



# Lifestyle of Families

LIFE OF CZECH AND ROMANIAN FAMILIES IN A SMALL SURVEY

# INTRODUCTION

Each person has their personal experience of family. Two antitheses can be seen from an external observer's point of view: **the family is most frequently mentioned as a life priority, but also as an institution undergoing a crisis caused by the disintegration of families and a reduced interest in founding new families.** Those who have decided to live in a family are subjected to various pressures caused by a society that disregards family needs. On the other hand, there are the lucky ones whose families prosper and who therefore have no need to discuss such an 'obvious matter of course' as family.

Why have we decided on a comparative sampling among Czech and Romanian families? There are several reasons: some speak about the 'value of the family', but do not denominate that value. Parents themselves sometimes do not know that their role is irreplaceable and easily succumb to the view that an 'upbringing in a group of children' is at least as important as an upbringing in a family. In surveys, the vast majority of both children and the young state that it is very important for them to live in a good family, but they include the establishment of their own good family very reluctantly in their plans. Other findings indicate that the ideal of a family as a place for meeting people's needs – time to relax and enjoy hobbies – is nearly incompatible with bringing up children and household work. **Everyday duties are not perceived as an opportunity for personal growth, but as a burden.** Sociologists report that as they grow older children are losing interest in 'social values' i.e. behaviour that supports good relationships between people, and are becoming more attracted to external values (consumerism, fame). Changing young people's preferences can be expected mainly from a change in the example given by their parents and from reinforcing the transfer of cultural behavioural patterns.

For these reasons, the objective of our work was to create a space for describing all the things that can HAPPEN IN A FAMILY. We did not want to create a list of activities and thus encourage the undesirable 'performance principle' in an environment that should deepen relationships. Yet we are also aware that while relationships are expressed in spoken words, they cannot do without actions. No one can educate anybody without spending time together, working and rejoicing. The word 'together' is the key. **The more voluntarily chosen time together, the more it can be expected that children will experience assurance from their parents of their good life choices that are attractive to follow.** The comparison with Romanian families confirms that family life quality is not predominantly determined by material wealth, but rather by parents' courage to use all opportunities for building a WE family.

# ABOUT THE SURVEY

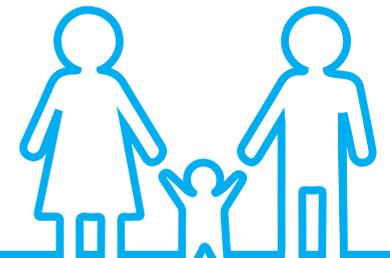
23 Czech and 24 Romanian families participated in the comparative survey. The questionnaire contained 26 questions for both countries and the Romanian version included four additional questions concerning family policy that the Romanian counterparts will use for their own needs.

While the Czech families were larger, with an average of 6 members and 3.9 children, nearly half of the Romanian families had only three members and families with five or more members made up less than a quarter (unlike the Czech survey, elderly couples were included).

One third of the Czech respondents were from cities with over 100,000 and one third from communities of up to 10,000 inhabitants. Two thirds of the Romanian respondents were from cities of over 100,000 and a quarter from communities with up to 10,000 inhabitants.

The survey's objective was not quantitative research, but a qualitative insight into the lifestyle and priorities of today's families.

Once processed, the answers to the questions were divided into five topical chapters.



# FAMILIES AND TIME

## FAMILY TIME SPENT TOGETHER



“I DON’T HAVE TIME.”

“TOO BUSY.”

“WE ONLY MEET AT HOME AT NIGHT.”

### HOW OFTEN DO WE SAY THESE WORDS OR HEAR THEM FROM OUR FRIENDS, RELATIVES, COLLEAGUES...?

The pace of life gained has accelerated in the last 20 years. Time has become a rare commodity that cannot be bought. Yet, time is surely one of the important factors in our lives that we need to care for and appreciate, as it will never return. This is especially true of time spent, given or sacrificed to those closest to us, to the family.

### IS LACK OF TIME ONLY A PROBLEM HERE OR IS IT ALSO IN ROMANIA?

In our survey among Christian families, we searched for activities that all family members do together, that are important for them and that they do not want to give up.

