“Advent: Waiting in hope because of Emmanuel – God’s presence with us.”

"Advent is a time of expectation and hope,” the former Episcopal Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori said. "We are in a time in the world's history when we are in a great deal of darkness."

Bishop Jefferts Schori urged all: "It’s a time to remember those who are suffering, around us and far away. I urge you to remember those who are at war, those who are returning from war and their needs.

Bishop Jefferts Schori concluded: "You have an ability to make a difference. We live in expectation of a world that is healed."

The Rev. Ada Wong Nagata, an Episcopalian priest, explains, “There is chaos in different parts of the world. We have our fair share of chaos causing disappointment, anxiety, fear, and anger in our own country right now. Enough people question the presence of God… As Christians, during Advent we are to slow down, reflect, and pray while waiting for the coming or our Lord. We need to reflect on what it means to be followers of Jesus our Lord, and our seeing and hearing of our Lord….We are waiting in uncertainty but we are waiting in hope because of Emmanuel – God’s presence with us."

May you find that of God in the world around you. May you advocate for that of God in the world around you. May you have a blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas!

~ M.J. Glauber
Contents:
Page 2…………… Contents, AAIF Contacts and Officers, Events in 2017 for Interchurch Families, Ecumenists, and Those Who Give Us Pastoral Care

Pages 3 - 18 ……. Amoris Laetitia: Comments from an Interchurch Family Perspective by Ruth Reardon

Pages 18 - 21…..Hope in the midst of darkness; An observation and reflection, by M.J. Glauber

Pages 21 - 22…..Interchurch Families in Dialogue: A Report from a Gathering at the National Workshop on Christian Unity by Daniel Olsen

Pages 22 - 25….Important Reading for Interchurch Families, Ecumenists and for those who give us pastoral care: Links that are useful for Interchurch Families, Ecumenists, and those who give us pastoral care

Page 26…. Many Thanks!!!!!

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Earlier editions of the ARK, A Publication of the American Association of Interchurch Families can be found at interchurchfamilies.org. - Please look at the site map and then scroll down to find the ARK.

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Events in 2017 for Interchurch Families, Ecumenists, and Those Who Give Us Pastoral Care

Many of the following events occur annually at about the same time each year


Ecumenical Advocacy Days: Theme for 2017 “Confronting Chaos, Forging Community” from April 21-24, 2017 to grapple with the intersectionality of racism, materialism, and militarism, and learn more about the impact they have around the world, in our communities, and in our own lives. http://advocacydays.org/2016/10/08/ead-announces-theme-for-2017-national-gathering/


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Amoris Laetitia: Comments from an Interchurch Family Perspective

The following article by Ruth Reardon published in One in Christ, Vol 50 (2016) Number 1, is reprinted here with permission.

The long-awaited post-synodal apostolic exhortation, on the Joy of Love, was signed by Pope Francis on 19th March 2016 and published on 8th April in Italian, English, French and German. This is an attempt to assess the importance of this document from the limited perspective of what is of particular interest to interchurch families as such.

**Mixed marriages**

There is one paragraph only (247) devoted to mixed marriages (‘marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons’). This simply repeats para 72 of the Final Report of the 2015 Synod. Under the heading ‘certain complex situations’, it states that issues involving mixed marriages require particular attention. There are three points. First, mixed marriages have an intrinsic value and can make a contribution to the ecumenical movement. Second, for this purpose there should be cordial co-operation between the Catholic and non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations for the marriage begin. Then the remaining half of the paragraph is devoted entirely to the question of Eucharistic sharing in such marriages. It repeats what is said in the 1993 PCPCU Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism: a decision as to whether the non-Catholic party may be admitted to communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms, taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of matrimony by two baptized Christians. Although the spouses share the sacraments of baptism and matrimony, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case according to the stated norms (159-60).

The contents of para 247 are taken from Familiaris Consortio and the 1993 Directory on Ecumenism. In this sense there is nothing new here. However, it can be noted that this section devoted to mixed marriages (between Catholics and other baptized Christians) stands by itself as a positive statement. Interchurch marriages are clearly distinguished from other kinds of mixed marriage, as the submission to the 2015 Synod of Bishops from the Interchurch Families International Network (IFIN) had hoped1. There are still negative references to marriages with disparity of cult (interreligious marriages), but no longer are mixed marriages lumped together with them as ‘leading to critical situations not easily resolved’ (248), as they were in the Final Report of the 2015 Synod. Interchurch families are treated as quite distinct from interreligious families and other kinds of mixed families, and there are no negative references to them in the entire document.

It is important that a reference to Eucharistic sharing in the context of mixed marriages has been included in the document, following its appearance in the Final
Report of the 2015 Synod, since the provisions of the 1993 Directory in this regard are not well known and many people even now still regard Eucharistic sharing as ‘impossible’. The general norms on Eucharistic sharing (Directory 129-131) are often quoted as though there were no specific reference to the particular situation of those who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ later in the document (159-60). Indeed, this was done in the Instrumentum Laboris of the 2015 Synod. While there has been no clear official clarification that in some cases exceptional Eucharistic sharing can be on-going in a marriage, as IFIN had hoped, that pastoral option is still open to those who wish to adopt it. The whole thrust of Amoris Laetitia is not to change legislation at this stage but to stress the need for a more sensitive pastoral approach where marriage and family life is concerned.

To sum up:
1. It is recognised that interchurch families can contribute to the ecumenical movement.
2. Catholic and other Christian pastors are encouraged to work together in their pastoral care.
3. Possibilities for authorised Eucharistic sharing exist for those who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ which do not yet exist for all Christians.
4. Interchurch marriages are clearly distinguished from other kinds of mixed marriage, and there are no negative references to them anywhere in Amoris Laetitia.

