Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches Highlight the need for more collaboration in society

- Our quest then is “How can we reconnect with God, each other and the very soil from which all of our food springs forth and grows both in our families and in the greater community that is the world?”

A Blessing, A Prayer for the New Year

"May kindness come to your house, may peace always be able to find you. May strength be there when you need it, may patience ever attend you. May laughter never be far behind the troubles you encounter nor sorrow stay too long when comfort comes seeking your hand. In every small way may grace enfold your life, the warmth of love sustain you. Receive these blessings now, take them in like old friends found once more, until they become a part of you, a reminder of your own value, of who you are and what you mean and why you woke to see the light again."

~ The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, Choctaw
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The current term of office will be from July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2014, at which time another election will be held. Please contact any of the above mentioned officers if you would like to have information about how to become more actively involved with AAIF.
Finding God’s Holy Spirit in the 21st. Century

"You shall love the stranger first of all because you know what it is to be a stranger yourself."

“Second of all, you shall love the stranger because the stranger shows you God.”

~ Barbara Brown Taylor, from An Altar in the World

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A Prayer for the Faithful That Highlights Life in the USA at the Beginning of 2014

"Let not the hope of the poor be taken away. Let not the dreams of hard working people be lost. Let not the woman or man searching for work be disappointed. Let not the few keep more than they need while the many are left without enough. Let not the world be divided by those who have and those who are denied. Please hear these prayers, God, and give us the will to live them out. Strengthen our resolve for justice, for fairness in the marketplace, for an honest chance for every person who works for their family. Let us earn so that we can share."

~ The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, Choctaw

The New Year brings with it Hope and Dreams for All; Our Challenge is to Create a World that is United in Seeking Justice, Fair Market Practices and an Honest Chance for Everyone. ~ M.J.. Glauber

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Theme for 2014: Has Christ been divided?

(1 Cor 1:1-17)

At least once a year, many Christians become aware of the great diversity of ways of adoring God. Hearts are touched, and people realize that their neighbours' ways are not so strange.

The event that touches off this special experience is something called the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Traditionally celebrated between 18-25 January (in the northern hemisphere) or at Pentecost (in the southern hemisphere), the Week of Prayer enters into congregations and parishes all over the world. Pulpits are exchanged, and special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services are arranged.

Ecumenical partners in a particular region are asked to prepare a basic text on a biblical theme. Then an international group with WCC-sponsored (Protestant and Orthodox) and Roman Catholic participants edits this text and ensures that it is linked with the search for the unity of the church.

The text is jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and WCC, through the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, which also accompanies the entire production process of the text. The final material is sent to member churches and Roman Catholic dioceses, and they are invited to translate the text and contextualize it for their own use.

Keep on praying throughout the year

The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle enables you to journey in prayer through every region of the world and through every week of the year.

http://www.oikoumene.org/en/currentprayercycle.xml


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Domestic Churches:
Please see the following important and very relevant article for interchurch families and ecumenists regarding Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches:

http://www.paulist.org/evangelization/how-do-we-raise-children-inter-church-or-interreligious-families
Acts 2:1-13  Translation:
New Revised Standard Version
1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The Acts of the Apostles describes a powerful process, the growth of the early Jesus movement in the ancient Mediterranean world. Transforming people, the good news of Jesus Christ spread beyond the bounds of Palestinian Jewish communities into the Hellenistic Gentile world of the Roman Empire. At the outset of his description of the energetic development of the Christian movement, Luke presents the Holy Spirit as the vitalizing enabler for creative and courageous Christian witness. Acts is a story of the first Christians who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, defied the gravity of geographical, cultural, political, and spiritual restrictions with astounding inner strength, both individual and communal, to become witnesses of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8).

The initial chapters of Acts describe the formation and nature of the first church in Jerusalem in the power of the Holy Spirit. The same author wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, and the two volumes are to be read as one literary unit. The prophetic tradition, especially the prophetic Spirit, is one of the thematic consistencies in Luke-Acts. It is only natural that Luke, who portrayed Jesus as a Spirit-gifted prophet who ‘brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, lets the oppressed go free, and proclaims the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19), also conceived of the first faith community of Jesus’ disciples as a Spirit-filled prophetic community, practicing justice and love.

The text in its context

Staying Together (v.1). This text is situated at a strategic initial point in Luke’s overall description of the formation and life of the Jerusalem church in Acts chapters 1-5. The opening verse of the present passage catches our eye because of Jesus’ disciples’ evident intent to stay together: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). They had just undergone a series of traumatic and incredible experiences, the meaning of which they were yet to grasp. They had tragically lost Jesus (whom they had believed in and trusted as the Lord and Christ who came to usher in the kingdom of God) through crucifixion, considered the most severe form of capital punishment in the Roman Empire. Worse, they must have felt ashamed of the
The unbearable fact that one of the insiders betrayed the Lord and that they themselves failed to be faithful disciples when exposure of their relationship to Jesus might have endangered their own safety and survival.

Before long, however, they experienced the unexpected and extraordinary events of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. They seemed not to know what to do, and their inability to grasp this series of unique experiences at once is reflected in their gesture of “gazing into heaven” as Jesus went up (Acts 1:10).

The disciples’ response to this series of remarkable experiences, which were beyond their understanding, was to stay and pray together. It didn’t matter that they were a heterogeneous group of fishermen, tax collectors, Zealots, men and women. “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14, RSV). They gathered there as a bewildered community, not with the expectation of being endowed with mystical or supernatural powers but to celebrate together their hope in God amidst fears, anxieties and uncertainties.

A spirit-filled community (vs.2-4). The day of Pentecost came. Pentecost is originally the Greek name for the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which concluded the period of seven-week grain harvest with the presentation of an offering of new grain and other offerings to the Lord (Lev. 23:15-16; Deut. 16:9). On that very day, the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit (vs.2-4), as Jesus promised (1:5).

The Holy Spirit came upon them “like the rush of a violent wind” and “as of tongues of fire.” In the biblical tradition wind is an emblem of the Spirit of God, which is life-restoring and spontaneous (Ezek. 37:9-10; John 3:8); and fire is the form of God’s descent upon Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:18). The coming of the Holy Spirit receives its metaphoric depth in association with the baptism with fire: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16).

The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in other languages. Unlike the unintelligible glossolalia (Fabricated and non-meaningful speech) at the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14; 2 Cor. 12:1-4), despite differences they experienced an ability to communicate with one another, a basic necessity for building community. The curse of Babel is removed (Gen. 11:1-9). While what happened in Babel was the loss of communicability and reciprocal comprehension due to diverse languages, what took place at Pentecost was the restoration of communication and the opening of the possibility of mutual understanding.

It was a celebration of their diversity, which is a gift of God as they saw themselves as one in faith, witness and hope.

The Holy Spirit comes down upon them in the form of gushing wind and tongues of fire. These are images associated with fury, force, destruction, purification and also transformation and change. Does this suggest that their coming and being together has a purpose distinct from other community formations?

An alternative community (vs.5-11). Now the scene shifts from inside to
outside the house, from speakers to hearers (2:5-11). The multitude of Jews, whether they are pilgrims from the diaspora or residents of Judea, gathered at the compelling sound that the Holy Spirit fostered. A long list of countries and peoples is enumerated to suggest “every nation under heaven.” Broadly speaking, the list moves first from east to west, then from north to south, generating the impression that the scale of Christian mission has something to do with “the ends of the earth” (1:8).

What is prominent here is the importance of the “Galileans.” To their embarrassment and amazement, the diaspora Jews found that the leaders of this event were Galileans (2:7). The mission to proclaim “God’s deeds of power” (2:11) thus begins from the margins. It was the despised and marginalized Galileans who experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and served as its pioneering instruments. In the ensuing story the Galileans, once regarded as not worthy of respect (John 1:46), are now addressed as “brothers” (2:37) and later acknowledged as leaders who provide teaching for the community (2:42).

The coming of the Holy Spirit effected the restoration of these marginalized people and their transformation into creative agents, to open up the possibility of unity among people with linguistic and cultural diversities. Not only the age-old socio-psychological convention of stereotyping was overcome but also reversal of centrism took place. It was an experience of unity, a genuine human togetherness that was not governed by unhelpful dynamics of hierarchical power but by mutual affirmation and responsibility.

Unity is strong and real only in situations where the power of some does not overwhelm others. We are overwhelmed by many expressions and experiences of oppressive forms of unity. Genuine unity is sustained in a spirit of humility, honesty, accepting each other’s difference and shaping together shared visions and goals. It is only then that the unity we have in Christ becomes a gift of the Spirit. As the three synoptic gospels record, when Jesus rejects power, he receives the Holy Spirit and announces the good news of the reign of God.

