

Effective Public Engagement Course
Course project:

Let's Strengthen Marriage

"Marriage should be honored by all..." Hebrews 13:4

By Plamena Valkova, Sliven - Bulgaria

Goals

1. To represent a deeper understanding of marriage based on the Biblical teaching for it and to realize the importance of this institution;
2. To enrich Christian marriages;
3. To find other good Christian practices focused on marriage and to apply them to our circumstances;
4. To reach families at risk and to provide them with spiritual, emotional and practical support;
5. To develop an ongoing program that addresses and deals with the problems of marriage;

Why this project?

Statistics show that the marriage is in crises. We face that problem every day in our society. If we had healthier marriages, there would be fewer problems in many other areas of life like adolescence crime, abandoned children and elderly people etc. I am interested in that topic because in Bulgaria we need to understand the importance of the marriage institution in a time when it is highly undermined. The understanding of the Biblical principles, their promotion and implementation could make very positive impact on my nation.

It is talked about death of the marriage institution as such. As a whole it is the fault of the society because in the past living together without marriage was immoral but now the society does not blame but even supports such way of living.

One hundred years ago there was a strict order in the structure and functioning of the Bulgarian family. The oldest man in the family, the head of the home and owner of the property, represented the family in the society. The oldest woman – his wife, looked after the house, bringing up the children and realizing other activities connected with running the house. There were rules that were accepted and kept by all in the family. Among those rules there were honoring the parents, respect, obedience and shyness.

This patriarchal structure gave confidence for the members of the family but also made them dependent. For example, the parents would choose the future spouses for their children. The society at that time took it as natural that like people with long life experience the parents can wisely make that choice and would not do anything that might do bad to their children. The pre-marriage relationship of the young people was characterized with meetings on specific places and time: working

places and public celebrations, at the market or by the well, at weddings or engagements. However this lack of “freedom”, as considered by nowadays young people, divorce happened very rarely at those times.

Nowadays, like everywhere in the world, the family as a value in Bulgaria is facing a serious challenge and the marriage institution is in deep crisis. Many marriages break, half of the children are born out of marriage, every year thousands of abortions are performed and the model of living together without marriage is a popular practice. The demographic situation in Bulgaria reveals crisis with the tendency to become catastrophe. The transfer of experience and qualities between parents and their children is blocked. Besides all these facts, there is also unfavorable influence of the migration processes (especially the migration of the young people away from our country) on the preservation of traditional family values, which is not improved in any way by the World Wide Financial Crisis.

The “healthy family” is the driving force and the future of any society. It guarantees its existence, survival and development. Unfortunately the degradation of the family started long ago and the present condition is a result of many years process, influenced by the left ideologists who ruled upon our nation for many years in the near past (1944-1989). The aim of their program was to destroy three things so that their “progressive” social order would triumph. These three things are: the private property, the organized religion and The family.

The family has always been exposed at risk starting from its very beginning in the Garden of Eden. The people who are not Christians blame the circumstances in life but the problem is much deeper and spiritual. Although times are changing and now there are different problems in marriages than some years ago, the reason is the same. We have an enemy, the Devil, who is never asleep *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1Pe.5:8)

I live in comparatively small country. The congregation that my husband pastors is also not a big one. However, following the example of Jesus who also choose only 12 disciples to train, not hundreds, I also think that it is important to remain faithful in the place where God wants us to be. To become salt and light for the society where we live and through our personal example and message to reach out those who are away from God. There is big encouragement in the parable for the talents and wonderful promise if we remain faithful: *“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!”* (Mt.25:21)

Being married and having two children makes me realize that it is very important to build a healthy marriage where someone can feel loved and secure. This is impossible without God! My prayer and deepest desire is to create a project, which will encourage the families in our church, will benefit our town and will make a little difference for our country!

It will be a blessing and wonderful reward if as a result of this project we see marriages being healed and strengthened and people coming to know Christ as their savior. This is not one-person work and that is why for the realization I will rely on the

support of my family, the whole church and helpers from the Christian society in the town and even other parts of the country. The vital key is prayer and from the very start of this project, I will have a group of brothers and sisters praying for it regularly!

