



**pokrov**  
foundation

# *S t r a t e g i c Orientation Paper*

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## **introduction**

The Pokrov Foundation, established in 1994 and registered in 1996, has positioned itself as an important factor in the life of the Orthodox Church, especially in the fields of social work (diakonia), the publishing and the missionary activities. The Foundation works also with non-Orthodox churches, groups and organizations, developing the inter-Christian relations.

The increased amount and the diversification of the activities of the foundation make it necessary to re-consider its long-term goals and short-term objectives, to evaluate its performance and achievements so far and to build a realistic strategy for its further development.

This document has been initially discussed within the Board of the foundation and then proposed for discussion to the staff. The desire of the founders is that the main principles, goals and objectives of the foundation are formulated as a result of a common effort, so that the organization becomes a territory of the shared time, personal capacities, possibilities and dreams of the broadest possible circle of people.

## the situation in bulgaria

The Pokrov foundation has been created in 1994 as an organizational form of the missionary activities of a group of Orthodox Christians, who decided to join their efforts to promote Orthodoxy as a holistic way of life. From its inception, the foundation has been *a response to a critical reality*: the founders perceived the state of religious life in the country as critical and burdened with wrong stereotypes and practices. The foundation was seen as one of the possible forms to stimulate certain changes in this direction, for a fuller experience of the Christian faith in the spirit of the Church Fathers.

The concrete forms which were applied during these few years, can be summed up to several main approaches: 1) personal life in the Church; 2) publishing of fundamental texts (books and the *Mirna* magazine), aimed at the young audience and based on the founders' understanding of Orthodoxy and Christianity; 3) social work based on the Christian concept of *diakonia*.

Established by “neophytes” in the Church, the foundation was perceived ambivalently by the official hierarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. A reason for this has been not only the lack of genuine intensive dialogue with the bishops of the BOC, but also the inherited stereotypes in the perception of any organized activity within the Church and the tendency to interpret any such activity exclusively in the terms of personal benefits or psychological deviations. The international contacts of the foundation for a long time were a reason for accusations in “ecumenism”, and the increased financial capacity – a pretext for irrational rejection of the Orthodox identity of the organization altogether.

The lack of any creative dynamics within the leadership of the BOC, traditionally explained with the continuing schism, the anti-ecumenical attitudes, which culminated in the withdrawing of the BOC from the World Council of Churches, the reproduction of organizational behavior and socio-cultural stereotypes inherited from the period of the communist rule in Bulgaria, together with the perceptions of the foundation, mentioned above, were the main negative factors which seriously influenced our activity. The numerous failed attempts towards organized activity in the Church in the period 1989-1996 have challenged us with the difficult task to prove *the principle possibility* for such activity. Maybe this is one of the main successes of the foundation that it managed to create a viable structure in an atmosphere of total negation and mistrust.

The main elements of the current positioning of the Pokrov foundation within the Orthodox Church are the following:

1. **Positive:** the foundation is perceived by the majority of the bishops, the priests and the laity as a strong and positive factor in the Bulgarian church life. Patriarch Maxim has visited the Foundation a number of times and has expressed support and warm attitude towards our activity. **Negative:** we have still not found proper ways to involve the leadership of the church and the priests in the forming of the foundation's strategy. This sometimes leads to the treating of the foundation as an “alien body” in the church organism, at least due to the independent statute of the organization as private and formally unbound to the church structures. Certain members of the hierarchy maintain a hostile attitude towards the foundation.
2. **Positive:** as a result of the work of the foundation, and especially due to the financial support to projects of other groups and organizations, there has been created a growing network of entities which are strongly bound to the foundation. This network is one of the main factors, which should determine the parameters of our work in the future. **Negative:** the funding opportunity sometimes exhausts the vision for partnership and determines a limited framework within which the network cannot develop.
3. **Positive:** there is an increased media interest towards the activity of the foundation. **Negative:** there is a lack of a professional media and PR concept/strategy.