When we reject power that dominates and destroys, the Holy Spirit finds its way to us, effecting new possibilities that benefit the larger community and not just individuals or individual self-fulfillment.

The mission of the church is not confined to the task of reaching out to witness but is to draw people and communities to become open, just and inclusive communities. An upper room, a humble corner at the margins of Jerusalem, thus became the birthplace of Spirit-filled creative movement – the church. This mission from the margins continues in the next chapters of Acts and is executed in the footsteps of the life-giving mission of Jesus Christ himself, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45).

The last two verses (12, 13) demonstrate two opposing responses to this astonishing manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit through the Galileans (12-13). Some, in amazement and perplexity, began to seek the meaning of this new event, while others, remaining numb and apathetic, intensified their deep-rooted traditional prejudice and insulted the disciples by dubbing them as drunkards.

This new community finds itself and with those on the margins and not those in places and positions of power and privilege, so it becomes an object of suspicion and sarcasm.

A prophetic community (vs.14-36). This passage, though not part of the text for our reflection now, is the threshold to a subsequent story about the genesis and nature of the first church, born of the prophetic Spirit. In a following address (vs.14-36), Peter not only quotes from the prophet Joel, who proclaimed...
a Spirit-endowed egalitarian vision.

Peter himself also functions as a prophet who criticizes the ignorant and arrogant authorities, Jewish and Roman, for having killed Jesus (v. 23). What sustains their unity is their mutual accountability and responsibility, and their courage to differ and to resist the existing oppressive and unjust norms and values.

A remarkable trait of the faithful community of the Holy Spirit was the sharing of possessions (vs.37-47). The first church “had all things in common; they would sell their possession and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (vs.44-45).

Sharing of possessions was not so much a compulsory regulation as a spontaneous and compassionate voluntary act, repeated as “any had need.” Luke’s portrayal might be an attempt to present the first church as both an ideal community in which the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical ideal of true friendship is attained, and as a faithful community in which the promise of Jewish scripture that “There will be no one in need among you” (Deut. 15:4; Acts 4:34). What matters is that the act of sharing goods and possessions itself embodies the vision of justice which creates true peace. The first church practiced the prophetic alternative economy of compassion and sharing.

**The text in our context**

Many Christians tend to think of the work of the Holy Spirit almost exclusively in a narrowly individualistic way, mostly in terms of the miracle of speaking in tongues. But the true miracle that the Holy Spirit performed was in building the faith community that lived up to the prophetic alternative vision of justice and peace. Luke, who described Jesus as the Spirit-anointed prophet in the Gospel, demonstrated in Acts that God’s prophetic ministry continued in the life of Jerusalem church individually and communally. Jesus said, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).

This was the wisdom that guided the first church, enriching it instead with abundance of life, joy and praise. The first church did not know the so-called individualistic “prosperity gospel” (5:1-11).

Recapturing the biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit is crucial for the church in the 21st century. The prophetic Spirit is the mother of the church, and this church is called to be a community with difference in its being and actions. Too often an individualistic and exclusively charismatic perspective eclipses the prophetic face of the Holy Spirit and impoverishes our understanding of the richness of the Holy Spirit.

From Luke’s perspective, personal healing, bold proclamation of the gospel message, and the practice of prophetic alternative community are inseparably intertwined in the life of the church (Acts 2-4). The therapeutic, the kerygmatic (the preaching of the gospel of Christ, especially in the manner of the early church. Kerygma means the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ), and the prophetic dimensions are interwoven.

Luke employed a vivid metaphor of wind and fire to describe the descent of the Holy Spirit. The historical creativity of the Holy Spirit, bringing the first church into existence, is somehow reminiscent of its cosmic creativity.

The Holy Spirit, who created the faith community in one of the civilized urban hubs in the ancient world, also contained within its own sacred energy the forces that operated beyond human control, even evocative of the untamable wilderness (Acts 8:26).

In the end, the first church was not so much a closed and self-sufficient institution as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), open to the transcendent space of life that the Spirit generates.
Neither an exclusively charismatic understanding nor a closed rationalism does justice to the richness of the Holy Spirit.

What sustains unity is a common vision of Spirit-led community.

Questions for reflection and discussion
1. When and how is unity as a gift of the Spirit?
2. How do we re-imagine power in relation to genuine expressions of unity?
3. What makes you assert or deny the prophetic character of your church?
4. A litmus test for true unity is its power to effect common good, and to create new realities for all, particularly for the marginalized and the discriminated. Share inspirational examples of true unity in your own context.

5. Is your church inclusive enough, especially for people with disabilities?

6. What are the examples of the stereotyping of “the other” in your own community and culture? How can we avoid getting caught in these oppressive cultural traps?

7. How do we view the reality of migration – as an obstacle or opportunity for unity?

Prayer
God of abundant life, we remember the day of your creation of the church as the amazing day of a new beginning in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bless us to be renewed and empowered by the healing and prophetic energy of the Holy Spirit, so that we may serve you and the world in joy, strength, and unity.

Give the church the courage to struggle for justice and peace, as witness of your creative work of grace and love. Amen.

About the author: Hyunju Bae teaches in the Department of the New Testament Studies at Busan Presbyterian University. She is a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Korea.


Implications for American Interchurch Families and Ecumenists:
We live in a global society although we may be physically situated in the United States. Much of what happens elsewhere in the world affects us either directly or indirectly. Hyunju Bae points out that recent events had baffled and perplexed the early Christians; they chose to stay together and to puzzle out the meaning of the events they were facing (This is significant.) In the 21st Century, it is very clear that we all need each other so that we can parse out the meaning of what is happening in the world today so that we can collectively and united with each other in community move forward. ~ M.J. Glauber

Welcome This Happy Morning -

May the New Year (2014) be filled with joy, peace, magic and above all else, love. Bless you all. Keep shining your light and together we can brighten the world! With love, ~ Jiraffe

“And now we welcome the new year, full of things that have never been”
~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Sparking the Human Heart
Take a few quiet moments to pause over the words of Barbara Brown Taylor who wrote, “The effort to untangle the human words from the divine seems not only futile to me but also unnecessary, since God uses whatever is usable in life, both to speak and act, and those who insist on fireworks in the sky may miss the electricity that sparks the human heart.” This quote by Barbara Brown Taylor comes from her book “Leaving Church”
“God works with what is” meaning that in our ordinary and simple actions we may be able to do that of God. I am reminded of a quote made by Calvin Coolidge, *“We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once.”* We can do something. We must do something that is for the good. Having a goal in mind may help us to decide what that something should be that we must do.

It is time to act as if we have achieved Christian Unity, because this is our goal, and to treat all of humanity as our brothers and sisters, but not as siblings coming from a dysfunctional family, but from one truly healthy human family system.

Paul in *Philippians 2: 1-8 ESV,* tells us 1 “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself .... Christ humbled himself to become human, like us.”

In *Philippians 4:8 ESV,* Paul states, “8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

What is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable and/or excellent is what we should seek out now among all of the distractions that exist in our time and place. In this way, we are very much like all of humanity who has ever lived before us. In *John 1: 1-5 ESV,* we learn “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men(humanity). 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Our Triune God is still our beacon in the darkness of modern life. We see that Holy Light reflected back to us and found in the faces of other human beings, all human beings. Our challenge is to recognize that of God shining out to us from the face of others so that we can ennoble them, the world, ourselves and find solutions, real solutions that move us closer to that of God and God’s plan for our world.

May the New Year be filled with hope and bright dreams for all of us because together we form one great community.

~ M.J. Glauber

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Page 9
What does being in an interchurch marriage mean?

Are Other Terms Also Used to Describe Interchurch Families?

From the link: http://interchurchfamilies.org

Ray Temmerman, who himself, is in an interchurch marriage, explains “Some people come to this site because they want to learn more about what is variously referred to as
• a mixed marriage,
• an ecumenical marriage,
• an interdenominational marriage, a two-church marriage, a mixed Christian marriage, an interconfessional marriage, a Catholic/non-Catholic marriage,
• an interchurch marriage,
• or (mistakenly) an interfaith marriage.

(Interfaith marriages are between people of two different faiths, whereas the marriages referred to here are those between two people of different traditions but both being of the Christian faith.)

“Some come because they have a family member or friend who is married to, or considering marrying, a Christian of another tradition. Others come to learn more of what the churches are saying on the journey to Christian unity, while still others come in an attempt to make sense of the pain and frustration they are feeling as they live in their marriage the impact of the scandal of churches divided.”

Ray Temmerman explains, “More and more, however, people are coming here to discover the richness and joy to be found in sharing in each other’s church traditions, and worshipping as much as possible together in each other’s churches.”