Problems in the modern Bulgarian marriages

Statistics

According the Bulgarian National Statistic Institute (NSI) The population in Sliven is at about 110 000 people. In Bulgaria at the end of 2009 the population was 7 563 710 people.

- *Demographic situation – crisis*

According NSI in 2009 in Sliven we had 2829 born alive babies and 2942 death-rate. At the moment for one Bulgarian child there are three-four children from the minorities. The population increase in our country for 2009 according NSI is -3,5 ppm but according CIA it is -11 ppm. They are also talking about reduction of the population in Bulgaria down to 5 million people in 5 decades.

- *Children matters*

According the statistics of NSI out of the 2829 born alive babies in Sliven we have 871 born in marriage and 1958 children born out of marriage. According the statistics of the Foundation “For our children” Bulgaria is on the first place in Europe for the number of abandoned children. Accord the Agency for Social Policy towards April 2009 we have 7276 children in the specialized institutions. The NGO statistics show that the number of these children is even 9000 for the same period of time! 10 out of 100 children were born by underage mothers. 70% from the children in the specialized institutions are with Roma origin and are undesirable for adoption.

- *Abortion*

Every year in Bulgaria there are 50 thousand abortions announced by the Bulgarian obstetric and gynecology association. Bulgaria is on the first place in East Europe for abortion among the teenagers. The chairman of the Bulgarian obstetric and gynecology association, Prof. Nikola Milchev comments that 41 out of 1000 teenagers in Bulgaria bear children and 38 out 1000 perform abortion, which is a very high percent. According him the negative tendency is due to the low sexual culture of the young people. *“It is impossible in the 21 century in Bulgaria for 65 000 births to have 50 000 abortions”*, he declared.

- *Divorces*

The NSI shows that in 2009 we had 628 contracted marriages and 311 divorces. This means that every second marriage finishes with a divorce! They say that more often it will be the women who tend to apply for a divorce.

There is an interesting material titled “10 myths for divorce” where American specialists dethrone the common perception about divorces. Here it is:

Myth 1

The second marriage is always more successful than the first one.

In practice: According to the statistics, second marriages break even more often than the first ones.

Myth 2

Living together before contracting a marriage helps to reduce the risk for divorce.

In practice: Many researches prove that the couples who live together before contracting a marriage more likely tend to separate than the couples who start their life together after marriage.

Myth 3

The divorce has bad influence over the children but their psychology is flexible and they can cope with it.

In practice: The divorce negatively affects the personal development of the children at any age. Some of the problems can worsen in the adolescence and even after it.

Myth 4

Children strengthen marriage and help to prevent divorce.

In practice: Compared to the childless couples the risk for divorce in families with children is smaller but the modern man and a woman more rarely stay together in the name of the child.

Myth 5

After divorce the life of the women is worsened by 73 % and the life of the man is improved by 42 %.

In practice: This information was taken out of a research 27 years ago. In the estimations of the author there is a mistake and it was revealed not long ago. In reality the life of the woman is worsened by 27 % and the life of the husband is improved by 10 %.

Myth 6

If the marriage of the parents does not work it would be better for the children if they separate.

In practice: Recent psychological researches totally deny this old myth. Except from the families where there are constant conflicts and violence for the families where there is a less level of misunderstanding but are at risk for divorce (60% out of the families liable to separate are such) the children suffer much more if the divorce happens.

Myth 7

The children from separated families are happier in their own marriage because from the example of their parents they learnt how to accept marriage more seriously.

In practice: It is more often for children who lived in separated families to separate themselves. The main reason is the same but with the reverse effect: following the example of their parents the children learned how to underestimate

marriage. After all they saw that the oath for faithfulness and everlasting love turned to be an empty talk. How could they believe in the unbreakable family values?

Myth 8

Remarrying is preferable for the children: the child will grow better in a full family with stepmother or stepfather rather than in family with one parent.

In practice: The full family formed by second marriage, does not save the child from stress and depression due to the divorce of his parents. The new full family will face enough difficulties like: fit the characters, psychological barriers, conflicts between the stepparent and the child, interpersonal conflicts between the child and the new members of the family.