## international partners

The main lines of the international partnerships of the Pokrov foundation are the following:

1. **Orthodox organizations and churches.** The foundation is a member of SYNDESMOS (The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth) and of BOYA (Balkan Orthodox Youth Association). Unfortunately, both of these organizations are in severe institutional crisis and their perspectives are unclear. We sustain contacts (at the information exchange level) with different Orthodox organizations all over the world, as well as with Orthodox individuals abroad. There are a number of unexplored opportunities for cooperation in the following directions: **a.** Parishes and dioceses of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church abroad. **b.** Orthodox parishes abroad which want to develop youth exchange; **c.** Orthodox organizations which distribute project funding, such as the Fund for Unity of the Orthodox Nations (Russia), International Orthodox Christian Charities (USA), Leadership 100 (USA), Orthodox Christian Mission Center (USA) and others.
2. **Christian organizations and churches.** This group of partners is related mainly to the funding of the foundation. Currently the main ones are: Diakonisches Werk, Ostpriesterhilfe, Kirche in Not, Evangelische Zentrale für Entwicklungshilfe, The Evangelical Church in Württemberg (Germany), Europe Desk of Protestant Churches (Netherlands). One of the strategic goals of the foundation for the next years is to involve as funding partners more organizations of this group. The World Council of Churches, which has played important role in the coordination of the international agencies' efforts to create a solid partner structure in Bulgaria, is an important partner whose role has also been to give ecumenical dimensions in the overall work of the Pokrov foundation, through the establishing of a Bulgarian National Christian Committee and providing ecumenical support in finding the right partners for the foundation in the ecumenical family. There are prospects for developing good cooperation with the WCC's Central and Eastern Europe office in Byalistok, Poland, especially in the field of training.
3. **Non-Christian funding organizations.** The Pokrov foundation has worked in a limited scope with a number of non-Christian partners. The main exception of this rule are the Co-operating Dutch Foundations for Central and Eastern Europe which have partially funded the reconstruction of the Parish Center of the foundation. Also, we have several minor projects financed by the British Council and the PHARE Program of the European Union. With the development of the foundation as an organization working in the field of social services, this group of organizations should more and more become our natural partner. Among the main potential partners from this group are the Foundation for Development of Civil Society, DemNet, Open Society Foundation, Charity Know How, the programs of some embassies, etc.
4. **Contacts related to training.** The foundation is developing as a provider of basic and advanced training for churches church-related and other NGOs in Bulgaria. Its main partner in the developing of its capacity in this field is the Management for Development Foundation (The Netherlands). In the future, a richer variety of such contacts will be explored and developed.

## mission

In the beginning of 2000 a discussion on the mission of the foundation was carried out. It was observed that the original mission statement, formulated in 1994, needs to be re-assessed, due to the experience gained and in order to better convey the *raison d'être* of the foundation. The issue has been discussed jointly between the Board and the staff. Several main lines of discussion have been identified in the form of questions and answers, which guided us later in the formulating of the mission statement.

### What?

- Establishing of a new public image of Christianity and Orthodoxy
- Introduction of an effective organizational model and related practices in the Orthodox Church, at the levels of parishes, dioceses and Holy Synod
- Provoking of certain public expectations from the Church
- Bringing up of a generation with strong creative attitude and a Christian way of life
- Overcoming of the cultural inertia in the perceptions of Orthodoxy

### Why?

- Implementing and manifesting the Gospel principles of mission and charity in the broad sense
- Satisfying the “thirst for meaning” in the society as an alternative for the nation’s survival

### For whom?

- For ourselves as individuals who need to live their faith
- For the young people trying to be practicing Christians
- For the people of the official structures of the Church
- For the “true seekers”, including the atheists
- For the vulnerable groups of the population

### How?

- Through spreading of authentic Christian message, oriented towards the contemporary mindset (texts, images, presence, personal example)
- Through creating of mechanisms and structures for quality education and training
- Through social work (diakonia) based on the Orthodox teaching of the renewal of the self
- Through creation of a territory of a new way of speaking about Christianity within the Bulgarian public

There were also a number of additional arguments of principle character, which influenced the formulation of the Mission Statement:

