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**TIME AS A BASIC FACTOR OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY  
RELATIONSHIPS IN SLOVAKIA**

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**Abstract:** In the search for factors affecting the stability of marriage and family, support for the family in changing conditions of adult access to children is based on findings of its empirical research that identified selected value and religious aspects of the family. These were enriched by sociological studies of religiosity and scientific studies from the field of psychology and pedagogy. This made it possible to identify family time spent in building relationships as one of the key factors of its stability. The study also includes some aspects of religious beliefs and their implications on declared values, as well as suggestions for creation of specific pastoral plans.

**Key words:** marriage, family, relationship, trust, counseling, communication

## 1. Introduction

Christian marriage and family have now been affected - like other institutions - by profound deep and rapid changes in society and culture. The Catholic Church responded by convening the Synod of Bishops in October 2015. This was preceded by the 2014 special Synod on Pastoral Challenges for the family in the context of evangelization, and in November 2013, a preparatory document with questions in eight areas was sent to all dioceses and believers. The final document of the Synod of Bishops from October 2015 leaves open several questions in which a distinction is needed for the balanced application of the principle of Christian mercy, without denying the traditional doctrine of the inseparable sacramental marriage. Marriage is based on the concept of natural law and biblical revelation, according to which a person is created in God's image as a man and a woman. This duality is fully realized in the marriage of one man and one woman, which is in Christ elevated to a sacrament, a sign of the saving presence of God in human life, as a covenant between the couple in Jesus Christ. Many families experience a changed cultural and social situation in faithfulness to values that create the basis for the Catholic family. In other families, there was uncertainty and hesitation related to their own tasks, or even doubts, and almost lack of awareness related to the main purpose and nature of marital and family life. Finally, a variety of situations caused by injustice prevent other families from implementation of their own fundamental rights. Pastoral theology today reveals factors affecting the stability of marriage and family, seeks to provide pastoral strategies and plans in order to help families.

## 2. Methodology

Creation of the project of strategy supporting the stability of marriage and family uses the method of pastoral theology: to see, evaluate and act. It is based on an objective view of the current situation, the revelation of the signs of the times provided by special sciences, sociology, psychology and pedagogy. Pastoral projects are based on evaluation of acquired knowledge. The mission of pastoral theology is to look for more appropriate ways to present Christian teaching to its contemporaries. Because one thing is the very treasure of faith, or faithful truth, and the other is the way they are presented, without changing their meaning and content.

The project carried out a research task to collect empirical data from all over Slovakia in order to create a representative picture concerning

opinions of parents of dependent children on family coexistence and family support. The nationwide data collection was carried out by the Social Analysis Agency in the first half of May 2018 in the form of 1031 personal interviews with adult household members with dependent children. The sample of respondents was created on the basis of quota selection, where the statistical basis were the data from the 2011 Population and Housing Census. The age, gender, education, size of the respondent's household and region were used as the selection features. The questionnaire contained 39 questions, including respondent's identification features. The research is unique in creating a mosaic of Slovak households with dependent children from the point of view of their parents' marital status. According to the results, seven out of ten parents live in their first marriage. One out of ten is single and lives with a spouse without marriage, and also one out of ten is divorced and lives without a spouse. The remaining 10% of parents include a group of people who live in a second or further marriage (5%), divorced people living with a partner without marriage (3%) and widowed people living without a partner (2%) (Bednárík, R. and Žuffa, J. 2018).

In 2019, the results of the 2018 research were provided to psychology and pedagogical experts in order to reflect them from their scientific perspective and to prepare expert analyses on the issue of marriage and family stability (Bednárík and Žuffa 2019). They clearly indicated the importance of developing a relationship of love between spouses and between parents and children. They also pointed to the important role played by father and man in education. The analyses showed not only the length of time spent together, but also its quality. These analyses are followed by pastoral-theological reflection and indication of strategy.