Myth 9

The lack of happiness in some stages of marriage is the first sign that the marriage will end up with divorce.

In practice: All marriages have their ups and downs, good and bad times, happiness and pain. All relationships have periodical drops and there should be and internal adjustment to this. A curious research shows that 70 % from couples who described their marriage as miserable five years ago, today think exactly the opposite.

Myth 10

Initiators of divorce more often are men.

In practice: Over 60 % of the divorces all over the world are initiated by women.

▪ Addictions

In Bulgaria we have various forms of addictions that ruin marriages. For example:

- Alcohol – During the last 10 years, the number of the youths drinking alcohol grew three times and the number of the girls drinking alcohol grew six times. A research of the National center for drug-addictions shows 6% of the students at the age of 13 to 18 years drink five brandies a day. Usually they taste alcohol for the first time at the age of 13 – 15 years but some of them start even at 12, which mean that most probably the parents allowed them to drink their first glass of alcohol! According the same research, 5% of the students in the high schools drink every day 2.5 beers, 1 litter of wine or 250 grams of brandy. The experts explain that the influence of alcohol upon children is disastrous because their bodies cannot process it easily. If a child starts drinking at the age of 10, within 6 months will become addicted while it takes 10-12 years for the elderly people. The sad facts show that the children take the example from their families because the statistics show that 70% of the Bulgarians drink alcohol and half of them overdo it! 6% out of them have created alcohol addiction.

- Drugs – the use of drugs starts at the same age as the alcohol, usually between 12 – 18 years. 90% of the children would confirm that at the parties, they are offered drugs and every four schoolchild tried marijuana! Non-official researches show that there are more than 150 000 people using drugs. The official statistic

indicate 57 000 but it does not include the people who are using the soft drugs like cannabis.

There are other forms of addictions like gambling, work etc., which ruin the personality and the family.

- *Homosexuality*

On 26th June we had the third gay parade in Sofia. The number of the homosexuals is rapidly growing. We still do not have laws supporting the marriages between homosexual couples but this is unfortunately inevitable to be raised as question in the future. There are many Embassies, for the first time a parliament party, organizations and formations that supported the parade. The Christians are openly against it. There were many declarations, protests and efforts to stop it but unfortunately it happened. One of the Medias stood against the parade. They noticed that the parade was guarded by a very big number of police officers. This is a paid service and the amount for that parade was huge. It was impossible for the gay society in Bulgaria to pay for it. The truth was that it is sponsored from abroad and there is outside influence that supports it. Parallel with the parade there was a group of Christians who were giving out to the people a leaflet, issued by "Forum for child and family protection" talking about the myths for homosexuality and revealing the dangers of it all supported with data, official researches and facts. The conclusion made in this leaflet was the following:

- *In terms of biology, the homosexuality is not natural, it is a choice;*
- *In terms of psychology, the homosexuality is reversible;*
- *In terms of sociology, the homosexuality is unnatural phenomenon;*
- *In terms of religion, the homosexuality is sin.*

We hope and pray that the message reached more people and will help them make the right choices!

- *Co-habitation*

Statistics show that many marriages happen after the birth of the first child. There is a positive tendency from June, 2010. The National Parliament voted against the regularization of the cohabitation without marriage. In the voting for these changes there were 92 deputies. 77 out of them voted against, 7 supported the changes and 8 voted abstention. In the beginning of October, 2009, the entire parliament supported that change! This prompted a sharp reaction from the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Chief of the Mufti's Office and the United Evangelical Churches. Despite that, the reality shows that this is a growing tendency in our society! At the same time the parliament accepted the law for marriage contracts. This settles the questions for the couples in case of divorce. In my opinion, these contracts totally undermine the oath "together until death". It gives an open door to end your marriage with less trouble or to force your partner do things in order to stay together and at the same time all things should be done willingly and lovingly!