- The understanding of the mission of the church is deformed in Bulgaria. The overcoming of the cultural inertia/distances/prejudices between the Church and the society is among the main goals of the foundation.
- The foundation works for the promotion of Orthodoxy as an active and living faith. This involvement is not outward, but is manifested as a natural response to Christ’s calling.
- The foundation is trying to spread authentic Christian message.
- As a result of the work of the foundation, there is an alternative position formulated and maintained, on a number of issues of social importance.
- The foundation promotes a certain understanding of Christianity as a lifestyle, not as a form of peculiarity, but as a normal way of life. There is something deeply perverted in the perception of the way of life that the Christian way requires/offers. Many people associate the church with marginal social groups. However, this way of life is pursued not in order to make it socially acceptable, but because we think it is the right one.
- The foundation is attempting to reveal the beauty of the Christian way of life in contrast to the world views and attitudes prevailing in the way of life pursued today by the majority of people as the only legitimate one.

On the basis of these discussions, the Board and the staff of the Pokrov foundation have formulated the following Statement of Mission:

## TO SERVE THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH BY

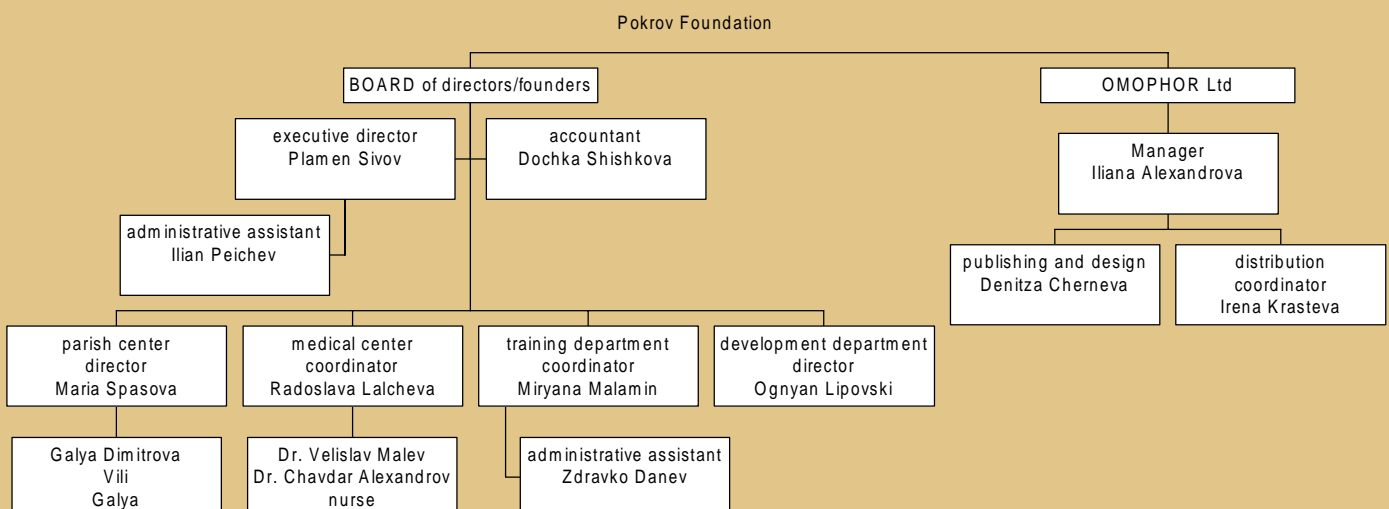
- ❑ helping to reveal the genuine image of Orthodoxy as a living and active faith, a continuous response to Christ's calling, an abundant and ever-actual way of life of the socially active individual.
- ❑ helping to overcome the prejudices in the perception of Christianity in the Bulgarian society.
- ❑ carrying out social and educational activity based on the Orthodox understanding of the renewal of the person.

To work for its mission, the foundation carries out the following activities:

- Funding projects of parishes and organizations, in the framework of defined programs
- Implementing its own programs
- Publishing activities
- Other activities in accordance with the mission

## current structure

The current structure of the foundation is presented below:



The activities of the foundation can be reviewed on the basis of several basic functions:

