



A GIFT UNOPENED

A statistical analysis of Mixed Religion marriages in Canada



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Executive Summary

- The Catholic Church keeps a registry of all marriages where at least one spouse is a Catholic, and either a) the marriage is celebrated within the Catholic Church, or b) it is celebrated in another Christian tradition, with the marriage record being sent back to the parish(es) where the baptism(s) of the Catholic spouse(s) took place.
- Of all such ecclesially recorded marriages, Mixed Religion marriages (i.e. between a Catholic and a baptized person of another Christian tradition) comprise approximately 10%.
- Based on available, if dated, data from civil society, of all marriages with at least one Catholic spouse, fewer than 25% are recorded in Catholic parish registers.
- Well over half of civilly recorded marriages (which includes ecclesially recorded marriages) in which at least one spouse is Catholic are marriages where one spouse is not Catholic.
- Of those in which both spouses are Christian, with at least one of the spouses being Catholic, again more than half are marriages between a Catholic and a Christian of another tradition, i.e. a Mixed Religion marriage.
- These couples, domestic churches in their own right based on their baptism and marriage, hold and live a gift of unity, a gift not only for them but for the whole Church.
- There being no record within the Catholic Church of their existence, the gift they bring is unrecognized there, despite the fact these spouses identified themselves as still affiliated in some way with the Catholic Church at the time of marriage.
- As such they are beyond the reach of the majority of Catholic clergy, whether these spouses are active participants in worship or not.
- Those with the greatest probability and possibility of connecting with people in Mixed Religion marriages, regardless of their ecclesial affiliation, are the laity, who work alongside them, send their children to the same schools, etc.
- Any outreach vehicle must be seen by the laity as being valuable in and of itself, both for those reaching out and those being reached.
- Any outreach vehicle must primarily involve the laity, who must be empowered and trusted to live their evangelical mission.
- Any outreach activity must not have as its focus an increase in the number of participants in worship. Rather, it must seek to help Mixed Religion couples discover and develop a sense of their value, within their respective traditions and with each other's, enabling and encouraging them to live their gift of unity and to share it with their churches and the Church for the healing of ecclesial disunity.

It is my sincere hope that this challenge may be taken up, and bear fruit.



Mixed Marriage Research: The Findings

Preamble

This paper is another step in a project seeking to explore the contemporary reality of mixed marriages, and in particular that subset known as interchurch marriages. That project involves developing a theology of mixed marriage, understanding the terms we use when speaking of Eucharist across denominational lines, and developing a vehicle or tool whereby mixed marriage and interchurch couples can be recognized for the gift they live and offer to their churches, call them forth in gift, and enable and encourage them to share it with others for the good of all.

While the data from which this paper draws is limited to Canada, the theology of interchurch marriage, and the gift God has given such couples for the healing of ecclesial disunity, applies to the whole world.

This work follows on what began as research into the theology of mixed marriages. The focus of that research, begun purely on theology and ecclesiology, changed into research on the reality on the ground, with a view to identifying the pastoral challenges mixed-marriage families present, but also (and, I believe, in the end more valuable) the opportunities for the healing of ecclesial dysfunction and disunity that such marriages and families offer to their churches. All this must, of course, be firmly grounded in sound theology and ecclesiology.

Research into Mixed Religion marriages (commonly known as mixed marriages) within the Catholic Church in Canada has proved rewarding, in the level of response, in what that response indicates about the level of interest in the matter by Catholic bishops in Canada, and in what the data indicates about mixed marriages in Canada.

The process

In December 2018, 71 letters were sent, one to each Latin and Eastern rite diocese of the Catholic Church in Canada, as well as the Military Ordinariate. In these letters, I introduced myself, indicating some of them knew me from my time as President of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, and all of them were aware of me from two books I had provided them, “Being One at Home: Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches” (edited by Prof Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi of the Catholic University of Leuven and myself),¹ the other being “Christian Unity: How You Can Make a difference” by Fr Thomas Ryan CSP.²

In the letter, I indicated that I was researching mixed marriages in Canada, with a view to identifying and responding to the pastoral challenges and opportunities such marriages present. To that end, I asked for marriage statistics for three years, 2015, 2016 and 2017. I asked for three years so that anomalies could be identified and eliminated, thereby giving a more accurate overall picture.

¹ Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, Ray Temmerman (Eds.), *Being One at Home: Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches*, (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2015).

² Thomas Ryan, *Christian Unity: How You Can Make a Difference*, (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2015).

Within that request, I asked for 1) the number of marriages between two Catholics, 2) the number of marriages between a Catholic and a baptized person of another Christian tradition, and 3) the number of marriages between a Catholic and someone who is not baptized. The latter could range from an atheist, through a faithful Jew or Muslim, to a deeply catechized but not yet baptized follower of Christ. The only criteria was that the person was not baptized.

