

INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AS DOMESTIC CHURCH

FAMILIAL EXPERIENCES AND ECCLESIAL OPPORTUNITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Theological deliberation on the topic of “domestic church” has until now focused almost entirely on same-church couples. And yet, in North America today some 32% of couples are in mixed-church relationships at the time of their engagement¹.

Since one may receive an answer one does not want to hear, I as a spouse in an interchurch family experience some trepidation in posing the question. Yet it seems important to directly ask: are interchurch families, where each spouse is a baptized Christian from a different tradition who, while retaining his or her original church membership, is also committed to live, worship and participate in their spouse’s church as much as they are able², truly to be considered “domestic church”? If they are not, we must surely question how our theology of marriage could, unnoticed, leave millions of faith-filled and faithful couples around the world in a sort of quasi-ecclesial state of unity. Alternatively, if they are, then not only do these couples and their churches have responsibilities each to the other, but these couples offer prophetic gifts and opportunities for their churches to explore unity, to nurture it in their midst, and together to grow into that unity which is at the heart of God.

It is as a contribution to answering that question that I chose to research indicators of “domestic church” in the experience of interchurch families and in their own words, then to explore what opportunities their experience might offer to the churches of which they are members.

The genesis of this project lies in two concrete experiences. The first is my marriage, as a Roman Catholic, to a woman of the Anglican tradition. What began as a journey of love developed into a life-long ecumenical journey. We began living in our marriage the *already* of Christian unity within the *not yet* of unity between our churches. Such families are known variously as interchurch families (Anglophone countries), *foyers mixtes* (France), *konfessionsverbindende Paare und Familien* (Germany), *Coppie interconfessionali* (Italy). The second is more prosaic. I participated in a meeting in Rome, Italy, in 2005, between representatives of the Interchurch Families International Network and some members of the staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity³ where we were invited to begin exploring the reality of the term “domestic church”.

II. RESEARCH

¹ M.G. LAWLER, et al., *Ministry to Interchurch Marriage: A National Study*. Omaha, NE, Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University, 1999, p. 5.

² Cf. *Interchurch Families and Christian Unity: Rome 2003*, paper formally adopted by the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families held at the Mondo Migliore Centre near Rome, 24-28 July 2003; available on http://interchurchfamilies.org/confer/rome2003/documents/roma2003_en.pdf; accessed 22.02.2011.

³ G. KILCOURSE, *Meeting of Representatives of the Interchurch Families International Network*, in *Interchurch Families: Issues and Reflections* (April 1996), no. 4; available on <http://interchurchfamilies.org/ifir/2006/ifir04-200604Romevisit.pdf>; accessed 22.02.2011.

Rev. Dr. Jamie Hawkey, a rapporteur for the 2008 Lambeth Conference, suggests churches need to “forge new and imaginative methods of appreciating and evaluating each other’s – and our own – ecclesiality”. He suggests that

one way of doing this might be to refocus our attention on the four classic “Marks” or “Notes” of the Church which embody the nature of the Church, and on how different Christian communities might appreciate each other through these four essential prisms⁴.

This exploration of these “marks” is situated within the larger context of a thesis in partial completion of the designation of Masters in Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) through the University of Winnipeg, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Written surveys were distributed to people identified as interchurch couples, registered either for the American Association of Interchurch Families biennial conference (Louisville, KY, 2008), or the 2008 British Association of Interchurch Families annual conference, Swanwick, England, or Canadian interchurch couples personally known to me. Their participation formed an invaluable component of my work, giving concrete, particular, personal witness to the reality of the domestic church.

