

Interchurch Families: Christian Unity Made Visible in our Households

by Father George Kilcourse

From Friday, July 9, through Sunday, July 11, the American Association of Interchurch Families (AAIF) will convene for its biennial national conference at Holy Wisdom Monastery near Madison, Wisconsin. AAIF, now in its third decade, undertakes ecumenical advocacy and support roles on behalf of the growing number of interchurch marriages and families around the United States. In some areas, marriages between Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox Christians are no longer rare but are proving to be the new majority.

Interchurch families and their pastoral advisers define an interchurch marriage as one which: (1) joins in marriage two baptized Christians from different church traditions; (2) each spouse participates actively in her or his particular church, and to various degrees in one another's church; and (3) each spouse takes an active, conscientious role in the religious education of their children.

The keynote speaker for the July 9-11 conference will be Prof. Lynn Turner of Marquette University. She will address participants on Saturday morning, July 10 from her expertise in "family systems" theory and practice and its contributions in improving healthy communications among family members. Prof. Turner's practical application of family systems to the lives of interchurch families will also bring insights to help us to improve relationships among the "family of Christian churches"—no less a victim of miscommunication across its diverse spectrum. Her presentation will prove helpful to interchurch couples and children as well as those from same-church families.

The Benedictine Women of Madison, who form the unique ecumenical community at Holy Wisdom Monastery, will address and

orient AAIF participants and other guests on Friday evening, July 9. There is a genuine convergence in the genesis of AAIF households and these Benedictine Women who have opened their household community to members of other Christian churches and traditions. Both groups palpably give witness to a *visible* unity which our respective churches scandalously accept while they remain divided, contrary to Jesus' prayer: "I pray not only for them, 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 17:20)

On Saturday afternoon, July 10, an ecumenical pastoral panel will reflect of the gifts and challenges of interchurch families, in light of the Benedictine Women at Holy Wisdom Monastery's story and the insights of Prof. Lynn Turner about "family systems." An Open Forum on Saturday evening will afford ample time and opportunity for participants to raise questions, discuss strategies, and narrate ecumenical pastoral events in their lives as interchurch families. The evening will conclude with a social hour for new friendships and reunions to be cultivated among participants from various parts of the country.

Following the Friday evening meal, Fr. Ernest Falardeau, S.S.S., a Blessed Sacrament priest from New York City and an AAIF pastoral adviser, will speak on "Eucharist: A Challenge for the Churches." Following the Saturday evening meal, Fr. George Kilcourse, an AAIF pastoral adviser, will speak on the recent mid-March conference at Leuven University, Belgium on the "Domestic Church" and IFIN (The Interchurch Family International Network) developments.

Oblates and friends of Holy Wisdom Monastery are especially welcome to join AAIF for this July 9-11 national conference. Clergy, pastoral associates, educators, and laity or members of local and regional churches are welcome and encouraged to join us. Activities including hiking at nearby sites, tours to points of interest in the area, activities for children at nearby recreational facilities, and a Sunday evening boat ride and dinner—all detailed on the AAIF web site. The environs, with Holy

Wisdom Monastery's ecological reverence for the earth and creation, and their certified green commitment to energy conservation will add a new perspective for participants at the conference. Equally contributing to your spiritual renewal is the ethos of contemplative prayer that the Holy Wisdom community shares—both in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Sunday Assembly Eucharist, to which all are invited.

For complete information on the program, registration, meals, travel directions, and a letter of welcome from our Co-Chairs, Laura and Franz Green of Virginia Beach, VA., see the AAIF web site: www.aifusa.org

For an international perspective on interchurch families, links to diverse national interchurch family associations, and documents from international and national ecumenical meetings see the web site: www.interchurchfamilies.org