In March 2019, having received a number of responses, I sent a reminder letter to all dioceses from which I had not yet received a response. I included in that letter a sample of data already received, and an initial finding that the data indicated very clearly a range of pastoral realities across the country, which in turn called for a range of pastoral responses. I sent the same sample data and initial finding to all dioceses which had already responded, as a way of thanking them for the data they had provided.

Data Distribution

In surveys such as this, the expectation is that about 15-20% of those surveyed will respond. That would have meant about 14 respondents. The actual response was far greater, indicating a level of interest far beyond anything I had imagined.

Of 71 requests, data was submitted from 41 dioceses or eparchies plus the Military Ordinariate, for a total of 42 responses and a response rate of 59%. Statistically, this must be seen as an excellent rate.

The responses were also well distributed across the country by episcopal region. The Atlantic region provided 4 of a possible 10 responses, a 40% response rate. Quebec provided 14 of 19, or 74%. Ontario provided 10 of 17, or 67%, while western Canada provided 13 of 18 responses, for 72%. The Military Ordinariate, concerning troops spread across the country and around the world, also responded.

While the response rate given above is significant, there is another factor which demonstrates an even greater significance. That is the percentage of Canadian Catholics who live within these dioceses, eparchies and ordinariates. According to statistics gathered by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops,³ Canada has some 13,999,762 Catholics. The respondents represent 11,324,316, Catholics, or 81%. This is a very substantial response rate, deserving of careful analysis.

The raw data follows below.

³ *Directory 2019*, (Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops / Conacan Inc., 2019)

Marriages: Diocesan Responses

Diocese	Responses: 41			Catholics	Totals		
	Prov	Reg			Total 2015	Total 2016	Total 2017
Antigonish	NS	E		117,860	198	195	150
Charlottetown	PEI	E		62,700	177	164	140
Edmundston	NB	E		43,284	55	47	39
Halifax-Yarmouth	NS	E		182,430	144	139	134
	Population:	2,333,322		406,274	574	545	463
	Response Rate:	4	40%	45%			
Hamilton	ON	ON		652,169	883	930	771
Kingston	ON	ON		116,500	151	120	144
London	ON	ON		444,310	582	579	524
Ottawa	ON	ON		394,515	453	434	493
Pembroke	ON	ON		66,000	65	87	87
Peterborough	ON	ON		76,320	75	83	89
Sault Ste Marie	ON	ON		164,000	185	169	156
St Catherine	ON	ON		163,791	209	188	220
Timmins	ON	ON		50,605	38	36	35
Toronto	ON	ON		2,107,967	3118	3009	2928
	Population:	13,448,494		4,236,177	5759	5635	5447
	Response Rate:	10	67%	96%			
Baie-Comeau	QC	QC		88,732	71	58	55
Chicoutimi	QC	QC		248,980	241	237	204
Gatineau	QC	QC		252,478	121	131	117
Joliette	QC	QC		266,995	166	153	137
Maronites in Canada	QC	QC		4,100	115	137	84
Montreal	QC	QC		980,000	1084	1073	914
Nicolet	QC	QC		215,740	164	134	131
Rimouski	QC	QC		141,797	109	105	88
Rouyn-Noranda	QC	QC		54,972	42	33	42
Saint-Hyacinthe	QC	QC		389,425	316	279	237
Saint-Jean-Longueuil	QC	QC		615,479	216	189	166
Saint-Jérôme	QC	QC		415,748	299	204	187
Sherbrooke	QC	QC		268,173	196	187	142
Trois Rivieres	QC	QC		247,616	138	127	122
	Population:	8,164,361		4,190,235	3278	3047	2626
	Response Rate:	14	74%	73%			
Calgary	AB	W		508,848	487	449	365
Churchill-Hudson Bay	NU	W		9,220	0	0	29
Edmonton	AB	W		419,830	573	504	513
Grouard McLennan	AB	W		49,424	57	32	43
Keewatin-Le Pas	ON	W		48,902	67	63	63
Mackenzie-Fort Smith	NT	W		20,110	39	26	31
Nelson	BC	W		78,000	0	0	56

Prince George	BC	W	49,500	39	49	32
Regina	SK	W	120,000	160	168	119
St Boniface	MB	W	113,170	127	98	94
St Paul	AB	W	107,381	40	55	41
Vancouver	BC	W	437,245	642	649	639
Winnipeg	MB	W	155,000	258	234	200
Population:	11,091,947		2,116,630	2489	2327	2225
Response Rate:	13	72%	88%			
Military Ordinariate	ON		375,000	74	68	60
Response Rate:			11,324,316	12174	11622	10821
Possible Responses:	71		% of Catholics:			
Actual Responses:	42	59%	81%			

To interchurch families, the issue of interchurch marriages has often been experienced as not being on Church radar in Canada. The response rate, especially as it is relatively evenly distributed across the country, is a very welcome indication that the issue is in fact of significant interest and importance to our bishops.

Indeed, this was spelled out in the response of one bishop, who said “With great appreciation I would like to express my gratitude and thank you for your contribution to the work of Roman Catholic Church and its Mission in the view of Marriage situation across Canada.