The research was carried out as a qualitative process, giving participants free range to response to a variety of questions posed to them. The survey questions were on topics familiar to the couples, quite possibly the subject of discussion around their dining tables and in their congregations. In other words, the topics focused on their lived reality. Included were questions concerning the “marks” of the church, elements of *koinonia*, and funeral preparations.⁵

Of fifty-three survey questionnaires distributed to interchurch couples in Canada, the USA and the United Kingdom, a total of twenty-four (45%) were returned: five (21%) from the American Association, nineteen (79%) from participants at the United Kingdom Association’s conference at Swanwick, and none from Canadians (0%). Of the responding couples, twenty had a total of 51 children, while three had no children. One respondent was an adult child of an interchurch couple, who offered to fill in the survey as well. While this was not part of the original survey methodology, I accepted the offer as a way of comparing the parents’ perception of what their children received and lived with the child’s perception of the same reality. The results were purged of personal identifiers.⁶

Several realities call for this paper to be written from a predominantly, though not exclusively, Catholic perspective. One is that the phrase “domestic church” has gained prominence primarily within the Catholic Church. Also, while clearly a significant number of

⁴ J. HAWKEY, *Renewing the Marks: Called to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, in *One in Christ* 43 (2009), no. 2, p. 184.

⁵ The questions are included in the Appendix.

⁶ The respondents’ answers, interspersed throughout this paper, can be understood according to the following format, e.g. Q3, R1078, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y, where Q refers to the question number in the survey; R refers to the number assigned to the respondent; H and W refer to the Husband or Wife. Within that, the following apply: A=Anglican/Episcopalian, B=Baptist, C=Catholic, D=Disciples of Christ, F=Free Church, M=Methodist, P=Presbyterian, R=Reformed. Y refers to the cohort of years married, with 1 being newly married to 10 years, 2 being 11-20, 3 being 21-30, and 4 indicating having been married for more than 30 years. C indicates whether or not the couple had children, i.e. Yes or No.

couples marry across Protestant denominational lines⁷, in each and every response to this survey, one of the spouses was a Roman Catholic. Finally, I am a Catholic writer, and am particularly concerned to address the unique and often challenging barriers to ecclesial unity that exist within my own tradition.

While the research project as a whole focuses on the “marks” of the Church, in this paper, a first fruit of my research, I focus specifically on indicators best summed up under the term *communio*.

It is perhaps helpful to clarify what I mean by *communio*. I am speaking of the organic unity which is found, by faith, in the mutuality and reciprocity of the Trinity. As Ladislav Orsy says:

Through faith, we discover *communio* in the inner life of God, who is one God in three persons. ... In the church an organic unity exists among individual persons; they are bonded together. The one Spirit of Christ dwells in many and holds them together ... This is the theological reality of *communio*. All external manifestations of unity ... flow from it⁸.

This is something given, which comes from God, and which is made concrete and then shared in real time.

Jesus prayed that we might share in this unity⁹. We enter into it in baptism, where we are made part of the family of God. According to scripture¹⁰ and the teachings of the Catholic Church¹¹, in marriage, where two individual persons within that family are bonded together, by God, to become *one*, this organic unity is enhanced, and experienced in a new way. The resulting unity is so powerful that it is understood to be indissoluble in this life.

III. EXPERIENCES

And so, we turn to the work at hand. In the first couple selected, it would seem that *communio* in faith was not very present at the beginning, but grew through the couple's marriage. In fact, at first the wife “deferred on marriage”, as her future husband “seemed to have no particular commitment to church”¹². The husband says of the situation, “... she impelled me to study the basis of my own belief, and I came back to the Catholic Church out of deep conviction”, so much so “that I excluded other Christian beliefs and practices from the household”¹³. This restricted any possible discussion prior to marriage: “We agreed that the children would be raised Catholics. I allowed no possibility of anything else”¹⁴. More than 25

⁷ Cf. M.G. LAWLER – G.S. RISCH – L.A. RILEY, *Church Experience of Interchurch and Same-Church Couples*, in *Family Ministry: Empowering Through Faith* 13 (1999), no. 4, p. 36, drawing on the research of A. Greeley, N.D. Glenn, D.R. Hoge & K. Ferry, and others.

⁸ L. ORSY, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009, p. 5.

⁹ Jn 17,20-23.

¹⁰ Gen 2,24; Mt 19,6; Mk 10,8.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, Article 7.

