get. If reconciliation is not possible after divorce and one is not able to stay unmarried, then another marriage is an option (1 Corinthians 7:15). In this case, one must simply make sure that everything is conducted in the fear of the Lord. Such a person will have to devote ample time to premarital counselling to ensure that they are ready for another commitment.

The RCSA in Vhembe District must not undermine the South African constitution, especially the Bill of Rights, where persons belonging to religious communities may not be denied the right to gather with other members of that community (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, p. 15). The church as the body of Christ must imitate Christ, instead of judging and punishing sinners, abandoning and forsaking them so that they have to cope with their sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) alone. Christ approaches sinners with the offer of God's love and identifies with the outcast. The church must offer passion, mercy, love and help to divorcees by visiting them, and by sharing the good news with them as a way of showing support. Members must treat divorcees in a good and honourable way, and as brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is called by God to practice what the Bible preaches in the community by merging Christian values with the African community values of love, mutual respect and inter-dependence. It should inform church members that divorce can happen to any marriage, and any marriage can die, even that of a Christian church member because all people are living in a sinful world. It should find ways of helping and supporting divorcees who are engaged in prostitution. The church should walk with divorcees and encourage them to do personal Bible study, attend conferences, go on trips and listen to God's Word

from the pulpit so that they can spiritually grow, and that they do not to face their challenges alone. Churches must be sympathetic to the needs of divorcees. It must encourage divorcees to live a God-honouring life. It must pray for them. The church should condemn rejection, discrimination and isolation of divorcees and work towards change. Church pastors should listen to the story of a divorcee and believe their plight. Pastors should make it clear to divorcees that it is not their fault; they must allow a divorcee to talk and talk and just listen and be there with them in respect and humbleness. Pastors must accompany divorcees on their journey of healing and should encourage them to attend pastoral counselling. The church must educate and train laypeople to become counsellors of divorcees who are facing challenges. The church can set up a centre where divorcees can receive counselling. The church can assist in healing the emotional, psychological and physical scars of the divorcees.

### **Recommendations**

The church should not ignore the African culture of the indigenous people, nor its practices, for these practices have affected the indigenous people for a long time and have always been part of their way of life. Transformation should take place amongst the ministers of the RCSA. In the transformation process, the Vhavenda traditional culture and practices should be respected and incorporated into the Christian religion. African culture should be nurtured, honoured and respected, thus encouraging the spread of Christianity. In the past, sadly, this was ignored in the interest of imposing Christianity on the indigenous people. It should be accepted that there is a difference between Christianity and Western culture. The Vhavenda culture in the Vhembe District could be used as a vessel to facilitate the acceptance of pastoral care and counselling practices. Jesus is above the ancestors, for he rules the whole universe and not a particular clan or tribe. The church should be realistic even in supporting African divorcees who are facing sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*).

### **References**

- Burnett-Van Tonder, C. (1987). *Sosio-etniese danse van die Vendavrou*. Cape Town: Haum.
- Clinebell, H. (1984). *Basic types of pastoral care and counselling*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Clebsch, W.A., & Jaeckle, C.R. (1964). *Pastoral care in historical perspective*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- De V. Minnaar, A., Offering, D., & Payze, C. (1992). *To live in fear: Witch-burning and medicine murder in Venda*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Francis, R. (2013). *The Gospel faith messenger: Ministry*. Retrieved on 1 May, 2016, from: <http://www.gospel.org.nz/>
- Kimathi, G. (1994). *Your marriage and family*. Potchefstroom: PU for CHE.

- Lestrade, G.P. (1950). The Mala system of the Venda-speaking tribes. In N.J. Van Warmelo, *Contribution towards Venda history, religion and tribal ritual* (pp. xii-xx). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Mafunisa, J.M. (2008). Ethics, African societal values and workplace. In R. Nicholson (Ed.), *Persons in community: African ethics in a global culture* (pp. 111-124). Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Maldonado, J.E. (1990). *A Guide to HIV/AIDS: Pastoral counselling*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Ma Mpolo, M., & Kalu, W. (Eds.) (1985). *The risk of growth: Counselling and pastoral theology in the African context*. Nairobi: UZIMA Press.
- Mashau, T.D. (2008). *God's road map for human sexuality. Disciplining your child to make sexual choices that honour God*. Kempton Park: Edleen.
- Mbiti, J.S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Msomi, V.V. (1992). *Pastoral counselling in South Africa with special reference to the Zulu*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Cape Town, Cape Town.
- Merriam, S.B. (1988). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from the case study during research in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mucherera, T.N. (2001). *Pastoral care from a third perspective: A pastoral theology of care for the urban contemporary Shona in Zimbabwe*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Phaswana, N.S. (2000). *Marital problems in religious mixed marriages amongst the Vhavenda people of South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Phaswana, D.R. (2008). *Communal pastoral counselling. Cultural gifted caregivers in times of family pain: a Vhavenda perspective*. (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis). University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Redding, G. (2012). *Pastoral care handbook*. Retrieved on 1 May, 2016, from: <http://knoxcentre.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Pastoral-Care-Handbook1.pdf>
- Retief, F. (2000). *Transforming lives. Divorce. Hope for hurting*. Cape Town: Cornelius Struik House.
- Schutte, A.G. (1978). Mwali in Venda: some observations on the significance of the High God in Venda history. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, IX(2), 109–122.
- Shutte, A. (2001). *Ubuntu: An ethic from a new South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Spoeltra, B. (1999). *Sending vir kerk of koninkryk? Sending-geskiedenis van die GKSA, 1869-1994*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Teologiese Publikasies.
- Stayt, H.A. (1931). *The Bavenda*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Van Rooy, J.A. (1964). *Sinkretisme in Vendaland*. Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO.

Mulovhedzi, Masoga & Mudau, Sexual challenges (*khaedu dza vhudzekani*) affecting Vhavenda divorcees in a church context: Reflection on a case study of care and counselling within the reformed churches of South Africa in the Vhembe district, pp. 89-103

Van Warmelo, N.J. (1935). *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa*. Pretoria: the Government Printer.

Waruta, D.W., & Kinoti, H.W. (Eds.) (1994). *Pastoral care in African Christianity: Challenging essays in Pastoral Theology*. Nairobi: Action Publishers.

West, M. (1976). *Abantu: An introduction to the Black people of South Africa*. Johannesburg: Struik Publishers.

Vorster, J.M. (2003). *An introduction to Reformed Church polity*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Potchefstroom: PU for CHE.

NB: This article is based on the PhD (African Studies) thesis: "Challenges of divorcees in the Reformed Churches of South Africa within the Vhembe District: towards an Afro-sensed approach to pastoral care and counselling", submitted at the Department of African Studies, School of Human and Social Sciences, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, in 2017.