The survey showed differences between families with small and with older children (14+) where weekday time spent together was influenced by hobbies, clubs, activities in fellowships or by children staying in halls of residence, dormitories, etc. The finding that eating together was an important moment in the family was encouraging. These typically included breakfasts and suppers on weekdays and additional lunches on weekends when more family members participated together in food preparation. Prayer, especially evening prayer and grace before meals is another shared family activity adopting various forms with respect to the children’s age (thanks and petitions in their own words, ‘formal’ prayers, singing, exceptionally Bible reading). Chatting, discussions and experience sharing are also quite frequent activities that the surveyed families

considered important and made time for. Other shared activities depend on the children’s ages: playing and doing homework with the small ones, watching movies, reading, household or garden work with the older ones. Weekends bring additional shared activities such as attending church, outings, visits, celebrations, sports and cultural events.

Similarly, Romanian families spend time together doing household work, attending church, praying and preparing food, even though typically only on Sundays, which differs from the Czech families who manage to eat together more often. Chatting and sharing are also activities perceived as important by Romanian families as well as walks or outings to the countryside. Compared to the Czech families, the Romanian ones spend more time together shopping.

The time together is largely influenced by the family being part of a congregation. The surveyed sample of families included mainly church activities, when whole families participated in the preparation of various programmes for the congregation, sang in a church choir, helped with repairing the parish house, etc. These families also spend their free time together at outings, celebrations, etc. and travel together for holidays.

Due to the average number of 3.9 children per family, it can be assumed that families opt for inexpensive sporting activities; cycling trips were often mentioned. They also frequently visit their relatives or friends.



***The families in our survey prefer time spent together either in entertainment or work. Visits of relatives or friends are more frequent than in the general population, which documents the fact that relationships and friendship are treasured values worth investing time in. Eating and praying together is important for these families and they would like to devote even more time to them. Time together does not have to mean only fun or particular activities. The surveyed families see the importance of time invested in talk and sharing.***

***The more time that the Romanian families spend shopping together can be the result of ‘slower development’ in a certain aspect; this form of family fun may be over for Czech families or they do not consider it ‘adequate’ time together.***

# FAMILIES AND TIME

## FAMILIES AND HOLIDAYS

Holidays are not only times of rest and recuperation. Holidays spent together by parents and children are key times for building strong and intimate relationships, and reinforcing fellowship. Psychologists believe that it is beneficial for a child to see his/her parents solving various unusual situations, while parents get a chance to learn more about their child and to recognise his/her strengths and weaknesses, which is useful for further upbringing.

Czech families from our survey go for holidays twice a year on average. The mountains are a typical destination in winter while inland hiking, cycling, visiting castles and chateaux, staying at cottages or log cabins are popular in summer as well as going abroad to the seaside. The condition of sufficient financial resources in the given year is frequently mentioned in association with seaside holidays. Families with four or more children go for – usually domestic – holidays at least once a year. Parents

expressed their gladness that their adolescent or nearly adult children still liked going on holiday with them. It is the parents who typically decide the holiday type and destination, sometimes with the assistance of the older children.

The financial situation plays a crucial role in Romanian families. Most of them go for holidays only once a year, but some up to four times. Others, however, do not go at all due to lack of resources or time. The Romanian respondents reported more often that it was the mother who decided on holidays.

There is a new law in Romania in force since July 1, 2015, which stipulates that employees are entitled to holiday vouchers (approx. EUR 1400 per year) that can be used only within the Romanian tourist industry. Its objective is to enable families to go together for at least one real holiday.



## CHILDREN AND THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

The summer months are the favourite among children as they can relax from school duties, and spend time on their popular activities. According to research, family holidays are clearly the most popular among children, but in reality only 20% of children can spend the main part of their holidays this way. Another popular activity is summer camps, but again only 16% spend the main part of their holidays there.

Our survey indicated that apart from family holidays, the most typical regular children's summer activities included summer camps or suburban camps and staying with the grandparents. As the majority of our respondent families had children

under 15, it was natural that they spent holidays with their grandparents or at home. Children over than 15 tend to spend part of the holidays in summer jobs. As these are from larger families where they do not receive regular pocket money, a summer job is a source of funds for their own needs or pleasure.

Romanian children also spend holidays in summer camps, but also doing a voluntary work. These are followed by stays with grandparents in rural areas, time spent with schoolmates, time with parents during their holidays, trips, sporting activities and various workshops (ceramic, etc.).



**Families consider family holidays as important and try to organise them in such a way to make all members happy. Czech parents see it important and encouraging that even the oldest children want to participate. Even though finances play a certain role in deciding the destination and form of the family holiday, families go at least once a year and only exceptionally spend it at home around their own pool in the garden. This is true even in the case of larger families. Children from our survey spend summer holidays mostly at camps or at their grandparents – depending on their age.**

# FAMILY LIFE MANAGEMENT

## HOUSEHOLD DUTIES

'The woman should cook and houseclean while the man should provide for the family', the majority of Czechs believe. This is based on surveys by the Centre for Independent Public Opinion Research (CIPOR). Both men and women should equally share the childcare. The view of the family duty distribution between sexes is practically unchanged in the last 14 years according to the CIPOR.

