

## Phillip Schanker: Couples Make the Promise to “Deal” with Marriages through “Ideal Year”

Ariana Moon  
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This winter quarter, the Blessed Family Ministry (BFM) in the United States is introducing the “Ideal Year,” a signed commitment from couples that, if they encounter serious marital difficulty, they will seek and undergo professional counseling and support for at least a year before losing hope.

“Every Unificationist should be aware of Rev. In Jin Moon’s emphasis about what an ‘ideal family’ is,” says Rev. Schanker, director of the BFM USA. “An ideal family means, ‘I deal with challenges that are inherent within families and marriages.’ It’s not about looking good at church and hiding my problems. She has brought out examples of the kinds of challenges that some Blessed Families face. In order to support that, we developed what’s called Ideal Year.”



*Rev. Phillip Schanker, director of the Blessed Family Ministry USA*

### **Ideal Year**

According to Rev. Schanker, “The most important thing in a marriage is commitment and character. All relationships will face times of difficulty. Men and women are designed differently, love differently and experience love differently. A healthy relationship requires a husband and wife to go beyond the self to understand how the other needs to be loved.

“The best way to have a good marriage is to have a healthy spiritual life, a supportive community, good communication and faith. But if problems arise, it’s not acceptable to simply drift into non-communication, to live separately in our missions and our jobs. It’s not acceptable to seek comfort in illegitimate ways or in a secret life. Therefore, we’re asking every couple that if they cannot solve their problems by themselves, they communicate with someone in a position of responsibility. Since In Jin Nim re-established the BFM, we’ve worked hard to develop resources for counseling, education, support and also a network of non-Unificationist professionals so that no one needs to be alone. We shouldn’t have to receive letters that say, ‘I cancel my Blessing,’ when there was no opportunity for anyone to help, intervene or support.”



*Rev. In Jin Moon has emphasized that an ideal marriage or family is one that “deals” with its problems.*

Couples planning to attend the Blessing will be asked to sign a statement to commit not only to their marriage for eternity but also that in a time of difficulty, they will invest a minimum of a year in a structured plan of counseling, education, intervention and support with a BFM counselor or pastor. The BFM is also asking all existing Blessed couples to sign the Ideal-Year commitment.

### **Building a New Culture**

Mrs. Debby Gullery, director of counseling and co-director of education, said, “The Ideal Year is a very positive step towards building a healthier culture, where people are honest about their struggles and motivated to take responsibility to become the best they can be. Our hope is that within the next few

years, Ideal Year will become the ‘norm’ for all our couples, and couples who get the help they need and invest the time and energy to break through will become known as the heroes of our movement! It takes courage to keep growing and it takes support too.”

“When trying to build a culture, we look at it as applying the Divine Principle,” said Rev. Schanker. “Father says that unity comes first – and unity comes from give and take – then love, and then the ideal. So, if there is constant struggle between the husband and wife, and the relationship becomes toxic, then they can’t see each other from God’s point of view and become more distant. A healthier paradigm is having an objective, experienced third party, pastoral or professional counselor, understand both the husband’s and the wife’s situations and help them understand each other and hold each one accountable.”

### **Goals for Ideal Year**



Gullery said: "We want our Blessed couples to feel empowered and to realize that their Blessing relationships are an integral part of their spiritual path."

Rev. Schanker outlined two goals; first, to embody Rev. In Jin Moon’s vision for Blessed Families and second, to fortify commitment to the Blessing when it counts.

“The kind of commitment that In Jin Nim is trying to foster is a dedication commitment, an actual investment in a marriage,” he said. “Not a constraint commitment, where one is in a marriage simply because he or she has to be or because it’s the ‘way of the Church.’ We’re trying to get to a deeper level of authenticity in people’s marital investment because simply hanging on when a marriage is unhealthy is not the kind of commitment that makes God happy. We want people to build more genuine relationships and it starts by taking ownership.”

Gullery added, “Unfortunately, our couples’ responses to challenge have been mostly shame, guilt and inaction. This is why the Ideal Year is a paradigm shift of huge dimensions, as it is asking people to change their way of thinking and acting when in crisis. We are suggesting that it is healthier, saner and smarter to ‘deal’ with our problems rather than hide from them, and we are offering suggestions and structure for support.

“We want our brothers and sisters, our Blessed couples, to feel empowered and hopeful and to realize that their Blessing relationships are an integral part of their spiritual path – so it's normal to struggle! It's how we grow.”

### **Implementing BlessedLIFE**

Rev. Schanker, together with Gullery and Mrs. Ayako Heller, director of Japanese family ministry, will spend the next six months visiting all 12 church districts in the United States for four days each to help them develop their BlessedLIFE ministries.

