

## Interchurch Families International Network November 2008 Newsletter

*Dear friends*

Here is some of the news over the past year from groups and associations of interchurch families around the world which are part of the Interchurch Families International Network (IFIN). Follow the links in brackets to reports from several different countries.

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### Worldwide

In August of this year, a small group of interchurch family representatives from the Association of Interchurch Families in the UK was able to meet with **Mgr Mark Langham**, who has recently been appointed as **Under-Secretary to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the Vatican**, with special responsibility for relationships with the Anglican Communion and the Methodist Church. He replaces Mgr Don Bolen, who was immensely helpful to us when we were planning the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families in Rome in 2003, and whom some of us met when a small group visited the PCPCU to talk to staff at the Council about interchurch families in 2005. Don has visited England once or twice since then and other members of AIF have met him. Having relinquished his post at the Vatican, he has moved back to his home country of Canada, where he us back with parish responsibilities and doing some teaching.

We heard of the personnel change earlier in the year, and were delighted to find who Mgr Don's replacement was going to be. As Mgr Mark was previously Administrator at Westminster Cathedral, the principal RC Cathedral in London, he was well-known to two of our long-term AIF members, Martyn and Rosy Baker, who worship there. In fact he had been very involved in the marriage preparation work at the Cathedral alongside them, and Rosy reported him as being 'very pro-marriage', which sounded extremely encouraging. You can imagine how many national and religious backgrounds the congregation of the Cathedral come from in London; marriage preparation is a very complex job there.

Before he left to take up his new position, we arranged a meeting with Mgr Mark at the Cathedral, and spent an hour with him explaining who we were, how we worked as an international network and as individuals, groups and associations of interchurch families, and how we had previously been in touch with Mgr Don. Fr George Kilcourse in Kentucky has sent Mgr Don reports of interchurch families' activities and works since 2005, and we said that we would like to continue to do this. We stressed the fact that we shouldn't be seen as a problem, but as a resource.

Mgr Mark received us very warmly, saying that actually this was the first meeting he had had in connection with his new job, so we felt that he would remember us. He listened very carefully, and was most encouraging and receptive. We came away very pleased! He was due to go to the Lambeth Conference of worldwide Anglican bishops just afterwards, where he and Mgr Don were among the RC guests, so we hope he spoke to Mgr Don about us and exchanged more information. **We hope to keep him in touch with our different activities around the world.**

[Here is a photo](#) we took of the occasion in the Cathedral garden, with (l to r) Rosy Baker, Melanie Finch, Mgr Mark Langham, Ruth Reardon (co-founder of AIF UK), Paul Docherty (co-Chair of AIF UK), Keith Lander (Executive Secretary of AIF UK).

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### Europe

A group of interchurch family representatives attended the **Third Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiù, Roumania, in September 2007**, organized by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of Episcopal Conferences in Europe (CCEE). We were delighted to be invited by Don Aldo Giordano, Secretary to CCEE, to send representatives. Those attending on behalf of IFIN came from groups and associations of interchurch families in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland. Here is a report by Ruth Reardon of AIF UK [\(1\)](#), and a report by Georgina Walsh [\(2\)](#) also of AIF who worked as a youth steward at the event.

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### Australia

Bev Hincks reports on ecumenical events in the **Newcastle, New South Wales region** of Australia. [\(3\)](#)

In Perth, David and Susan White's 17-year-old daughter and two friends, James and Brayden, were tragically killed in a car accident in August. David & Susan's experiences following the accident showed that it is not only on the occasion of Baptisms and First Communion that interchurch families can find it difficult to find sensitive pastoral care. The Whites wanted very much to make Rosy's funeral an ecumenical celebration, which proved quite complicated at short notice, although in the end it was a wonderful witness to their interchurch family reality. David hopes to follow up some of the issues the funeral raised with church leaders.

God is able, however, to work good out of the worst events in our lives. Since the accident, eight friends have made faith (re)commitments, including Adam (Rosy's boyfriend), his two sisters, and James' sister - six of them at Perth's Churches' Together celebration in November. A new little grandson Isaac was born three weeks after Rosy's death.

### Austria

**ARGE-Ökumene** held conferences in October last year and this year. Here is a report from Klemens and Elisabeth Betz. [\(4\)](#)

### Canada

Ray Temmerman in Winnipeg sends a report from several Canadian provinces. [\(5\)](#)

## France

The **Association Française des Foyers Mixtes Interconfessionnels Chrétiens** held a well-attended meeting in Versailles in April this year. [\(6\)](#)

## Germany

The **Netzwerk Konfessionsverbindender Familien** has been busy with conferences of their own and in different parts of Germany, and has more events coming up. [\(7\)](#)

## Kenya

David and Joyce Makumi send news from Nairobi. [\(8\)](#)

## Northern Ireland

During the latter part of 2007, Jayme Reaves, a researcher from the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College, Dublin, **interviewed old and new members of the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association** about their experiences. She also explored the history of the Association and the setting in which it has worked for the past 33 years, namely in the context of sectarianism and the work of interchurch cooperation, or lack of it. This project has been funded by the Anchor Foundation, which supports Christian charities concerned with social inclusion. It is hoped that the final document as a result of this research will provide a marker for NIMMA's progress and influence over its existence, and detail problems that continue to require attention, identifying potential issues for the future.

Members of NIMMA were delighted to be awarded **funding for another year** by the Dublin Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund, which enabled the Association to appoint a Development Officer, Paul McLaughlin from Belfast, who has experience in community work and media relations. He hopes to work as a proactive ambassador for the Association in such fields as funding, public relations and lobbying.

**Anne and William Odling-Smee** were able to attend both the American AIF conference in Kentucky in June and the UK AIF conference in Swanwick in August, where information was exchanged and friendships were renewed.

## Switzerland

Here is a report from Gisèle Francey on **recent activities of the Swiss Association AFI-CH**. [\(9\)](#)

## United Kingdom

The 2008 Association of Interchurch Families **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference** was held at Swanwick in August. There were many old friends in attendance, including from Austria (Klemens and Elisabeth Betz), Belgium (Thomas, Annette and Marcus Knieps-Port le Roi), Canada (Ray and Fenella Temmerman), France (Bertrand and Corinne Bitaud), Northern Ireland (William and Anne Odling-

Smee) and Switzerland (Guy and Gisèle Francey). Here is a report on the conference written by long-term members of AIF Leslie and Elaine Leach. [\(10\)](#)

The Association of Interchurch Families in the UK has a **new website**, which is gradually being filled with information. You can find it at [www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk).

### **United States**

The American Association of Interchurch Families has been active over the past year, particularly with their biennial conference in the summer. [\(11\)](#)

### **Conclusion**

Thank you very much indeed to all who have sent reports and information for this newsletter. Some are in translation: please contact me if you would like the original version. We look forward to hearing more news of your activities as they develop. There is a good deal of useful information on the **international website** [www.interchurchfamilies.org](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org), where you can find details of international contacts, and links to websites of several national groups and associations. Please keep interchurch families and their priests and pastors in your prayers.

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*Association of Interchurch Families UK*

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