Differentiation and Difference

Marriages: Numbers

Diocese	Catholic-Catholic			Catholic-Other			Catholic-Not Baptized (Disp Cult)			Catholic - Baptized (MR)		
	C-C: 2015	C-C: 2016	C-C: 2017	C-O: 2015	C-O: 2016	C-O: 2017	C-NB: 2015	C-NB: 2016	C-NB: 2017	C-B: 2015	C-B: 2016	C-B: 2017
Antigonish	144	138	51				18	15	66	36	42	33
Charlottetown	103	105	83	74	59	57						
Edmundston	51	46	37	4	1	2						
Halifax-Yarmouth	101	83	85	43	56	49						
	399	372	256	121	116	108	18	15	66	36	42	33
Hamilton	581	589	525	302	341	246						
Kingston	80	65	75				31	27	31	40	28	38
London	392	393	328				73	72	82	117	114	114
Ottawa	337	326	396				44	52	32	72	56	65
Pembroke	42	57	70				12	16	9	11	14	8
Peterborough	35	46	47				21	18	20	19	19	22
Sault Ste Marie	136	135	109				20	9	13	29	25	34
St Catherine	133	116	128				32	31	30	44	41	62
Timmins	34	26	30				1	7	3	3	3	2
Toronto	2306	2183	2171				460	469	436	352	357	321
	4076	3936	3879	302	341	246	694	701	656	687	657	666
Baie-Comeau	68	54	53				1			2	4	2
Chicoutimi	241	237	201						3			0
Gatineau	112	122	106				5	3	3	4	6	8
Joliette	163	153	137				2		0	1		0
Maronites in Canada	92	117	72	23	20	12						
Montreal	917	941	745	167	132	169						
Nicolet	162	132	130				2	2	1			0

Rimouski	106	102	88				3	1	0		2	0
Rouyn-Noranda	42	32	42					1				
Saint-Hyacinthe	307	270	233				4	8	4	5	1	0
Saint-Jean-Longueuil	206	166	148				5	18	13	5	5	5
Saint-Jérôme	295	195	180					4	1	4	5	6
Sherbrooke	191	183	138				2		3	3	4	1
Trois Rivieres	136	127	121				2		1			0
	3038	2831	2394	190	152	181	26	37	29	24	27	22
Calgary	280	258	213				130	90	73	77	101	79
Churchill-Hudson Bay			22						1			6
Edmonton	346	287	318				102	109	93	125	108	102
Grouard McLennan	39	17	27				9	11	9	9	4	7
Keewatin-Le Pas	58	54	58				4	5	1	5	4	4
Mackenzie-Fort Smith	30	23	29				4	3	1	5		1
Nelson			18						27			11
Prince George	14	27	18				16	18	7	9	4	7
Regina	100	105	70	60	63	49						
St Boniface	86	75	70	41	23	24						
St Paul	24	40	25				10	11	10	6	4	6
Vancouver	353	369	360				184	162	146	105	118	133
Winnipeg	181	137	125				37	27	19	40	70	56
	1511	1392	1353	101	86	73	496	436	387	381	413	412
Military Ordinariate	45	41	39				1	2	0	28	25	21
	9069	8572	7921	714	695	608	1235	1191	1138	1156	1164	1154

Of the 42 responses, 34 provided data differentiated as requested, with 2 being for 2017 alone. Eight of the 42 (20%) provided data in which the issue of baptized versus non-baptized was not differentiated, i.e. wherever there was a marriage in which only one spouse was Catholic, the marriage was listed simply as “Catholic-Other”, whether the other was a baptized Christian or not.

There is a significant difference, theologically and ecclesiologicaly, between the two types of marriage (“Disparity of Cult”, and “Mixed Religion”). The former involves a Catholic in relationship with a person who, while also a child of God, is not an adopted sibling of Christ Jesus, is not a member of the Body of Christ, the ecclesia. The latter, on the other hand, involves a Catholic in relationship with a person who is fully a sibling in the Body of Christ, though the parts of the ecclesia through which they are incarnated into that Body are, for various reasons, more or less estranged from each other.⁴ As such, they bring different pastoral realities, calling for different responses. But they also bring different gifts, especially for the healing of ecclesial disunity. Without making that differentiation, we cannot begin to determine the depth and breadth of either need or gift.

Without certainty as to the reasons for such amalgamation of these statistics, one cannot help but wonder if it indicates an understanding, however unintentional, that the only person of concern here is the Catholic spouse; not the Christian of another tradition, not the unbaptized person, not even the *one* made so by God in marriage. If true, albeit completely unintentional, this would be a most unfortunate situation, one which simply bringing the reality to the dioceses’ attention may be sufficient to have rectified.

Discussions with one diocese have led that diocese to decide to begin gathering data in a way which recognizes that differentiation. Another is now considering making a similar change. It is my sincere hope that all dioceses, not only in Canada but around the world, may gather marriage data in that way. It is also my sincere hope (expressed in a letter to the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life in Vatican City) that the Dicastery may begin to request and report on that data on a global scale. Doing so would allow our Church to call forth the differences, not as problems, but as points of learning, and potential gift for the healing of Christian disunity.