This corresponds to the work division in both Czech and Romanian families in our survey. It is mostly the woman who is in charge of cooking and housecleaning.

Yet fathers ever more often participate in food preparation and in doing 'major' shopping. Their domains continue to be repairs in the household, care for the garden and the car and driving children to school and possibly to after-school clubs. The answer that 'the household work is done as needed by the member who is freer at the moment' was quite typical.

The Romanian respondents stated that the father's role is to 'protect the mother and adopt her duties if needed'.

A difference between Czech and Romanian families can be seen in including children in domestic work and duties. Czech children most often help with food preparation, are in charge of emptying the bin and sorting the waste, vacuum cleaning, washing the dishes or emptying the dishwasher and helping with the laundry. Cleaning their own room is taken for granted. Even the youngest are included in running the household, doing tasks adequate to their age. Household work is financially remunerated only in exceptional cases.

Romanian children also participate in household work of similar kinds to the Czech ones, but a very frequent answer was that children work at home only rarely as their priority is school and learning.



*The difference in the extent of children's participation in household duties can be caused by the different family sizes. While the Czech families in the survey had 3.9 children on average and the most frequent number of children was 3 or more, most of the Romanian families had one or at most two children. Smaller families obviously do not have to clean and do other domestic work so often and parents tend not to 'burden' their children with these duties regularly or often. The questionnaires indicated that parents are sometimes almost afraid of loading their children with household duties.*

*Another factor causing the different involvement of children in family duties is the fact that Romanian families live more often with the grandparents who regularly step in for both the parents and the children in domestic work as 'they have more time'.*

## PLANNING

Planning and harmonisation of all family members' activities seems to be a necessary component of a smooth day or week these days. There are numerous ways to record and coordinate the daily agenda: from standard/family calendars or stickers on the fridge to more sophisticated methods using a PC or smart phone applications.

The most common planning method in the Czech families is simple verbal communication: members remember regular activities and inform each other of the extraordinary ones during evening preparations for the following day or record them in calendars. Phone communication is used for

solving urgent matters or for arranging changes to the plan. Verbal arrangement is surprisingly the most common means of communication even in larger families.

'We live in turbulent times, rarely having quiet time to communicate,' was a frequent answer from Romanian families on their planning. They typically discuss their plans and schedules during meals either in the evening or morning – according to the current situation. The mother is often the final decision maker in planning.



*It seems that family size plays an important role even here. Czech families reported alternative forms of communication in addition to verbal arrangements, while the Romanian families more often arrange everything verbally due to there being fewer members in their families and predominantly use meal times for that.*

# FAMILY LIFE MANAGEMENT

## THE FAMILY AND FINANCES



Financial and budgetary matters are important factors in family life. Their successful management is a condition of peace and content: if the family budget is balanced, the parents can better focus on other areas of family life and are not under constant stress that would otherwise be reflected in relations and behaviour to themselves and the children. It is a demanding task to feed a family with children, especially if one of the parents stays home and does not earn a salary. To have children actually means giving up certain expectations of material standard of living and to focus on things that are suddenly more important.

Czech families from our survey discuss financial and budgetary matters with their children, answer their questions and offer explanations appropriate to their age. They talk about the prices of basic foodstuffs and favourite sweets with small children who get their moneybox and learn the first skills of not spending everything at once but saving part of the money for later – as mum and dad do. Older children are often acquainted with the whole budget, which is beneficial at times when they long for an expensive item such as a computer or a bicycle.

Children can obviously be introduced to the topic of the budget in various ways: parents explain that some desires are unrealistic and some discuss priorities – not only financial but life ones. Other families invite children as partners (also depending on age) to discussions concerning family investment plans or solutions of certain complex issues.

The answers of our families also included the opposite practice, i.e. that children are not involved in the family's financial matters. This can be partly caused by the lower age of their children and generational transfer surely plays a certain role: if parents did not have a chance to discuss finances with their parents in their childhood, this can be a new and difficult part of their own parenthood.

The situation is rather different among the Romanian families. Only about one third of parents include their children in the decision making process concerning the family budget. They would appreciate the church being more active in financial training. One third of parents discuss shopping, taxes, invoices and investments with their children.