For the rest, beyond these specific points, Pope Francis addresses interchurch families and those who endeavour to offer them pastoral care in just the same way that he addresses same-church families and their pastors. They can feel included. Interchurch families are ordinary Christian families too; the only thing that distinguishes them is that they relate as couples and families both to the Roman Catholic Church and to another Church or ecclesial community. There is a wealth of pastoral understanding and spiritual enrichment in Amoris Laetitia to be absorbed over time. Here I am going to pick out a few of the principles and attitudes which lend themselves to particular application to interchurch families as such, as well as acknowledging that there is so much else in the document that will apply to them as well as to others.

Interchurch marriages are Christian marriages and domestic churches
‘Christian marriage, as a reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a leaven of new life for society’ (292). This description of a ‘fully realized’ Christian marriage applies to many interchurch marriages, although some (like some Catholic/Catholic marriages) would
find themselves in situations ‘which do not yet or no longer correspond to the Church’s teaching on marriage’ (292).

(It should be noted that this ‘full realization’ is not a ‘perfect realization’, as Pope Francis is at pains to underline a number of times.)

**Families are not a problem**

Pope Francis understands that Christian families today face many difficult issues and complex situations as they respond to their vocation. He makes it clear that the synodal process has been a beginning, not an ending. There is need for a continuing open discussion of complex doctrinal, moral, spiritual and pastoral questions (2). His focus is clearly on the urgency of developing new pastoral approaches and attitudes. This is not the time to raise canonical questions. Thus it is not surprising that the two issues on which IFIN asked for consideration of a change in the rules (the need for a pre-nuptial ‘promise’ by the Catholic partner, and a further clarification on the norms for Eucharistic sharing) do not figure in *Amoris Laetitia*. It is support for family life that is urgent, and rules can follow later. (In fact, since Vatican II there has been a gradual change in the norms both in relation to the pre-nuptial promise required for the validity of a mixed marriage, and to Eucharistic sharing for those ‘who share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’; interchurch families hope that this development will be taken further, as soon as possible.)

For the time being Pope Francis asks for patient careful reading of the exhortation, hoping that in this reading all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for ‘families are not a problem, they are first and foremost an opportunity’ (7). The specific opportunity identified in the case of interchurch families is that they can make a contribution to the ecumenical movement (247). As interchurch couples used to assure one another in the early days of the Association of Interchurch Families in the late 1960s, when faced with a difficult problem over getting married or arranging a shared baptism: ‘Our problems are our opportunities!’. Think in terms of pastoral care for *families*, not just for individuals, says Pope Francis. Family units are important in the life of the Church and the world (44).

**Each family is unique**

When Pope Francis reflects on the challenges that face pastors, he does so in a very general way, because it is the task of different communities to devise practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church’s teaching and local problems and needs (199). If families are to fulfil their calling to be ‘joy-filled witnesses as domestic churches’, it is vital that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy. Pastors ‘are called to help sow seeds, the rest is God’s work’. ‘The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to families and to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters’. *Each family*: ‘it is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning’ (200). There is to be no blanket approach. ‘In the home, decisions cannot be made unilaterally, since each spouse shares responsibility for the family: yet each home is unique and each marriage will find an arrangement that works best’ (220).
This is one of the points that IFIN made; there are some issues that are common to interchurch families as such, and a general policy needs to be worked out. But also, each interchurch family is unique. Each has to find a way to live out their ‘two-churchness’ that is right for their particular situation. As interchurch couples have always said: there is no blueprint for an interchurch family. Here pastors may find it helpful ‘with humility and compassion’ (200) to work together with other Christian pastors involved with interchurch couples, as they are encouraged to do. It is not always easy, and it is time-consuming, but there are sometimes considerable ecumenical benefits. As an Irish Catholic priest said in recounting his participation with Anglican priests in shared celebrations of baptism: ‘I came away from these experiences utterly convinced of the unsurpassable value of time spent in mutual preparation by both clergy in a spirit of co-operative partnership.’

**Marriage is a vocation**

*Amoris Laetitia* identifies the family as a domestic church, with love at its centre (67). Marriage is a sacrament, a gift ‘given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses’. ‘Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment’ (72).

Interchurch spouses often have a very strong sense of being called to marry one another. It is often a difficult decision to marry someone from another ecclesial communion, sometimes in the face of strong discouragement from communities and families. Many couples have been surprised by the way they have been drawn together in love, often attracted by the deep Christian faith of the other. As one Canadian Catholic wife said: ‘God gave me all I had asked for in a spouse – only I had forgotten to say he must be a Catholic’. Similarly a Protestant wife from New Zealand: ‘only I didn’t ask that he shouldn’t be a Roman Catholic’. Interchurch couples are happy when their vocation to form a domestic church, reflecting the love between Christ and the Church, is respected by their communities.

**Accompaniment through all the stages of marriage and family life**

Pope Francis stresses the need to accompany married couples and families throughout their lives, to be close to them in all their joys and sorrows, their hopes and hurts – and especially when they are hurting. It is certainly true that pastoral understanding is needed for interchurch families through all the stages of marriage and family life, as IFIN pointed out in its submission to the 2015 Synod. Interchurch couples and families have often been hurt by the way in which they have felt that their church communities have been pulling them apart, rather than supporting their unity.

*Marriage preparation* begins the process. It ‘begins at birth’ (208), and interchurch parents too can be aware of this, and consider together how the particular values expressed in their marriage can model a way forward for their children, if and
whoever they eventually marry. The more immediate preparation of engaged couples should ‘assist them to recognize eventual problems and risks’. ‘They should be strongly encouraged to discuss what each expects from marriage, what they understand by love and commitment, what each wants from the other and what kind of life they would like to build together’ (209). For interchurch couples this will include discussion of the particular problems and opportunities that will come if they marry across church boundaries, and attempt to live together in their domestic church a unity that their respective communities have not yet achieved. They will need a ‘firm resolve’ to be willing to ‘face eventual sacrifices, problems and situations of conflict’ (210). In facing these together their love will be deepened. Couples should be given details of where they can turn for help when problems arrive (211); for interchurch couples that will include information about groups and associations of interchurch families, where these exist.