### **3. TO SEE: The Current Status of Families**

Pastoral theology and pastoral practice now face a challenge related to Christian marriage and the family. Over the last two centuries, we have seen a gradual change in the understanding of marriage. The attention has shifted from the male and female union focused on fertility and upbringing of children to the predominance of the affective dimension. The two are married because of their mutual love, and marriage is no longer a duty, but a free choice of two free persons. This overwhelming emotional dimension corresponds to the progressive and radical privatization of marriage and family life. It seems that love cannot fail when passion and reason join. Love, in its richness, is a rational project that transforms from affection to its fullness in a relationship (Belletti 2015, 25). The marriage is made out of love and free choice of both partners, not because of proprieties or the will of parents. This creates a married family as a separate household of a married couple with

dependent children and with the employment of at least one spouse outside the household. It is relatively autonomous and its function is primarily to ensure emotional stabilization, physical regeneration, mutual assistance and solidarity, childbirth and upbringing. It is no longer a productive community, so family members also live in a non-family social ties such as school, work or association. This factor has significantly reduced their family time (Sievernich 2010, 49).

This cultural shift is both a chance and a threat to deepening of family relationships. Every human relationship, especially those in the family between spouses and between parents and children, is built on three following pillars: feelings, trust and commitment (Jeník L., Karaba M. and Nemeč, R. 2014, 67). The basis of the human relationship is declared love, in other words a realized relationship. The phenomenon of love is present both in emotional expressions as well as in the deepening of trust in the partner, in reliance on him. Love very often takes the form of a decision and a responsibility. It is therefore an essential part of a commitment, a public promise, which externally expresses the decision to stay with another person in good and bad, in health and disease, in happiness and distress. Love as an autonomous force must remain free in order to exist as a gift. When a relationship of love is affected by a problem, the process of crisis begins. It is likely that the problem will occur in one of these pillars (Potočárová 2017, 117).

The changed cultural mentality is spreading intensively, mainly through the Internet and television (Karaba M. and Nemeč R. 2018, 88). Films and soap operas are full of cohabitation that begin and end and in which people simply live together, marry and divorce, marry again, all that with a kind of normality. In a real life, these events are very hurtful, especially for children. A regular viewer of this mass product loses a critical look, accepting it all as a game and a normal phrase of a functional story. The negative impact lies especially in the fact that the tragic life experiences are presented with ease and as something normal. In stories and episodes, the easy way to solve problems is also expressed in a lightweight language style (Gaitano 2015, 214).

The overall change in cultural mentality does not avoid Slovakia with more than 5.4 million inhabitants. 66% adhere to the Catholic Church, 6% to the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, 4% to other registered churches, 13% are not religious (Census 2011). When it comes to the remaining 11%, this information is missing. Out of the total number, four out of ten people live in households where adults with dependent children reside. Thus, the cohabitation of adults with children includes a total of 2.28 million people. For 78% of adults in this group, cohabitation is based on marriage, 7% live in cohabitation and 15% of adults in households live in single-parent families where one parent takes care of one child or several children (Podmanická and all 2015). These figures show that marriage is the dominant institution in existing households in Slovakia.

In sociological research of the religiosity of Catholics in Slovakia who are in productive age, Catholics were highly tolerant to divorce and cohabitation. Only 18% have the unequivocal opinion that a sacramental marriage is inseparable and almost 80% admit that cohabitation is some kind of preparation for marriage (Matulník, Kratochvíla and Kyselica 2008, 182). Similar attitudes are held by young Catholics at the age of 17. Only 20% of young Catholics think that young people should wait for sexual life until they get married. More than 80% agree that it is appropriate for a man and a woman to live together for a certain period of time before being married. Majority of mothers, 83%, think that it is appropriate for a man and a woman to live together for a certain period of time before getting married (Matulník and Kratochvíla 2014, 170).