“This month, Debby, Ayako and I visited our first district, which was the Seattle area. It was an overwhelming success,” said Rev. Schanker. “Rev. Larry Krishnek, the district pastor, was really happy. We were able to counsel some of the members with what he said were the most serious, intractable issues in his district, and our Couples Seminar had well over 100 people when he had expected about 70. People traveled up to six hours to get there, and we had everybody from the seminar sign the Ideal Year commitment, which everybody felt was a good idea. We met with the local planning team for BlessedLIFE, showed them the tools and resources that we have, and supported them in planning how they wanted to develop their BlessedLIFE ministry.



*Ayako Heller, director of the Japanese family ministry, and her spouse, Jorg Heller*

“Ayako Heller is a new member of the BFM, inheriting the great work done by Hiromi Stephens. Through her, we’re connecting more deeply to our Japanese communities. She has a beautiful sense of transcending the different ethnic barriers.

“With ideas and guidance from one of the foremost marriage educators, William J. Doherty at the University of Minnesota, who through working with an Asian community from Laos developed effective methods of reaching Asian families, we met with the Japanese community in Seattle and asked them, ‘What are the issues of greatest concern? What are the challenges that the Japanese community faces the most?’ Asian communities usually don’t want counseling, but our brothers and sisters were surprisingly forthcoming. Through these kinds of meetings, we hope to understand and serve the needs of our Japanese community all across the country.”

In addition to building a national Japanese ministry, Heller is also in charge of supporting other ministries, such as those for adoption and for adult singles.

Rev. Schanker said, “Approximately 80 percent of our Blessed Children couples from 2004 until now are still together. The only solid figures that we have are from December of 2004, which is when I took over the BFM. That’s not a great percentage, but that is way better than many people thought. During this time, we’ve instituted the matching handbook and helped parents and children communicate, make a plan for the Blessing and prepare to take ownership of the Blessing. I believe that it’s just going to get better from here.”

### **Testimonies from Seattle Workshop Participants**



Gullery engages her audience with a presentation on building healthy relationships during the Blessed Family Ministry team's visit to Seattle.

The following are testimonies from participants of the BFM workshop in Seattle from February 3-7, 2012. The identities of the speakers will remain confidential to ensure their privacy.

“I always appreciate and learn a great deal from Debby and Phillip – I feel a deep relationship of heart and always look forward to their presentations.”

“The personal aspects and stories about True Father, Hyo Jin Nim, Rev. Schanker and Mrs. Gullery were the most memorable and moving. I am a second-generation who has not started the matching process, but [attending the seminar] was helpful in that I can use the knowledge I’ve gained when I am in that situation, starting with the awareness that men and women are complementary opposites and that without understanding our value from God, genuine love is impossible.”

“I really appreciated the content from Rev. Schanker. Even the ‘old’ stuff seemed new. [The most meaningful aspect was] the understanding of the providential progress related to True Parents’ accomplishments.”

“I was interested in everything. I recognized my problems. Rev. Schanker’s explanation of the male [psyche] struck me and I realized how I don’t understand my husband well. Now it’s clearer. I should change my attitude and viewpoint.”

“I loved having Headquarters over in Seattle. The whole event was great because we all were united on it. The young-couple participation gave me great hope. And the introduction to small groups was great.”

“[This was] a great way to spend the weekend with my husband. The presentation from Rev. Schanker, ‘Making Cheon Il Guk Real,’ was a great reminder of our core values and truly touched my heart. Thank you! [I now have] a new perspective and great way of looking at my marriage. This was overall a wonderful reminder of our values and what God wants for us!”

“I felt God’s love in the fact that Headquarters came to reach out to couples and share the importance of loving one’s spouse, who is the source of connecting to God and True Parents.”

“I enjoyed the lectures very much. Although I don’t see a great deal of difficulty in my marriage, I think it is still valuable to have ideas re-enforced. I enjoyed the lectures that outlined how Blessed-Family life relates to the Principle. [I want to] make a renewed commitment to appreciate my wife.”

“BlessedLIFE has a lot of tools, but I didn’t know they were available. Now the ball is in my court. The fact that you came to our district is the most inspiring.”

“[It was most meaningful] to know that Lovin’ Life is really trying to help our Blessed Families and that in the future, there will be more support locally.”

“I especially appreciate Rev. Schanker’s question in the beginning of how we want to invest in our relationships this next year. Thank you so much for coming, and for all the hard work, wonderful resources and support you are making available for all of us.”