## POCKET MONEY AND HOUSEHOLD WORK REMUNERATION

According to the surveys, only 8% of children do not receive any pocket money. This means that most children have their own money and must manage it. However, in more than 40% of cases the money is paid only when children need it or when parents have it. And this is rather financial anarchy, which can hardly be called training in healthy financial management according to the experts. Experts also say that paying children to help with domestic work is not educational.

Our survey in Czech families reported that approximately half of the children receive some pocket money, including children of pre-school age in some cases (such as CZK 10 per week).

In larger families (six or more children in our survey) only the oldest children who commute to school receive pocket money or none receive it and the oldest ones (16+) must make their personal money through temporary jobs. The largest sum given to a child was CZK 500 per month. No parents pay their children for doing the regular household work, but some do for work exceeding children's given duties.

Parents in Romania receive a flat child allowance of EUR 20 up to the age of 18. Families in our survey mostly use this contribution for household expenses but some give it to their children as pocket money.



***The children's age and the family financial situation play a role in paying children pocket money. Even pre-school children frequently receive pocket money in Czech families as a means of teaching basic financial management, which testifies to the 'maturity' of their parents who are aware of the importance of the 'financial literacy'. Hardly any parents pay their children for doing household work, which is applauded by experts. Financial matters and pocket money are not such important subjects in Romanian family discussions, perhaps due to the fact that parents lack support in their own financial training.***

# FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS AND VALUES

## VALUES

Values help us to find our way in the world and to make decisions. Each person treasures certain values that are expressed as standards of his/her behaviour. The foundation for these values is laid in the family, and they can cover the relationship to it and to a broader social neighbourhood, attitudes to life, life expectations, ways of spending leisure

time, etc. Prevailing values in society influence society-wide life and the country's orientation.

In our survey, we asked parents what values they wanted to impart to their children and what they considered the most important for family happiness.

### THE MOST FREQUENT ANSWERS TO THE FIRST QUESTION BY THE CZECH FAMILIES:

- ▶ faith
- ▶ decency, responsibility, reliability, uprightness
- ▶ willingness to help, tolerance, respect for others, fairness, generosity
- ▶ healthy self-confidence, joy of life, self-appreciation, not giving up, ability to overcome obstacles

### THE SECOND QUESTION WAS MOSTLY ANSWERED AS:

- ▶ mutual love, being together, good relationships
- ▶ time spent together, good communication
- ▶ faith

### RESPONDENTS FROM ROMANIAN FAMILIES ANSWERED MOST FREQUENTLY:

- ▶ faith
- ▶ honesty, truthfulness
- ▶ love for neighbours
- ▶ charity
- ▶ Christian morals, moral virtues
- ▶ righteousness

### THE MOST FREQUENT ANSWERS TO THE SECOND QUESTION ON FAMILY HAPPINESS:

- ▶ understanding
- ▶ love
- ▶ faith in God
- ▶ good health

*It is understandable that faith appears as the number one value when Christian families are asked. This is followed by moral and social values and last but not least parents want to impart to their children values and attitudes that will lead them to a contented personal life.*

*Even though these times focus on performance and achieving large goals, our survey did not receive any answers like 'performance, assertiveness, success, good material standing', etc.*

*Both Czech and Romanian families appreciate and want to transfer to their children the same or similar values based on the Christian tradition. Things valued even in the general population are considered important for the family happiness: good relationships and mutual love.*

## RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships are not limited to parent-child or inter-sibling relationships. These include also relationships to grandparents, to siblings of partners, to children's partners and their children...

According to developmental psychologists, a child's personality is most likely formed much more by what the parents do and how they treat

the child and other family members than by what they purposefully order, ban or teach.

The method and style of upbringing is expressed in moments of parent-child interaction and communication. This style determines the disciplinary tools including rewards and punishments.

### OUR SURVEY ASKED THE QUESTION OF 'WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN'S UPBRINGING?' AND THE CZECH AND ROMANIAN RESPONDENTS TYPICALLY ANSWERED THIS WAY:

- ▶ leading by example, correct values
- ▶ love, good relationships, trust, safety, communication, humour, ability to set fixed boundaries, consistency, training for responsibility
- ▶ respect, tolerance
- ▶ teach them to help others, not to harm,
- ▶ imparting of faith

Romanian parents more often stressed all kinds of education including religious while the Czechs emphasised communication, ability to help others and responsibility.



# FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS AND VALUES

## EXERCISING PARENTAL AUTHORITY, PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS

Various analyses and psychological studies indicate that a good atmosphere in the family is important for good relationships and upbringing. This is achieved mainly by positive communication between members and by setting certain limits for children and insisting on them, while also explaining the reasons for the demands and emotionally supporting the children.