“Interchurch families (where the partners belong to different denominations - often a Roman Catholic and a Christian of another communion) are increasingly found all over the world. We have found that as we draw closer to Christ, we draw closer to each other, and to each other’s churches. Today we are gathering in groups and Associations in various countries. We lend support to each other, share information, and discuss how to live the often painful and confusing situations arising out of the divisions in the churches.

We also reach out to other interchurch families so they, too, may come to discover and celebrate the richness of each other's traditions, a richness of our baptismal unity which we know from experience far exceeds the divisions.” says Ray Temmerman.

Ray explains his mission, “This web site seeks to link all those families, groups, and Associations so that together we may grow in Christian unity, and become for our churches an ever-greater gift of healing of the scandal of disunity.”

Ray observes that “It takes seriously both our marriage commitment to one another and the fact that two churches are represented in our family; by affirming at local, national and global levels the gifts of interchurch families and their potential as a catalyst for wider church unity.”

Ray Temmerman observes that “The Interchurch Families International Discussion Group enables us to share joys and sorrows, to discuss ways of dealing with immediate issues which arise as a consequence of living our marital unity within churches which are divided. Many, be they interchurch couples, pastors, or family and friends of interchurch couples, have found it a source of great encouragement.

Speaking for all interchurch families who make up the Interchurch Family International Network, Ray Temmerman says, “We hope that as you browse these pages, you will find new
insights which will help you better understand your Christian brothers and sisters of other traditions, find new ways of responding to Christ's prayer that all may be one and, if you are involved in an interchurch marriage, discover a new source of encouragement and support for the vocation to which you have been called.” He closes by saying, “Enjoy and, if you have comments or questions, please contact me, Ray Temmerman at ray.temmerman@gmail.com

Ray volunteers his service for the benefit of other interchurch families. He provides a valued resources for the IFIN (Interchurch Families International Network)

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Please see Ray Temmerman’s article at http://www.paulist.org/ecumenism/interchurch-couples-and-families-issues-and-goals

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As we begin a new year we ask:
“Where to From Here?”

Opportunities Exist:
Choices Faced by Interchurch Couples -

Making Sense of the Pain and Frustration they (Interchurch Couples) are feeling as they live in their marriage the impact of the scandal of churches divided

It has been hypothesized that our actions matter and influence how we think.

What contributes to a healthy family whether that family is non-affiliated with any denomination, a single church family or an interchurch family?

Is the surrounding community encouraging and nurturing or detrimental? If the surrounding community is detrimental for the well being of the interchurch marriage and family (and we are assuming that it is not their intent to be detrimental), what changes are needed then?

The family is the basis upon which society is founded. We refer to our homes and families who live in our home as being the Domestic Church or the Little Church of the Home. We learn all of our core values in our home of origin.

If the family system is broken, it may follow that the society is also broken. All families need to be nurtured by their faith communities.

The fact that Interchurch couples marry across historic church divisions is actually a positive sign for finding Christian Unity. However, many interchurch couples find that it is when they try to worship with their church communities that all too frequently they are met with unnecessary road blocks of one kind or another. No one is intentionally trying to harm interchurch families from flourishing; it may be from a lack of proper information or from a complete lack of information for how to be supportive of interchurch couples so that they can become truly interchurch families.

We may be missing many opportunities in our church communities by failing to acknowledge the gifts that interchurch couples bring with them or hold as a potential within their relationship.

We attended an interchurch wedding a few years ago. After the wedding, the priest and the minister were talking to each other at the front of the church moments after they had both participated as officiants and witnesses of this interchurch marriage. Each of them doubted as to whether this marriage would be able to survive because the couple, both Christians, had married across that historic divide. Neither clergyman appeared to have perceived that the very division between the churches to be the source of the real problem that the newly married interchurch couple might face, although they lamented all of
the pain they perceived that the couple would encounter.

Ray Temmerman had observed that “making sense of the pain and frustration they (the newlyweds who had married across an historic denominational divide) are feeling as they live in their marriage the impact of the scandal of churches divided. This clearly states what we have heard interchurch families say again and again over the years.

Loving another human being matters. In fact, it is essential. The real question then is how can our churches help us to become truly interchurch and to nurture that which is healthy within an interchurch family or a potentially interchurch family so that they can fully experience Christian Unity.

Choices Faced by Interchurch Couples Affect Ecumenical Efforts and Whether They Actually Can Become Ecumenical Couples

~ Not all Interchurch Families are identical; No single solution fits all

Non-Affiliation

Interchurch Couples when they first marry are quickly faced with choices. Dropping out of all church affiliation may seem like a solution for some, especially if their home parishes are not perceived to be supportive. The choice to become non-affiliated removes potential interchurch couples from actually becoming interchurch couples; they become simply “not affiliated.”

A Third, Neutral Church

Another choice that many potential interchurch couples perceive is to find a third church which they consider to be a neutral church. This allows them to attend church together, but this choice doesn’t allow them to explore becoming an interchurch family.

Conversion to The Church of the Other Spouse

For some potentially interchurch couples, one of the spouses converts to the church of the other spouse. This conversion tends to go 50% in either direction. This technically makes the couple a single church family. If one of the spouses feels that their conversion is one that has been required of them as a condition for the marriage to take place and if the conversion isn’t done based on a person’s genuine beliefs, and if one spouse feels dominated or coerced into converting, this creates an unhealthy family dynamic. Spouses should feel that they are equal. Each spouse in a marriage has their own unique gifts.
Both Spouses Remain Active in their own Church
Other couples choose to remain in their own denomination of origin so that they can become an interchurch couple and interchurch family. This kind of marriage encourages each spouse to further explore their own belief system and religious practices while learning more about the beliefs and religious practices of their spouse’s denomination. Frequently, truly interchurch couples try to participate in the worship practices in their spouse’s church to the extent that it is possible. It is through an ongoing in depth exploration of their own belief system from their church of original along with the comparison of their own early belief system with the one found in their spouse’s church that allows and encourages the spiritual growth of both spouses.

Interchurch Families may serve as bridges between two separated church communities if they are properly nurtured.

What is needed at this time?
Our churches need to seek out the gifts that we, as interchurch families, have to offer them as they seek a path toward some form of Christian Unity, the one favored by God for us that we may all be one.

Remote marriage preparation needs to address the possibility or rather the high probability that approximately 60% of all marriages each year in the Roman Catholic Church will be potentially interchurch marriages. Marriages for Orthodox Christians with other Christians are approximately 90% of all of their marriages; the cultural component and identity also factors in to the decisions that Orthodox and other Christian denomination interchurch couples must face together as a newly forming family. While many couples may choose another path that doesn’t make them an interchurch couple nor do those choices contribute to toward finding Christian Unity. The couples are making the necessary choices to keep their families intact.

Remote marriage preparation needs to explore the best ways to nurture interchurch marriages once they take place. At a minimum having a place where potentially interchurch couples can share their lived experiences with
others in a similar situation can be helpful, especially if it is not designed to convert one spouse.

However, the most important component that is necessary in our American society at this time is for Church communities to be able to see interchurch couples for the gifts they offer so that they can nurture the couple rather than setting about to try to make a convert. While “Making a convert” may seem like “a win for the home team” it is important that church communities explore more fully the potential to be found within truly interchurch families along with the reason why all churches need to be a nurturing community for interchurch couples.

Perhaps, our churches of origin should endeavor to study why the other options seem to be more appealing to some couples than trying to become a truly interchurch couple/family. It simply is an oversight to lump all potentially interchurch couples in with those who are pursuing a genuine path toward being truly interchurch. That oversight can be corrected though if and when our churches become aware of us, as interchurch families, as an asset rather than a liability.

(Is anyone looking for a research topic? This may be the one for which you are looking.)

Interchurch Families are engaged and active participants in their churches of origins and they have the potential to help our churches to grow more fully toward the Christian Unity that many churches are actively seeking as their pathway forward. It seems logical that families who are already living a form of Christian Unity in their very ordinary lives, and who may have been overlooked in the past, have some lived experiences that automatically translate into being a lived example for those who are seeking ways forward toward Christian Unity.

We all remember the philosophical statement made by John F. Kennedy as part of his inaugural address that “We should not be asking what our country can do for us, but what we can do for our country.” Kennedy had heard this basic sentiment related to becoming servants quoted repeatedly at his prep-school when he was growing up so that it had become his own personal philosophy. Being a servant is at the core of much of what we learn in the Bible.

