

INTERCHURCH FAMILIES: Issues – Reflections – News (IRN) is an email newsletter compiled by Martin and Ruth Reardon two or three times a year. You can subscribe to it free by sending an email to Ray.Temmerman@shaw.ca. Those who cannot receive email can request paper copies from Ruth and Martin Reardon at Little School House, High Street, Turvey, Bedford MK43 8DB, UK (and email correspondence can be sent to them at aifreardon@talk21.com). IRN is distributed by Ray Temmerman, who is responsible for the international Interchurch Families website. You can find the latest version, and older ones, at www.interchurchfamilies.org/irn/index.shtm.. It is written for interchurch families (usually where one partner is Roman Catholic and the other a Christian of another communion) and all concerned for their welfare.

Our intention

This letter continues the work of the *Interchurch Families* journal (1993-2004). Longer articles and resources will be placed directly on the website and the letter will draw attention to the new material. There will be theology and spirituality, pastoral and historical studies related to interchurch families, as well as interchurch family 'stories' and news from around the world. The letter will also give information about printed resources published by the British Association of Interchurch Families.

The Rome paper

The first of those printed resources is *INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AND CHRISTIAN UNITY: a paper adopted by the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families from eleven countries held in Rome in July 2003* (16 pp., with a full-colour cover showing the interchurch families triptych and illustrated throughout by line drawings). This booklet has recently been published by the British Association of Interchurch Families, and is a useful introduction to the ethos of the international interchurch family movement.

The contents are as follows:

How Interchurch Families see themselves

Mixed marriages and interchurch families
The marriage covenant between two baptised Christians
The 'church belonging' of an interchurch family
The 'church belonging' of interchurch family children
Authority and conscience in interchurch families

Contribution of interchurch families to Christian unity

Interchurch spouses live in one another's traditions
Growing mutual understanding
Interchurch families as signs to the churches
The practical engagement of interchurch families

Pastoral care and understanding

Pastoral understanding
Pastoral policies that welcome, respect and liberate
Joint pastoral care
Marriage preparation
Bringing up children in an interchurch family
Shared celebrations of marriage, baptism, first communion
confirmation and funerals
Eucharistic sharing

This document offers a good introduction to the experience and reflection that lies behind the international interchurch family movement as it has developed since the Second Vatican Council.

We hope that with its modest cover price of £1 it will have a wide circulation among interchurch families themselves, all involved in their pastoral welfare, and all concerned for the promotion of Christian unity, both in Britain and in the rest of the English-speaking world.

[INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AND CHRISTIAN UNITY](#)

can be ordered from the Association of Interchurch Families, Bastille Court, 2 Paris Garden, London SE1 8ND England and paid for in sterling: single copies £1 + 50p p/p. (info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk).

Copies can also be ordered and paid for in US dollars, Canadian dollars and Australian dollars. Ray Temmerman in Canada and Bev Hincks in Australia are willing to collect payment in these currencies and transfer this to London in sterling, as they did for the journal *Interchurch Families*.

Orders and payment in US and Canadian dollars can be sent to Ray and Fenella Temmerman, 879 Dorchester Avenue, Winnipeg MB, R3M 0P7, Canada: single copies US \$2 + \$1.25 p/p; Canadian \$ 2.50 + \$1 p/p. (rayfen@shaw.ca)

Orders and payment in Australian dollars can be sent to Bev and Kevin Hincks, PO Box 66, Swansea, NSW 2281, Australia: single copies \$5. (kevinbev@bigpond.com)

(Details of cheaper bulk mailings can be requested from the addresses above.)

Marriage Preparation in the USA

Fr George Kilcourse, pioneer of the interchurch family movement in the United States and author of *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity* (1992), has written of a new initiative planned in Louisville, Kentucky, that will transform the way in which interchurch couples are prepared for marriage.

His article will appear in the ecumenical quarterly *One in Christ*, and we are grateful to be allowed to post it on the interchurch families website.