The wedding celebration itself should become a ‘profound personal experience’ for the couple. ‘In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent and the bodily union that consummates the marriage can only be seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church (213). In an interchurch marriage the two baptized persons who are committing themselves to one another for the whole of their lives come from two church communities; the couple will feel that they are supported by both if the clergy and congregations of both share in the preparation and the liturgical celebration, whichever church building is chosen for the wedding. Because these communities are not in full communion with one another – their communion is real, but not yet fully realised – they do not normally share Eucharistic communion (Directory 129-31). The couple will need to decide whether they want the wedding to be celebrated in the context of a Eucharist. Even if they as a couple may be allowed to receive communion together, they might not wish the congregation and families to be divided, if the same is not true for them. There are many decisions to be made that are specific to an interchurch wedding, so that the marriage liturgy which is ‘a unique event, both a family and a community celebration’ (216) may be as appropriate and joyful as possible for the couple and families involved.

Pope Francis insists on the importance of accompanying couples in the first years of married life, when they have to learn that neither is perfect, but each is ‘a work in process’ (218), that they have to negotiate to arrive at win-win situations (220), that God is calling each to help the other to mature (221). It is a time when an interchurch couple need to work out their relations as a couple with both their church communities, and establish a worship pattern and a tradition of family prayer as they ‘dance towards the future’ (219) into which they will be able to integrate a child, the child of them both.

Amoris Laetitia speaks of love and pregnancy. ‘Children are loved even before they arrive’ (166); ‘for nine months every mother and father dreams about their child ... for Christian married couples, baptism necessarily appears as a part of that dream’ (169). The time of expecting and receiving new life from God is a time of joy.
for the couple, but for interchurch couples it can also be a time of anxiety. Will their two church communities be willing to rejoice together at the birth of their baby? Will they be willing to join together in a shared celebration of baptism? Will the couple be able to get the baptism registered in both registers – a concrete sign that both communities will take responsibility for supporting them as parents as they bring up their child to the best of their ability? Will they experience a family tug-of-war, as both sets of grandparents try to make exclusive claims on the religious upbringing of their grandchild? Pope Francis advises mothers not to ‘let fears, worries, other people’s comments or problems lessen your joy at being God’s means of bringing a new life to the world. Prepare yourself for the birth of your child, but without obsessing’ (171). It has sometimes been very hard for interchurch mothers not to ‘obsess’.

Both parents are necessary; ‘every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father’ (172). This is not just ‘the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one’s life and the solid foundation of the family’. The following words have a particular application to interchurch parents: ‘Together they teach the value of reciprocity, of respect for differences and of being able to give and take’.

Both parents together are the teachers of their children. The Church plays an important supporting role, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities, says Pope Francis (84). ‘At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a “most serious duty” and at the same time a “primary right” of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them’. This is said in relation to the claims of the state, but it can also be applied to church authorities. Indeed, for mixed marriages a first recognition of this was made in 1970 when both partners no longer had to promise that all children of their marriage would be baptized and brought up as Roman Catholics. ‘The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission. She must always do this by helping them to appreciate their proper role and to realize that by the reception of the sacrament of marriage they become ministers of their children’s education’ (85). This help is just what IFIN appealed for, taking account of the two-church situation of interchurch families from baptism onwards, as the children grow and develop in their relationship with Christ, experienced through the life and traditions of the two church communities of their parents.

The couple must ‘leave’ their own parents (not abandoning or ignoring them), in order to create together a new home that ‘will be a true hearth, a place of security, hope and future plans, and the couple can truly become ‘one flesh’ (190). Neither can simply expect to reproduce the pattern of their own upbringing – certainly not in an interchurch marriage. ‘Both spouses need to make the effort to grow in trust and communication. Marriage challenges husbands and wives to find new ways of being sons and daughters’. It is a cause for joy when an interchurch marriage is the
occasion for one or both families of origin to be drawn into a concern for Christian
unity that they might never have known without that experience.

In a section on crises, worries and difficulties, Pope Francis points out that crises can
become opportunities (232) – many interchurch couples have discovered this.
Facing them together has ensured deeper communication, and pastors can
courage this process (234). For interchurch couples this means that church
divisions must not be allowed to drive an unnecessary wedge between the couple;
pastoral care needs to concentrate on supporting the unity of the marriage in
whatever ways are possible. For all marriages, forgiveness and reconciliation are
basic, and separation must only be considered as a last resort. Accompaniment must
continue after separation and divorce. It is here, under the heading ‘Certain complex
situations’ that we find paragraph 247 on mixed marriages, followed by a
paragraph on marriages with disparity of cult (which includes a reference to
marriages in which one partner is a Catholic and the other a non-believer), and
consideration of the problems that arise when persons in a complex marital situation
wish to be baptized, families whose members experience same-sex attraction, and
single-parent families (248-52). All need pastoral accompaniment.

Pope Francis speaks of the challenge of the death of a loved one. ‘To turn our backs
on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy’ (253). The death of an interchurch
spouse, or that of a child, is a time when it is particularly valuable for the pastors and
communities of both churches to show their loving concern for the remaining spouse,
or for the grieving parents. Interchurch families have felt joyful gratitude when both
have come together to celebrate the life of a spouse or a child who has meant so
much to them. A funeral can be a final act of ecumenical witness, and a great
comfort to those left behind.

Discernment
The need for wise discernment to guide couples and families through the
complexities of their experiences today is central to the thinking of Pope Francis.
Sometimes this means that pastors should stand back, and allow space for couples
to make their own discernment in their particular circumstances. It is not helpful ‘to
try to impose rules by sheer authority’ (35). Pastors themselves ‘need a healthy dose
of self-criticism’ (36). ‘We find it hard to make room for the consciences of the
faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations,
and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We
have been called to form consciences, not to replace them’ (37). Jesus himself
‘never failed to show compassion’ (38). So often interchurch couples have been
grateful to pastors who have offered them this kind of respect and support. ‘I don’t
think it’s a good idea’, said one parish priest to a couple who explained to him how
they intended to bring up their children. ‘I don’t see how it will work. But if that’s what
you’ve decided together to do in conscience, I shall do all I can to support you.’

