Admission to communion in the Roman Catholic Church for the other Christian partner in an interchurch family is canonically permissible in certain circumstances and by way of exception (although it has to be said that not everybody knows this yet).

The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993, specifically recognized mixed marriage between baptized Christians as an instance of the "grave and pressing need" required by the Code of Canon Law for exceptional admission to communion (159, 160). The unique situation of interchurch families, united sacramentally by marriage as well as by baptism, is indicated by the fact that, apart from danger of death, it is the only specific instance of need which is given in the Directory (although other possible instances are not of course excluded).

We hope that all Catholic ministers will soon be aware that admission to communion is not only "permitted" but "commended" in certain circumstances and by way of exception (129), and that the just assessment of particular cases is what the Directory requires of them (130). They should be aware that the need of some interchurch couples to share communion is specifically recognized at the level of the Catholic Church world-wide. The onus is now on those who refuse admission without carefully considering each case of pastoral need brought to them to defend their own conscientious decisions.

Reciprocity
When it comes to reciprocity the situation is very different. The Directory makes it clear that a Catholic may lawfully receive communion "only from a minister in whose Church (the eucharist is) valid, or from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination" (132). This means that from the Roman Catholic point of view Catholic-Orthodox partners may receive communion together in both churches. (There is more caution on the Orthodox side, but for the first bilateral agreement on this subject, between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, see Interchurch Families, 1994, no.2, pp.6-7). However, a Catholic married to an Anglican or a Lutheran or a member of a Free Church is forbidden to ask for communion in the church or ecclesial community of his or her partner (unless the minister is known to be validly ordained from the Roman Catholic point of view), although that church may be willing to offer it.

There are difficult decisions to be made, and we all need to respect the very different decisions which will be conscientiously made by particular couples in particular contexts. In this field as in others, however, we can share our experience as interchurch families, and our reflections upon that experience. Some of the articles in this number contribute to that sharing and reflection.

Ruth Reardon

In this issue: Eucharist, Community and Orders pp.2-6; News from Ireland pp.7-9; Interchurch Families as a Threat of Resurrection pp.10-15

"You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity." Pope John Paul II, York, 1982.
What I have written here describes the journey, not the destination. I cannot say I have worked everything out in neat, clean, theologically correct packages. Much of what I live with remains for me the struggle to seek understanding of what I believe and experience.

**Beginning our journey**

I met my wife, Fenella, in London, England, as I was moving back home to Canada after some six years in Australia. Over the next seven years or so we “dated” over thousands of miles back home to Canada after some six years in Australia. Over thousands of miles. Our only time together was on holidays. We usually went to Roman Catholic churches when in Canada and a mixture of Anglican and Catholic in England. But even though I went to Fenella’s church, I also went to the nearest Catholic church as well.

I made a point of not receiving communion in Fenella’s church. I could not bring myself to do so, on a number of grounds. First, my church said I was not permitted to do so. Secondly, my church had said I could not invite her to come and receive. If I could not invite her to receive in my church, how could I then go to hers and receive? I felt that would be an insult to her and her faith as well as her church. I would in effect be saying that ours was too great for her, but hers was not too great for me. Thirdly, I could not bypass the struggle to understand unity between the churches simply by choosing to receive. Rather, I had to live that pain, allow it to become part of me, and of Fenella, and allow God to work with it. Fenella did not understand the matter the way I did, but, thank God, respected me in it, and allowed my struggles to impinge fully on her. And so we did not share the eucharist and continued to live that division. That, for both of us, was a very difficult thing to do, but I felt I could not do otherwise.

**Taking a closer look**

Something began to happen, however. As we discussed our faith experiences, what we believed, what we lived, how we expressed in liturgy what we believed, we found ourselves being challenged and called to grow. I began to look closely at what was happening in the liturgies in her church, and in the life outside those liturgies. As well, I began to listen hard to the words of the liturgies. I found there so often that the Anglican Church, with its centuries of experience in celebrating in the English language, was using forms of words which for me were much stronger, more to the point and expressive of the reality, than were those of my own church. For example, we say, “Do this in memory of me”, something which for me is quite passive. The Anglican communion says, “Do this as a remembrance of me”, which is more active, more forceful, and more true to the reality of God’s remembering.