⁴ It is helpful to bear in mind the words of George Tavard, one of the drafters of the *Decree on Ecumenism*: “First, the Latin term used to designate other Christians with whom Catholics ought to be in ecumenical dialogue was not *fratres separati*, but *fratres seiuncti*. This was done deliberately at the request of Cardinal Baggio, well known for his mastery of the Latin language: *separati*, he argued, would imply that there are and can be no relationships between the two sides; *seiuncti*, on the contrary, would assert that something has been cut between them, yet that separation is not complete and need not be definitive. The nuance does not come through easily in translation, but I would suggest “estranged brothers,” rather than “separated.” (G.H. Tavard, “Reassessing the Reformation,” in *One in Christ*, vol. 19 (1983): 360-61.)

Data analysis challenges

Marriages: Percentages

Diocese	% Catholic only			% Catholic-Other			% Catholic-Not Baptized (Disp Cult)			% Catholic-Baptized (Mixed Religion)		
	% C-C: 2015	% C-C: 2016	% C-C: 2017	% C-O: 2015	% C-O: 2016	% C-O: 2017	% C-NB: 2015	% C-NB: 2016	% C-NB: 2017	% C-B: 2015	% C-B: 2017	% C-B: 2017
Antigonish	73%	71%	34%	0%	0%	0%	9%	8%	44%	18%	22%	22%
Charlottetown	58%	64%	59%	42%	36%	41%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Edmundston	93%	98%	95%	7%	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Halifax-Yarmouth	70%	60%	63%	30%	40%	37%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	70%	68%	55%	21%	21%	23%	3%	3%	14%	6%	8%	7%
Hamilton	66%	63%	68%	34%	37%	32%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Kingston	53%	54%	52%	0%	0%	0%	21%	23%	22%	26%	23%	26%
London	67%	68%	63%	0%	0%	0%	13%	12%	16%	20%	20%	22%
Ottawa	74%	75%	80%	0%	0%	0%	10%	12%	6%	16%	13%	13%
Pembroke	65%	66%	80%	0%	0%	0%	18%	18%	10%	17%	16%	9%
Peterborough	47%	55%	53%	0%	0%	0%	28%	22%	22%	25%	23%	25%
Sault Ste Marie	74%	80%	70%	0%	0%	0%	11%	5%	8%	16%	15%	22%
St Catherine	64%	62%	58%	0%	0%	0%	15%	16%	14%	21%	22%	28%
Timmins	89%	72%	86%	0%	0%	0%	3%	19%	9%	8%	8%	6%
Toronto	74%	73%	74%	0%	0%	0%	15%	16%	15%	11%	12%	11%
	71%	70%	71%	5%	6%	5%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%
Baie-Comeau	96%	93%	96%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	3%	7%	4%
Chicoutimi	100%	100%	99%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Gatineau	93%	93%	91%	0%	0%	0%	4%	2%	3%	3%	5%	7%
Joliette	98%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Maronites in Canada	80%	85%	86%	20%	15%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Montreal	85%	88%	82%	15%	12%	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Nicolet	99%	99%	99%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Rimouski	97%	97%	100%	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%
Rouyn-Noranda	100%	97%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Saint-Hyacinthe	97%	97%	98%	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	2%	2%	0%	0%

Saint-Jean-Longueuil	95%	88%	89%	0%	0%	0%	2%	10%	8%	2%	3%	3%
Saint-Jérôme	99%	96%	96%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%
Sherbrooke	97%	98%	97%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Trois Rivieres	99%	100%	99%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	93%	93%	91%	6%	5%	7%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Calgary	57%	57%	58%	0%	0%	0%	27%	20%	20%	16%	22%	22%
Churchill-Hudson Bay			76%			0%			3%			21%
Edmonton	60%	57%	62%	0%	0%	0%	18%	22%	18%	22%	21%	20%
Grouard McLennan	68%	53%	63%	0%	0%	0%	16%	34%	21%	16%	13%	16%
Keewatin-Le Pas	87%	86%	92%	0%	0%	0%	6%	8%	2%	7%	6%	6%
Mackenzie-Fort Smith	77%	88%	94%	0%	0%	0%	10%	12%	3%	13%	0%	3%
Nelson			32%			0%			48%			20%
Prince George	36%	55%	56%	0%	0%	0%	41%	37%	22%	23%	8%	22%
Regina	63%	63%	59%	38%	38%	41%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
St Boniface	68%	77%	74%	32%	23%	26%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
St Paul	60%	73%	61%	0%	0%	0%	25%	20%	24%	15%	7%	15%
Vancouver	55%	57%	56%	0%	0%	0%	29%	25%	23%	16%	18%	21%
Winnipeg	70%	59%	63%	0%	0%	0%	14%	12%	10%	16%	30%	28%
	61%	60%	61%	4%	4%	3%	20%	19%	17%	15%	18%	19%
Military Ordinariate	61%	60%	65%	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	0%	38%	37%	35%
	74%	74%	73%				10%	10%	11%	9%	10%	11%