The Church’s way ‘is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it
with a sincere heart.’ We need ‘to avoid judgements which do not take into account
the complexity of various situations, and to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition (269). Each person should be helped ‘to find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous mercy. No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and re-married, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves’ (297). Interchurch families can feel themselves included too, and there is quite a lot in chapter 8 (‘Accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness’) referring to the Church’s care for the divorced and remarried that can be applied to them.

Pope Francis notes the immense variety of concrete situations of the divorced and remarried, so that ‘neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases’ (300). (Footnote 336 adds that ‘this is also the case with regard to sacramental discipline, since discernment can recognise that in a particular situation no grave fault exists’. ‘Priests have the duty to accompany the divorced and remarried in helping them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of their bishop’ .... ‘What we are speaking of is a process of accompaniment and discernment which guides the faithful to an awareness of their situation before God’. There can be a ‘grave danger of misunderstandings’, but ‘when a responsible and tactful person, who does not presume to put his or her own desires ahead of the common good of the Church, meets with a pastor capable of acknowledging the seriousness of the matter before him, there can be no risk that a specific discernment may lead people to think that the Church maintains a double standard (300). ‘General rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule (304). But rules are not ‘stones to throw at people’s lives’. Pastors must not close their hearts and hide behind the Church’s teachings, judging difficult cases and wounded families with superiority and superficiality. By thinking that everything is black and white, pastors sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth. People need the Church’s help to grow in the life of grace and charity (305). Here is a second footnote (351) which says that in certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Pope Francis adds a reminder, taken from Evangelii Gaudium, that ‘the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak’.

Pope Francis assures his readers that ‘to show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing anything less than what Jesus offers to the human being. Today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus prevent their breakdown’ (307). This might well be applied to the fears of those who
are worried that any extension of exceptional Eucharistic sharing might undermine the Catholic witness to the close bond between ecclesial and Eucharistic communion. There is no reason for it to do so. Indeed, an understanding of an interchurch family as a domestic church should in itself be a strong support to that witness. Reflecting on the way that family members need to relate to one another if they are to grow in love and joy as a domestic church, can also be a stimulus for church communities, as they reflect on the way in which they need to relate to one another if they are to grow together into unity.

Pope Francis can ‘understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion’. But ‘Jesus expects us to stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated’ (308). ‘The Bride of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who goes out to everyone without exception. He loves them all. On the basis of this realization, it will become possible for the balm of mercy to reach everyone, as a sign that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst’ (309). ‘At times we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems’ (310). At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel’ (311). We need to avoid a ‘cold bureaucratic morality’ in dealing with sensitive issues, but to practise ‘a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate.’ ‘I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. ... I also encourage the Church’s pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church’ (312).

Training in ministry for marriage and family life
It is not always easy for interchurch families to ‘speak confidently with their pastors’; many have tried it and have met with such discouragement and incomprehension that they have felt unable to try again. When they talk with other interchurch couples, however, they learn of the wide spectrum of pastoral responses that exist. The Synod on the Family identified the need for ‘a more adequate formation ... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers’ and Amoris Laetitia took up this theme, saying that ‘ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families’ (203). The IFIN submission to the Synod pointed out that it would be helpful if further education on the pastoral care of interchurch families could be included in all seminaries, especially if some of the input is given by interchurch couples. Where this has been done, it has proved very positive.
Interchurch families, Christian unity and the Eucharist

There are many references in Amoris Laetitia to the link between the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of the Eucharist, between family life and sharing in the Eucharist. In the opening chapter, ‘inspired by the Scriptures, to set a proper tone’ (6), there are two references to the close relationship of Eucharistic communion to the family life of the home. The first is to the New Testament texts that speak of ‘the churches that meet in homes; a family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table’ (15). The second is a reference to the family becoming ‘a union of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. ... The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the Word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells’ (29). Families are not just collections of individuals when it comes to Eucharistic communion; they are families, domestic churches who need to share Eucharistic communion. This is felt deeply by some interchurch families. Family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist is important, and it is valuable to celebrate the Eucharist for families, especially on wedding anniversaries (223).

Besides a number of references to the family as a union of persons in the image of the Trinity, Amoris Laetitia also focuses on marriage as a sign of the love between Christ and his Church. The mutual belonging of the spouses is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church’ (72). ‘Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the Cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses. By becoming one flesh, they embody the espousal of our human nature by the Son of God. That is why, in the joys of their love and family life, he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb. Even though the analogy between the human couple of husband and wife and that of Christ and his Church, is “imperfect”, it inspires us to beg the Lord to bestow on every married couple an outpouring of his divine love’ (73).

The theme of ‘imperfect’ love is referred to again in a meditation on one of the phrases in the Pauline hymn to love in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13: love endures all things. Although ‘the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else to perfect the couple’s love’ (89), ‘we encounter problems whenever we think that relationships or people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves at the centre and expect things to turn out our way (92). ‘Love does not have to be perfect for us to value it. The other person loves me as best they can, with all their limits, but the fact that love is imperfect does not mean it is untrue or unreal’ (113). This is a reminder of how the 1993 Ecumenical Directory described the way in which members of other Churches and ecclesial Communities are brought by baptism into a ‘a real, even if imperfect’ communion with the Catholic Church (Directory, 129) – a communion that is real, even if not fully realized, as the phrase can be translated.
Another reminder of the relationship between married love and ecumenical relationships between churches and ecclesial communities comes in the section ‘Growing in conjugal love’. Married sacramental love ‘is an “affective union”, spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside’ (120). This recalls the meeting of Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury when the Pope said to Archbishop Runcie that ‘affective communion’ leads to ‘effective communion’. Much of this section of Amoris Laetitia can be applied to church relationship as well as to marriage. ‘God makes of two spouses one single existence’ (121). However, ‘there is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and the Church, for marriage as a sign entails a dynamic process ... one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God’ (122). Other examples: a faithful covenant that entails no going back (123); sharing everything in mutual respect (125); joy growing through the free exchange of gifts (129); joy also growing through pain and sorrow and shared effort (130); a shared commitment to deeper growth together for the sake of society as a whole (131); definitive commitment made publicly (132); authentic dialogue that takes time (136-7); ‘unity in diversity’ or ‘reconciled diversity’, freeing ourselves from feeling that we all have to be alike, and a recognition that many disagreements are not about important things (139); reciprocal submission (156); a shared and lasting life project; living as one (163). A daily effort is needed, and the grace of the Holy Spirit who confirms, directs and transforms (164).