Warren Wiersbe explains the concept of being a servant as he has observed it in the Bible. Wiersbe says “The Bible has a great deal to say about servanthood because the central theme of the Bible is the Servant of all—Jesus Christ. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When we give Jesus Christ His rightful place as Lord of our lives, His lordship will be expressed in the way we serve others (Mark 9:35; 1 Peter 4:10; John 15:12-13).

How can we demonstrate love for God? Our love for God will be expressed in our love for others. “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

“True leadership is servanthood, and the greatest leader of all time is Jesus Christ. Servanthood is an attitude exemplified by
Christ “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7).

The five words in the New Testament translated “ministry” generally refer to servanthood or service given in love. Serving others is the very essence of ministry. All believers are called to ministry (Matthew 28:18-20), and therefore, we are all called to be servants for the glory of God. Living is giving; all else is selfishness and boredom,” says Wiersbe.

Wiersbe says, “It has been rightly stated, “Rank is given you to enable you to better serve those above and below you. It is not given for you to practice your idiosyncrasies” (General Bruce C. Clarke, USA, Ret). Let’s serve others by serving Christ (Colossians 3:23-24). God the Father has served us by sacrificing Christ on the cross for our sins, and we should serve others by giving the gospel and our lives to them (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6). Those who desire to be great in God’s kingdom must be the servant of all (Matthew 20:26)."

(Source: On Being a Servant of God by Warren W. Wiersbe)

**Implications for Interchurch Families and Ecumenists:**
It appears that what churches need to be asking then, at this time and place in history, is “How can we best nurture potentially interchurch couples/families so that they can fully explore what being truly interchurch is like so that we can all benefit from this lived example of Christian Unity?” We all share the ministry of servanthood, one to the other.

~ M.J. Glauber

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**Upon the Celebration of Our Fortieth Wedding Anniversary: Some Reflections; Some Observations**

My husband and I recently celebrated our 40th Wedding Anniversary as an interchurch couple in an interchurch marriage. It has been a 40 year journey of discovery.

I have come to the conclusion that we became an interchurch couple and family for a reason or for a purpose, a purpose created by God. This serves us as we seek out ways forward along with our churches as they also move toward Christian Unity.

We have been inspired by the Gospel of John 17:21 which says: “....that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”.

The phrase forms the basis of several ecumenical movements and united and uniting and denominational traditions. It is also a common sermon topic on church unity.

We have found great insight and strength from those who have forged the pathway before us and who have given us proper pastoral care throughout this amazing journey.

We have great feelings of gratitude for those who have shared their journeys with us, given us a sense of hope and who have guided us through the valleys so that we may reach those mountain tops where that Holy Light shines brightly.

**Observations Gathered over a 40 Year Time Period**

During this extended period of time, we have heard many shared experiences, stories of what interchurch couples have faced. Some stories of great courage and hope along with some struggles. May these stories, told anonymously here,
help to pave the way forward for all of us.

One Roman Catholic wife said that she had never considered prior to her marriage to a Protestant even the possibility of what marrying a Protestant would mean. Perhaps that had been true, but is that still true? What are we doing to nurture the ecumenical potential in couples who marry across and who serve to bridge that historic divide between our two Christian denominations? Are interchurch couples and their children being ignored for the potential they have within them to help to direct all of us on our journey toward Christian Unity simply because no one has considered interchurch couples and families for the positive asset that we are?

We know that marriage between spouses coming from two different Christian denominations happens regularly enough to be considered rather common place. We do not know what happens to many of these couples specifically unless they self identify and/or seek out other interchurch families. Many couples feel more comfortable “staying under the radar” where they can avoid thoughtless criticism. In this way, the interchurch couple may live what we would consider to be a fully interchurch lifestyle, but in an effort to protect the solution they have found for “how to live an interchurch life” they remain as invisible as possible.

Being in an Interchurch Marriage Isn’t About Being Right; It is about learning how to love more fully

I recently read a quote that said: “Just because I’m right, doesn’t mean that you are wrong.” The concept that two people could both be right and have different opinions or different childhood experiences, one from the other, that nurtured them to become who they are resonated with me.

Several couples indicated that one of the spouses had experienced what amounted to being a form of abuse on the part of their spouse’s family because they were from another Christian denomination. They had been excluded and considered inferior not only by their in-laws and their extended family, but also by their spouse who was struggling to find a way forward, to be devout and to grow in their faith. That spouse went from being thwarted and fettered by their own sense of triumphalism or a need to be triumphal so that they would win at all costs to becoming an advocate for many Ecumenical Efforts. This is real growth.

The question, of sorts, posed to interchurch families when we met in Northern Ireland in 1990 at Corrymeela near Ballycastle http://www.corrymeela.org/ , was to remind us that we are among people who come from a culture that is far away from the one that we know and who must win at all costs. However, the comment was made in the form of a prayer and in such a way that I had to ponder forever after that if the person praying was referring to me. Had I been “a fly on the wall” I may have realized that this same prayer was said for all who come to Corrymeela, but I can’t be a “fly on the wall” so I must then assume that the issue of pride, the need to be right at all costs, not only may exist within me, but that it also exists in all human beings.

Overcoming the need to be right, to prove ourselves to be right may be one of the greatest tasks that is ever presented to us. We share being human with each other; every aspect of being human affects all of us, but we all share our humanity one with the other.

In Northern Ireland, there were dedicated people working toward Christian
Unity. Integrated schools has been one of the outstanding success stories of the Northern Irish members of NIMMA (Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association). They are now working on the creation of religiously mixed neighborhoods, integrated neighborhoods.

At Corrymeela, A Peace and Reconciliation Centre in Northern Ireland, we prayed the “Our Father” also known as “The Lord’s Prayer” together. For the first time in our married life, we were told to pray that prayer out loud all together using the words that were familiar to us in the language that was familiar to us. Some French interchurch families were with us and among the English speakers so we had a decent variety of accents or dialects represented saying the same prayer in a familiar form for each person so that it became a prayer of humanity for hope. I felt truly nurtured for the first time as a married couple by the ecumenical worship we experienced at Corrymeela in Northern Ireland. I concluded that more opportunities for worshipping together as a family in an ecumenically nurturing community are needed here too.

Needed: Proper Pastoral Care For Couples Planning to Marry Across Historic Denominational Divides:

One spouse had been told that as a condition of their marriage that the children must be brought up as Roman Catholics, and that spouse must have accepted this rule as being an actual and indisputable fact. They were married long before the internet existed, and in reality where would a young couple even begin to search for how marrying across historic divisions within the church can become a fully ecumenical experience that nurtures both spouses. This couple and their children had clearly suffered within these constraints.

Becoming a couple in a truly interchurch marriage as a concept needs to be fully understood. I would suggest that any couple who plans to marry, especially if it is across historical denominational divisions in the church, such as the marriage between a Protestant and a Roman Catholic, that the couple, and any clergy person who may be sought out to provide them with marriage preparation or pastoral counseling have a better and a more thorough understanding of the Vatican’s Ecumenical Directory. This document can be found on the Vatican’s own website. I have found the Vatican Website to be a most valuable resource. A second resource for anyone and everyone about what the Roman Catholic Church actually states regarding any topic is the USCCB (the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

The Rules; What Rules.... Love is the Rule, or is it?

At the International Interchurch Families Conference in 1996 in Virginia Beach, we looked at Catholic Canon Law. The basic premise behind all of the laws governing the Roman Catholic Church are founded on love, God’s love for us, our love for each other, and our love for God. Love of humanity and all of God’s Creation then become a guiding premise for how the Canon Laws should be interpreted.

The couple, whose wife believed that the children had to be raised as Roman Catholics, did raise their children as Roman Catholics. However, the father who felt more or less pushed out from participating in one of the most important aspects of his children’s lives began to act in
passive aggressive ways. I heard him say over a period of many years that “church goers were just a bunch of self-righteous hypocrites.” Whether he would have said that same thing had he been given an active role in the religious education of his own children, we will never know, but sabotaging the religious formation of his own children, his own flesh and blood, has clearly served no good cause for any of them.

Personally, I found it painful to listen to him sabotage all of the potential that all Christian Churches hold because his spouse hadn’t understood nor been aware of the fact that the children could be raised in both denominations. Their understanding of the rules governing their marriage was incomplete, at best, but no one won out in the end.

In Omaha, one woman said that during her premarital counseling as a Roman Catholic when she was about to marry a Methodist, that her own priest told her that she had an inadequate understanding of her own faith tradition.

For years, then she worshipped as a Methodist. They raised their children in the Methodist Church where she taught Sunday School. After the children had grown though she said that she felt something was missing so she began to attend Mass at the Roman Catholic Church on Saturday evenings with her mother and sister. She said that she knew that her husband wouldn’t want to attend church alone, so she went to the Methodist Church with him on Sundays.