**A. Operational function.** Own projects of the foundation. Currently these are:

1. *Parish center.* The work of the parish center, on its behalf, consists of a number of separate projects and programs, with different orientation. Some of them serve particular target groups, while others have elements of self-sustainability and are designed as income generating.
2. *Medical center.* It has started as a small institution to serve the mentally handicapped people in Sofia, but today the center is oriented mainly to home care programs with physically disabled and elderly people, and working with volunteers.
3. *Training program.* The goal of the program is to prepare a “critical mass” of trained and motivated project coordinators and social workers from the country, related to the Christian churches. They will be encouraged to create their own projects and organizations. Another “side effect” from the work of this program is that it envisions forming an ecumenical development agency to work professionally on development projects.
4. *Social program.* Initially it started with the Ugarchin project (Ugarchin is a small community in Northern Bulgaria, where an orphanage is located). Today the program is more like a small movement of volunteers strongly motivated to work with concrete children, in a concrete institution, for a longer period.

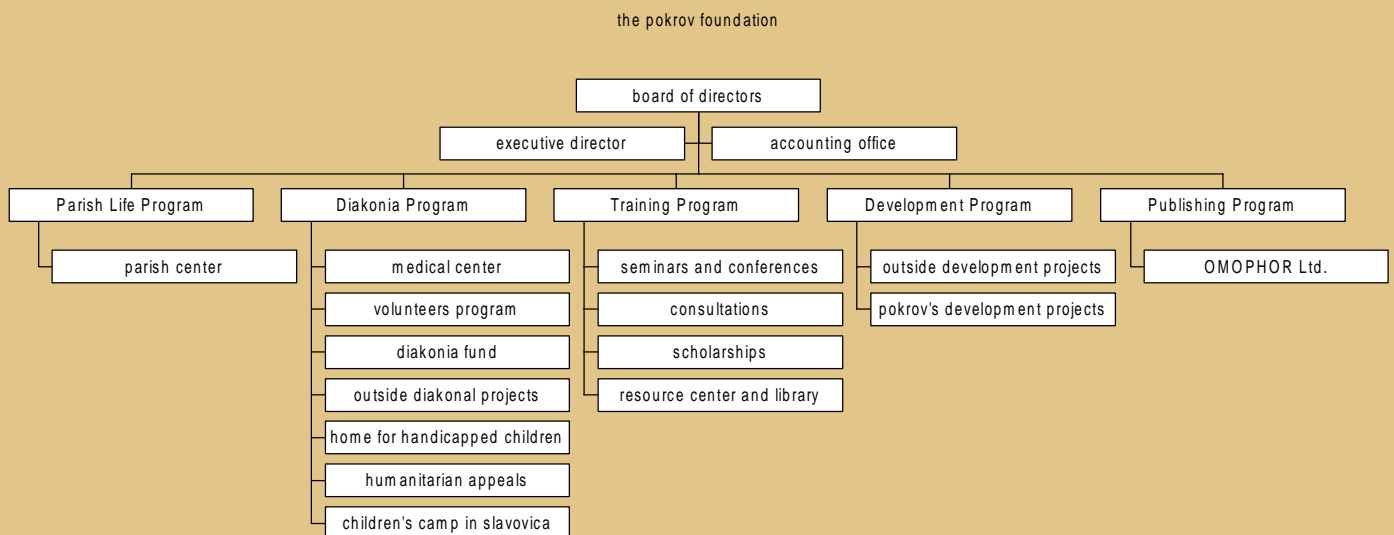
**B. The foundation as an intermediary in funding other organizations.** Historically bound to the National Christian Committee (BNCC), this function is manifested in several directions:

1. *Three consecutive appeals* for humanitarian assistance submitted to the Action by Churches Together (ACT) in 1996, 1997 and 1998.
2. *The Small Diakonial Projects Fund* (currently Diakonia Fund) for funding of mid-term and longer term projects of churches and church-related organizations in the field of social work and (more recently) culture and education.
3. *Separate larger projects* of Bulgarian organizations, which are processed by the Pokrov foundation (i.e. a project of the Sofia Seminary).