There were other things as well: the Anglican involvement of laity; the focus on Scripture not as something remote, to be read on Sundays, but something alive, a meeting place with a living and personal God; and times of shared prayer outside the eucharistic celebrations. These things really began to speak to me. I began to see that there was a true lived faith there that recognised and proclaimed the reality of the Body of Christ, not just in the eucharist, but through all of life. And eventually I came to the point of saying, with all honesty, that I recognised the Body of Christ present in those liturgies.

My church still said that I could not receive. I began to recognise, however, that this was because my church could not yet say it recognised the Body of Christ present there. And so I had to make a decision. I could not receive lightly, dismissive of the regulations of the church. To do so would be an insult, both to my own and to Fenella’s church, but above all to Christ himself. But equally I could also not deny the reality I experienced.

**A personal decision**

I respect my church’s inability to say “yes” to the Anglican communion. As a formal church body, it has a grave responsibility to the Body of Christ, and must not make such a decision lightly. That decision can and must come only through the struggle of deep reflection on the reality of the Body.

As an individual Roman Catholic, however, I have come to accept the reality of the Body of Christ in the Anglican eucharistic celebration. And so I have now decided, as an individual before God, to receive in an Anglican church whenever we are together at the eucharist there.

This has clearly not come easily for me as a “faithful son” of the Church of Rome. I suspect my struggle, and Fenella’s with me, is a small reflection of what the two churches go through together in their dialogue and discussion. I now pray that my church may come to the point where it, too, can say, along with many of its members. AMEN to the reality of the eucharistic presence in the Anglican Communion.

**We struggle on together**

We don’t know where this journey will lead. We struggle to live in our marriage a true sacrament of unity, not just between ourselves in social areas but in that core area of our hearts, our walk with Christ. It is very difficult to do this when in so many ways my church does not acknowledge (whether by default or by choice) and celebrate the reality of faith which my spouse, with whom I am sacramentally united, lives every day of her life.

I read recently that some 37% of the marriages in our Roman Catholic Canadian diocese today are interchurch marriages. Undoubtedly, that reality will eventually begin to have an impact on the authorities in the church, as they slowly become aware of the struggle which such a substantial portion of the faithful live. And our struggle to live, to grow, to discern the direction of God’s call, and then to have the courage to move in that direction, will become theirs as well.

I find it so very difficult to wait patiently for this process to unfold. Meanwhile, I continue on my journey, dialoguing with others, including my bishop who while disagreeing with me is responding graciously to his call to respect my decision. I pray that in the end the truth may emerge, and either that I will come to realize that I am mistaken, or the church may yet discover some understanding of the eucharistic mystery which will enable it to say AMEN to the Anglican priesthood and communion; but even more I pray that all Christians may come to recognize the reality and unity of the Body of Christ.

Ray Tennentman
Sacrament: sign of what the Church is and does

I wish that at some time in my life I had had an opportunity to write a thesis on validity, and chase the concept through the literature. The whole matter needs the backing of a sound sacramental theology. Christ himself is the primordial sacrament, making present and visible in our history God’s self-gift and conveying this to us. After his death and resurrection, the Church in which he dwells and acts by his Spirit is the basic sacrament. A weakness of the scholastic theology of the sacraments is that it separated them off from each other and from their roots in the Church. Each particular sacrament is an effective sign of what the Church is and does all the time: the ritual by itself is simply a sign. It is the Church (Christ in his Church) that produces the effect.

Valid means “recognised”

The word “valid” has had different meanings at different times. Augustine argued that baptism by Donatists was valid and so converts to the Catholic Church from Donatism should not be rebaptised. But what he meant was that the ritual had been objectively and correctly performed - the Names of the Trinity had been invoked over the immersed person - and this fact stood and could not be erased. It was unrepeatable. But the ritual was ineffective, did not forgive sins and impart the life of grace, because Donatists did not possess the Holy Spirit, who dwelt only in the true Church. Their ritual was like a vaccination which had not “taken”; it took when they were reconciled to the Catholic Church by the laying-on of hands. Thus he could say a ritual was valid but ineffective. His view prevailed that there is no such thing as rebaptism.