I have concluded that spouses should help to nurture their spouse’s personal spiritual growth as well as their own. Sometimes, this may merely mean being physically present for their spouse.

The Need For Remote Marriage Preparation: For The Entire Community Of Believers

In Northern Ireland, attending church with a spouse we were told may appear to others in their greater community as if they are being disloyal. This feeling may be heightened in Northern Ireland, but it also appears to exist more covertly elsewhere.

No interchurch couple will ever know for certain if they are being treated differently by their in-laws and their spouse’s extended family or others in their spouse’s church community because the way they are being treated may be more due to quirks in the personality of the in-laws, the extended family or their spouse’s church community or if they are actually being treated as less because they come from another Christian Denomination.

It just doesn’t seem to be an open conversation, but we have heard on several occasions that the extended family acts in an unfriendly and rigid manner to the spouse who comes from another Christian denomination. Given the fact that this story has been repeated on several occasions, we are only left to guess at the causes.

The Promise

Interchurch families have reported that the Roman Catholic spouse must promise to do everything possible to see that their children are raised in the faith.

Oh, but the Vatican documents do not stop there, there is a provision that recognizes that the spouse may feel an equal responsibility. The Vatican believes that the sanctity of the marriage should come first. This second part is often overlooked. And yet in a healthy marriage, there needs to be a sense of equality between the rights of each of the spouses.

Interchurch couples have observed that in the Roman Catholic Church when a
couple marries who are both Roman Catholic that neither spouse is required to make a promise to do everything in their power to see that their children are raised in the faith.

We all have relatives who have married and become a single church family. For devout and faithful interchurch families, it is an affront for the Roman Catholic spouse in an interchurch marriage who had to promise to do everything in their power to raise their children “in the faith” when they observe that in the single church Roman Catholic families of their close friends and relatives that no promise to raise the children in the faith was required so that no promise had to be made.

It is even more painful when a Roman Catholic spouse who had to make such a promise upon the occasion of their marriage, their interchurch marriage, that they observe that there is no religious upbringing of any kind happening in the single church Roman Catholic family when it would be so easy for the single church couple to decide in which church to raise their children and where to worship together as a family.

The Roman Catholic spouse who is in an interchurch marriage no doubt perceives that things would be much easier for those single church couples “to raise their children in the faith” and yet they aren’t doing this. The fact that the Roman Catholic Spouse in an interchurch family observes that single church Roman Catholic Couples are choosing not to introduce the faith into their home lives feels like an affront to their spiritual character and that they have been singled out unnecessarily. Knowing and seeing this raises many questions for the Roman Catholic about their own church, we have been told.

We believe that because approximately 60% of all marriages in the Roman Catholic Church each year are with Christians from other denominations that not only do young people need to consider this likelihood, but that our church communities need to find ways, and to consider ways that they as a community of believers would be able to properly nurture an interchurch marriage.

In conclusion, I believe that remote marriage preparation for the high probability that many young couples will be marrying across historic Christian denominational divisions is needed. Remote Marriage Preparation should be implemented so that the church communities would seek out ways to nurture the positive ecumenical potential
that innately exist in these couples so that these interchurch couples no longer feel the need to remain invisible in their churches.

**Being Different Doesn’t Mean Being Nothing**

One mindset which also needs to change has to do with the assumption that if another Christian worships differently in any way that they are not as religious as the observer. In families where the children are raised in one church, this frequently means that the children are completely cut off from the traditions, beliefs and practices of one side of their family.

We have heard adults who were brought up in one tradition but whose parents had come from two Christian backgrounds say that the other side of their family, the side of their family whose religion was never shared with them, really had no real religious beliefs. We strongly suspect that growing up that they simply never saw nor were they allowed to explore the spirituality of the other half of their family. Historically, America has been a very religious country that has prided itself on religious freedom.

We believe that some children have been left with the impression that one side of their family really didn’t have much of a faith tradition simply because they never experienced it. We have heard numerous similar comments that the side of their family with whom they had not been brought up sharing in that tradition, and perhaps this was because it was an impression from childhood that had never been challenged anywhere nor by anyone, that these children who could have been bridge builders between two Christian communities have not been given the tools with which they can connect the two communities.

This is a lost opportunity for Christians who are seeking Christian Unity.

**Double Church Attendance…. Not Recognized or Perhaps Misunderstood**

Many interchurch families tend to attend church in approximately double the amount from other single church families. This becomes a lot of church attending so some couples simply attend church alone. This may contribute then to the impression that a couple is a single church family rather than that they are a two church family, which they may appear to be by their church communities.

A Roman Catholic Priest told us that a man had attended Mass on Saturday evenings at his church for years and then he died. The priest set out to plan the newly deceased parishioner’s funeral when he received a phone call from a Protestant Pastor who explained that this same man had been attending services at the Protestant Church with his wife on Sunday mornings for many years and asked if they could plan an interchurch funeral. The Roman Catholic Priest never knew this about his parishioner. Many interchurch couples try to “keep below the radar,” that is to remain invisible, so they do not self-identify in an effort to avoid any potential problems or unwarranted criticism. This lack of self-identification is a form of self-preservation, and yet it is a lost opportunity for our
churches as we seek Christian Unity.

One man in Louisville went to the early Mass at his Roman Catholic Church and then drove over for the presentation by a local scholar on church history that was to be given at his wife’s Protestant Church. The service had gone over time due to a baptism so he arrived early. The organizers for the presentation wondered aloud to him if he had simply chosen not to go to church that day after he had made what amounted to an heroic effort to get from his church to her church before the presentation started. No one recognized nor thought to consider that this was an interchurch couple making their way through what amounts to a maize with open paths at one turn and dead-ends at another turn.

Spouses Who Attend Church Separately:

For some, it is just easier to attend church separately and only once on Sunday, like most of the church-going population. We live in a very over scheduled society so this decision makes sense to me.

In Omaha, a Roman Catholic wife, married to a Methodist husband, told us that the members of her husband’s Methodist Church thought so highly of him, but because they only saw him, and no wife, they wanted to introduce him to eligible women because he is such a nice person. He explained that that was very kind of his church community to try to introduce him to eligible women, but he thought that his Roman Catholic wife would object to this. It makes for quite a story among interchurch couples. We may laugh, but perhaps we should be weeping.

A Protestant woman married to a devout Roman Catholic in Louisville attended her church carrying her new born infant with her. Her husband who was very much a part of the upbringing of their children, was attending Mass at the Roman Catholic Church at the same time on Sunday morning. The Protestant wife told us that she received an invitation to attend a support group for single parents. This makes sense on one level because her church community never saw her Roman Catholic husband who was worshipping at his own church.

The other question that this situation poses is how best should interchurch couples go about identifying themselves as being interchurch in their own church communities? Will their church communities become supportive if they self identify or view this as an opportunity
to convert the spouse from the other Christian denomination?

Conversion of Convenience or Because of a Deeply Felt Faith

A Roman Catholic woman had required that her husband convert to become a Roman Catholic as a condition of their marriage.

By the way, in the Vatican documents which are readily available on the internet, we have read that conversion is not a requirement for marriage to a Roman Catholic.

We overheard this Roman Catholic woman ask for affirmation from her pastor that she had done the right thing, although The Vatican’s Ecumenical Directory doesn’t require the conversion of a spouse as a condition or requirement for marrying a Roman Catholic. In particular, The Vatican’s Ecumenical Directory specifically mentions that other baptized Christians will not be sought out for conversion. The Roman Catholic wife clearly hadn’t gotten the message that the conversion of her spouse wasn’t necessary. It should be noted that she had tried to follow what she perceived to be the rules. Understanding the rules, what the rules actually say, what exceptions may also exist, and discerning what would be best for the health and well-being of their new family may at this time have become unduly cumbersome.

It should be noted that conversion in theological terms refers to “a change to another attitude or belief, as in a change of religion.” A coerced conversion is not an internal personal change which is needed for it to be an authentic conversion of the heart, but a form of forced or coerced conversion. It should be noted that although we saw this woman looking for affirmation that she had been right in requiring her husband to convert as a condition of their marriage, the husband was never seen at church with her. It appeared then that the husband had converted in name only.

What kind of an example did this give to their children? Had the best interests of the family been served in this case?

Had the stated goal of our churches to find a way forward toward Christian Unity been served or explored in any manner?

Conversion should be based on a person’s own personal beliefs and not as a condition for a wedding to take place. Coercion to convert should never be made as a condition for the marriage.