The concluding sentences of the last chapter of Amoris Laetitia, on the spirituality of marriage and the family, can equally well be applied to the ecumenical process. ‘Families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven.’ We have not yet arrived, we cannot ask for perfection; that is for the Kingdom to come. This perspective will keep us from judging others harshly. We are striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families. ‘Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us’ (325). Interchurch families will want to add: let us make this journey as Churches and ecclesial Communities too, let us keep walking together.

This final section on the spirituality of marriage and the family also stresses the need for Eucharistic sharing in their walk together. ‘The family’s communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest. Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper (cf Rev 3:20). There, spouses can always seal anew the paschal covenant which united them and which ought to reflect the covenant which God sealed with mankind in the cross. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the new covenant, where Christ’s redemptive love is carried out (cf Lk 22:20). The close bond
between married life and the Eucharist thus becomes all the more clear. For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a “domestic church”.’ (318)

That necessary ‘sharing together in the Eucharist’ is difficult for the domestic churches that are interchurch families, so long as the Church communities to which they belong are not in communion with one another. Many have shared as far as they can without receiving communion together, but they know that this is not enough. They can be powerful witnesses to an underlying unity when they are able to share the Eucharist fully (although exceptionally) across church divisions. ‘The married couple are a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament’ [of marriage]’ (72).

Sometimes it is the children themselves who take the initiative. When children are lovingly helped to ‘grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy’ (261), they ‘will surprise us with ideas and projects born of that freedom, which challenge us to rethink our own ideas. This is a good thing’ (262). There is the child who looks up at the bishop when he visits the parish and asks: ‘Why can’t my Mummy receive communion with my Daddy?’ There is the son who is reluctant to receive his First Communion if his father is not able to receive alongside him. There is the child who breaks her Host in two in order to carry half back to her mother and share it with her. There is the child who observes: ‘I don’t think that’s a very good rule, because it breaks up families.’

Traditionally the Catholic norms for Eucharistic sharing have allowed for the needs of individual Christians, but not for those of mixed families as families. The 1993 Ecumenical Directory broke new ground when it referred to those who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ as in possible need of Eucharistic sharing – but much more work needs to be done in relation to spouses and to families. It needs to take account of the fact that ‘the family’s communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest’, and that ‘the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a “domestic church”.’ ‘Each day’; it is not a question of rare occasions; marriage is an on-going commitment and needs on-going sustenance.

‘The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church’ (87). ‘The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church’ (88). May interchurch families become an ecumenical good; may the love that unites them be recognized as an ecumenical strength.

**Personal reflections on a puzzle**
On 15th November 2015 Pope Francis visited the Lutheran church in Rome, and his address was followed by a question-and-answer session. A Lutheran wife, Anke de Bernardinis, married to a Catholic, raised the question of sharing communion. Ever since I read his answer (appended below), I have been puzzled by his statement that ‘I would never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority.’ I would have thought that in terms of canon law and the 1993 Ecumenical Directory he could have done precisely that (obviously after pastoral dialogue) as Bishop of Rome. But having now read Amoris Laetitia, it seems to me that it makes sense to read the answer in the light of the Exhortation.

*Amoris Laetitia* shows Pope Francis as not interested in changing rules and regulations, or in the minutiae of their interpretation, but rather in setting out a renewed vision of marriage and family life, based on love, and inculcating a whole new pastoral approach, based on accompaniment and discernment. As we have seen, he envisions an inclusive Church, and leaves it to bishops, priests, parishes, ministers for marriage and family life, to work out and implement pastoral policies, to show compassion and welcome to all. He trusts families to exercise their own discernment.

Right at the beginning of *Amoris Laetitia*, he repeats a phrase that he used in *Evangelii Gaudium*, ‘time is greater than space’ (3), and later he repeats it again, adding that ‘it is more important to start processes than to dominate spaces’ (261). More explanation was given in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where Pope Francis says that this approach ‘enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give priority to time.’ He explains what he means: ‘Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity’ (*Evangelii Gaudium* 223).

So the whole thrust of *Amoris Laetitia* is to encourage, at every level of the Church’s life, actions that will initiate or contribute to processes leading to positive developments in marriage and family life. With respect to mixed marriages, the process has already begun. Law has changed, and it can change further. Already bishops are free to admit interchurch spouses to communion together, in particular cases. Some bishops and priests want to do so, others do not. Some want to limit admission to rare occasions; others feel that this does not take account of the nature of marriage. May it not be that Pope Francis does not wish to pursue the question at
the level that might risk ‘crystallizing’ it too soon (the level of law) but to encourage actions that will open up fruitful possibilities for the future? Always to be done with love, humility and patient discernment, as he constantly indicates.

This attitude is at work in his answer to Anke de Bernardinis. He refuses to answer the question in terms of ‘criteria for admission’. He muses over some theological questions in his own mind. Jesus said ‘Do this in memory of me’; we do the same thing. Is Eucharistic sharing a final sign of unity or a way to move towards it? The marriage supper of the Lamb will be the perfect banquet at the end of time, but in this imperfect world is not the Lord’s Supper food for the journey? We share a common baptism, so we have to walk together. An interchurch family may share in that walking together even more deeply than others, because it is also a conjugal journey, a family journey of love and faith. There are shared failures and the need for forgiveness; this is the same for both partners, although they may express and seek it in different ways. They pray together, and their baptismal bond becomes stronger. They teach their children who Jesus is and why he came – and it is the same message, whether it is expressed in Lutheran or Catholic terms. So what about the Supper?