**C. The foundation as a founder and owner of separate structures,** i.e. the OMOPHOR publishing house.

## new structure

The suggestion for a new structure results from the increased amount of the activities and from certain functional disrupting of the current structure. The main change is the establishing of *programs*, within which the different projects and activities will be positioned. The Program Coordinators will form a Program Committee which will work closely with the Board and Executive Director. The new structure may be presented in the following way:



### General priorities related to the institutional strengthening and overall development

- Publishing of audited annual reports on the overall activity of the foundation, starting from 2000 (report to be published not later than March 2001)
- Introduction of a new accounting software (Escort+) and adaptation of the current accounting system
- Full computerisation of the document circulation within the foundation
- Introduction of regular planning sessions jointly with the Board and the staff
- Development of the existing web site to include a complete updateable library resource and a fuller English version and the content of the recently produced Presentation and Resource CD
- Ensuring specialized continuous training for the staff
- Introduction of regular annual donors' meetings for Bulgaria
- Continuation of the efforts to strengthen the ecumenical dialogue in Bulgaria through the work of the Bulgarian National Christian Committee
- Considering possibilities for investments, which can support the program work of the foundation
- Purchase of an appropriate office (120 m<sup>2</sup>, more centrally located)

The programs have the following main parameters:

## Parish Life

**Principles:** Creation of parish communities based on the concept of the “liturgy after the liturgy”, on common eucharistic and social life; providing an opportunity for the development of the personal talents; interaction between clergy and laity (syn-diakonia), mutual care between the members of the parish; sharing of successful models with other parish communities.

**Structure:** the program is institutionally linked with the Parish Center. The program coordinator of the Parish Life Program is the Director of the Center. The Center works on the following programs:

**Parish life:** publishing of the Pokrov bulletin; pilgrimage trips, meetings after the liturgy.

**Diakonia:** humanitarian assistance for the most needy members of the parish through consultations, provision of clothes, food, counseling and specialized assistance for vulnerable groups; work with orphan children (through summer camps and scholarships); distribution of a small parish fund for donations for the hardest cases; charity shop; gardening.

**Education:** Sunday kindergarten, pre-school, icon-painting school for children and adults, wood carving classes, catechetical school for adults, Sunday school, classic guitar courses, Patrology classes, a class on Orthodox heritage, Greek language, ancient Byzantine chanting classes.

**Culture and arts:** concerts, exhibitions, literature readings.

### *Priorities:*

- For the period until 2003 the main emphasis in the work of the Center will be in the **educational program** which will be aiming at the establishing of an “Orthodox academy” as an alternative opportunity for receiving basic Christian education, with different profiles, full educational courses and quality teachers. The goal is to have an **alternative to the faculties of theology** and the secondary education seminaries and the offering of accessible knowledge to people of most ages. There will be many possibilities for interaction with the existing educational structures (faculties and seminaries) in the fields where they do not offer specialized education (arts, methodology of teaching, pedagogic). One of the possible forms of such co-operation is that the Center trains students in theology in teaching methodologies. There is an opening opportunity for **cooperation with the Sofia University**. The students of the Social Work Department will have a chance to practice in the Medical and the Parish Center. This will give the foundation a chance to select the best students and to involve them in the work of the center as trainers and in the work with children.
- The Center must become a **full-fledged member of the existing network of laity centers** in Europe and of IKOSNET.
- Opportunities for **self-sustainability** need to be further explored and developed, starting with covering the administration expenditures. There are **alternative forms of funding** available, related to the expansion of the existing donor base and especially through local philanthropy. Additional income will continue through renting out the premises for seminars and other events.
- All courses will issue **certificates and diplomas**.
- A closer and more dynamic **relationship with the Parish Council** and the parish priests should be developed. The model should become more popular within the churches and ways should be sought to stimulate the creation of similar centers in other parishes.



- The existing relationship with the municipal social welfare offices should be developed further. A closer cooperation should aim to result in the contracting out of certain services to the Parish Center, a practice that is proven to be possible in Bulgaria through the work of CARITAS.
- The Public Relations work of the center should be given special attention. Opportunities for advertising of certain companies should be made possible through the Center, for designated funding for some of the programs. A **Sponsors' Club** will be established to include representatives of such companies.
- The existing practice of **regular informal meetings between Orthodox and Protestant youth** in the center should be encouraged and expanded to include more events and involve more people.
- The parish newsletter (Pokrov Bulletin) which is published since the creation of the foundation, should be more closely related to the life of the parish. Its making should be transferred more to parish members, rather than to be made by the staff of the center. Its structure and concept should be developed further to make it a more informative and accessible publication.
- An experimental **Pilgrimage Tourism program** will be introduced in the work of the Parish etc assistance for socially vulnerable groups and involve the church in the social field. This commitment and involvement includes also spiritual assistance. The needy should be addressed with the assumption that we can (or, the Church can) give them hope and meaning, not only a solution to their material problem.