¹² R1058, Narrative, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

¹³ Q3, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

¹⁴ Q4, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

years later, this same couple can say “[w]e are glad to have people of different traditions gather with us”¹⁵. Also, “[b]eing involved in ecumenism has been a tremendous eye-opener and opportunity for spiritual growth”¹⁶. Clearly, there has been growth in *communio* in the intervening years, with a far greater openness to the faith tradition of the “other”. Evidence can be seen in the way they approached the education of their children. “In [one state] our children attended a Baptist elementary school because it clearly had the best educational program. In [another state] they went to Catholic schools”¹⁷.

Both now worshipping in both churches, the husband says, “[w]e have become an interchurch couple. ... There has been a kind of evolution toward this. We are still discovering what it means, and still exploring how to build Christian unity, both within our household and in the broader church community”¹⁸.

The second couple, married 34 years, has no children. Asked about expectations he may have had in marrying someone of another Christian tradition, the husband says: “Not a lot of thought was made concerning religious tradition. I was so comfortable and confident of our sound relationship that there was no need to consider this part of our lives”¹⁹. In an indication that understandings developed and deepened over the years, he says: “For a few years, we both attended the local Catholic church on Sundays. Later, I would accompany [my wife] to her Baptist church on occasion. Then, more and more frequently, I would go to Sunday worship with her (as well as to my own church) as well as other services and events”²⁰. They are today both involved in both the Baptist and Catholic churches. In the former, both find themselves called on to provide the “Catholic” perspective on many topics.

When asked what makes living their interchurch life joyful, the husband replies: “The appreciation, love, acceptance, interest, support, encouragement and Christian joy encountered when either of us participates in the other's denomination or participates in an ecumenical situation in our own denomination. When experienced from clergy, this is especially exciting and motivating”²¹. The wife says: “The acceptance and encouragement from clergy is especially motivating”²².

Both spouses expressed a desire to have both their churches involved in their funerals: “clergy, choirs, congregations, liturgy, music, and lay ministers ..., a wake at one church and funeral at the other. How better to wind up my life in which ecumenism and interchurch marriage have meant so much”²³?

How has their interchurch marriage impacted on their faith life? Listen to the husband: “My original unthinking espousal of Catholic teaching has been reshaped by our joint religious experience into a thinking appreciation and support of the truth that is behind Catholic thought”²⁴.

¹⁵ Q8, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

¹⁶ Q7, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

¹⁷ Q5, R1058, W:B, Y:4, C:Y.

¹⁸ R1058, Narrative, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

¹⁹ Q3, R1061, H:C, Y:4, C:N.

²⁰ Q5, R1061, H:C, Y:4, C:N.

²¹ Q10, R1061, H:C, Y:4, C:N.

²² Q10, R1061, W:B, Y:4, C:N.

²³ Q11, R1061, H:C, Y:4, C:N.

²⁴ Q12, R1061, H:C, Y:4, C:N.

The wife says: “Over the course of our marriage, I have asked many questions, and have learned much, not just about Catholicism specifically, but about the larger issues of Christianity”²⁵. These, and many more, are examples of *communio*, of growing organic unity in their marriage.

We turn now to a couple married over 40 years. Their story gives evidence of how far we have come in our ecumenical understanding, while underscoring how far we have still to go.

Speaking of their time of marriage preparation, the husband says: “I was aware of the difficulties that would lie ahead but, somewhat simplistically, assumed that because [my wife] had agreed to sign the promise at that time required that she would be able to accommodate herself to the requirements that the Catholic Church imposed on her; and that thereafter ‘things would work out’”²⁶! His wife was somewhat more realistic: “I was fearful as I knew it would be difficult, although I do not think I realized how difficult it would be in those early years. I was very unhappy about some issues, [for example] having to sign a promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics; [my husband's] not being allowed to come to my church with me; our being debarred from taking communion in each other's churches”²⁷. Such were the ends to which people had to stretch in order that their love might bear fruit. A significant event shows the painful gravity of their situation. The husband again: “In December 1962, a Catholic priest thought it would be all right if I attended [my wife's] church on Christmas day ‘provided’ that I ‘did not take part in the service’. So I accompanied [her] as a spectator (a compliment she returned by accompanying me to mass), but the thought that we would not be together for another year was all so distressful that we repeated the practice at Easter, and then again and again as we felt the need to be together”²⁸. This sense of, and need for, *communio* is expressed by the wife: “During the first year we worshipped separately after which I always worshipped, ... for the sake of family unity, with [my husband] and the children in [his] church. Very soon in our marriage we felt an overwhelming need to worship in both churches ... ”²⁹.