Pope Francis recalls a great friend of his, an Episcopalian bishop, who accompanied his wife and children to Mass on Sundays before going to worship with his community. We know that he was deeply affected by the fact that the family did not receive communion together. The great friend was Tony Palmer, a bishop of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. He first met Archbishop Bergoglio in 2006 in Buenos Aires, where he was on a joint mission with the head of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Italy to bring Catholics and evangelicals together. When they met, the Cardinal was especially interested to learn that he had a Catholic wife and children. Palmer explained that it worked well – they were complementary in their diversity – but there was a problem. ‘I told him that since I led my family back to the Catholic Church, I am not allowed to take communion. I have to stay in the benches on Sunday morning. So my kids come back after taking communion and say, “Dad, why would you join us to a church that separates a family?” When he heard this, Palmer said, Bergoglio’s “heart broke – his eyes filled with tears.”

Then Pope Francis gave his reply to Anke. ‘I respond to your question only with a question: how can I participate with my husband, so that the Lord’s Supper may accompany me on my path? It is a problem to which each person must respond.’ We believe the Lord is present. ‘Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to baptism: “one faith, one baptism, one Lord”, as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there. I would never dare to give permission for this because I do not have the authority. One baptism, one Lord, one faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say any more.’

‘Go forward’ – not expressly to receive communion, but not specifically for a blessing either, nor to witness to the pain of division. It is up to ‘each person’ to make their prayerful discernment in any particular circumstance. In the context of his reflections
Pope Francis’ answer can be read as an encouragement to Anke de Bernardinis to go forward to receive communion as food for the journey so that those who already share baptism and their family journey of love and faith should share the nourishment they need for their further journey.

Does this leave interchurch families where we were before? Does Amoris Laetitia leave the Church where we were before? There has been no change in legislation. But the entirely new insistence on discernment by couples and families and their pastoral accompaniment by parishes, priests and bishops may in time create an entirely new climate of pastoral understanding that will lead to a new flourishing of the domestic churches that contribute to as well as receive from the life of the Church.

Ruth Reardon

[1] The text of the IFIN submission was given in One in Christ, 49, 1, 2015, pp.142-160.


Appendix: an extract from the question-and-answer session that took place when Pope Francis visited the Lutheran Church in Rome, 15 November 2015

Then Anke de Bernardinis, the wife of a Roman Catholic, expressed sorrow at “not being able to partake together in the Lord’s Supper” and asked: “What more can we do to reach communion on this point?”.

Thank you, Ma’am. Regarding the question on sharing the Lord’s Supper, it is not easy for me to answer you, especially in front of a theologian like Cardinal Kasper! I’m afraid! I think the Lord gave us [the answer] when he gave us this command: “Do this in memory of me”. And when we share in, remember and emulate the Lord’s Supper, we do the same thing that the Lord Jesus did. And the Lord’s Supper will be, the final banquet will there be in the New Jerusalem, but this will be the last. Instead on the journey, I wonder — and I don’t know how to answer, but I am making your question my own — I ask myself: “Is sharing the Lord’s Supper the end of a journey or is it the viaticum for walking together? I leave the question to the theologians, to those who understand. It is true that in a certain sense sharing is saying that there are no differences between us, that we have the same doctrine — I underline the word, a difficult word to understand — but I ask myself: don’t we have the same Baptism? And if we have the same Baptism, we have to walk together. You are a witness to an even profound journey because it is a conjugal journey, truly a family journey, of human love and of shared faith. We have the same Baptism. When you feel you are a sinner — I too feel I am quite a sinner — when your husband feels he is a sinner, you go before the Lord and ask forgiveness; your husband does the
same and goes to the priest and requests absolution. They are ways of keeping Baptism alive. When you pray together, that Baptism grows, it becomes strong; when you teach your children who Jesus is, why Jesus came, what Jesus did, you do the same, whether in Lutheran or Catholic terms, but it is the same. The question: and the Supper? There are questions to which only if one is honest with oneself and with the few theological “lights” that I have, one must respond the same, you see. “This is my Body, this is my Blood”, said the Lord, “do this in memory of me”, and this is a viaticum which helps us to journey. I had a great friendship with an Episcopalian bishop, 48 years old, married with two children, and he had this concern: a Catholic wife, Catholic children, and he a bishop. He accompanied his wife and children to Mass on Sundays and then went to worship with his community. It was a step of participating in the Lord’s Supper. Then he passed on, the Lord called him, a just man. I respond to your question only with a question: how can I participate with my husband, so that the Lord’s Supper may accompany me on my path? It is a problem to which each person must respond. A pastor friend of mine said to me: “We believe that the Lord is present there. He is present. You believe that the Lord is present. So what is the difference?” — “Well, there are explanations, interpretations...”. Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism: “One faith, one baptism, one Lord”, as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there. I would never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority. One Baptism, one Lord, one faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more. (Translation given on the Vatican website)

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**Hope in the midst of darkness**

*An observation and a reflection, by M.J. Glauber*

In the Bible, we read about the Israelites who were wandering in the desert wilderness for 40 years after escaping from slavery under the Pharaoh in Egypt. They were being led by God across the Red Sea and through the desert wilderness to a Land of Milk and Honey. God provided for their needs during this epic journey. They simply needed to pay attention and to follow God’s guidelines. However, there were moments when they became afraid for their own survival. They questioned God’s presence, and yet God was there with them. Not unlike the lamentations that we read in the psalms, the Israelites call out to God for help, and God listens by providing them with Manna, bread, sustenance for our/their journey.