The research carried out as part of our project has verified the background which the family provides to its members through fulfilling their interests and developing their family life (Bednárík 2017). Out of the whole range of relevant conditions and activities, adult respondents commented on possibilities ensuring children's leisure activities, adult leisure activities, as well as family weekend stays and family holidays. They commented on time possibilities related to joint activities with children, on factors affecting strengthening of partnerships and time dedicated to their own interests. The basis and selected aspects of spiritual values of parents were also examined (Compare: <https://ifstudies.org> (data from 2015) and <http://www.ggp-i.org> (data from 2016)), as well as a question in which areas these values are passed on to children.

#### **4. TO EVALUATE: Analysis and Interpretation of Results**

Comprehensive results of empirical research are published in the monograph Bednárík, R., Žuffa, J.: *Families with Children, Empirical View in Slovakia*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2019. Here are the three areas for evaluation of options of the parents interviewed, first of all to ensure the specific needs of family members.

In all cases, there is a great effort on the part of the family to support the interests of their individual members and to share family time together on weekends or holidays. In terms of hierarchy, the European cultural phenomenon of giving priority to children over adults is confirmed. Slovak families are more interested in satisfying the interests of children than those of adults. 16% of respondents reported limited opportunities to satisfy the interests of children, and every third parent of a dependent child reports limited opportunities to satisfy the interests of adults - twice as much. At the other end, there is an opinion that more than one third of families have a background that allows their children to enjoy their interests "without problems", while the same applies to adults in only one fifth of the families. Support of the satisfaction of interests of

family members is met with a mostly positive evaluation, but there are greater problems with management of family weekend stays or family holidays.

The decisive factor is the *income situation of the family*. Lower earnings limit the opportunities to provide activities. This is more evident when arranging common family events, such as weekend or holiday family stays. With family earnings up to 850 € per month, respondents perceive arrangement of family holidays "without problems" or "with occasional problems" in only 14% of cases (for 63% this is not possible at all or with major problems); with family earnings that are higher than 1750 € it is in up to 79% of cases (only 15% of wealthy respondents perceive this negatively). Families with lower earnings do not resign from satisfying their children's leisure activities. Respondents from households with low common earnings (up to 850 € per month) declare restraint or major problems in children's interest activities in 37% of cases, but for half of them arrangement of their children's interest activities is problematic only occasionally, or even problem-free. However, low earnings limit interest activities of adults. For households with shared earnings up to 850 € per month, adult interest activities are either not possible at all (27%) or only with major problems (23.8%); on the other hand, for households with shared earnings over 1750 €, the interest activities of adults can be arranged without any problems (84% in total).

In addition to the financial situation of the family, there are other factors that support or weaken the possibilities for ensuring the interest activities of family members as individuals or as a whole. Such factors include *education* - when, with increasing level of education, both on the part of an adult man and on the part of an adult woman - the potential of the family to ensure the interest activities of both children and adults is raised. There is also a positive correlation between adult education and the possibility of providing family weekends or family holidays. Another factor supporting the satisfaction of family members' interests is the *stability of the relationship*. Respondents from families established in the first marriage (78% without problems or with only minor problems) evaluate the possibilities of securing the interests of children more positively than respondents living with a partner and children (63%). Similarly, the possibilities of providing the interests for adults are higher rated in spouse households (64%) than in cohabiting households (50%). The same connection applies to family weekend stays or holidays.

The research confirmed the second area of general stereotype stating that mother should take more care of the family and education, specifically in the form of closer ties of women to intra-family activities, when they find more time than men for education and joint activities with children, but also for strengthening of partner relationships. The view of men and women is practically balanced only when evaluating the possibilities of time for pursuing their own hobbies.

Men's time possibilities for different activities in the family are more unfavourable in relation to children than in relation to their wife or partner. While there is not a particularly abysmal difference, 27% of men see enough space for spending time together with children and their upbringing, while 29% of men see enough time for marriage / partnership strengthening. It is interesting to note that Slovak men think that they have more time for children than for their own hobbies. Women reserve significantly more time for children than for their partners; six out of ten women state that they have enough time for children, while four out of ten women have enough time for their partners. Similarly to men, women evaluate the time possibilities for pursuing their own hobbies as the least realistic of the three activities compared.

