

For Those in Crisis, Help From Blessed Family Ministry Is on the Way

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Rev. Schanker (top center) flanked by his children and children in law: Marina and Josh Schanker (top left), Ben and Kjersti Schanker (top right), David Schanker (bottom left), and Chris and Mi-ae Stien (bottom right).

In a recent interview, Rev. Phillip Schanker, Director of the Blessed Family Ministry, and Debbie Gullery, Head of the Counseling Network, welcomed second-generation to pose their questions about the Matching and Blessing process, and explained the year's goals for the Blessed Family Ministry (BFM) in America.

“The Blessing is not about ideal families in the sense that everything's perfect, and you go to church and look good,” said Rev. Schanker. “Whatever's out there we have to deal with it, so we're trying to build a support system that would make that possible for all families.”

In terms of a more technical point of view, Gullery said, “We put our focus last year on the Matching and Blessing, and on that foundation, this year we're focusing on developing curriculum so that it can be utilized around the country.”

Building a New Culture

“We're not looking for a response – we're looking to send a message,” said Rev. Schanker. And the message is, “If you need us, we're here. We're going to do a better job of supporting you.” Everybody knows our church was focused on the providence, because that was True Father's priority, and we weren't always able to minister well. But we're not looking for people to make us look good by calling in – we want to be the resources available when people need them.”

“The church culture has very much been of a “You don't tell people that you're struggling” culture, and I feel that that's slowly starting to change,” said Gullery. “I credit In Jin Nim for that. She keeps drilling into us that we have to grow, and we have to work hard to grow and sometimes we need help to grow. Change always takes time. But if people get the help they need, then they can, in turn, help other people. We're really trying to teach that to second-generation, but there's still this kind of reluctance to reach out. They think to themselves: “What will people think if they know we need help?” It's not a bad thing to ask for help. The healthy paradigm is that the people who know they need help and get it are the healthiest!”

“Another cultural issue within our community is that people feel that everything needs to be addressed in a religious or spiritual way,” said Rev. Schanker. “So people will seek to solve problems that have emotional roots through ancestral liberation or spiritual conditions or *hoon dok hwe*. Well, Principle teaches that religion and science need to be harmonized. And we recognize there are ancestral, spiritual, and religious dimensions to problems, but Principle teaches us about the four realms of the heart and there are emotional and relational dimensions as well. And In Jin Nim and our international president, Hyung Jin Nim, have been very clear about the importance of utilizing professional, scientifically-based and effective resources for working with emotional, relational, marriage- and family problems.”

Creating Constructive Communication

One of the Blessed Family Ministry's biggest projects is creating a helpline, currently titled the "Family and Youth Helpline."

"In Jin Nim asked us quite a long time ago to prepare a helpline that would be accessible for our young people and our families at any time, because she wants our members to know that they are never alone," said Rev. Schanker. "In the process of preparing a call-in helpline, we realized that there are a lot of legal, professional, training- and organizational issues, and it's taking us time. While we're putting that together, we wanted to create an online-accessible helpline, so that anybody can go to our BFM site if they or someone they know is in a critical situation, if they just need someone to listen to them, or if they have some particular urgent question, and know they can reach us, and that we'll respond soon. Eventually that online system will become a call-in system."

"We are calling this service a helpline instead of a hotline because a hotline is a 24-hour service," Gullery clarified. "We'll probably start with daytime hours, work into a few evening hours, and eventually, make our helpline 24-hours."

The Blessed Family Ministry is in the process of researching training programs for the helpline responders and of reaching out to find second-generation interested in this area of work.

"We're going to need more people with training on answering when someone calls for help – second-generation, males and females, people who speak other languages – but we'll get there. And down the road, this will be not only for Unificationists, but hopefully anyone seeking help," said Gullery.



Debbie Gullery (right) with daughter Janna and husband Jonathan during Janna's college graduation.

Resources of the BFM

In addition to knowing where the Blessed Family Ministry needs further development, Rev. Schanker and Gullery were quick to point toward its current resources and strengths.

"We have seven people available on our website right now who are Unificationists and trained mental-health professionals," said Rev. Schanker. "It's Mrs. Gullery's decision if and when to channel them to the right resources. If the volume is greater than we can address by that approach, then we will bring in other volunteers who are professional and who can offer support. Our BFM site also has a link to 350 marriage-friendly, commitment-oriented family therapists around the country."

"Often we have the resources, but people don't know we have the resources," said Gullery. A lot of the questions that come in are simple, like, "where do I get this form I need to fill out?" and I answer, "It's right on the website." People will come in saying, "I don't know what to do about the Matching," not knowing that we have a *Family Matching Handbook* and a large number of matching advisors available. But, of course, there will be more serious questions connected to emotional or mental trauma or illness."

International Scope, Unified Standards

Rev. Schanker and Gullery explained that their work is for the BFM of the Unification Church of America under In Jin Nim's guidance, but working towards Hyung Jin Nim's vision of bringing all the Blessed Family Departments of the world together and establishing international standards.

“We’re not going to discriminate if someone writes from outside the U.S.,” said Rev. Schanker. “But we can’t dictate what other countries offer. In terms of having it online, we’ll see who responds. This is more addressed to people in critical-needs situations. We’re not going to be taking on the standards and values of other countries, but in the meantime, Hyung Jin Nim is consistently bringing all the Blessed Family Departments together and working toward international standards that have unique cultural expression, according to the country. So, we’re already working towards one, common vision.”

For more information, please go to the Blessed Family Ministry link on familyfed.org