

## A Unificationist's Blessing, Marriage, and Family Education Providence - Our Movement Has Come Full Circle and the Time is Ripe to Invest in this Work

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I experienced a flash of insight a few days ago while looking at True Father's picture. The gist of that revelation was that 30+ years ago, I was in a position to help facilitate the development of a Unificationist's Blessing, Marriage, and Family Education (UBMFE) Providence as inspired by the revelations of the True Parents. What happened back then? The USA Blessing and Family Department (USA BFD) began its activities in the 1970s, pioneered by two 777-couples wives, Nora Spurgin and Betsy Jones, and one 43-couples wife, Linna Rapkins, who was heavily invested in youth education. I was Betsy Jones's administrative assistant beginning in 1987 and was even the Director of the USA BFD for a few months. In the early days, the main work of the USA BFD work consisted of supporting and administrating the very intense and providentially cutting-edge Blessing providence.

Efforts to guide couples and families consisted mainly of preparing couples for their 3-day ceremonies, counseling, and the publication of two Blessing-related magazines, which included True Parents' speeches and some educational material, titled "The Blessing Quarterly" and the "The Blessing Journal". To a large extent, the work of the USA BFD ministry was limited to the greater New York area (with periodic trips to Korea), but towards the end of the 1980's the USA BFD began to gradually extend their activities throughout the country. Even despite these germinal efforts, family education was not pressing because most couples were just starting out and most did not even have children, but anyone connected to the BFD who was even remotely observant, could see that we were eventually going to need education material and programs that could minister to these precious Blessed Central Families (BCF).

Unfortunately, budgetary concerns and administrative decisions occurred that had a major impact on the existence of the BFD. In around 1990 the USA BFD was shut down completely, an action that wasn't reversed until 2004 (due to True Father's prodding). With the benefit of hindsight, I believe that 30+ years ago I would have gravitated towards investing in the development of family life guidance educational material, since this is an arena where I currently focus much of my energies and heart. I strongly believe that the sequence of events surrounding the USA BFD going dark in the 1990s directly caused, among other repercussions, True Parents' UBMFE providence to stagnate and eventually stop altogether.

I believe it was not a coincidence that during the time that the USA BFD was dormant, the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, LLC (CMFCE) was founded by Diane Sollee in 1996. I believe through the CMFCE and the Smart Marriages Conferences that they sponsored, God worked to encourage faithful professionals who were caring for beleaguered families to identify and make available to the greater public, ministries, clinical practices, and educational programs dedicated to enriching healthy marriages and saving marriages that were in trouble. The purpose of the CMFCE, on their website, is as follows. (I find these as worthy and laudable goals.):

The coalition serves as an information exchange and clearinghouse to help couples locate

marriage and relationship courses; to help professionals, clergy and lay educators locate training programs and resources; to connect those with an interest in the continuing development of the field; to support community initiatives, legislation and research; and to promote the effectiveness of marriage education programs and increase their availability in the community.

After the USA BFD was re-established in 2004, USA BFD leaders began to attend Smart Marriages conferences. I believe the reinstated USA BFD was meant to study the programs and ministries that had been and were showcased by the CMFCE and other organizations and programs dedicated to saving the institution of marriage that was under attack (which we did!). As well, I believe that from 2004, the USA BFD should have initiated the development of a UBMFE providence (which we haven't done yet!). Unfortunately, the current Blessing and Family Ministry's (BFM - note the name change) family guidance providence relies heavily and almost exclusively on material that was spawned due to the efforts of what has come to be commonly known as the Marriage Education Movement.

I believe that it is imperative for Blessing ministry leaders and Unificationist members and to resuscitate, kick start and rejuvenate the development of an educational system grounded in the words and guidance on the topic of Blessing, Marriage and Family Life that were given by True Father from 1960 until his passing and the words of True Mother from before 2012 until today. I believe the Unification Movement is uniquely positioned to pioneer the establishment of a Blessing, Marriage, and Family educational providence. In contrast to what I would characterize as individual-focused content that is to be widely found in many religious traditions, words sharing insights into the sacredness and significance of the Blessed Marriage and the way of life of a Blessed Family are interwoven throughout the speeches and sermons of the True Parents. Those of us who are familiar with and are dedicated to supporting the providence that has been initiated by the True Parents, understand that the Unification Movement is uniquely qualified and positioned to contribute to the transformation of the family into an ideal and sacred institution. At its outset, the Blessing and marriage in the Unification Tradition has been one of the Unification Movement's core sacraments and pivotal traditions. Those who understand the providence of restoration that has been initiated by the True Parents, as exemplified through the sacrament of the Blessing, realize that God has given the True Parents authority to move humankind's restoration to the family level and beyond.