The lost Christian Values reflect on the crisis of the marriage relationships in the modern Bulgarian family. Iuri Dachev, an ex vice minister of Culture in the

Government of Ivan Kostov expressed the following opinion in an interview for Focus Agency regarding this problem: *The 40 years of absolute persecution of the upbringing in Christian spirit, of Christian literacy we are to pay for at least as much again. So, I do not think that we are losing something at the moment because long ago these Christian values faded. This is, of course, drama for our society...*” We are living now in a generation without God and the outcome of this is a big tragedy!

The hope for our society is in the Christianity and returning to the Christian Values. Unfortunately, I would like to say that the situation with the Christian marriages in Bulgaria is also very sad! There are many divorces among Christians and the understanding of the pre-marriage relationships is very secular. That is why it is very important to have proper understanding of the purpose of marriage in the way God meant it to be.

Problems in the modern Christian marriages in Bulgaria

I decided to make a small inquiry about the problems in the Bulgarian Christian marriages by asking Christian couples to share their observations. Here are some of the answers that I received:

Petar Valkov, Christian, qualified psychologist, Sofia

As a psychologist I find the following most common problems in the Christian families in Bulgaria:

1. Clash of Christian and secular values in the family. The world with its values exercises immense pressure on the Christian family. The media, advertisements and the rulers of our country flooded us with new model for the family: the two partners are not obliged to contract civil and church marriage, the children can and even must attend and be brought up in nurseries and children gardens, the father can go in “maternity” instead the mother until she makes her career, the goods and objects are more valuable than the individuals (higher value is the good work, house, car and not to raise a child or to spend time with him/her.)

2. Segregation of the modern church. Families today are not getting enough support from the church. They, in contrast to centuries of history, are left alone to deal with their problems and difficulties. They feel shortage of communication and to spend time with other families. That is why there is a growing need for Christian counselors but in Bulgaria there are almost no trained specialists.

Svetlana Mancheva, Burgas

One of the problems that I have noticed is the increasingly growing “feminism” in Christian families. Out of it come many other problems: the wife seeks to build a career, children are brought up in public institutions or by grandparents or unknown women but not by their own mothers. There is a lack of authority of the husband.

Vanya Stoycheva, Sliven

The problems that I notice in the modern Bulgarian Christian family are the following:

1. *Difficulties in bringing up the children;*
2. *Insufficient financial funds in the family;*
3. *Due to the fast lifestyle, there is not sufficient time to read the Bible and to pray;*
4. *Lack of sufficient trust in God.*

Based on these observations, I would like to summarize the problems down to two main tendencies:

1. **Secularization of the Christian family and moving away from the Biblical principles and way of life** – the feminism and the ruined family values come from the lack of desire to exercise Christian way of life. It is sad to say but there are many Christians who excuse and allow divorce as well as many other compromises with the Christian moral.
2. **Insufficient commitment by the churches in general** – In Bulgaria it is still not accepted to talk openly about your problems especially among the Christians. We do not have special pre-marriage or marriage consultations developed in the country. Usually it depends on the good will of the minister to organize such by his own means and strength. There are few Christian family therapists focused on that area!

I would also like to add a third tendency, which is:

3. **Lack of dialog between the generations** – as a mother I decided to look after my children. Very often, when I talk to other people about it they express their concern that my children will not be socialized if they do not go to kinder garden. At the same time, I see families where the parents leave home for work all the day, their children grow in public institutions and they do not spend enough time together. As a result, children do not respect their parents and the parents do not have the time and will to understand their children. It is sad to say that there are many drug-addicts, adolescent criminals and law-breakers coming out of Christian families.

To find the right cure for a disease, it is important to put the right diagnoses. The marriage is in crises! There are many “symptoms” proving that. By the facts and statistics, I have tried to explain the main problems and tendencies in the modern Christian and non-Christian marriages in Bulgaria.

Knowing the above-mentioned truths and being aware of the only possible cure for my nation, which is found in Christ only, I am motivated to be of service

for my society. My responsibility also comes from the following verse from the Bible:

“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.”
(James 4:17)

The vision of the project

“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD'S purpose that prevails.” (Pr.19:21)

My deepest desire is to start a tradition in our church and the entire Christian society in our town to raise constantly the topic on marriage, to talk about the issues in this institution and to find the encouragements in the Bible and to pray about it.