“Valid” is a canonical word and for a long time now it has been used in a sense different from Augustine’s. It is of the nature of a sacrament to embody, make visible, ensure and convey God’s self-gift, his grace, for example for the forgiveness of sin, for nourishment by the Lord’s presence and glorious humanity. The Church can give an assurance of the effectiveness of a sacramental ritual if it is duly performed (and people need to know that their sins are forgiven, that they truly receive the risen Lord). So, to say that the ritual is valid is to say that the Church declares its effectiveness because the conditions (minister and ritual and intention) are fulfilled. Thus, to say that orders are valid is simply to say that they are recognised. There is no other way to inspect the reality of a sacrament than to examine the conditions of its performance.

No guarantee of ineffectiveness

The crucial and essential point, where many go wrong, is that, whereas the Church can guarantee effectiveness of priestly acts when the canonical conditions are fulfilled, it cannot give a guarantee of ineffectiveness. That would be to limit God’s power to the Church’s “usual channels”. This leaves it open to you or me to become convinced that Anglican orders are indeed effective, both because of my experience of their ministry and because I could not believe in God “holding back” in the face of such evident faith and trust, and fruitfulness, in all concerned. So in our view Anglican orders could be invalid, i.e. not recognised by the Catholic Church, but effective.

Anglican orders: a safe decision

In the later nineteenth century, Lord Halifax led an effort to get Rome to revise its attitude to Anglican orders. But hopes were dashed and the Bull of 1896, Apostolicae Curae, arguing that continuity had been broken by the Edwardine Ordinal, ruled in extreme language that these orders were “absolutely null and utterly void”. The validity of orders raises the question of the reality of the eucharist and so is of concern to interchurch families.

The arguments leading to the decision of Apostolicae Curae are intricate and cannot be fully treated here. But many of the grounds on which the decision was based have since been questioned by theologians. They rest on the notion of power possessed by priests (to forgive sins, to change the bread and wine) and passed on by ordination. But theology today sees the power as the Spirit’s and sees it residing in the community and not in the person of the minister. So the whole “relay-race theory” (as it has been called) of ordination goes by the board, and it becomes irrelevant for ministers to claim that they were ordained by an Old Catholic bishop ...

The decision of Apostolicae Curae was a play-safe decision. It has long been a principle of moral theology that in cases involving the sacraments, the more probable or safer view must be followed as regards validity. For all its strong language, the verdict could be no more than a prudential judgment that, in the existing state of historical and theological knowledge, a guarantee of effectiveness could not be given to Anglican orders - and a fortiori to non-episcopal ordinations, since “the power” was passed on by bishops.

A canonical term

One might end there, but a marriage case (real or fictitious) made me realise that one must bring in the idea of legality. A happily married couple were the mainstay of their local Catholic church somewhere in America, leading all the parish societies, and with children singing in the choir and serving on the sanctuary. Then an old dying nanny in Oklahoma revealed in confession that they were in fact half-brother and sister, and she alone knew it. The case was referred by the confessor to the Sacred Penitentiary in Rome, which replied that they were to be left in peace. So the marriage is valid, i.e. recognised in the external forum, though not fulfilling an essential condition.

Hence I would define the word “valid” as meaning recognised by competent authority as fulfilling the conditions for legality and sacramental effectiveness.

The word is a canonical and not a theological one, and is viewed with some distaste in some other Christian traditions. But it is nevertheless a necessary one. It is necessary, for example, to be able to state firmly whether A and B are truly married and so incur the responsibilities of marriage towards each other, their children and society, which has responsibilities towards them. Before nation states and a civil...
law of marriage existed, the Church was the only legislator for marriage. Churches of the Reformation have been able to rely on civil law - in Europe. But the Catholic Church, which already had canon law of her own, could not rely across the world on the laws and customs of any and every nation. It is legitimate to be convinced of the reality and effectiveness of Christian ministry by reasons of the heart, by experience of it. But, for coherence, the head also has to be satisfied, as it has in deciding some particular cases.

Theological renewal
The only way in which real change can take place with regard to the recognition of orders is for inadequate theology to be replaced by a fully convincing one. Ideas of transmission of power have to be replaced in the end by recognition that power lies in the Christian community, and that it is inconceivable that the community, the Body of Christ, should be unable to celebrate the eucharist because of the absence of some particularly commissioned, appointed, ordained person.