Certainly, this responsibility cannot rest upon the shoulders of our precious brothers and sisters in the Christian faith traditions. It may be enlightening for us to consider that the early Christian church focused more on the legal implications of marriage, rather than the spiritual aspect. It wasn't until the time of the Reformation that marriages were held inside the church building (rather than at the church door or the local tavern or a home, where the early church's involvement in marriage was minimal) and the emphasis shifted from the idea of a contract to that of a covenant. At the same time, the Protestant Reformation removed the status of a sacrament from the institution of marriage, though it remains as such in the Roman Catholic tradition.

The church's encroachment was unintentional. With the growth of legal systems out of chaos, it became increasingly necessary to have written records of weddings to prevent clandestine marriages and to provide for legitimacy of offspring and uncontested inheritances. Wealthy people (cf. Jan van Eyck's portrait of Givoanni Arnolfini and bride) could afford painted portraits as a record; ordinary people needed a written certificate. In most villages, the only literate person was the priest ("clergy" meant learned), and his presence became increasingly necessary at weddings simply to witness and record them legally. A nuptial mass (distinct from the wedding itself) would frequently be celebrated at the parish church after the wedding and the newly married couple blessed just before the fraction.

The legal character of the wedding ceremony is its most distinctive feature. Weddings consist essentially of a public contract freely and mutually assented to before witnesses. The traditional language, "to have and to hold," is language still used in conveyance of property. "From this day forward" dates the contract. Then follows the unconditional nature of said contract, "for better for

worse." "Till death us do part" terminates the above, and "I give thee my troth" is the pledge of faithfulness to it. All this is lawyers' talk, not liturgists. Words almost identical to today's vows appear in English in fourteenth-century manuscripts, long before other liturgical documents were translated into the vernacular. The center of this most joyful occasion is a legal transaction. (White, James F. "Introduction to Christian Worship, 2000 (3rd Edition), Nashville, Abingdon Press, P. 277)

However, the Protestant Reformation was another big step in the formation of the secular discourse. Lutheranism reduced the number of sacraments from seven to two (on the historically rather doubtful ground that Jesus instituted the sacraments of baptism and communion but not the other five), with the significant consequence that marriage was no longer considered to be a sacrament but rather a worldly institution, to be blessed but not created by the church. To illustrate this point, in the early days of the German Reformation there were no church weddings. The marriage was established when the couple began to live together, later, they came to a pastor asking him to bless what had already been consummated by themselves, and this blessing was performed outside the church building. This arrangement changed when Lutheran state churches were established in Germany and Scandinavia, and pastors became in effect officers of government. Lutheran theology insisted on a sharp differentiation between the "Two Kingdoms of Law and Gospel," with only the second being the proper concern of the church. Luther pithily expressed this view when he said he would rather be governed by a just Turk than by an unjust Christian. (Peter L. Berger. 2014. *The Many altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*. Boston/Berlin: Degruyter. Pp 59-60)

I believe that the ambiguity found in the stance of the early Christian church towards marriage alluded to in these quotes stemmed from the fact that Jesus never married and therefore did not leave much in the way of tradition related to marriage, nor did he move the providence forward to substantially offer rebirth into a pure lineage for humankind. In Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32, he does speak about the indissolubility of marriage and also refers to himself as the bridegroom leaving his followers and also, in eschatological terms, referring to the last days (Matthew 9:15, Matthew 25:1-13), but that's about it.

There are several reasons why I believe the timing is right for the Unification Movement to launch a UBMFE providence. For one, the BFM just recently created a Family Ministry Department, and the leaders of that department are grappling with how to initiate and shape their department from ground zero, including crafting their vision, mission, objectives, organizational structure, curriculum, and practices. In relation to this challenge, the leaders of that department are actively searching for scholarly works related to UBMFE, especially in couple care and parenting. In addition, since True Mother is strongly pushing our Unification Movement to bestow the Blessing worldwide, certainly mature and professional educational material that reflects a Unificationist worldview and that can care for and raise up these newly Blessed Central Families is urgently needed.

Let me conclude by encouraging concerned and dedicated members and professionals who are being called to create and contribute UBFME material. I am strongly convinced that the world is in dire need of UBMFE material, especially since, as True Father said, the Blessed Central Family is the cornerstone of the Kingdom of Heaven. I am arguing that the Unification Movement is meant to provide leadership in the arena of UBMFE for the world, that we are to be the pioneers and standard bearers in this next providential step. You can submit your material directly to the BFM's Family Department, post your works on my website ([bcf-ed.org](http://bcf-ed.org)) and on my husband's website ([tparents.org](http://tparents.org)), and also engage in dialogue with other concerned members. Whatever avenue you choose to pursue, please engage in this crucial work now!