George Kilcourse points out that there have been many changes for the better in the forty years since Vatican II, so far as marriage preparation for engaged interchurch couples are concerned. In some places in the United States the parish-centred 'couple-to-couple' marriage preparation ministry frequently pairs an interchurch couple with an engaged couple identified as a prospective interchurch couple. Engaged couples are well served not only in such couple-to-couple ministry but in clergy-to-clergy ecumenical relationships. However, the ideal still remains far too rare in real life.

Ecumenical officers in the USA have on the whole been unable to take up the challenge – not through disinterest but sheer overwork. When asked to help particular couples, many refer them to the parish priest. However, this is only appropriate and effective where he enjoys a degree of ecumenical literacy, and is knowledgeable about the applicable principles, norms, and criteria for making pastoral decisions about the care of children and spouses in interchurch families.

The way forward has come to be seen by enlisting the help of Family Life officers. In the Archdiocese of Louisville there have been long conversations between the local chapter of the American Association of Interchurch Families (AAIF) and the Director of the Family Life Office.

Fr Kilcourse describes the process through which the marriage preparation program is being redesigned to accommodate the needs of interchurch engaged couples. This will be part of the course intended for all couples, to enlarge the perspectives of Catholic-Catholic couples, and to ensure that mixed couples do not feel marginalised.

The 'interchurch' segment of the marriage preparation program will aim to present: (1) the change of attitude and teaching in the Roman Catholic Church with regard to Christian unity, and how this relates to the sacrament of marriage, (2) an overview of the ongoing ecumenical movement and the Roman Catholic Church's participation in it, especially as its 'irreversible' development (to quote Pope John Paul II) will touch the lives of interchurch couples and their future children over the next generation; (3) the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on the family as 'domestic church', and its implications in the life of interchurch families, (4) the fact that the Roman Catholic

Church provides particular canonical norms that may be applied pastorally so that an interchurch family can live out (at least to some extent) in concrete, visible ways the unity that the still-divided churches aspire to realise, (5) the unique experience of a *given* Christian unity that interchurch spouses and children already share through the sacraments of baptism and marriage and their family experience as a 'domestic church'; (6) how and under what conditions the extraordinary possibility of eucharistic sharing (by way of exception) that the Roman Catholic Church (in principle and in accord with prudent pastoral judgment) may offer another Christian might apply to a particular interchurch spouse or child.

Interchurch families in other places will watch the development of this initiative by the Archdiocese of Louisville with great interest.

Bridgefok interchurch families

In the previous *IRN* we introduced an article that appeared in *One in Christ* (April 2004) on the experience of the Bridgefok, a Mennonite-Roman Catholic group meeting at St John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, and the thinking on eucharistic sharing that has come out of it.

We are grateful for permission to post on the interchurch families website two articles that have appeared in the Summer 2004 number of the Bridgefok newsletter. Two young interchurch couples heard about Bridgefok soon after they were married, and their joy when they attended a Bridgefok conference parallels that experienced by many interchurch couples when they meet interchurch family associations or groups. 'We've found a community in Bridgefok that can sustain us in spite of the current divisions between our traditions.'

Questions remain: 'Is it possible to raise children on the bridge?' On the upbringing of children within two church communities and on eucharistic sharing they may well find experience to be shared that goes beyond that of Bridgefok at present.

A French Association

Groups of interchurch families in France predate those in English-speaking countries. There has been no formal national Association, however, until the *Association Français des Foyers Mixtes Interconfessionnels Chrétiens* (AFFMIC) was formed at Rimlishof in May 2004.

New on the website:

- [A Transforming Ecumenical Initiative: Ministry to Interchurch Engaged Couples](#), by George Kilcourse
- [Two Bridgefok Interchurch Family Stories](#)
- [Fourth Meeting of French-speaking Interchurch Families, Rimlishof 22-23 May 2004](#)

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