These interchurch couples give evidence that *communio* is, however imperfect, nonetheless possible in a very real way across denominational lines.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES

What are places of opportunity for our churches, that they might benefit from this experience, help such couples, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church suggests, “live out their particular situation in the light of faith”³⁰, and might grow in the unity for which Christ prayed? For this, we look to where there is pressure against *communio*.

Couples speak of “artificial barriers / ignorance of current rules, particularly by vicars and priests”³¹, an indicator that the problem transcends denominations. Nor is it limited to churches. Indeed, the issue is an indicator of just how much marriage has a societal dimension. Couples

²⁵ Q12, R1061, W:B, Y:4, C:N.

²⁶ Q3, R1070, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

²⁷ Q3, C1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y.

²⁸ Q5, R1070, H:C Y:4, C:Y.

²⁹ Q5, R1070, W:M Y:4, C:Y.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, Article 7, Section 1636.

³¹ Q10, R1066, H:A, Y:3, C:Y.

speak also of “family attitudes to what we are doing”³², of “opposition and misunderstanding from family and friends”³³, and “the sense that I was not socially a member of the club”³⁴. One wife talks about her husband seeming “to want to expedite a marriage agreeable to his parents”³⁵, then asks that people “not constantly question why I have not changed to be like [my husband]”³⁶. Blood family and church family bring pressure to bear on couples, especially on the spouse of the “other” tradition, to put aside that spouse's beliefs and persona.

Incorporation into the church becomes problematic when baptisms are not mutually recognized, the parents' intent not respected to raise their children in (again as per the Catechism) a “flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them”³⁷. Parents come to their decisions in different ways, from the straightforward “I allowed no possibility of anything else” to “if 1st child was a girl, all kids would be raised Catholic, if 1st child was a boy, all kids would be raised Lutheran”³⁸. Whatever the choice, however, insistence by the churches on a single way of being incorporated into the Body of Christ can place great stress on the *communio* of the family.

We turn now to the question of Eucharistic sharing, the neuralgic issue facing interchurch couples. One woman says: “It was almost unbearable to sit in the pew with everyone tripping over me while [my husband] and the children went up to the altar rail. It seemed that the unity we had achieved at home was being shattered by the Church”. She speaks of “the exclusion and non-acceptance experienced by her and by their children”³⁹. Her husband likewise names the issues which caused difficulty, “the baptisms; the exclusion of [my wife] from unity with us all at communion”⁴⁰. These sentiments are expressed by couple after couple.

Perhaps the words of the husband in our first couple are most illustrative: “I see great need to work out in practice how the Catholic Church can reach out to interchurch couples and other churches in respect and love, so as to show forth the gospel and build Christian unity, while seeking always the truth”⁴¹. And so, we turn now to some questions, and some proposals by way of exploration.

How can we come to know the riches of each other's traditions if we will never spend time with each other in our liturgies? There is room for pulpit exchanges⁴² to be encouraged, so not only interchurch couples but the congregations of which they are members can begin experiencing the riches of other Christian traditions. Our churches could begin sharing space and resources together, learning to live, as married couples do, under one roof, where gifts can be

³² Q10, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y:4, C:Y.

³³ Q10, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y:1, C:Y.

³⁴ Q10, R1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y.

³⁵ Q3, R1058, W:B, Y:4, C:Y.

³⁶ Q16, R1058, W:B, Y:4, C:Y.

³⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, Article 7, Section 1636.

³⁸ Q4, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y:3, C:Y.

³⁹ Q10, R1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y.