Evaluation of time opportunities for intra-family activities is partly dependent on the earnings situation in the family, as in the case of evaluation of possibilities for meeting the needs of family members. Logically, the impact of work activity on time possibilities of intra-family activities is rather negative - less time for people who are more committed to work. For example, 82% of women on maternity or parental leave declare sufficient time for children, but only 59% of women who are working full-time. Men working full-time declare "enough time" for children in 29% of cases, but self-employed men only in 22% of cases. This factor also has a negative impact on the evaluation of sufficient time for marriage / partnership strengthening, but this impact is relatively weak when it comes to the time possibilities related to one's own hobbies. "Enough time" for hobbies of a full-time working woman is declared in 21% of cases, with women on maternity or parental leave in 22% of cases.

The legitimacy factor of the *marital / partnership relationship* is different when comparing the time possibilities for intra-family activities to possibilities related to hobbies. In this area, the already mentioned "enough time" data declare more often the cohabitation-based households than the marriage-based families, in all three activities under review. Enough time for upbringing and time spent with children was declared by 72% of single women living with a spouse without marriage, but less, 65% of women living in first marriage; with men, this ratio is 42% to 29%. Enough time for partner relationships strengthening was declared by 49% of single women living with a partner, compared to 43% of women living in their first marriage; with men, this indicator shows 37% and 34%.

The factor of the *locality* proved to be an interesting phenomenon, when the highest data concerning sufficient time for intra-family relations appeared in cities with 20 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants. Usually, respondents from smaller municipalities, whether men or women, reported less time for their children, partners or hobbies. The inhabitants of our two large cities also reported a smaller amount of time.

The third area examined concerns the role of religion in households. It is interesting to note that religious issues are not a significant source of

disagreement between partners. It is money in the first place. The second reason is household chores, followed by leisure time, relationship with parents, father-in-law, mother-in-law, raising children, sex, relationship with friends, decision to have children, use of addictive substances. Religious questions are on the last tenth place.

What is remarkable is the ordering of characteristics that a child should acquire, from their parents' point of view. In the first place they show diligence and perseverance, in the second responsibility, tolerance and respect for others, independence, obedience, and in the last sixth place is religious faith. 36% of households attend worship regularly or occasionally, 27% talk about faith, 19% pray before or after a meal, and 13% of families read the Bible or other religious literature. 40% of parents declare that religious faith has a positive impact on their family, one third states that faith is a private matter and has no impact on the family, one quarter says that they have no particular experience with faith having impact on the family. Two percent chose the answer that faith brings rather negative elements to the family.

Pedagogical studies unambiguously claim that if a child really needs something, then it is a regular contact with both parents. Love in both partner and parent relationships must not only be created but also cherished. They need to divide the time between building a certain economic background and upbringing in order to be able to respond to the educational needs of their children. Children are not a material that needs to be modified according to the ideas of educators, but they are unique living beings who have their own life story and desire to discover themselves and the world. Every child wants to be discovered and assured that he / she is someone special and essential for this world. In the family space, a force field of father-mother-children relationships is created, standing for one of the key moments affecting upbringing and requiring sufficient amount of time. Children can witness their parents' quarrels, so they should also witness their reconciliation. They need to see that parents can make a mistake, disagree on something, offend each other, but they are also able to realize it, apologize, ask for forgiveness, because they love each other. This gives children a sense of stability and confidence that they live in a loving environment (Podmanický 2019, 38). The question, however, is not only the subjective feeling of parents, but also the objectively necessary quantity of this time. Psychologists talk about the need to learn how to solve conflicts, without which mutual love in the family can hardly grow (Schwarz 2019, 64).

It seems that the minimum time for building a family community is two hours a week, but this should be a time of good quality, not spent watching TV. This is confirmed by the experience of self-help groups and small communities. Like any social support system, the self-help group is similar to the ideal family model. Like older family members who, for example, collect and transmit information about the world and provide



role models to younger members who are trying to resemble them, the more experienced members of the self-help group provide a role model to less experienced members. At the same time, the self-help groups can provide a system of feedback and guidance, which helps the individual to understand how they respond to others and how others respond to them through family help. Also vice versa, the self-help groups can also be support for the family (Csontos 2015, 25).