My hope is to reach out not only Christian families but also through various ways and methods to raise the awareness towards this problem of the non-Christians and the public institutions that are directly connected with the marriage institution.

I humbly submit this project in the hands of God and believe that:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph.3:20,21)

Place of implementation Sliven Baptist church

Target groups The Christian society in the town of Sliven and more specifically the Christian families, their friend families, representatives of non-Christian organizations in the town

Aim to acquaint the participants to the problems of the marriage institution;

- to introduce them to the Biblical purpose for the family;
- to offer them practical ways for enrichment of their own marriages based on the Bible;
- to show them that the Church has important role and responsibility in strengthening the marriage institution as well as the necessary resources and desire not be indifferent to the problems of this institution.

Time for its realization 14 February – 18 February, 2011

Different speakers will give the information in the form of seminars. They will take place in the evening after the end of the working day so that those who are working to be able to join.

Every evening there will be two sessions, each would last between 45 – 50 minutes with a small break with refreshments in between. The break will give possibility to the families to get to know each other better.

Program

Day 1

1. Introducing the problems; showing the statistics and the sad tendencies that are observed in the marriages in Bulgaria.

This way of beginning the marriage week is very important because those who are not Christians are open to facts and statistics and it is a way to raise and keep their interest towards the continuation of the event. I have already looked at the various matters above and will not go in details here.

During this day, it is important to deal with the meaning of marriage, to compare the secular and Christian definition, and to see that it is impossible to talk about marriage without mentioning its creator who is God himself. This is going to be the introduction to the Christian basis of marriage and the Bible based solutions of the problems mentioned before that.

2. The nature of marriage.

What is marriage?

Usually, under marriage we understand union between man and a woman, marked with emotional and physical communication and is contracted before the state in accordance with the respective legislation of the specific country.

However, keeping the public and law requirements does not make the marriage Christian or Biblical.

Every sort of marriage contract, acknowledged by the society and the state is just a form while marriage is much more than just a form.

The Bible gives us some guidelines in defining marriage as such and in the way it was meant to be.

Firstly, marriage in the light of the Bible is sacred and long union between two people who love each other and who made the mature decision to dedicate themselves to one another.

Secondly, the Biblical marriage is union between a man and a woman.

Third, the Biblical marriage is monogamous marriage.

Fourth, the Biblical marriage is a lasting union.

Fifth, basic point in the Biblical definition of marriage is the participation of God “*So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.*” (Mt. 19:6) The idea for marriage is entirely of God and only in His presence and blessing it is possible a union between man and a woman to become Biblical marriage. God is the one who *joins*, He joins two people in one.

Day 2

1. The purpose or function of marriage

Does it mean that a marriage, which was started according Biblical way makes it ultimately Biblical for the entire life?

The Biblical marriage or the Christian marriage is determined as such based on the aim that it has and the functions that it fulfills.

PURPOSE 1 of the marriage and family “*to be one flesh*” – Genesis 2:22-24

The reason for many families to break is the lack of attachment, unity between the man and the woman. They are simply not one!

For this to happen there are 2 steps needed – leaving (father and mother – the closest people) and attaching.

PURPOSE 2 – the happiness of the spouse

In the very beginning of marriage, God himself says in Genesis 2:18 “*it is not good*” – it is not nice for him, not happy, not useful *for the man to be alone*. God created the marriage and the family for mutual complementarity where the man and the woman find their true happiness, fullness and personal development.

PURPOSE 3 – bearing and bringing up children, Genesis 1:28

The understanding and fulfilling of this part of the purpose of marriage is highly neglected in the Bulgarian families. Most of them would give excuse with their finances or the social instability. However, they are in conflict with the purpose of God for their marriage. However, the meaning of bearing children is not just reproducing man fellows. There is a much higher purpose – to bring your children up. This starts from an early age – Proverbs 22:6

Useful tools for the family towards this are:

- The Word of God – Deuteronomy 6:6
- Discipline – Proverbs 13:25
- Joint prayer and worship

2. Principles

A good visualization of the marriage is the house. Using the parts of the house, we can imagine the principles that are used to make the marriage strong and secure:

The BASE

The base of our marriage and family is God. This only strong foundation can resist strong cataclysms and can protect it from collapse.