This lack of differentiation presents challenges also in analyzing the survey data. For example, initial thoughts of averaging the differentiation, by episcopal region, for the three years in question, and applying the average to the undifferentiated responses, proved possible for 5 of the responses, but not for another 3. Those 3 were all from Atlantic Canada, where only 1 reported in a differentiated manner. In addition, 1 of the responses from Atlantic Canada was clearly different from the others in regards the number of Catholic-Other marriages, having almost no such marriages (no year above 7%) while the other three had a significant number (no year under 30%). To average all those would skew the results.

That one diocese with the low rate of Catholic-Other marriages is Edmunston, one of two francophone dioceses in New Brunswick, which may give an indication of the reason for the response. The data there falls in line with data from Quebec (also francophone) where marriages across denominations or faiths are consistently significantly lower than in other regions. Other than Montreal (which has a significant multi-lingual and multi-ethnic influence), no diocese in Quebec reported less than 88% of marriages having both spouses as Catholic. Montreal itself recorded 82-88% marriages, depending on year, between Catholics. The overall average of marriages between 2 Catholics was 93% in Quebec, whereas other regions show overall averages ranging from 60-71% of marriages being between 2 Catholics.

The Maronite eparchy, headquartered in Montreal, presents similar findings to Montreal.

Within this overall picture, it must be remembered that while Atlantic Canada and Quebec indicate the highest percentage of self-identified Christians (78% and higher),⁵ Quebec has experienced the greatest drop in religious attendance, from 48% in 1986 to 17% in 2011, while Atlantic Canada fell from 57% to 31% in the same period. Meanwhile, other regions, while beginning with lower attendance rates, held fairly steady, e.g Ontario (42 – 31%), the Prairie Provinces (41 – 31%), and British Columbia (26 – 23%).⁶ Whether there is any correlation between the dramatic drop in attendance rate and the exceptionally high Catholic-Catholic marriage rate in Quebec cannot be determined at this point. More research is called for in this area, but is outside the scope of this study.

The experience of Quebec and Edmunston is paralleled nowhere else in Canada. In Atlantic Canada as a whole, for example, about 55-70% (depending on year) of marriages are between two Catholics. Given that 3 of the 4 responding dioceses did not differentiate, simply placing all non-Catholics together into an ‘other’ category, it is impossible to know with certainty what percentages each differentiated category holds.

The closest we can come are the dioceses of Timmins in Ontario (6-8% of marriages being Mixed Religion) and Keewatin-Le Pas in northern Manitoba (6-7% of marriages being Mixed Religion). All other dioceses have higher to significantly higher levels of Mixed Religion marriages.

⁵ *Religion in Canada*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Canada accessed 29 June 2019.

⁶ *Canada's Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/27/canadas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed 29 June 2019.

The possibility of applying the results from the one differentiated diocese (Antigonish) to those in a region that did not differentiate is negated when looking at the results from Antigonish. While it had a fairly consistent range of 18-22% of marriages between a Catholic and a baptized Christian, it also showed the largest range in Catholic-Catholic marriages, from 73% in 2015 to 34% in 2017, and the largest range in marriages to a non-baptized person, being 8-9% in 2015-16, and 44% in 2017. As a result of such variations, it became evident that there was no rationale for simply applying the ratios of the one differentiated diocese to the other dioceses.

Other variations

Excepting the two dioceses already mentioned, the results from Ontario and western Canada are more closely aligned with each other.

Ontario shows a range of 52-89% of marriages being between two Catholics, with an overall average of 70-71% depending on year. One diocese reported without differentiation. If we exclude that diocese, the rest show an almost even split between baptized and non-baptized.

Western Canada is somewhat different again. Here we find about 60-65% of marriages being between two Catholics, with the rest of the marriages being again somewhat evenly split, ranging anywhere from 15-20% depending on category and year.

The Military Ordinariate shows yet another situation. Here we have, as with western Canada, 60-65% of marriages being between two Catholics. The remainder, however, is far from evenly divided. Instead, we have only 1-3% of marriages between a Catholic and a non-baptized person, and some 35-38% (again, depending on year) of marriages between a Catholic and a baptized Christian of another tradition.

It is clear, from this brief overview of the data, that pastoral situations vary greatly across the country. Therefore, pastoral response may rightly vary across the country. According to Church data, francophone Canada, for example, has such a low number of marriages that are not between two Catholics that the Church there may seriously question putting significant resources toward that pastoral reality, helpful though it may be for the married couples involved, and for the churches of which they are part.