**Structure:** program coordinator and project coordinators of the different social projects of the foundation. Some of these projects are institutionalized or in the process of institutionalization (medical center, children and youth camp base, home for disabled children), others are operational projects (volunteer's program), a third aspect is the funding of small (diakonia fund) and larger projects of outside organizations which correspond to the goals of the program.

**Priorities:**

- structuring of the program
- establishing the home for the disabled children
- continuation and expansion of the Diakonia Fund
- involving of the priests in social work;
- institutionalizing of the relationship between the foundation and the Orthodox Church in the field of social diakonia, so that within the church itself the function of diakonia is institutionalized, with our participation and support, by stimulating the church leadership to participate in the process;
- to search for alternative mechanisms for social work and to prioritize the problem areas;
- to have an emphasis on the outside projects, since the Pokrov foundation has limited resources and will not be able to cover all possible areas;
- the accumulated experience should be somehow registered and analyzed, and then shared with other organizations. We are still experimenting, but it is already important to analyze the activity at a given stage and then to start planning the next phases. The real niches, which are not covered in the social field, should come out as a result of such analysis.
- complementary resources for funding should be looked for;
- the activity of the program should be advertised more actively, especially in the church media;
- the existing network of diakonia activists in the country should become more structured, with our active participation in this process.

## Publishing Program

The formulation of the goals and objectives of the publishing program starts from the observation that there has evolved a misleading cultural image of theology as being a matter of education, science, intellectual exercise and a scholar's qualification. This blocks any normal and mature attitude towards the theological literature, even if these syndromes do not contaminate it. These prejudices are further transferred to cover the Christian literature in general and the result is that there are many influential writers now who honestly believe that they can be good theologians without living an individual spiritual life.

**Principles:** follows the principles stated in the mission statement of the foundation. Aims at financial stability at the end of the period.

The selection of titles so far has been influenced heavily by the personal tastes and opinions of the members of the Board of the foundation and it has been noted that this is a very subjective way to form a publishing policy. The idea to establish a Consultative Committee co-opted with the publishing program is explored further on.

As a whole, the program will publish books which:

- share the personal experience of real people who have discovered Christianity. This is not scientific literature and these books do not pursue theoretical interpretations of reality, but rather link theology with liturgy (understood as common service in the broader sense) and the Christian way of life
- explore the relation between theology and life in the Church
- suggest a journey back to the roots of the Ancient Church and the Holy Fathers
- explore the issue of church renewal in the terms of going back to Tradition
- incorporate the conviction that theology is not possible outside the person's spiritual experience within the church
- have a notion of *modernity*, relevance to our times, regardless of the time they were written
- cultivate a certain taste and overcome the inherited negative stereotypes towards the Orthodox and Christian book and imagery
- overcome the distancing of the Christian literature from the cultural horizon of the modern man
- pursue an overall graphic and textual suggestion, using selectively the contemporary graphic design

**Audience:** people with similar to ours attitudes, social status, age and educational background, since this provides an opportunity for a dialogue and personal standing. Specific audiences: neophytes (recently believed), students, priests and students at the seminaries; children up to fifth grade.

**Structure:** the activities of the program are organized through the OMOPHOR publishing house.

**Priorities:**

- to analyze the existing market of such literature, especially in relation to the specific audiences

- to achieve financial stability of the publishing house, with respect to its full independence through its own publishing activity and also supporting activities: literature with a broader audience, brochures, textbooks, specialized literature (medical, legal, fiction), possible rented bookstore (with an information center); contracts for desktop publishing and printing services
- searching for ways of cooperation with existing (Greek) printing houses within the Greek Orthodox Church
- membership in international professional associations of Christian publishers
- expanding the cooperation with the national Christian publishers (New Man Publishing House, TABOR, PRAXIS and others)
- production of multimedia and musical products
- establishing of a Consultative Committee for a more adequate planning of the titles. The Committee will have at least two meetings per year. It will produce a list of titles which will be suggested to the Board for publishing. It will consult the current publishing activity of the foundation and will come out with argued suggestions on the needs of new titles and on the overall publishing policy. The names of the experts from the Committee will be printed on each book as an editorial board. This will allow OMOPHOR to have a better legitimacy. The Committee members will not be paid.
- A publishing concept and an yearly plan of the Mirna magazine to be developed, preferably in combination with a professional marketing plan, prepared by an external consultant

