

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE TEACHING

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Introduction

This paper is not a “how-to-do-it” manual, concerning the subject of “Marriage and Family Life Teaching”. It is rather a “how-it-could-be-done” proposal. This paper is an invitation to rethink the topic, and to sharpen the vision for an integrated “Marriage and Family Life Teaching Program” at any theological school in Melanesia.

Throughout this paper, I base my practical proposals on the current academic setting at the Maria Molnar Bible Training College (BTC).

Since the spiritual fruit of the ministry of a married pastor is going to be the result of a united effort of himself, his wife, and his children, he needs constant spiritual strengthening of the unity of his own marriage and family, which is the basis for his ministry.

This spiritual input should begin during the time of his ministry preparation. It, therefore, requires an appropriate marriage and family life teaching, within the curriculum of the theological training institution, which focuses on both the student and his spouse.

The course should provide both an intensive counselling for the student, and his wife, and an adequate academic training for being a marriage and family counsellor in his ministry.

The Need – Thesis

Unity in Ministry Preparation:

1. Focus on student and spouse.
2. Counselling and spiritual strengthening.
3. Academic training for becoming a counsellor.

Unity in Marriage and Family:

1. Understanding biblical principles.

2. Applying biblical principles.
3. Essential basis for fruitful ministry.

Unity in Ministry:

1. Constant effort of maintaining the vision.
2. Constant evaluation and redeeming of roles.
3. Result = Spiritual fruit (John 15:16).

1. Unity in Ministry Preparation

The key for any fruitful ministry is unity. First, there is the united training of the pastor and his spouse at the theological training institution, which calls for a combined training of the pastor and his wife, or a special training program for the student wife. At all costs, the training should focus on both the student and his wife.

The course, preferably, should be conducted by team teaching, where the teacher and his wife teach the student and his spouse. The focus should be on encouraging communication between the student and his wife, and on partnership. The course in marriage and family life should provide private counselling for both the pastor and his wife, by the teacher and/or his wife. Counselling sessions could be set up for both, in separate sessions, where the teacher deals with the student, and the teacher's wife with the student's wife. Wherever possible, the provision of combined sessions, where all four are talking about certain topics and problems, should be arranged.

The course in marriage and family life also should give a careful analysis of the various biblical concepts of marriage and family life.

The idea that the course might provide an adequate academic training for becoming a marriage and family counsellor is desirable, but, probably, would be to go far beyond the focus of the course, and would be too demanding for the student.

2. Unity in Marriage and Family

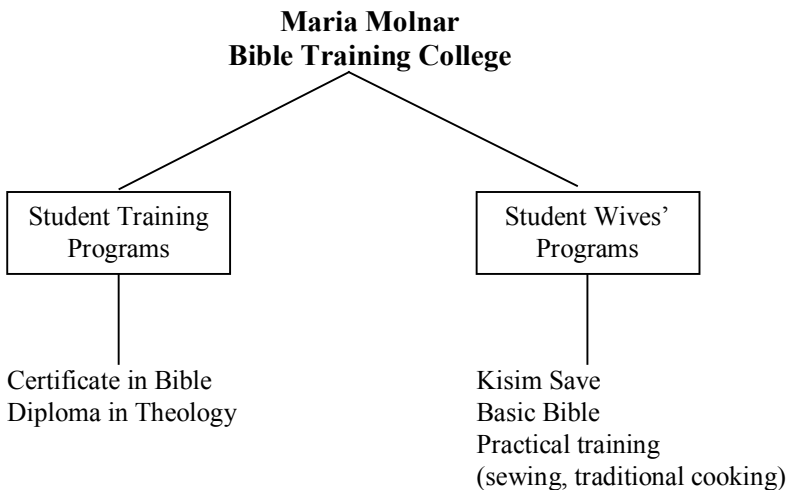
The goal of the course should be that biblical principles are clearly understood by the student and his wife, so that they can be applied in the everyday situation. While on campus, the marriage of the student and his wife,

and their family as a whole, should grow towards greater maturity. The unity of the marriage and family should be seen as the utmost, essential basis for a fruitful pastoral ministry.