Everyone’s life could be compared to being an epic journey. If we are lucky, we live for many years at the end of which we are changed by the experience and we have learned so many things. Our own journey is filled with joy and sadness, failures and successes, love and fear, happiness and sadness, along with many other polar opposites of experiences for which we feel an emotional response. God is with us on this journey even if we don’t always stop to take note of that.
How might we become more aware of God’s presence in our lives, I wondered.

Fred Rogers had been trained as a Presbyterian minister. Rogers indicated in an interview, “I went into television because I hated it so, and I thought there’s some way of using this fabulous instrument to nurture those who would watch and listen.” Rogers received many awards during his lifetime for all that he did to nurture viewers on his children’s program, “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood.”

Fred Rogers said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

According to Snopes, “During his lifetime, Fred Rogers reassuring way of helping families with difficult times, began with his response to Robert Kennedy’s assassination. Over the years since then, there have, unfortunately, been other tragic events during which parents and educators turned to him for his calming and thoughtful insight. Fred Rogers' wisdom is timeless, and his messages continue to be valuable for children and the people who care for them, as we deal with the events of today’s world.” Fred Rogers is now deceased, but his message survives.

AAIF members, as we progressed along on our own epic journeys during this past year and a half, have mourned the death of Lamar Burton who with his wife, Diane, served in various positions on the AAIF Board since its formation by Father George Kilcourse in the 1980’s. Father George Kilcourse’s own father, after whom he was named, died. Libby Montgomery’s brother died suddenly during the past year. Other AAIF members have indicated that their plans for their lives ahead suffered a set back of one kind or another. Friends and family members, who have been part of our lives, and who have provided a support system for us, have died. Other friends or relatives have been diagnosed with serious illnesses. The sum of these events can leave you feeling sad and a bit empty. The national and international news seems to be filled with reports of one disaster after another that can be quite discouraging. We mourn and we look for ways forward in our own lives that seem to have changed so drastically.

The concept that Fred Rogers shared with us to “look for the helpers” is a comforting message in a world that can seem to be quite chaotic.

It is Advent, Christmas will be here soon. We have that message and the image in our minds of a baby who was born in a manger under very humble circumstances; this baby became the Light for our world especially when events seemed to have plunged us into a sort of darkness where we see a divided community in an acrimonious world. We are impressed by the very humble beginnings for this baby, the son of God, who is born in human form and who lived among us. Christ arrived in very simple circumstances in a manger. He is the King of Peace, not the kind of Messiah we had expected, but better. Therefor, God came to us in human form although not in a way that we had expected the Messiah to appear among us.

In this city, over a year ago now, someone reported that a mother was living in a car with 8 month old twin boys and a 1 1/2 year old girl. The boys had spent the first 8
months of their lives strapped in car seats. The little girl had lived far longer in the car. The mother is unable to care for her children. The children were then placed into the foster care system. The mother is receiving medical care now. A young couple agreed to adopt all 3 of the children. I visited the newly formed family of 5 a few days ago. The children who had such a difficult start in life are now getting the chance that they need. It was then that the quote, “Look for the helpers” became crystal clear to me as being significantly important. This young couple stepped up to take on this challenge when we can assume many others wouldn’t. I felt a renewed sense of hope in humanity when I saw that people do step in to help others, especially to help those who are the most needy and most vulnerable among us. They report that they have felt enriched by the presence of their 3 adopted children.

West Virginian Quakers indicate that “at the very center of the Quaker faith lies the concept of the Inner Light. This principle states that in every human soul there is implanted a certain element of God's own spirit and divine energy. This element, known to early Friends as "That of God in every one", "The seed of Christ", or "The seed of Light", means to Friends, in the words of John 1: 9, "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world".” Some Quakers explain this as looking for that of God in the face of Others. It would be similar to the concept of looking for the helpers of which Fred Roger spoke.

The West Virginian Quakers explain that “George Fox acknowledged that there is "an ocean of darkness and death" over the world. But he also saw that "an ocean of light and of love" flows over this ocean of darkness, revealing the infinite love of God. Friends believe that the power of God to overcome evil is available in the nature of anyone who truly wants to do the will of God. To a great extent, we are the arbiter of our own destiny, having the power of choice. Salvation, in the Quaker sense, lies in our power to ‘become’ children of God.” This made sense to me as I had seen an example of God’s Light in a world that had seemed to be so filled with darkness. This young couple who is seeking to adopt three precious foster children had found that Light of God, and had been guided by that Light; in so doing, they are shining God’s Light out into the world. This event will not make front page news, but the potential for providing a positive impact is significant.

In the northern hemisphere, Christmas, the birth of the Baby Jesus, occurs at the darkest time of the year. Hope, that Light for the world, comes in a very humble form, an unexpected form of God’s own choosing. Finding that Light and choosing that Holy Light brings hope into a world that is otherwise filled with far too much darkness.

May you find the helpers and be inspired by them.
May you find that the helper is you.
May you be inspired by the divine Light of our Creator. Merry Christmas!

Links related to this observation and reflection:
Interchurch Families in Dialogue:

A Report from a Gathering at the National Workshop on Christian Unity

Out of a shared interest among several Ecumenical Officers in the United States, two years ago a dialogue group was formed to discuss the pastoral needs and ecumenical gifts of interchurch families. As a working group within the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Offices (CADEIO), members have conducted quarterly conversations about various matters related to interchurch families. Such matters include understanding better the norms and exceptions for Eucharistic sharing as related to interchurch couples and local initiatives for pastoral care of interchurch families. These discussions are meant to raise awareness of interchurch families in the U.S., think through what Diocesan Ecumenical Officers and others might do to assist these families in their local dioceses, and to share resources among the various dioceses.

At the 2016 National Workshop on Christian Unity in Louisville, Kentucky (U.S.A.), the dialogue group, along with special guest Bishop Mitch Rozanski, chair of the US Bishop’s Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, was privileged to welcome several members of the American Association of Interchurch Families (AAIF) for an evening of dialogue. The Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops graciously sponsored the gathering.