⁴⁰ Q10, R1070, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

⁴¹ Q17, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y.

⁴² The term “pulpit exchange” refers to the practice, at least in North America, of inviting clergy from another tradition to preach the sermon in “our” church.

discovered and magnified, the shadows of our deepest selves brought into the light and expunged. Though always challenging, this can help create and nurture respect for the “other”.

How can the gift of interchurch families in our midst be recognized and developed, if they are kept relegated to the shadows? Pastors could begin inviting interchurch couples to gather for times of discussion, where those pastors can listen to their voices, hear of their joys and difficulties, and together begin developing ways to respond pastorally within the parameters of their tradition. This would contribute greatly to making interchurch families feel respected and valued, enabled and encouraged to share their particular gifts of unity.

How can spouses of other traditions be made welcome if they are seen as a threat to our faith? That is, intended or not, the effect of Canon 1125 of the *Code of Canon Law*, often known simply as “the Promise”. Article 1 of this Canon states: “The Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church”⁴³.

Several options are open to us. One, given that handing on one’s faith is seen as so important, is to have the promise made by all Catholics in every marriage, interchurch and same-church alike. Another is to have the promise continue, but worded such that one promises to ensure the children “brought up in the fullness of faith”. For the Catholic Church, that faith would be as per its Catholic expression. But it would open the door to, and make room even to encourage, other Christians to give expression to the seriousness with which they take raising the children in the faith which has given them life. These options would contribute to removing the sense that the person who is not Catholic is a threat to faith. Even better, however, would be to remove entirely the canonical requirement for the promise, instead moving the value of handing on one's faith to the forum of pastoral care and concern, where it can be seen as the sharing of a great gift rather than a legal requirement where one may fall short.

How can the *communio* of interchurch families be strengthened through their children? As a foundation, common agreements on baptism could be developed (as they already are in some countries), along with common baptismal certificates. In addition, churches could welcome these certificates from “other” churches, and duly recognize the child's baptism as reception into one's own church, the intent of the parents being sufficient for that reception. When churches do that, however, it is imperative that this joyous reception of the “other” not be perceived as a rejection, by the parents or child, of the church where the baptism took place. There is real need to receive, not just the person of the other tradition, but also the gift of lived ecumenism which that person brings.

How can the churches enable that *one* made so by God in marriage to take and eat, take and drink at the Eucharistic banquet? How can the churches remove the impossible choice to be made, the option of both spouses refraining from Eucharist in favour of the unity of their marriage, or that of denying the unity of their marriage in order to receive – and in that very denial making themselves no longer disposed to receive?

⁴³ *Code of Canon Law*. Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, Can. 1125.

There is an urgent need for the issue of intercommunion to be clearly separated from that of Eucharistic sharing, of making the Eucharist accessible to individuals of other traditions who, by virtue of baptism, are brothers and sisters of each other in the same household of God.

In keeping with the need for that *one* to take and eat, take and drink, should the churches not allow interchurch couples a far greater role in determining the depth of their own need? Too often, the wording which greets Christians of other traditions worshipping in Catholic parishes dictates that they follow unfamiliar processes and speak to unnamed, unknown, and usually unavailable church leaders to obtain permission to receive. As an example, we can turn to the guidelines of the *Committee on Divine Worship* of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The part of interest here is as follows:

For our Fellow Christians: We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 § 3)⁴⁴.

The language asks no questions, invites no dialogue. It calls no one, not even Catholics, to learn anything more about the Eucharist, or why one should or should not receive. The wording needs to change, to that which calls for and encourages prayerful discussion and discernment, and signifies trust in the answer which emerges.

Should the Eucharist not be more generously shared with persons of faith, couples who, experiencing this grave need, are unable to have recourse for the sacrament to a minister of their own church or ecclesial community *because* they are at *this* liturgy in *this* place in the *communio* of their marriage, ask for the sacrament of their own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament, and are properly disposed? In this, do they not meet the exceptions specified in the *Directory on Ecumenism*, Article 131⁴⁵, as well as Canon 844, Article 4 of the *Code of Canon Law*?