3. Unity in Ministry

Unity in ministry, as the essential basis for a fruitful and successful work, has to be maintained constantly. The student should have learned, in the course about marriage and family life, and in his practical experiences on campus, that keeping up the unity in marriage and family is a constant effort of love and mutual assistance of both partners. In the same way, the vision for ministry (i.e., the answers to the questions: “Why?” and “How?” the ministry should be done) has to be kept up by both partners, in a mutual effort of finding, and redefining, the answers. At the same time, the pastor and his wife have to work at a constant evaluation, and redefining, of their roles within the family, and within the realm of ministry. This is because of the always-changing situation within the family (number of children, death, and relatives), and within the realm of ministry (church size, various groups in the church, interpersonal conflicts, and geographical changes).

Academic Setting for “Marriage and Family Life Teaching”



1. Wives with grade 6, and above, can take part in certificate courses, without paying extra fees.

2. The course “Marriage and Family”, at BTC, is located under the elective courses. The length is one term, which is equal to 1 credit (1 credit = 30 class hours, and 10 hours homework).

The overall goal of the course would be to instruct both the student and his spouse.

Some options could be:

1. A combined lecture for student and his spouse. Assignments for both, to work on together in class.

Problems:

- What academic level has to be chosen, if the husband is in the diploma level, but his wife does not have grade 8 or 10?
- What kind of text book should be used?
- What language has to be maintained in class, English or Pidgin?
- What about child care, when the mother is in class?

- 2 Teaching the student in class, and having him do some assignments together with his spouse at home.

Problems:

- Will there be enough discipline to fulfil the requirements?
- Are there any communication problems between husband and wife?

3. Teaching the student and his wife parallel to each in their programs.

- The content could be adjusted to academic level.
- Plan sessions of group work during the course.

Problems:

- The teachers need to closely work together in time planning, which takes a lot of organisation.
- Feedback and progression of both programs have to be regularly exchanged, which is time consuming.

Content of “Marriage and Family Life Teaching”

For the outline of the content of this course, I use the BTC catalogue course description.

1. Identifying and Describing the Christian Family

This includes analysis of the biblical basis for marriage and family life, and the biblically-defined distinctions and functions of the Christian family.

At this stage, it would be absolutely essential to regard the Bible as the inspired, and inerrant, translation of God for man, as the absolute, and only, authority in questions of marriage and family. If the absolute authority of the Bible in those matters is denied, then it will lead to the confusing dependence on the changing ethical codes of the non-biblically-thinking society.

2. Preparing for Christian Marriage

The course must include a special section for single students. At this point, specific assignments are to be given to single students.

3. Defining, Clarifying, and Building Effective Family Roles and Relationships

In this section, there could be placed the essential group work sessions between the student and his spouse.

4. Parenting and Child Training

5. Dealing with Practical Concerns and Serious Marital Problems

In this stage of the course, there should be the opportunity for individual counselling of the student and his spouse.

6. Evaluation of the Christian Home in Melanesia

At this point, the student should be involved in sharing and collecting information about the situation of the Melanesian Christian home.

Conclusion

Besides offering the course “Marriage and Family Life” at the theological training institution, there should be the opportunity for longer-married pastors to attend a post-certificate program about marriage and family life. It would be easier for them to pick up the content, because of their advanced experience in marriage and family life. Also, some thought should be given to the set up of a local-church-based program of marriage and family life, to strengthen families and marriages within the congregation.

Unity in ministry, as the result of unity in theological training, and unity in marriage, should guard the pastor against a ministry “drop out”, or difficulties, which could be caused by marital or family problems. Many marital and family problems seem to be arising in connection with finances, the extended family, adultery, and polygamy.

I believe that a consistent marriage and family life teaching, which is based on clear biblical principles, and focuses on the spiritual maturation of faith in Jesus Christ, can prevent the student and his family from those marital and family problems that could lead to serious difficulties in their ministry, or even to a ministry “drop-out”.