Mixed Religion marriages

While situations vary according to region, across Canada as a whole there are a significant number of marriages which the Church has recorded as being either 'Mixed Religion' or subsumed under the catch-all of 'Other'. If we look only at those marriages which are specified as being of Mixed Religion, they consistently run at approximately 10% of all marriages. If we assume that non-reporting dioceses experience similar levels of marriage in general, and Mixed Religion marriages in particular, and that non-reporting dioceses account for some 19% of Catholics, we can reasonably assume that just under 10,000 marriages are recorded within the Catholic Church each year, with about 10% or 1,000 being Mixed Religion.

This is not a large number, stretched across the breadth of Canada, but over the years amounts to a cohort large enough to warrant serious reflection, and a process of outreach to them, for their good and the good of the whole Church.

This is especially true if we begin looking at mixed marriages not as a problem but as a source of gift to the churches and the Church.

Other data sources

There is another source of data which should also be considered, and that is the number of marriages between people of different Christian traditions, as recorded by Statistics Canada.⁷ Here we draw on statistics gathered in 2002. (The data ceased to be gathered in the same form after 2003.)

Marriages, Canada, 2002, by religion of groom and religion of bride, opposite-sex marriages 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Table: null (formerly CANSIM 101-1009)

		Total, all marriages:	146,738	Percentages	
		Involving a Catholic:	41,021	28.0%	
		Both Catholic:	17101	41.7%	
		Mixed Religion:	17743	43.3%	
		Disparity of Cult:	6,177	15.1%	
Mixed Religion (One spouse Catholic):					
Bride Catholic		Groom Catholic			
Groom:		Bride:			
Anglican	2,070	Anglican	2,021	4,091	
Baptist	368	Baptist	340	708	
Lutheran	613	Lutheran	612	1,225	
Mennonite and Hutterite	97	Mennonite and Hutterite	69	166	
Orthodox	437	Orthodox	433	870	
Pentecostal	218	Pentecostal	268	486	
Presbyterian	491	Presbyterian	518	1,009	
Salvation Army	82	Salvation Army	89	171	
United Church	2,190	United Church	2,245	4,435	
other Christian	2,354	other Christian	2,228	4,582	
Total Christian:	8,920	Total Christian:	8,823	17,743	43.3%
Disparity of Cult					
Jehovah's Witnesses	5	Jehovah's Witnesses	6	11	
Jewish	124	Jewish	80	204	
other non-Christian	484	other non-Christian	342	826	
other specified	9	other specified	5	14	
no religion	2,171	no religion	1,534	3,705	
not collected by province		not collected by province			
10	0	10	0	0	
unknown or not stated 11	858	unknown or not stated 11	559	1,417	
Total non-Christian:	3651	Total non-Christian:	2526	6,177	15.1%

⁷ Statistics Canada. Table 39-10-0015-01 *Marriages, by religion of groom and religion of bride, opposite-sex marriages*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=3910001501>, accessed 16 Nov 2019.

Footnotes

- 1 Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Marriage Database
- 2 Prior to 2003, marriage was defined as the legal union of two persons of the opposite sex. Since 2003, the definition of marriage has been changed in some provinces and territories to include the legal union of two persons of the same sex. Common-law relationships are excluded.
- 3 This table contains data on opposite-sex marriages only.
- 4 The words 'groom' and 'bride' are used for opposite-sex marriages. The word 'spouse' is used for same-sex marriages.
- 5 Religion refers to the religious denomination reported on the marriage certificate.
- 6 The following standard symbols are used in this Statistics Canada table: (..) for figures not available for a specific reference period, (...) for figures not applicable, (x) for figures suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act and (0s) for a value that rounds to zero.
- 7
Following provincial court rulings in 2003, vital statistics registries in Ontario and British Columbia started registering marriages of same-sex couples. In 2004, subsequent rulings by courts in five provinces (Québec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador) and one territory (Yukon) expanded the number of jurisdictions registering same-sex marriages. A court ruling in New Brunswick allowed same-sex marriages, a month before federal legislation legalized same-sex marriages across Canada, on July 20, 2005. Starting with the year 2003, Statistics Canada will publish data on three types of marriages: opposite-sex marriage, male same-sex marriage and female same-sex marriage.
- 8 A table with data on religious denomination of the spouses for same-sex marriages is not published, because British Columbia does not collect data on the religion of the spouses and as of 2003 Ontario marriage registration forms do not include a data element to identify whether the marriage is opposite-sex or same-sex. As of 2003, Ontario data are not included in the table.
- 9 The geographic distribution of marriages in the table is based on the place of occurrence, that is, marriages that took place in Canada. Marriage statistics may include marriages of non-residents of Canada and non-residents of the province or territory where the marriage took place.
- 10 For 2000 to 2004, religion is not collected by New Brunswick, Quebec, British Columbia and the Yukon.
- 11 For 2000 to 2004, the majority of unknown or not stated cases are from Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta.