The opening reception was more akin to a conversation than a meeting with a formal agenda. This dialogue provided a wonderful opportunity for the members of the CADEIO dialogue group and the couples to come to know each other better. After opening introductions, representatives from the AAIF were “given the floor”. The time was mainly used to share stories of their experience of being in an interchurch marriage and raising children in an interchurch context. Significant time was devoted to reflecting on the pain of being told that they were unable to receive Eucharist together in their respective churches. This was especially evident around key moments of family life (weddings, funerals, first Communions, etc.).

These stories led to a conversation about the 1993 Ecumenical Directory and how one best interprets its norms for Eucharistic sharing. Before the meeting ended,
there was an agreement that the CADEIO Dialogue Group would use their next phone dialogue to explore the issue of Eucharistic sharing within the Ecumenical Directory in light of the experiences of interchurch families.

A subtext of this conversation was a commentary on the various pastoral approaches employed by local parish/congregational leaders. The group explored together how best to address pastoral issues as they arise, noting what they found helpful and unhelpful. “It feels like we had to reinvent the wheel each time something came up” one interchurch participant noted. This led to a brief conversation about the need to pursue resource development at the national, regional and local (diocesan and parish) levels. Gathering up the stories of interchurch couples and making them widely available might be a start, one participant suggested.

The interchurch couples also reflected on the experience of belonging in various ways in one another’s churches. One AAIF member commented on the welcome and continued reception she experiences at her husband’s church, even after his recent death. It was a moving account. His church is now hers too, she proudly claimed.

Beyond the formal conversation, there were countless other side conversations that took place before, during and after the food was served. These moments of bonding added much to the evening.

The most insightful comment of the night may have come as it ended. One participant shared with me that the most important development on this warm night in Louisville may have been (simply) that this meeting took place. It showed to the interchurch participant that it felt like people in leadership roles within the Church had taken the time to listen to their stories in ways that had not always been the case. That, in itself, was empowering to her and she hopes that future gatherings can be similarly arranged.

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By Dan Olsen, 9/22/2016
Please see the following documents which can be found at the following links: Our discussions with the Ecumenical Officers at the NWCU focused on material which can be found at the following links:


PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM - AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM DIRECTORY FOR THE APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES AND NORMS ON ECUMENISM

I would like to draw your attention to the following passages that pertain to interchurch marriages in this document:

B. SHARING SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES: General Principles

b) Sharing Sacramental Life with Christians of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities

129. A sacrament is an act of Christ and of the Church through the Spirit.130 Its celebration in a concrete community is the sign of the reality of its unity in faith, worship and community life. As well as being signs, sacraments—most specially
the Eucharist—are sources of the unity of the Christian community and of spiritual life, and are means for building them up. Thus Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression.

At the same time, the Catholic Church teaches that by baptism members of other Churches and ecclesial Communities are brought into a real, even if imperfect communion, with the Catholic Church and that "baptism, which constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn... is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ". The Eucharist is, for the baptized, a spiritual food which enables them to overcome sin and to live the very life of Christ, to be incorporated more profoundly in Him and share more intensely in the whole economy of the Mystery of Christ.

It is in the light of these two basic principles, which must always be taken into account together, that in general the Catholic Church permits access to its Eucharistic communion and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick, only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. For the same reasons, it also recognizes that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities.

130. In case of danger of death, Catholic ministers may administer these sacraments when the conditions given below (n. 131) are present. In other cases, it is strongly recommended that the diocesan Bishop, taking into account any norms which may have been established for this matter by the Episcopal Conference or by the Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches, establish general norms for judging situations of grave and pressing need and for verifying the conditions mentioned below (n. 131). In accord with Canon Law, these general norms are to be established only after consultation with at least the local competent authority of the other interested Church or ecclesial Community. Catholic ministers will judge individual cases and administer these sacraments only in accord with these established norms, where they exist. Otherwise they will judge according to the norms of this Directory.

131. The conditions under which a Catholic minister may administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, of penance and of the anointing of the sick to a baptized person who may be found in the circumstances given above (n. 130) are that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.

C. MIXED MARRIAGES

http://interchurchfamilies.org/index.php/other-articles/being-one-at-home-review.html Because of problems concerning Eucharistic sharing which may arise from the presence of non-Catholic witnesses and guests, a mixed marriage celebrated according to the Catholic form ordinarily takes place outside the Eucharistic liturgy. For a just cause, however, the diocesan Bishop may permit the celebration of the Eucharist.
the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party of the marriage may be admitted to Eucharistic communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter both for Eastern Christians 152 and for other Christians,153 taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians.

160. Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case the norms stated above concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to Eucharistic communion,154 as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in Eucharistic communion in another Church,155 must be observed.

Chapter II The Practice of Ecumenism #8
… Yet worship in common (communicatio in sacris) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity. There are two main principles governing the practice of such common worship: first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace. Witness to the unity of the Church very generally forbids common worship to Christians, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice.…

Further information regarding the pastoral care of Interchurch Families can be found at the following links:

Interchurch Families and Christian Unity: Rome 2003 - This paper was formally adopted by the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families held at the Mondo Migliore Centre near Rome, 24-28 July 2003. “Conclusion: Interchurch families are greatly encouraged when their ecclesial communions see them not as problems, but as pioneers of Christian unity. They are called to witness by their lives, their actions and their words to the fundamental and growing unity of all Christian people, and to share a common life in the Church for the reconciliation of our churches.


Being One at Home: Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches, Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, Ray Temmerman (eds.) (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 224 pages.

This collection of talks and articles is a product of what has come to be known in international interchurch family circles as the ‘domestic church project’. The idea came out of an informal visit by a number of representatives of interchurch family groups to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome in 2005. This was a follow-up visit to one that took place on the occasion of the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families, Rome 2003. The Pontifical Council staff said that they would like to be informed of the outcome of that Gathering, and the return visit duly took place two years later. — Ruth Reardon
Many Thanks

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~ M.J. Glauber