It is optimal for a child when both parents participate in the upbringing, so the upbringing includes both the male and the female principle. The child needs to know both principles for his / her healthy development. Both principles are irreplaceable precisely because they are qualitatively different, as well as male and female vision of the world and thinking is different. Man and woman have their particularities that preciously complement each other. The child needs upbringing in a complete and functional family, offering both male and female principles to be seen and experienced in different life situations. The feminine principle vitalizes the masculine principle so that it can enter the broader spheres of the creation of the world and at the same time protect the feminine principle (Podmanický 2019, 41).

## 5. TO ACT: Family Support Perspectives

The family clearly needs more time to cultivate relationships, which, as we have seen, is influenced by both external and internal factors. In the first place, there is the financial security of the family, where state policies can help, in particular by increasing the maternity support, child allowances, parental allowances and childcare allowances. Child allowances in the Slovak Republic are among the lowest in the EU, but in combination with the tax bonus for families of working parents, Slovakia ranks among the more generous countries of the former "Soviet Bloc". Compared to child allowances provided in economically rich countries, these are still low. It would be necessary to provide differentiated support to families not only in the care of the youngest children up to the age of 3, but also in the care of students. It would also be appropriate to financially support families with three or more children (for example, by increasing the child allowance for the third and each additional child). The strategic objective should be reaching at least the EU average in benefits (Bednárík 2019). In this respect, it is necessary to re-evaluate the Slovak routine model of work engagement and to support lower working engagement in combination with special benefits for working parents.

The positive fact is that the parental allowance is granted to both mothers and fathers, thus contributing to a balance in the educational effect between women and men. Although motivation varies, it supports the necessary change in education (Bošňáková 2019, 24). The role of a

man in raising a child in the educational space is as important as that of a woman. An ideal solution would be a fair balance of this fact. Children should be able to communicate with both male and female educators. In such an effort, women and men can contribute to specific benefits that will support interaction and cooperation with children in the educational process. Mutual stimulation, influence and synergy between teachers and children or students will be highly supported. The school positively affects the overall development of the child. Some European and Scandinavian countries in particular undertake several support activities aimed at increasing the proportion of male teachers already in kindergartens (Zentko 2019, 25). This gender balance in education should also be a strategic goal.

However, increasing financial support, the gender balance of the educational process, do not automatically mean an extension of parents' free time, which they will use to build relationships in the family. Spouses' decision and community help is needed. Creation and propagation of self-help communities in the US may be an inspiration. Lifestyles as an expression of belonging to a certain group and promoted by tabloids are also a challenge (Karaba M. and Nemec R. 2018, 52). In other words, lifestyle is the behavior of fans of different styles of popular music or specific groups, while their typical lifestyles can be attributed to subcultures. In this scope, however, the lifestyle of the family and especially of the Christian family is missing. In the past, the basic elements of the lifestyle of the Christian family were passed down from generation to generation by living in multi-generational families and the life of the Christian community, which were closely linked to the celebration of the liturgical year. It was normal that there was a common prayer in the family, rituals of mutual forgiveness and solidarity with close and distant relatives. Thus, younger families were naturally accompanied by older ones. Nowadays, when a young family considers it necessary to be independent from their parents, there is an increasing need for counseling young families so that they can adopt a Christian lifestyle. But they accept it through personal decision only (Csontos 2017).

There is a need for counseling young families, which, however, cannot be ordered by some regulation, but can be submitted as an offer. This can be a personal meeting in the community, led by an older family, or a priest, a catechist, or an animator. At the beginning of spiritual counseling, it is important to open up the space of desire in human life, to be inspired by the life of other people. To give this desire a space so it can guide a person. Without such a desire, without internal motivation, counseling is not possible. The young families can not be motivated by inducement. When the inner desire arises, the offer of counseling can come. If there is no strong inner desire, little will happen, because it is the engine of development as a strong identification with the counsellor. Although this identification is necessary to some degree, it must not

become the main motive to copy it without a free choice (Sýkora 2000, 116).