To exercise parental authority, the Czech respondents set limits and borders for behaviour. They see an ability to admit one's own mistakes and to apologise to children as important as well as respecting the child's personality.

The Romanian parents want to mainly lead by example. They apply their authority through rules. If difficulties arise, they discuss them with the children and clarify arguments. Mutual trust is important.

The most frequent reward is praise and the expression of joy in both Czech and Romanian families as well as an invitation to a confectionery, a small gift or an experience.

Most frequent corrections include reproof, raised voice, a ban on popular activities and in Czech families also a reduction in pocket money, extra household work and possibly a light spanking.



**The answers of parents in both countries confirmed the opinion of psychologists: teach by good examples and impart correct values and behavioural patterns.**

**Exercising parental authority and the forms of praise and correction correspond to the upbringing style that parents in our survey appreciate: a good example, communication and setting limits.**

## INTIMATE ISSUES IN THE FAMILY

### THERE COMES A DAY IN EACH FAMILY WHEN THE CHILD ASKS: MUM, DAD, HOW DO CHILDREN COME INTO THE WORLD?

Answers to this and other logically connected questions differ considerably as each family has its own way of communicating about intimate topics. Yet the parental task associated with education for the healthy integration of sexuality in a child's development is clearly defined. If we as parents manage to show children a positive picture of a family standing on a solid and heartfelt relationship between the parents, if we show children what respect the gift of life deserves, then we can hope that they will be more resistant to today's approach to sexuality where nearly everything is available for everybody, and that they will be able to choose and maintain their own values.

### AND HOW DID PARENTS FROM OUR SURVEY DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCE?

They speak with children individually. A child's question or a family situation (when a sibling is to be born) usually being the trigger point. Talk with children is led with respect to their developmental needs and therefore the content reflects the child's age and his/her other characteristics. A mother reported she talked very differently about sex with each of her two boys as 'they are utterly different

from each other'. Books and short videos selected by the parents in advance are sometimes suitable tools for such discussions.

Romanian parents state that their position is very complex in this issue. They would appreciate some training in 'educating for relationships' feeling rather helpless when facing such discussions with their children. Parents tend to support each other and keep to common ground. It is a matter of agreement which of the parents would talk with which child 'at the right time'. Answers like 'dad we already know all this very well' is not rare. Some children refuse to discuss intimate topics with their parents, but attend a fellowship or undergo catechetical teaching dealing with the topic of sexuality – and parents are then very thankful that there is someone trustworthy who leads their children through. They rely on the church as a body with a significant forming effect on their children. Other families experienced a direct confrontation of values and children openly disagreed with their parents' view of premarital sex, for example. The question remains to what extent such expressions of disagreement are just reflections of young people's search for an identity and how much these attitudes change or stabilise in their early adulthood.



# FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS AND VALUES

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRANDPARENTS



Experts agree that the grandparent-grandchild relationship is beneficial for both sides. Children find additional stable people in their grandparents who provide a feeling of safety and security; grandpa and grandma are sources of experience and adventures. On the other hand, grandchildren bring new impulses and sensation into the grandparents' lives and they can also become a source of new information and activities that both generations enjoy doing together.

Grandparents spend most time with their grandchildren when they are still small while helping with babysitting and care. The frequency of meetings changes with the grandchildren's age.

Grandfathers and grandmothers in Czech families typically see/baby-sit their grandchildren once or twice a week, 5-6 hours in average. They spend time with them at home or pick them up from kindergartens, schools or clubs. It depends very much on whether the grandparents live in the same town/village as the grandchildren. The closer they live, the more frequent the contact is.

Grandparents spend time with bigger grandchildren rather randomly – as requested by the parents.

Apart from babysitting, families spend time together with grandparents especially on occasions of birthdays and feasts, and they also go together for outings and holidays.

Families from our survey most often visit their grandparents once a week if these live in the same community, or once a month if they live in a different village/town.

Nearly a quarter of the Romanian grandparents from our survey live together with the young family and thus have daily contact with the grandchildren and they are important assistants in their upbringing and helping out in the household. The help is mutual, the generations accommodate each other, have mutual understanding and respect.

Where the grandparents do not share the same household, their contact is similar to Czech families.

## HELP FOR GRANDPARENTS

70% of Czechs claim they help their retired parents. Most typically (nearly half of them) help with their household operation, one fifth support them materially and every fourteenth contributes to them financially.

84% of Czechs believe that children should take care of their aging parents.