Passing on the Faith: Our

Domestic Churches

We believe that children learn religious practices mostly in their homes of origin. It seems to be most effective when both parents are encouraged to grow and to mature in their own faith while raising their children. The importance of the Domestic Church or what is also known as The Little Church of the Home can not be emphasized enough. Interchurch families often report that within their homes they have certain Christian traditions that flourish and grow over the years. It seems to be when the interchurch families try to attend church together and worship fully together in the community as a family that this is when they encounter blockades of one sort or another of rejection. We sincerely hope that in the future interchurch families can be nurtured in their faith and seen for the gifts they may hold for their church communities of origin.

Please see the Vatican document which can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jpii_hom_19820531_familiy-york_en.html

Feeling Welcomed or Rejected

Sharing communion can be problematic in Ecumenical settings of all kinds, whether...
it is among interchurch families or other Ecumenical settings. Many Roman Catholic spouses have complained that they are unable to bring their spouses to the place, their church of origin, to share in the Eucharist with them as a family. It seems that this form of rejection when it occurs most adversely affects the Roman Catholic spouse. They feel a greater pain perhaps even than their own spouse who is the one who has actually been rejected from the possibility of sharing communion in their spouse’s church home. On the other hand, the Ecumenical Directory specifies exceptions when it is possible for other Christians to share in the Eucharist. Could it be that the Vatican’s Ecumenical Directory hasn’t been studied or understood by those who represent the church and who may come into personal contact with the people, the lay people worshipping there?

By excluding some baptized Christians from taking communion, what kind of message is being given about Christian hospitality?

Roman Catholics in South Carolina told us that they were constantly being invited to events or to worship in their neighbors’ churches. Whereas, as Roman Catholics, they didn’t feel that they could ever invite their neighbors to share in their church activities and certainly not in the Mass. One of the surprising complaints was that these Roman Catholics who are the Lay Church Leaders, themselves, felt that anyone who visited their Roman Catholic Church with them would become lost and that they would find the meaning of what is happening during the Mass to be an act of exclusion rather than one of inclusion. This lost feeling regarding what is happening and the issue of sharing or rather not being able to share in the Eucharist made the Roman Catholic Lay Leaders feel sad.

Years ago, I remember hearing adults talking about the recent visit that one of them had made to a Roman Catholic Mass. The other adult who had never been to Mass asked what had happened. By the way, both adults were members of other Trinitarian Christian Churches, commonly known as Protestant. The one who had been to the Roman Catholic Mass said that there was a lot of standing and then a lot of kneeling. In retrospect, it appears that she had no idea for why they stood or why they knelt. In fairness to her, the Mass was being said in Latin still at that time. However, the conversation highlights that better knowledge and dialogue may help to bridge the divide observed when hearing this conversation.

On the other hand, this related experience would also tend to highlight that what the South Carolina Roman Catholic Church Lay Leaders had believed to be true about how they worshipped and the fact that visitors would become easily lost in what was happening in the Mass was in fact true. The Roman Catholic South Carolina Lay Leaders wanted to be able to make guests, especially first time visitors, comfortable when they visited their Roman Catholic Church.

Most significant was the fact that the Roman Catholic Lay Leaders wanted to be able to invite people from other Christian denominations, their friends and neighbors in their communities, to worship with them at their Mass. Their neighbors were always inviting them to events and worship at their churches; they wanted to be able to do the same at their Roman Catholic Churches.

The Eucharist

The Ecumenical Directory, a Vatican Document, notes that there are possibilities for sharing the Eucharist with other Christians. Specific examples are given. Interchurch Families would urge our communities to apply a pastoral approach and solution so that we can be nurtured together as a family, just as any single church family may be nurtured by sharing the eucharist, likewise interchurch families would be nurtured. As interchurch families we sincerely hope that we will be able to freely share in the Eucharist with our spouses as one single family of Christians.

How other Christians may understand whether they may
be welcomed at the Roman Catholic Church is an area that needs to be better understood. First the concept, the need, and the desire for some kind deeper understanding of what it is that we are seeking when we seek Christian Unity may need to be explored in greater depth at a grass roots level in each of church communities. Without that kind of background information and in depth preparation, it may simply be easier to follow learned patterns that only serve to continue to divide us from each other.

Our world in general needs to develop and to improve dialogue across all perceived differences; the real issues that require collaborative problem solving may continue to be unresolved if we do not actively seek real solutions. It seems appropriate then that our churches should be actively working to model dialogue and collaborative solution finding for their communities whenever this is possible.

Tithing
Families who are members of two churches are faced with the question of how to tithe. In a marriage, it is conceivable that the wife will become a mother and that she will stay at home for either a short period of time or an extended period of time to raise the children. While the wife is not bringing in any income of her own, tithing may become a major issue for the family and a great source of tension with the family.

How money is or isn’t spent in a family can make or break apart the whole family structure. Interchurch Families have the added burden of needing to support two denominations. This is perhaps one of the most basic and important discussions that an interchurch couple will have to have and for which a real solution must be found.

Where Will You Go To Church The First Sunday After Your Wedding?

Because remote marriage preparation simply doesn’t exist or what does exists as remote marriage preparation at this time doesn’t adequately address the great probability that their youth will marry across denominational lines, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about what to do if someone does marry across denominational lines. If a family member marries across denominational lines, the extended family may not know how to be supportive, even if they wish to be supportive.

Although it is highly probable that an interchurch marriage may take place, and statistics show this to be true, no one has ever reported to us that they have ever gone through this kind of remote preparation.

When the couple marries sometimes the community where they live also haven’t thought yet of the ways that they could become a support network for an interchurch marriage.

Often young interchurch couples are left feeling alone. Even people who may wish to be supportive haven’t considered what would work best, and they may without thinking unintentionally say hurtful things.

Most couples get to know each other and decide to
marry before there is any mention of religion or where the couple should worship on the first Sunday after their wedding.

Where will the couple worship on the first Sunday after they get married? Whatever the answer to this question may be, it should help the couple to grow in their personal faith and all of us to achieve some form of Christian Unity. How are our respective churches working to address this issue?

Regarding Remote Marriage Preparation:
It has become very clear to us as interchurch families that there is a need for remote marriage preparation that takes into consideration the probability that couples will marry across historical Christian church division. It appears that this probability hasn’t been properly if at all addressed in any way by any or all institutions where pastors are prepared to serve.

Marriage Preparation at this time usually first happens after the couple has fallen in love, and their churches of origin haven’t considered the best way to be supportive nor how to nurture an interchurch couple so that they can explore their faith in a lifelong journey together.

If the possibility of marrying someone from another Christian denomination is being addressed by the training programs that prepare pastors, then it would appear that the training guidelines are out of date or that they never consulted with any genuinely interchurch couples to seek out the best practices for how to advise interchurch couples who are about to marry. It isn’t apparent that the training that is being given to pastors at this time adequately considers the gifts that interchurch families may hold for the divided church so that we have churches instead of church.

At the moment when a couple seeks out a location for where their wedding will take place, the discussion of necessity needs to focus on the wedding preparations. Remote marriage preparation in anticipation that an interchurch marriage is highly probable should take place long before any couple falls in love.

Marriage preparation for being or for becoming ecumenical or interchurch seems to be lacking in general. One Protestant pastor told me that she simply told the couple to raise the children in the faith of the parent who has the strongest faith or the parent who is more devout.

This was not a real solution; it filled in the empty spaces that posing the question had created, but no real solution had been given. If the question had been turned around and had that pastor been asked to imagine that you have before you a church congregation, your congregation, and assuming that you know your parishioners well, which one would you designate as being the most devout among them? What criterion would you use to define as “being the most devout?” Could it be that people may be very devout but manifest their spirituality in very different but valid ways? I suspect that the answer to the question of which of the spouses is the more devout would require the wisdom of Solomon in order for us to find the best answer, and yet the rest of us are just ordinary people seeking out the Will of God so there is no best or single answer.

Another factor is that most people grow in their faith and understanding of the Divine throughout their adult lives. Every person’s faith journey is in a constant state of evolving. Anything that gets in the way to prevent the spiritual growth and a person’s understanding of that of God in their life would also be getting in the way for allowing God to be present and working in our lives. Imagine a couple in their twenties, a rather young couple, getting married, and then go back to see that same couple 40 years later; neither spouse will be a twenty something year old in the way they look, nor in the way that they view the world, nor in the way that they go about seeking that of God in their world. Oh, they may still be members of the same church 40 years later, but most people evolve and
grow in their understanding of God, that is, if they allow that to happen and if their religious communities encourage that.