Statistics Canada. Table null Marriages, by religion of groom and religion of bride, opposite-sex marriages
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3910001501>

Data from this specific year is selected for a variety of reasons. First, 2003 was the last year for which marriages in Canada were recorded as being between a man and a woman. Subsequently, some provinces introduced legislation recognizing same-sex unions, and recorded those within their statistics. I am, here, dealing only with heterosexual marriages. Secondly, the years 2000, 2001, and 2002 show a similarity in data, with each following year showing a small drop in marriages. 2003 on the other hand shows a significant drop in recorded marriages. That steep drop may persist in following years, but as I do not have data from later years, and later years show marriages, at least in some provinces, being between people of the same sex, I have elected to retain the year most in line with the majority (2002), and drop 2003 from the list as an anomaly.

It must also be recognized that in 2000-2004, data on religions in marriage was not collected in British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick and Yukon. As a general indication, we can say (working from 2016 data) that the data on religious traditions in marriages covers approximately 61% of the Canadian population.⁸ Within the remaining data-collection area, this data includes all marriages, be they church-related or otherwise. As such, it presents some very important facts.

⁸ *World Population Review*, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/>, accessed 19 June 2019.

The data collected shows 146,732 marriages in Canada in 2002. Of these, 41,021 or 28% have at least one Catholic spouse. Of these, 6,177 or 15.1% are between a Catholic and a non-Christian, and hence outside the scope of this research. Of the remaining 34,844 marriages, 17,101 (49%) are between two Catholics, with a further 17,743 (50.9%) marriages where one spouse is Catholic, the other a disciple of Christ of another tradition. Whether that Christian disciple is baptized or not is impossible to say. All we can be certain of is that the person self-identifies as being from one of a specified group of Christian traditions.

It is significant that, within the secular data, a slight majority of marriages are between a Catholic and a Christian of another tradition. **More Catholics marry Christians of other traditions than marry other Catholics. This is not evidenced in any of the Church records.**

The Christian traditions of the various spouses fall primarily into three denominations. The largest number are from the United Church (4,435), with Anglicans a very close second at 4,091. Next is a catch-all category entitled simply ‘Other Christians’, for 4,582 spouses, both male and female. From there the numbers drop off rapidly, with two denominations of slightly over 1,000 each, the rest much smaller.

Initial conclusions

In 2002, as we have seen, we are working with a specific subset of provinces and territories in Canada, comprising (in 2019 terms) some 6,526,052 Catholics, or 47% of all Catholics. As we have already seen, that group, in 2002, recorded a total of 41,021 marriages, of which 17,743 were marriages in which only one spouse was Catholic, the other a Christian of another tradition. If we extrapolate that to take in the remaining 53% of all Catholics, we can more than double the number of marriages across denominational lines, to approximately 36,000. Yet in 2015-2017, that same subset region shows an average of only 7,806 marriages being recorded in the Catholic Church, of which about 800 would be Mixed Religion. Add to that a further 200 to cover those dioceses that did not report, and we have about 1,000 Mixed Religion marriages. Yet the secular statistics from 2002 show there to be about 36,000 such marriages. That is a huge discrepancy. We need to look further, to verify that the numbers we are dealing with are reasonably accurate.

An article in *Wedding Bells*, an e-publication, indicates an estimated 160,324 weddings in Canada for 2015.⁹ This is an increase of some 17% over 2002. By comparison, the Canadian population grew from 31,024,072 in census year 2001, to 36,289,822 in census year 2016, an increase of only 9%.¹⁰ It is not an exact equivalence, but sufficient to suggest that the numbers recorded in secular society then and now are realistic.

As we have already seen, the total number of marriages in 2002 within the given subset region where a Catholic was involved was 41,021. That represents 47% of Canadian Catholics as of 2019, but 61% of the estimated 36,000,000 Canadian population today. (The discrepancy can be understood when one considers that people in Quebec, not included in the subset, self-identify as

⁹ Jen O’Brien, “Wedding Trends in Canada 2015”, *Wedding Bells* (Toronto, ON: ST Joseph’s Media Inc.) <https://weddingbells.ca/planning/wedding-trends-in-canada-2015/> accessed 20 June 2019.

¹⁰ *World Population Review*, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/>, accessed 19 June 2019.

predominantly Catholic, and hence a correspondingly larger part of the excluded Catholic population.) If we extrapolate to the total Canadian population, we arrive at an approximate number of 70,000 marriages in which at least one spouse is Catholic. Then there are all the marriages in which an Anglican marries an Anglican, a Lutheran marries a United Church person, two Muslims marry, etc.

We can safely conclude that the vast majority of marriages in which at least one spouse is Catholic do not take place within the Catholic Church. Whether they take place in other Christian churches, with the record of marriage not sent back to the Catholic parish, or in the context of another faith, or in a secular context, we do not know.

On the one hand, this is a great sadness, as these couples are unable to avail themselves of the full graces that come with the sacramental life and liturgy of the Church. Both they and the Church are the poorer for it.

On the other hand, they represent a very large portion of the population who may at some point be invited to reflect on their marriages within a spiritual and ecclesial perspective, may be able to be nurtured through the Good News in their lives of faith and in their marriages.