*(research by the NN insurance and pension company)*

Families in our survey typically answered that the grandparents did not need any help yet and on the contrary the grandparents were helping the young parents. In cases where the seniors did need assistance, it was predominantly small-scale cleaning, shopping, accompanying them to a doctor or to public authorities or giving a lift in a car as needed.



***Romanian families feature more mutual help due a co-habitation of three generations in one household. Yet it seems that it is rather the grandparents who help more often: with babysitting, cooking or cleaning ('they have the time for it'). Generally the Romanian grandparents appear to be more involved in household work including the care for children, while the grandfathers and grandmothers in Czech families baby-sit and rather take care of the children than the household.***

***Unlike the Czech families, some Romanians in our survey use assistance of a nanny – but only those that are financially well off.***

# FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS AND VALUES

## REACTIONS TO PARENTHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

Czech families in our survey had 3.9 children on average, so they were more or less large ones.

There are two parallel but contradictory opinions on large families. Some express recognition, admiration and respect for how the family manages life with more children while others claim that it is irresponsible to have more children in our times as it is demanding physically, mentally and financially.

### WHAT REACTIONS DO OUR FAMILIES TYPICALLY MEET?

It is encouraging that most reactions to this approach to parenthood and upbringing are positive, some admire how a numerous family can

be managed and still help others and be active in the community.

Yet families occasionally face misunderstanding, envy and scorn, frequently within their own broader family – sometimes fear of how the young parents will survive financially or in the community or on the contrary why they have ‘only’ XY children.

The Romanian survey collected only very few answers to this question – insufficient for any comparison with the Czech reality. Answers included things like: ‘The family is perceived normally in both good and bad, some ironic comments from others on the family’s Christian values.’

# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

## FAMILY AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

We asked our families how much time they devote to volunteering and what it gives to them, in other words what their motivation is in working for the church, a fellowship or the community. This was based on our previous experience that families with an active attitude to the upbringing of children frequently also participate in activities that maintain contacts with other families or a fellowship – and thus build or reinforce their social network.

The vast majority of our families associated themselves with some type of volunteering, usually within their church, a Scout troop or the community they lived in. The form and level of involvement obviously differed especially in the number and ages of children and the consequent domestic duties. The number of voluntary working hours in a month (summed up for all family members) reached as much as 50. The average number in our sample was 18 hours per family, i.e. approximately 4 hours per person per week.

Nearly all answers to the question of ‘what is the benefit of volunteering’ were in harmony and the word ‘joy’ was the most frequently mentioned. Joy from work performed, joy from new relationships, and the good feeling gained from helping others. This benefit is one of the deepest meanings of working for others. Other answers agreed that ‘voluntary work generates a feeling of self-fulfilment and the use of one’s own potential’. It seems that volunteering is an ideal complement to work within the family, partly due to the fact that it is more appreciated by society. In other words, a volunteer receives praise, recognition and respect. Like the family work, volunteering can also put an active person in danger of personal burnout – especially if the work is not appreciated. As one of our respondents wrote: ‘I teach in Sunday school and it does not give me anything.’ – or perhaps she does not receive any positive feedback from others?

Even answers that characterised volunteering as an honourable duty or an opportunity to educate and form the new generation, accented the overall social impact.

The research on the Romanian side also presented the high engagement of families in local fellowships and especially the church. This involvement varies between 2 and 60 hours per month and concerns predominantly activities in the parish, in the church choir, youth associations or the Association of Catholic Families. People devote their time to regular attendance of church services, cleaning and adorning the church, various forms of voluntary work including activities with children and the youth, support for families with handicapped children, consulting on natural methods of family planning, and the preparation of engaged couples for entering into marriage.

Respondents characterise the benefits of such work in a similar way to their Czech counterparts: the development of relationships, self-fulfilment, the establishment of new contacts, as well as the development of communication and organisational skills. Even this topic brought occasional answers saying that such work does not bring any benefits. One respondent mentioned an unspecified financial benefit.

Children involved in voluntary activities find new friends, gain valuable experience and get a chance to do things that they would rarely experience in other areas of life. From the parents’ point of view, the opportunity to offer children low-cost experiences that would otherwise be difficult to provide is also important.

Family involvement in the community also provokes external reactions. Such a family is more exposed to others, people notice the cohesion within the family and its engagement, and judge it on a scale running from ‘admirable and inspirational’ through ‘a normal part of life’ to ‘why do they do it when they get nothing out of it and it’s just a waste of their time’. All these reactions would deserve space in a separate sociological discussion.