The WALLS

The walls separate the house from the external world and determine how much heat or cold will enter the house.

The walls are the Biblical principles in the family:

- Love *Ephesians 5:25*
- Care for one another
- Hierarchy – the man is the head of the family *1 Kor 11:3*, the woman submits to the man *Eph. 5*, the children submit to the parents *Eph. 6:1-3*
- Communication

This is the material with which we can construct solid walls for our marriage.

The DOOR

The door is an important element from the house. On its quality, it depends how easily it is possible to enter the house. The door symbolizes the protection but also the hospitality of the house.

The WINDOWS

The windows determine the light and the atmosphere in the house. This is the family discipline and relationships.

The ROOF

It represents the protection from any sort of spiritual influences, occultism, which is widely spread in Bulgaria, temptations, sins etc. This is our holiness and purity before God.

The HEAT

This is the joint spiritual life – prayer, Bible study, unity in submitting to the Lord, spiritual service in and outside the family and church. This is a wonderful way to witness to the visitor in this house.

Day 3

1. Communication

The five levels of communication:

1. Standard conversation. It usually consists of phrases like “How are you?”, “How is your father, mother or your dog?”.. there are no personal relation in such way of conversation. It is safe but not enough for closeness.

2. Announcing facts for the surrounding world and people. In this type of conversation we announce what someone else said or what we have seen or read. We do not share our personal opinion. The reason for this might be fear or shame.
3. Own thoughts and reflections. The real communication begins from this level. One wants to get out of his shelter and starts sharing his own thoughts and opinions. However, he is still alert. If he feels that his words are not accepted, he becomes silent again.
4. Feelings and emotions. On this level one exchanges feelings connected with what he is announcing. Here not only the thoughts but also the emotions are revealed. Not all people reach this level. The reason for this is again fear or shame. The true communication reveals the feelings between each other.
5. Full disclosure of their emotions and personality. All deep relationships should be based on absolute openness and honesty. This is difficult to achieve because there is a risk of being rejected. This is necessary if you want to strengthen your relationship with someone.

Unfortunately, most of the people communicate between each other on the first and on the second levels! Interesting questions might be on which level do we communicate with the other people and on which level do we communicate with God?

Useful guidelines for fruitful communication:

1. Share your bitterness and insults *Eph. 4:26-27*
2. Learn how to say "sorry"
3. Share your worries, concerns and anxieties in the relationship between each other.
4. Share your desires.
5. Use questions that start with "how" instead of "why".
6. Have positive attitude to the problems.
7. Give promises to one another.
8. Love one another *Gal 5*

Day 4

1. The differences or the position and responsibilities of the man and the woman in the family.

The question for the position and the responsibilities of the man and the woman in the family is as important as the communication. Because on this, how the roles in the family are allocated and how they are fulfilled depends the spiritual and living atmosphere within the family.

Some researches show that due to the ambiguity of roles in the family there are many broken marriages. The spouses enter into endless arguments and clarifying the relationships. This is the reason why each couple needs to discuss and decide who is more competent in the specific areas and to allocate the tasks between each other.

God himself created the family with a specific structure and organization. During the last 100 years the human interference in this structure worsened the society. We need to go back and see what the Biblical structure of the family is:

- *The man is the head of the family.* There are several facts supporting it: Adam was created first I Tim 2:13;

God created the man and the woman and the woman was created with the task to be a helper. Gen 3:16 talks *"To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."* (Ge.3:16);

The Bible also clearly emphasize that the authority of the man in the family makes him even more obliged to love his wife as Christ loved the church. – Eph 5:25 *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"; "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."*(1Pe.3:7); *"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them."* (Col.3:19)

The role of the man is leadership with love.

