

Couples Survey Promoted in the Spirit of Valentine's Day - Phillip Schanker

Ariana Moon
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This Valentine's Day, the Blessed Family Ministry (BFM) USA is encouraging lovebirds nationwide to show initiative in their relationships and participate in a comprehensive couple's survey called the Couple Checkup. According to Rev. Phillip Schanker, the director of BFM USA, "This is the first time we've ever provided a national-level survey for our entire Lovin' Life community."

The Couple Checkup, developed by acclaimed marital and family therapist of the University of Minnesota Dr. David Olson, asks both the man and woman involved in a relationship to answer a series of questions, minutes after which it will generate a 20-page report on the relationship. The Checkup comes in three versions: one for couples in early communication processes, one for engaged couples and one for married couples, and is available throughout this Lovin' Life winter quarter, which began on January 8, 2012 and will last until April.

Rev. Schanker said: "On Valentine's Day, we're going to make a big push and promote the Checkup for the rest of the quarter. When the winter quarter started, we put information about it online and in the LaunchPad packets we sent to every district, but we realized that still, not many people were aware of it.

"The survey is normally \$30. National Marriage Week has made a special deal for people to get it for \$20. I would very much encourage our couples to take advantage of this resource."

Goals for the Couple Checkup



Rev. Schanker outlined two goals for the implementation of the survey: "The personal goal, or the goal that we hope to reach for our couples is for them to be aware of the areas of strength and areas that need work in their relationships. Typically, one or both partners in a marriage are not so interested in outside involvement, and if there are difficulties in their relationship, sometimes one person is more aware of it than the other. Usually, men are more reluctant to take such surveys, but the Couple Checkup is particularly helpful because it prints out with graphs and charts a clear depiction of the areas in which you and your partner may have different outlooks. It provides left-brained, research-based, observable, factual data.

"We won't get any couple's personal answers or confidential information, but we'll get a snapshot of what the general areas of strengths and weaknesses amongst the couples that take the survey are. Therefore, the goal for our movement through the Checkup is to get a chance to consider where we should focus our ministry and support education."

Both partners in the relationship take the same survey, which is customized according to several initial answers given and which is available in several different languages such as English, Spanish, Japanese, Korean and French. "Therefore, couples can answer in the language with which they're most comfortable, and the survey will compare their answers and analyze the differences of their approach in different

areas,” said Rev. Schanker. “Much has gone into developing the survey and the 20-page analysis that it generates is very comprehensive. The analysis looks at 20 different areas where relationships are typically challenged – important areas of communication, values, religious beliefs, etc., and will not only show areas of strengths and weakness but also provide ideas and discussion guidelines as to how to improve the areas that need work, because some couples may not have a habit of good communication.”

Resources for couples and small groups in which women, men and couples can share their experiences are also available at www.couplecheckup.com.

Development of the Couple Checkup

“Dr. David Olson, the creator of the Checkup, is one of the pioneers of the marriage movement in the United States,” said Schanker. “A very famous annual conference called Smart Marriages began in 1997, which I attended and at which I met Dr. Olson. A Protestant minister, social researcher and counselor, he developed the first inventory for couples, which was originally a pre-marital inventory that couples could use before marriage to look carefully at their faith, how they want to raise their children and at areas such as money-management, communication, conflict resolution, etc. The survey wasn’t a compatibility check – it was to make couples aware of their deepest values and to bring them to the place where they could talk about them. The Couple Checkup is a shortened, simplified version of that survey developed in 1997.

“There are other similar surveys such as the Mormon-based *Ready-Relate* or the Catholic Church’s *Foccus*, but the reason we chose the Checkup is that it’s a simplified version, an introductory level to these more extensive ones. Knowing that many of our members might not have enough time or interest to take it, we wanted the process to be as simple as possible, as digestible as possible. Furthermore, we have the most confidence in the research and the quality of the questions in the Checkup.”

Planning a National Checkup

“A number of relationship experts who are involved with the Smart Marriages conferences and who are very well-known in America are excited to work with us. They like our strong family ethic. We’re currently working with the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, which has put all of its marriage education online – something we hope to do as well. They’re working with a number of different tools and we’re learning from them and sharing ideas.

“Ever since Rev. In Jin Moon encouraged us in this direction, we’ve spent a lot of time and energy to making counseling resources available. We have a network of Unificationist counselors and of 350 non-Unificationist but commitment-supporting marriage counselors, emergency services, a helpline, all of which are available on the BFM webpage at familyfed.org.

“We will be visiting every single district in the next six months and promoting these resources and the Couple Checkup, holding couples seminars, offering individual counseling and putting in place follow-up ideas for small groups and annual marriage retreats. We really want to put legs on Rev. In Jin Moon’s clear emphasis that the health of our families and becoming a community that people want to be part of is the best way to grow our movement and to witness.”