One woman told us that her husband had insisted that as a requirement for them to be married that she consent to being married in the Roman Catholic Church. Dispensation and the proper paper work will allow Roman Catholics to get married in their Christian spouse’s home church so that their marriage will be considered as a valid marriage in the Roman Catholic Church. It is customary to get married in the bride’s church in the United States; Interchurch couples can still follow this tradition and have a valid marriage.

I have learned that “Being Christian” and "Being Ecumenical” are not always synonymous, but they could be. Please stop for a moment to consider this and what this implies.

I don’t fully understand why the two terms are not synonymous, but we have experienced on a very personal and rather painful way more than once that the two terms aren’t yet synonymous. (This too would make a great doctoral thesis for someone to study in depth.) I can only surmise that in the absence of any real knowledge that what may be verbalized is more likely to either come from a place of fear or inspired by previously learned biases that have never had a chance to be fully explored, or rationally challenged and analyzed.

Are Interchurch Marriages Valid?  
.....And, by the way, the answer is yes.

In a theology class at a Roman Catholic Highschool in Louisville, an interchurch family’s daughter, who had attended many interchurch family conferences during her life time, mentioned that her mother was Protestant and that her father was Roman Catholic. Her parents had been married in the mother’s Protestant church. One of her classmates worried that perhaps this interchurch child’s parent’s marriage was not a valid marriage in the Roman Catholic Church, but the interchurch daughter could assure her classmate that her parent’s marriage was valid, and it is.

This interchurch girl was making a bridge through correct information. This is of what we need more.

One interchurch couple told us that they had their children baptized in the father’s Protestant church
and take their First Communion in the mother’s Roman Catholic Church. Their daughter was to marry a Roman Catholic in the Protestant Church where she had been raised. She felt equally a member of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church as the child of an interchurch family, but a wedding location had to be chosen. She chose the Protestant Church for whatever reason: scheduling, location or for whatever reason, but she had to select one location so she did.

Dispensation can be given so that a Roman Catholic can get married in the Protestant bride’s church; this has been in practice for many years. It is a valid marriage. It is just that the word hasn’t apparently gotten out yet to the general public.

The interchurch daughter who chose to marry in the Protestant Church from her childhood up-bringing was marrying a Spanish speaking Roman Catholic. I heard that it was a beautiful wedding. The next day, the groom’s mother was found weeping. She didn’t speak English, but the parents of the bride were able to ascertain that she was worried that her son’s marriage wasn’t valid in the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic mother of the bride wanted to assure the groom’s mother that it was a valid marriage in the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, if I were to have any complaint about the Roman Catholic Church it would be that they have created mountains of documents. There are so many documents that it would appear that it is impossible to know all of them. Well, this is what appears to have happened in this interchurch family’s experience.

The American interchurch couple, who knew that their daughter’s marriage was a valid marriage in the Roman Catholic Church asked if someone at the archdiocesan office could help them to convey this to the mother of their new son-in-law. The document needed to be in English and Spanish so that both families would be able to understand that it was a valid marriage. However, because the daughter had been baptized in one church and received her First Communion in the other church and was now getting married in the Protestant Church, it may have appeared to the bilingual official in the local office of the archdiocese that she was a “Fallen Away Roman Catholic.” The daughter is part of two churches and she isn’t a fallen away Roman Catholic anymore than she is a fallen away Protestant. The letter that was sent to her family said that the Roman Catholic Husband had married a “Fallen Away Roman Catholic” woman; her parents didn’t believe that this bilingual note either addressed the question that had been asked nor did it take into account the interchurch aspect of their daughter’s up-bringing. I do not think that anyone would intentionally seek to cause another person added pain. In this case, it may have been that the message got passed to a bilingual person who didn’t understand what kind of pastoral care was being requested.

Clear and correct information is needed. Proper pastoral care is needed, especially for interchurch families and for children brought up to be interchurch.

Confirmation in both Churches
(26 November 2013)
‘At present I cannot be confirmed by a bishop in a traditional confirmation service involving both churches, but I have devised a Affirmation Service, which will be for me an important step forward in the Christian faith. I wanted to show my two church communities that I was committed to church and God. I also felt it would deepen my relationship with God. My parents and two priests were very supportive.’
~ An interchurch child

If being Confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church is a
Do Divorced Protestants Have to Go Through the Annulment Process In Order to Marry a Roman Catholic? ..... And the answer, by the way, is yes. It should be a positive growth experience as much as possible that clears the slate so that the new marriage can flourish.

One Ohio Interchurch couple when they went to remarry, after having divorced their first spouses, discovered that the Protestant wife was also required to go through an annulment. She reported that after her first marriage had failed that the annulment process served to help her to heal. I have heard others state that they do not want to bring up old pains and hurts from the past; I can understand where they are coming from.

What can be done to assure people that the annulment process will be one of healing?

If the annulment process served to make people feel healed from past wounds and hurts, then it has done what it should so that the couple can move on into their new life together without having any unnecessary baggage miring them down.

The annulment process seems to have been misinterpreted or misapplied so that it doesn’t resonate in a positive way for everyone.

Protestants have rarely given the annulment process any kind of consideration that it may also apply to them should they marry a Roman Catholic in their subsequent marriage after a divorce.

However, it is mostly Roman Catholics who have complained about being required to get an annulment after having gone through a difficult divorce.

We have heard reports from some who say that the annulment process gave them the closure they had been seeking. Others have simply stated that it was difficult for them. It may have more to do with a desire to avoid re-opening old wounds which I can understand.

We all need proper pastoral care that nurtures us. Having clear and correct information may be the best starting point for deciding what pastoral care would be best for any given situation, and how we should approach reaching out for the pastoral care that is needed.

Trinitarian Baptisms

We are united as Christians through our baptism “in the name of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit/Ghost”

Some interchurch families may also find that they will have to address the issue of which practice to follow infant dedication with believer baptism or infant baptism.

This discussion of how to have their children baptized usually would be further complicated by the belief in the difference in the efficacy between the complete immersion of a believer versus the sprinkling of water over the head of an infant. This topic has yet to be fully explored so that we can uncover the potential within what may seem to be an insurmountable problem for interchurch couples.

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Topics To Be Explored More Fully

We have just mentioned that interchurch couples may be faced with the question regarding infant baptism versus believer baptism; sprinkling versus immersion baptism and that this topic needs to be explored more fully. It is an issue that even two Protestants, but who come from different Church denominations, may also have to face. Frequently, we note the issues that come up between a Roman Catholic spouse and a Protestant Spouse, but other combinations may bring up similar and unique issues between other Christian denomination’s practices as well.

One family baptized their children alternating between baptizing one as a Roman Catholic and the next child as a Protestant, etc. Because they live in Northern Ireland, they also then set about to create integrated schools in Belfast. This means that Protestant and Roman Catholic Students would be sitting in the same classrooms together. They would know each other as real people. The integrated schools serve to eliminate misunderstandings across historic divisions.

Misunderstandings may occur simply due to a lack of clear and correct information.

It is important for all of us to get to know each other.

Cultural Interpretations or Misinterpretations

There seem to be many rules in the Roman Catholic Church. This topic is one that has been discussed over the years by interchurch families.

Rome, as the primary location for the base of the Roman Catholic Church is located in Italy. Italy is also known for having many laws, and something akin to counter laws, which also address many extenuating circumstances.

On the other hand, in England and in the United States, we have grown up in a culture with far fewer laws, but these laws must be adhered to without variance. How two separate communities write their own laws reflects how they perceive themselves to be as a community.

It is believed that when Roman style laws are brought into the English and American cultures where we believe that we must follow the letter of the law that the great number of rules found in the Roman Catholic Church seem to not translate well. Simply using Italian influenced laws in an English legal system creates a great amount of confusion for English speakers who are accustomed to a society that has fewer rules, but rules that must be enforced without exception. Italian culture provides for exceptions; English speakers seem to “champ at the bit”, that is to struggle with the constraints and misunderstandings when they are given rules created by an Italian and Mediterranean culture.
We, English speakers, become overwhelmed by the sheer number of rules. The issue of which rule is more important than other rules comes up although we may not even be aware that we are talking about two different rules. The genuine principle upon which all of the Canon laws were written has to do with God’s love for us and how we take that love into our communities and put God’s love into practice in our real lives.

**In Conclusion:**

As interchurch families, we believe that our greatest guiding principle has to with love and how to love others who may be from greatly different backgrounds. Most of the world’s religions follow some form of the Golden Rule to “Do Unto Others As You Would Have Others Do Unto You.” Therefore, if one rule should guide us as we give pastoral care to interchurch families, let love, God’s love, reign supreme over all of the earth.