In the period of adolescence and independence, a young person releases family relationships, as Scripture says, "Therefore a man abandons his father and his mother." (Gn 2,24). An important role in this period is played by the friendships that arise in the Christian community, where young people get to know each other better because they see how "the other" behaves in the community. There is room for growth to personal faith and creation of good preconditions for a functioning marriage. Thanks to the community, the married couple will have many common friends, many of whom have become other married couples. The problems they encounter in everyday life and marriage can thus be discussed with their friends who experience similar situations. It is actually a non-violent form of counseling a young family. The circle of these friends is a certain extension of the family and connection to the life of the parish community (Makovník 2019, 112). The benefit is that young people participate in volunteer organizations that help disadvantaged people and thus gain a realistic view of life. The common denominator is the fact that the help is concrete, everyone involved in the community is a living and active entity, no one is just a passive recipient but also a provider, the family community is mutually enriching (Csontos 2019)

It should be emphasized that the family counseling is of a different type from the classical spiritual counseling taken from the heritage of monastic and religious spirituality. An essential element of this counseling helps spouses in their relationship. It is a challenge to find appropriate ways for spouses and families. The spirit of the merciful Samaritan accompanies the steps of the Church while meeting with the family. There is a particular need for attention to the family, to provide counseling in all difficult situations: separations, divorced people living alone, divorced and re-married people, single-parent families. We have a duty to help these families to find not only a healing path, but also to lead them to testify about the indisputable value of the family (Paglia and Sciortino 2015, 113).

Managing conflicts that cannot be excluded from life is important for the development of family relationships. The spouses must be helped to learn how to solve them. The sad fact is that nowhere at schools, but neither in families, nor in communities, is it taught how conflicts can be resolved. Conflicts are part of everyday life, so all pupils at primary school should already have a subject called *Conflict Solving*, so not only at schools but also in families and society there will be fewer conflicts, negative atmosphere and more cooperation. It is a society-wide role that the family, school and the media must play together. Education concerning conflict solving is simply needed everywhere, because we encounter conflicts everywhere (Schwarz 2019, 64).

Counseling, as it turns out, is necessary as soon as a sacramental marriage is contracted, because marriage is actually beginning, and here

young couples are exposed to a strong influence of consumer lifestyles and lack the counseling in order to adopt a lifestyle of Christian marriage and family. Counseling as a new method of supporting families in stressful situations helps individuals and families manage work and unemployment problems, marital and family conflicts, problems related to sexual and emotional life, inability to make decisions, educational problems, loss and sadness, solitude, inadequate interpersonal relationships, illnesses, existential emptiness, lack of faith, and problems related to spirituality (Šmidová 2015, 18; Trębski 2015).

## 6. Conclusion

The research revealed the fact that parents are willing to dedicate more resources and more time to their children than themselves. It shows that not only women but also men highly appreciate the value of marriage / partnership. It has been confirmed that higher incomes and higher education make it easier to satisfy the interests of family members and spend more time with each other. An interesting fact is the legitimacy factor of the relationship. In addition to the quantity of time devoted to the development of family relationships, its quality remains a question. It is the quality of time spent together that contributes to the stability of marriage and family. Pedagogical and psychological studies have shown that it is necessary to balance the presence of men and women in upbringing, both in the family and school. Another need is education related to dealing with conflict situations that belong to everyday life. This shows the positive impact of small communities in youth movements, volunteering and self-help. Young marriages counseling may be of particular benefit, while its need must be based on the young family itself; it cannot be enforced but provided as an offer. The study is an invitation for family communities and parish communities to reflect on the current form of pastoral care of marriage and family, which hardly involves the family in the life of the parish community, which should in the future become a family of families.

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