Where to now?

As indicated in the beginning, this project relates to those couples in which one spouse is Catholic, the other a member of another Christian tradition. It is being carried out in hope of recognizing their presence and participation in the one Body of Christ, the Church, listening to their stories of faith, calling them forth in a way which nurtures and sustains them in the unity of their bonds of baptism and marriage, and celebrates the unity they live, for their wellbeing and for the good of the whole Church. As such, that very large group appears at first glance to be beyond the scope of this research and its potential fruits. But is this truly the case, or is there another truth to be recognized here?

It is clear that the Catholic Church in Canada, as institution, has little or no connection to the multitude of marriages taking place in which one spouse is Catholic. Therefore any program inviting such couples to tell their story, be listened to, and nurtured in the realization of their gift of unity cannot be focused on the institutional Church.

These same couples are, however, known to couples within the Christian churches, through their workplaces, the schools to which they send their children, the communities in which they live and work. As such, it becomes clear that any vehicle, any tool used in any process or program must focus on the laity, in any Christian church, whereby they invite their brothers and sisters in Christ, whether active in a church or not, to come together in their homes, there to recognize each other, listen to and learn from each other, and in the process call each other forth in realizing the gift of unity they live in their marriages, a gift that is also there for the healing of ecclesial disunity.

This is not intended to increase ecclesial participation, though that may well be a result. It must focus not on the Church as institution, but on the gift of faith that lives in each of the spouses and

couples, recognizing, welcoming, including, nurturing, first and foremost for the wellbeing of the couple in their realization of unity. We can leave the rest to God, trusting that His power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

In short, the laity must be empowered and equipped to take up their work of sharing and enhancing the gift of faith and unity which has been given them, and which they are called to share, as gift, with each other.

The Way Forward

The envisaged way forward is that of Receptive Ecumenism. For this, I am most indebted to the work of Dr Paul Murray of Durham, UK.

Receptive Ecumenism works on the principle that, in the ecclesia, the greatest way forward is to ask not "What does your tradition first need to learn from mine?" but "What do I need to learn from yours?" You might say that Receptive Ecumenism calls for receptive learning. The assumption is that if all were asking this question seriously and acting upon it then all would be moving in ways that would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into more intimate relationship.¹¹

In receptive learning, we do not only value the other. We equally recognize our own difficulty and need; a need and difficulty, moreover, which cannot easily be addressed from our own existing resources, and so prompts us to look with a sense of lack and longing as well as appreciative desire at the gifts and strengths the other brings.

While the self-critical and ecclesially reforming dimension to Receptive Ecumenism can be lost from view, (as Dr Murray says, "become sanitised down into encouraging us just to be a bit more appreciative of each other"), Receptive Ecumenism invites us to something more challenging and transformative than that; something which seeks to take our unitive realities, in all their imperfection, seriously. Dr Murray sees interchurch marriages as wonderful RE sacraments because the fundamental movement at the heart of RE – which is the movement of the Spirit – is the movement of love. Deeper than the repentant recognition of our own difficulty and dysfunction, deeper than any hard-nosed reasoning about the causes of this and possible ways forward, deeper than strategizing, is the movement of loving attraction and desire. RE is indeed all of these other things, and needs so to be, but at its core it is a matter of falling in love; the kind of love that moves us, drives us, enables us to become more than we have been.¹²

In this, people in mixed marriages, and especially those in that subset known as interchurch marriages, can be called to mission – "very humble, of course, but prophetic to serve the unity of the church. Mission to encourage meetings between the local churches, Mission to remind the members of these churches of the practical points which unite us, Mission to go beyond the rules,

¹¹ Cf <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/constructivetheology/receptiveecumensim/>

¹² Private conversation, via email, between Dr Murray and the writer.

for example in the field of eucharistic hospitality, Mission to help our churches forward on the road to unity.”¹³

Through such mission by way of receptive dialogue and learning, we expect to find ourselves developing deeper understandings and richer relationships which will help us deal with the difficult questions. In this, I want to stress that RE does not make the difficult questions go away! What it does is establish a relationship, a relationship of respect and love, within which we become capable of dealing with the hard questions.

It will not be possible for mixed marriage couples, even fully interchurch families, to resolve everything. That is not possible in the context of estranged churches. But a process of Receptive Ecumenism, led by lay people, relating to their peers both inside and outside of the Church and the churches, with their church leaders participating by listening and learning more than telling and teaching, may help resolve some questions. More importantly, it will enable mixed marriage couples, and their churches, to more easily live peacefully with the questions that remain, knowing they are being recognized and valued, until the unity that Christ prayed for is brought to fruition by the Spirit at a time and in a form that God alone knows, and in a manner which God alone can do.

¹³ Eric Lombard, “From Problem to Mission”, *The Journal*, Vol 2, No. 1, January 1994, <http://interchurchfamilies.org/index.php/the-journal/1990-1995/january-1994-2-1/255-from-problem-to-mission.html> accessed 9 July 2019.