This is a brief summary of issues facing many interchurch families. This is not a conclusive nor comprehensive discussion of the issues that interchurch families face nor of all of their pastoral needs. May this report serve to highlight some of the issues and some of the great success stories, our stories, as interchurch families. ~ M.J. Glauber

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**The Vatican has been a Valued Source of Encouragement for Interchurch Families**

**1982: York**  
- Pope John Paul was speaking in the course of his address to families during the Mass he celebrated at York that included the Renewal of Marriage Vows. He spoke directly to interchurch families: *‘In your country, there are many marriages between Catholics and other baptised Christians. To these families I say: You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity. Express that hope in prayer together, in the unity of love. Together invite the Holy Spirit of love into your hearts and into your homes. He will help you to grow in trust and understanding.’* These words have been an encouragement to interchurch families ever since. The Pope’s complete pastoral message from 1982 can be found at [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jpii_hom_19820531_famiglie-york_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jpii_hom_19820531_famiglie-york_en.html)

It would be well worth your time to read his pastoral message in its entirety at the preceding link.

- [http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/whoarewe.html](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/whoarewe.html)


**2003:**

Greeting from Pope John Paul II to interchurch families, 27 July 2003

Many participants in the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families went to Castel Gandolfo on Sunday 27 July 2003 to join other pilgrims when Pope John Paul II led them in praying the Angelus. He greeted a number of groups by name. Speaking in French, the Pope gave a special welcome to interchurch families:

“Je vous salue, chers pèlerins …. qui appartenez au groupe de foyers mixtes. En ce dimanche, jour du Seigneur, puissiez-vous puiser dans sa parole la force dont vous avez besoin pour votre vie quotidienne. Avec la bénéédiction apostolique.”

He asked that they may draw from the Word of God the strength they need for their daily journey, and gave them the apostolic benediction:

Continued on the next page
The following segment of that speech pertains to Interchurch Families and their churches of origin.

....... “The second question to which I want to refer concerns married life and family life. We know that among Christian communities, called to witness to love, the family occupies a special place. In today’s world, in which international and intercultural relations are multiplying, it happens increasingly often that young people from different traditions, different religions, or different Christian denominations, decide to start a family.

For the young people themselves and for those dear to them, it is often a difficult decision that brings with it various dangers concerning both perseverance in the faith and the future structuring of the family, the creation of an atmosphere of unity in the family and of suitable conditions for the spiritual growth of the children. Nevertheless, thanks to the spread of ecumenical dialogue on a larger scale, the decision can lead to the formation of a practical laboratory of unity. For this to happen there is a need for mutual good will, understanding and maturity in faith of both parties, and also of the communities from which they come.

I would like to express my appreciation for the Bilateral Commission of the Council for Ecumenical Issues of the Polish Episcopal Conference and of the Polish Council for Ecumenism, which have begun to draft a document presenting common Christian teaching on marriage and family life and establishing principles acceptable to all for contracting interdenominational marriages, indicating a common programme of pastoral care for such marriages. To all of you I express the wish that in this delicate area reciprocal trust and co-operation between the Churches may grow, fully respecting the rights and responsibility of the spouses for the faith formation of their own family and the education of their children.”

“I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26). Brothers and Sisters, placing all our trust in Christ, who makes his name known to us, let us walk every day towards the fullness of fraternal reconciliation. May his prayer cause the community of his disciples on earth, in its mystery and in its visible unity, to become ever more a community of love reflecting
the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/ifir/2006/ifir05-200611BenedictXVI.htm

http://www.catholicnews.com/data/briefs/cns/20060526.htm

VATICAN CITY (Catholic Online) - On Monday, October 21, 2013, Pope Francis met with members of the Lutheran World Federation and representatives of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity. Like his predecessors, Blessed John Paul II and His Holiness Benedict XVI, Francis is a Pope of Christian unity. His words to the Lutheran leaders are further evidence of his intention to continue the work of authentic ecumenism. ..... 


but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17:21)

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Pope Francis Prayer Intentions for January 2014 ~

Universal: That all may promote authentic economic development that respects the dignity of all peoples.

For Evangelization: That Christians of diverse denominations may walk toward the unity desired by Christ.

Implications for Interchurch Families and Ecumenists:

We appreciate all of the encouragement, the ecumenical dialogues and every effort that our churches have made to promote Christian Unity and to show the important role Interchurch Families, the role we have played, and are continuing to enact so that we may all reach the goal of Christian Unity that Christ wished for us.

Thank you to every one who has shared this 40 year journey with us.

~ M.J. Glauber

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http://www.aarweb.org/

Wendell Berry Receives Marty Award

Wendell Berry was honored at the 2013 Annual Meeting as the recipient of the 2013 Martin E. Marty Award for the
Public Understanding of Religion. Awarded annually since 1996, the Marty Award recognizes outstanding contributions to the public understanding of religion.

The award goes to those whose work has a relevance and eloquence that speaks not just to scholars, but to the broader public as well.

As a novelist, poet, essayist, and public intellectual, Berry has provided a powerful voice in promoting values that extol land, critique the culture of late capitalism, and support human rights.

Berry is the author of more than 40 works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. In 2012, Berry, who has taught at Stanford, Georgetown, and New York Universities, delivered the National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lecture, the most prestigious honor that the U.S. federal government confers for intellectual achievement in the humanities.


Reflections upon hearing Wendell Berry speak in November 2013 by April Yamasaki

What a wonderful privilege to hear Wendell Berry at this year’s American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL)! For me, it was the best of the best.

Here are the ten things I found most inspiring:

10. His humility – Wendell Berry has received many awards, including this year’s Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion. When he received a standing ovation at this year’s AAR/SBL, he gently and humourously chided the gathering known for its critical scholarship, “Now this is overdone. This place should be more critical.”

9. His poetry – He’s a prolific writer of novels, short stories, poems, and essays, but I know him mainly for his poems. One of my favourites is Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front, even though I’m not mad and not a farmer.

8. His confessional approach – He describes his poetry “not trying to call anyone [else], but trying to make the terms of my own peace.”

7. His sense of home - “Stop somewhere with the intention of staying there and dealing with it.”

6. His cultural critique – “This is the age of divorce—not only in marriage—but the divorce of everything from everything.”

5. His compassion both for the world and our place in it - “The scale of what’s wrong [with the world] is so incomprehensible . . . we are so flawed . . . so implicated . . . there is a danger of despair, being cynical, just letting it go.” We can’t do everything, but maybe we can make it “a little bit better.”

4. His active approach – which for him takes the form of working on a land use bill that would mean “more eyes per acre” (i.e., sympathetic attention, knowing attention of what’s happening to the land). “You can’t save the integrity of the natural world in wilderness preserves. If you can’t do it in the landscapes we’re using, we don’t have a hope.”

3. His practical approach – “Love has to wear a face—even if it’s your neighbour you don’t like. You have to get better at ‘hypocrisy’ and act as if you love your neighbour.”

2. His ability to continue to grow as a writer, to change his mind, and even to disagree with himself - After reading his poem, The Peace of Wild Things, he said that he would now object to the term “wild things,” because the wood drake and the heron might well “see us as wild. They’re right—we’ve shaken off our limits and are out of control, have given up our compassion,” so we are really the wild things.

1. His reading of Poem VI from Leavings, a great prayer/poem of longing that moved me and everyone, even Wendell Berry himself. He said he might not be able to read this one in public again. ~ April Yamasaki

Implications for Interchurch Families and Ecumenists

Wendell Berry’s body of work highlights what it means to be a Christian in the 21st. Century. We are all connected to each other and to all of God’s creation; as a concept Berry explores this theme so that we are left with a feeling of hope. Berry grasps the essential components of what it means to be a Christian in this time and place. I was personally inspired by Berry’s book: "Hannah Coulter, a Novel" which was my first introduction to Berry’s work and philosophy. Wendell Berry is most deserving of this award. M.J. Glauber
Many Thanks!! We would like to express our gratitude to those people who have made this edition of the ARK possible:

We give thanks:

For Father George Kilcourse who founded the American Association of Interchurch Families; Thank you!
For the Ecumenical Efforts of Father Ernest Falardeau, SSS; Thank you!!
For the Ecumenical Research of Daniel Olsen, Ph.D.; Thank you!!

For all of those people who have come before us and paved a way forward, and for those who have shared this journey with us as we all seek Christian Unity. Thank you!!
For Our Divine Creator who has been constantly present with all of us and shining that Holy Light to guide us.; Thank you!!

For the AAIF Board Members who help to organize all AAIF events and conferences; Thank you!!
For our families and our churches who have encouraged us on our journey; Thank you!!!

I give thanks for my husband and our family, whose encouragement and understanding have helped to make this edition of the ARK possible. Thank you! ~ M.J. Glauber

THE ARK,

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