## Development Program

**Principles:** within the field of social activity and support, the development concept and the related practices are maybe the most effective. However, the inherited tradition within the European funding structures is to fund the processes of “democratization” and the development approach is still very weak. The program will aim at developing church communities and solving of pressing social issues. The emphasis will be on the church communities but the program will be open. The priority fields will be defined later. Long-term projects with sustainability elements will be funded, including small credit schemes.

**Structure:** a new Development Program is formed. Only outside projects will be supported. Whenever there is no established structure, the foundation may serve as a guarantee for the project, until such structure is established.

### **Priorities:**

- Structuring of this type of activity as a professional development agency under the Pokrov foundation
- The Board of the new agency will be formed by churches’ representatives and will be linked with the Training Program. Possible church quota principle in the forming of the Board may be applied, but no quota will be applied in the selection of the projects, only objective criteria will be taken into consideration
- The initial stage will include the forming of a consultative body co-opted with the program

**Strategic partners:** Christian development agencies, EU programs, OIKOCREDIT, IOCC.

## Training Program

### *Principles:*

- Development of the human and organizational capacity of the churches, which includes not only the social work, but also the pastoral stewardship. Missionary work cannot be separated from pastoral care and a synthesized (holistic) approach is sought for. The activities within this program also correspond to the general mission of the foundation to support the Church to carry out its mission through all levels, bishops, priests and laity.
- The program includes training in practical organizational skills which are completely unknown in Bulgaria. The goal is that the target groups achieve effectiveness in the framework of a highly competitive environment which puts very high standards and requirements.
- The program stimulates the forming of principle position of the churches on certain social issues. The program will not influence the contents and rationale of this position, but rather will support the processes needed to formulate the church's position, while at the same time will try to identify those people and institutions within the churches which can be encouraged and assisted in stating this position to the society This will also include organizing of conferences and discussions with representatives of the government.
- Certain elements from the philosophy of the Orthodox Academies and the Protestant Laity centers will also be used, for example to idea for a bridge between the church and the civil society.
- The program is problem oriented. It is designed as a response to concrete needs stated by representatives in our training seminars during the last three years. It is a result of a long assessment process.

### *Structure:*

- establishing of a training unit;
- training of trainers who will work on the basis of an adapted methodology, according to the needs of the concrete target group. There is a possibility of partially selling this kind of services both to the national and to the international market.
- Establishing of a Scholarship Committee to support the foundation in identifying and endorsing candidates for specialized training and education in foreign educational institutions (theological scholarships, but also other types of scholarships which support the Christian communities in Bulgaria)
- Establishing a resource center with specialized information for church-related and church-oriented NGOs and the related network
- Consultation services for the target group, supporting their institutional strengthening.

### *Priorities:*

- Designing a broad spectrum of training courses, both paid and covered by project funds, adapted to specific audiences (local church-related NGOs, general Bulgarian NGOs, international and foreign NGOs)
- Forming a solid group of trainers co-opted with the foundation through contracts for services. The trainers should undergo an intensive introduction to the methodology used by the Pokrov foundation
- Consultancy services for CRNGOs

- Establishing of a resource center: part of the current library resources of the foundation should be separated into a specialized unit with materials on NGO management and the diakonia. New materials should be purchased and an intensive INTERNET survey should be carried out to collect relevant links. A database with existing national social services and church-related organizations and their available resources should be developed. Continuous flow of follow-up information after the training courses should be ensured from the participants. A paper and INTERNET bulleting of the program should be published periodically.
- Involvement of institutions such as: Theological, Pedagogical, Philosophy Faculties of the universities; representatives of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Protestant and Catholic leadership; Ministries and NGOs in the conferences organized by the program.