- *The woman is submitted to the man* *"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."*(Eph.5:22)

The word obedience is mentioned 32 times in the New Testament and is used for the position of the believers to the pastor, the servants to the masters, the people to the rulers, the people to the Lord and the wife to the husband. We need to consider not impersonal submission like dictatorship but reasonable, humble acceptance of his authority in the marriage collaboration.

- *The children submit to their parents* *" Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* (Eph.6:1-3)

On one side, the obedience to the parents has great promise for the children! On the other side, the parents, especially the fathers who are by nature more strict than the mothers need to follow the next direction: *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* (Eph.6:4) In Col 3:21 he adds, *"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."* (Col.3:21)

How to make decisions as a family?

Following I Cor 11:3 “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (1Co.11:3) we see that the responsibility lays on the husband. Does it mean that the husband should take single decisions on all questions, including those where he is not so competent as the wife?

Useful directions in decision making as a family:

- clarify the structure and the allocation of powers in the family;
- be open to every method for making decisions;
- have in mind the competency of the partner;
- consider the abilities of the partner. He/she might be competent but in a particular moment not to be available;
- Learn how to decide which decision is important and which can wait;
- In all questions: counsel with each other, complement each other; seek the consensus!!

Day 5

The last day will be with free atmosphere. It is possible to have special party or to watch a film like “Fireproof” or to have other event that encourages the unity of the family.

Team

Plamena Valkova – organizing the event

In the program part, I have given guidelines of the talks during the seminars. The speakers will have the liberty to expand and look deeper in the topics. Hopefully there will be two Christian psychologist, one of whom is focused on the issues of the family.

For the practical organization of the event, I will rely on volunteers from the church.

Enduring impact I am aware of the fact that only five days are not enough to look at the various questions and to respond to every need. My hope and prayer is to start regular forums, meetings, events of any form for the time after this week so that this topic to be addressed regularly.

Finances to apply to the church and other partners for financial assistance.

Engaging the 7 pillars

1. The Church – this is the place where we can see marriages being healed and where we can see the start of strong families. This includes personal counseling, pre-marriage consultations, seminars, Bible teachings, any form of events that promote Bible focused families etc.
For every step of the project, the prayer-support and assistance by the church is vital!

It will be good to establish a devoted group of people within the church and even to add other representatives of the Christian society in the town to meet regularly, to pray for the event, to discuss the imminent needs and problems connected with the Bulgarian marriages and to work out strategic actions of how the churches can get involved into them. Sometimes there are issues that need immediate actions and it is not good to wait until February next year to do something about it.

2. The Family – most of the people who go to church are single Christians at home. This project will be addressed to everyone in the family. It will equip the single Christians with better understanding of their marriages and will encourage the non Christian spouses to think on that matter and get involved, too.
3. The media – We do not have Christian TV program or radio broadcast. There is one Christian TV program available only in Internet and based in the capital of the country. Being a small town, the personal type of invitation is always most effective.
It is possible to produce invitations, which can be given out. It is also a good idea and we have the abilities to produce a special leaflet that will introduce the problem and will motivate the people to participate! We hope that the leaflet will reach many people in the town and will encourage the Christian societies to be active in giving it out.
4. Arts and Entertainment – It is possible to use icebreakers, films and presentations, which will present the information in a more accessible and varied way.
5. Education – There is still an opportunity to speak in the secular schools about God but only within the material provided in the curriculum. We will not be able to organize talks or activities of our own. However, it is possible to organize events on different topics outside the schools but addressed to the school-age children. We do not have Christian schools in our area! For this event it will be difficult to involve the schools.
6. Business – We will be glad if there are casual families from these institutions present in the organized events. We will send invitations to them, too.
7. Government – It will be nice if there are casual families from these institutions present in the organized events. We will send invitations to them, too.

Blockages / Overcoming

1. To have enough families who would want to get involved.
2. To find enough finances.

One of the most important things is to get the church involved by prayer. This will make all members incorporated to the idea.

Measuring the results

To measure the results it will be good after the marriage week event to answer the following questions:

- How many families have been present?
- After providing inquiry to be filled in about the adequacy of the event, what is the feed back from the participants?
- Are there real results for positive influence upon families at risk?