These proposed changes would go far in making interchurch couples feel recognized, welcomed, and nourished within both their churches. That, in turn, would contribute greatly to receiving the gift of the *communio* of their domestic church, leading in turn to the *communio* of the *ecclesia* universal.

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⁴⁴ UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, COMMITTEE ON DIVINE WORSHIP, *Non-Catholics and Holy Communion*, 14.11.1996, available online at <http://nccbuscc.org/liturgy/q&a/mass/communion.shtml>; accessed 02.02.2011)

⁴⁵ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

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APPENDIX

Questions for written response:

1. How many years have you been married? _____

2. On a scale of 1-7, with 7 being the highest

___1	___2	___3	___4	___5	___6	___7
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what was your level of involvement in your church prior to getting married?

3. What expectations did you have in being married to someone of another Christian tradition?

4. What kinds of discussions did you have prior to marriage, about things like

Where to worship Eucharist Baptism of children

First communion Confirmation Religious education

5. Looking back at the topics for discussion in the previous question, after your marriage how did you actually deal with

Where to worship Eucharist Baptism of children

First communion Confirmation Religious education

6. How do you as an interchurch family experience unity in your marriage and family life?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most important, how important is this to you?

___1	___2	___3	___4	___5	___6	___7
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Why?

7. What kinds of things have you done to create an atmosphere in which God is central?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most important, how important is this to you?

___1	___2	___3	___4	___5	___6	___7
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Why?

8. Do you think your home is a place where people of different Christian traditions feel welcome? If so, what have you done to achieve that?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most important, how important is this to you?

___1	___2	___3	___4	___5	___6	___7
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Why?

9. What kinds of ways have you attempted to hand on your faith, and the tradition in which it is formed and nurtured, to your children? To others around you?

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most important, how important is this to you?

___1	___2	___3	___4	___5	___6	___7
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Why?

10. What issues have made living your interchurch life joyful? Difficult?

11. How do you want your spouse to handle your funeral service? Why?

12. What kinds of things have you discovered about your spouse's religious tradition?

13. What kinds of things have you discovered about your own religious tradition?

14. What impact do you think interchurch family life has had on your children?

15. What impact do you think your children have on your churches?
16. In what ways do you think your churches could more clearly enable you to 'be church'?
17. How has your understanding of the church(es) changed since your marriage?
18. Do any scripture passages, formal church teachings, or church documents come to mind that encourage or discourage you in your interchurch life? How do these passages speak to you?
19. Why do you continue to live an interchurch family life, i.e. one in which you both remain within your specific Christian traditions rather than one of you becoming a member of the other's tradition or both of you becoming together members of another tradition?

Note: The full list of responses, as well as the thesis which resulted from the project, have been posted at <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/STM/>

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THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD AND
LOCAL HOUSEHOLDS

REVISITING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

THOMAS KNIEPS-PORT LE ROI – GERARD MANNION – PETER DE MEY



Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi
Gerard Mannion
Peter De Mey (eds.)

The Household of God and Local Households Revisiting the Domestic Church

In the growing body of theological and spiritual literature on the family over recent years there is hardly any publication that does not explicitly refer to the “domestic church”. In spite of this broad interest, however, the concept itself today still remains

unclear. Where the model of the “church in miniature” is not used to further align the family with the hierarchical ecclesiastical institution, it simply serves as a pious metaphor to instil some spiritual dignity to the Christian household. Likewise, theological treatises insist that the church is not a family and so the domestic church has remained a marginal and exotic note in ecclesiology as well. One may wonder, however, whether small communities, as families are, have indeed so little to tell the “new family of God” to which Christ has called his disciples to belong. Can the churches afford to neglect the specific competences that families have when it comes to serving and sharing with each other, to dealing with differences and otherness of its members (be they related to gender, age, ethnicity, or religious conviction), and to encountering God in ordinary life with its everyday ties, duties and responsibilities? This volume is intended to critically revisit the notion of domestic church and to explore both its pitfalls and potential for the life of the churches and of families.

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