## FAMILY AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

*The fact that families with children are important actors in building civic society being ready to take their part of responsibility for its shaping was again confirmed. They create and develop an environment, which is pleasant to live in not only for the family itself but also for others. On the other hand they also deepen their social competences and gain valuable experience and skills applicable for example in the labour market or in municipal politics.*

*Romanian families are open to an even greater involvement in communal activities. Active parents are usually role models for their children ('it is contagious'). Volunteering is a growing trend in Romania, aiming at finding a balance between a paid job and voluntary civic engagement. Such engagement can contribute to improving the standing of those families that do not deal with their subjective problems only, but are willing to make their efforts and time available to the society. In this respect, better communication clearly needs to be encouraged.*



## THE FAMILY AND THE CONGREGATION

Answers to questions concerning activities of families or their members in parishes and various Christian fellowships are interesting if evaluated in the light of the growing value of free time associated with a hedonistic life focus and the increase in the importance of friends (as detected by sociologists), which is typical especially for the Czech Republic.

Both Czech and Romanian families are active in their parishes. The lists of particular activities are very similar: material help to the church, cleaning and decorating the church building, lector ministry in reading liturgical scripts, help to others, preparations for marriage, but also volunteer work for a Christian radio station. Many Czech respondents stated that they were part of a fellowship of catechists who teach religion, assist in preparations for sacraments, run catechetical training for children during Sunday services and some conduct children choirs called 'scholas'.

Families or their members in both surveyed countries are engaged in new communities and movements such as Focolare for example. Romanian families have an additional opportunity to work for family organisations that do not exist in the Czech Republic such as the Association of Catholic Families, the General Association of the United Romanians or Catholic Action.

Czech respondents' answers suggest a significant awareness of the importance of small Christian fellowships or communities. The survey

outcome is probably influenced by the age of the respondents, which corresponds to the active parental phase. Conversely, the higher the age, the lower the awareness of the importance of these fellowships. The reason is an attitude that was carried over from the communist dictatorship, which largely confined piety to itself without sufficient consideration of its impact on the testimony of faith in the church.

Our respondents confirmed that the focus of these communities was very diverse and that they had different time demands and personal expectations from their members.

Czech respondents also participate in local community life e.g. through membership in the local council or committees, leadership of after-school children activities including Scout troops. Romanian respondents engage themselves mainly within their Christian communities or in charitable organisations (Association of Families with Disabled Children).

Prayer communities, consisting mostly of married couples in our sample, are used by those who appreciate the benefits of sharing. Some communities live by the spirituality of various orders or new communities/movements and are also formed by them.

*What is the significance of these communities? Above all, they expand the liturgical dimension ('going to church') within the local church by two more dimensions: mutual testimony of faith and attention to the daily needs of people. A certain disadvantage can be seen in the fact that these dimensions of local church life thrive more or less only between particular members of these communities. Unfortunately, we often witness a certain isolation of these communities and an indifference to those who do not belong to any.*

## CHILDREN AMONG THEIR PEERS

The importance of peers in child's life is generally known. The need arises especially at the time when their own family is no longer sufficient inspiration for the integration of a young person into society.

Directing a person towards life in a fellowship or a congregation is crucial for Christianity. It is not possible to reach God without other people; the only route to God leads through another person. After man rejected God, an individualistic approach replaced fundamentally important relations with people with relations to things. This attitude can be seen practically (among others) in things being more important than people and in how dealing with things influences dealing with people: relationships with others seem to be too demanding for their incalculability or illogicality. The original focus of relationships on serving others has been replaced by a focus on pleasure or relaxation (only).

The main purpose of Christian education, therefore, is to learn to perceive ourselves and others as having value, as a unique opportunity to live life in relation to ourselves, neighbours and God. The qualities of a human being are secondary; the crucial thing is that he/she is loved by God.

It is clear from this perspective that the importance of social ties beyond the family is important for two reasons: the experience of our own contribution to these ties, and particularly their contribution to reinforcing Christian attitudes. This experience is valid for both surveyed countries.

Our respondents were parents who recognise the need to include their children in a fellowship.

The forms can be diverse, as with those for adults. Compared to activities of the adults, prayer is usually complemented by games. Other activities include officiating (as an altar boy), sport in the Orel organisation, music, but also use of the programmes of institutionalised communities such as Focolare or Scout.

Some respondents reported that their children had no fellowship. The reasons were many. One, the most important in terms of passing on the faith, is that the importance of a Christian fellowship is probably underrated. This can be explained by the discovered fact that educational values are unfortunately no different from those of mainstream society. Believing parents stress only religious faith as such. If children from such families meet, belonging to a community gives no guarantee that such a meeting will be viewed as an opportunity to consolidate the Christian way of life. This statement, however, has not been confirmed by an investigation into the lives of Romanian families. Thus it applies only to the Czech environment.

Results of sociological studies encourage the formation of fellowships for youth in a Christian spirit. Young people prefer environmental protection to economic prosperity and solidarity with others takes precedence over responsibility for themselves. The experienced quality of life is more important than the acquisition of property and material riches. The fact that the need for interpersonal relationships is motivated by children's own enrichment should not discourage us.

***Although peers are irreplaceable for young people, parents should not renounce their own agency. A fellowship of youth should not be left without adult influence. The absence of life-forming personalities is often mentioned in this respect. In spite of the fact that young people often choose their models under the influence of the media, it remains the case that the decisive factor for the testimony of faith is a personal experience of the actions of those with whom young people meet and who reach all spheres of their personality.***

## THE FAMILY AND PRAYER

### **PRAYER IS ONE OF THE SHARED ACTIVITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY.**

The word prayer evokes a picture of a religious act with unclear content for mainstream society. The mention of a shared prayer in a family can suggest a certain level of fundamentalism.

What is prayer for Christians? It is simply an OPPORTUNITY. An opportunity to stop, to rest physically, to realise the self, to experience a community, it is silence, confidence and inner balance restoration. For a believer, prayer is primarily an opportunity to meet God, i.e. the real YOU who has an imperishable relation to my ME, and in the case of a family to our WE. Prayer is an inseparable part of life in a Christian family, not a mere ritual.

Questioning the Czech and Romanian families showed that prayer can be a means that reinforces mutual relationships and the relationship to God – for both parents and children. Yet the motivation for using this proven 'means' is hindered by both subjective and objective obstacles.

Both available studies and our own survey confirmed that the greatest obstacle to shared prayer is paradoxically the specific feature of the prayer itself: it is a very intimate expression of relation, dependent on the level of trust (on the inter-human level and the supernatural one). A shared prayer flourishes in places where family members are used to good communication, are

able to forgive each other and to accept their own weaknesses. It is very important that parents have their own sufficient experience with prayer and especially with its effects. A frequent obstacle to shared prayer is busyness of the parents or unwillingness to pray among older children.

Due to the above intimate character of prayer, it is understandable that families typically pray together on externally induced occasions, especially before meals when they use learned prayer formulations. This method is not so demanding of personal openness. An evening prayer is the second most frequent opportunity. The way a family approaches the prayer forms its faith and the family life itself. Especially grace before meals can sound a bit 'purposeful'. It can remind us that God is the creator and giver of all things needed for life, but the question is to what extent it can bring shared joy and support the fellowship.

Prayer is always an expression of a living faith in God. The faith's authenticity is obviously the key. The 'learned prayers', which are the most common form in both Czech and Romanian families, have their irreplaceable position. Some Romanian respondents, however, pointed out that the use of only these can be an expression of a certain rigidity and absence of a living relation to the Spirit of God. The Romanian partner stressed the need for a new perception of prayer.

***Faith in God is often assigned to the 'private sphere' of each person, like the family background. To build a living prayer fellowship and a family fellowship is currently the same challenge in the Czech Republic and Romania. The family and prayer have one thing in common. They support the awareness of unconditional acceptance and by that also one's own dignity. By that, both prayer and the family enable individuals to accept responsibility for fulfilling their personal life task as a member of a family of humans.***

# FINAL WORDS

The goal of the presented investigation into the life of Czech and Romanian families was not to present new and shocking findings, but to describe how such families live, what priorities and values they have, and perhaps what troubles them or what they struggle with. It also compared the lives of Czech and Romanian families: what they have in common and where they differ.

Some findings confirmed the generally known facts: family members would like to have more time for each other, insufficient communication between them, an unbalanced distribution of household work, a lack of financial resources in families with higher numbers of children especially for leisure time activities, holidays, etc. Other findings document the importance placed on quality relations within families: shared meals, prayers, frequent contact with grandparents and friends, engagement in a church community

or fellowship, pursuit of a space for sharing, discussions and experiences together; values passed on to children.

Many answers, however, generate numerous topics to ponder: the need to include a broad spectrum of aspects when dealing with family life and not to limit the assessment of family needs leading to a happy and contented life of its members to mere material issues. What the family needs for a happy and contented life was clear from the respondents' answers in both countries: mutual love, time spent together, good relationships, communication and faith.

No matter how similar or different the situation of Czech and Romanian families is, a healthy and functioning family in both countries deserves support to be able to continue being beneficial to society as a whole.



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