John Coventry, SJ

TWO ORDINATIONS: ONE REALITY

A year ago I had never attended an ordination to the priesthood, yet within the space of a week in June/July 1994 Lucy and I were privileged to participate in two such services. Fittingly for an interchurch family, the ordinands came from both our traditions - the Catholics being represented by Marcus Brisley, who had been serving as deacon in our parish in Fareham for a year, and the Anglicans by Diana Ormsby, Lucy’s mother, also a deacon, who was ordained in Plympton.

Similarities and differences
Both services were profoundly moving, different in liturgical detail but remarkably similar in the deep spirituality which they evoked, both at the personal level and in the assembled communities. Here were two people of different gender, ages and traditions within Christ’s separate Church, each answering the same call to share in the timeless continuation of Christ’s ministry.

Of course, the most striking similarity between the two occasions was the expression of sheer exuberant joy shared by both. We were celebrating not only as families (linked in one case by kinship and in the other by the fellowship existing in the parish), but also as the People of God, thanking him for the gifts he had given us in the persons of Diana and Marcus. For, as Bishop Crispian, Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth, reminded Marcus, “Just as you receive a great gift today, so you become a gift to us.”

This joy was transparently obvious within the congregations of both Fareham and Plympton, but it was magnified on the two sanctuaries among the ordinands’ brother priests (men only in both cases, for the first women priests in the Exeter diocese had been ordained only a few weeks earlier). I shall never forget the exquisite but purposeful tenderness on the face of my ordained father-in-law as he positioned himself so that, when he stretched out his arm through the throng of his priestly colleagues, he could lay his hand alongside that of Bishop Richard of Plymouth on the head of Diana, his wife.

And what of the differences, for it is around these which so much of the church life of an interchurch couple often appears to revolve?

Ordained as part of the “backlog” of women, Diana was one of six candidates presented for ordination, five of them women, and thus her service was somewhat less intimate than that held for Marcus. His service, coming at the end of a successful parish mission and being devoted to him alone, was an unashamed celebration of his personal journey in faith. Despite the more formal atmosphere in the centuries-old Devon church of Plympton St Mary, it was clear to Lucy and me that, for each of the six ordinands, this was an intensely personal experience in exactly the same manner and magnitude as it was for Marcus when he stood alone before the bishop.

Both congregations too felt spiritually involved, participants not just observers. We might not have been among the celebrants on the sanctuary, or have been invited to lay hands on the ordinands, but in a very real sense we were contributors to the mystery of the sacrament. Our contribution, humble but real, was our eagerness that God should choose one of our community as his minister, and our offering of love and support which would enable the candidates to share that ministry with us so that we might share God’s gifts.

A common reality
Once the elation of the two services had subsided, the accident of their timing focused our thoughts on the way that we could see in the persons and functions of our new priests an essential unity born out of Christ’s gift of his own ministry. Somehow, although the two ordinations were definitely rooted in their respective traditions, they seemed to us to have a clear, common reality. A liturgical celebration is not the place to enter into semantic discussions about theological or canonical definitions; rather it is a time to celebrate one’s experience by worshipping God. This we did as members of both church communities, and we thank God for the privilege which he has given us as an interchurch family of being able to experience this unity and double joy. Interchurch couples often speak of the pain which some of them experience in belonging to a divided Church; in contrast, this was a wonderful example of the positive blessing which our “double belonging” can sometimes bestow. This coincidence of timing gave us the sense that we had experienced a single reality through the two celebrations.

I conclude with two extracts, one taken from each of the ordination services, and challenge anyone to identify, without prior knowledge, which is which...

Let us pray that the all-powerful Father may pour out the gifts of heaven on these servants of his, whom he has chosen to be priests.

Give them wisdom and discipline to work faithfully with all their fellow-servants in Christ, that the world may come to know your glory and your love.

Paul Docherty
NICK AND THE EUCHARIST

Nick, who was born with Down's Syndrome, was a member of l'Arche community in Lambeth. L'Arche communities came into being, first in France, in response to the needs of people with learning disabilities. After Nick's death in 1991 Therese Vanier wrote his story in Nick: Man of the Heart (Gill and Macmillan, £2.99) and we are grateful for permission to reprint part of the chapter on Nick and the eucharist.

When l'Arche came to England there were ecumenical questions to be faced which had never arisen in France. There were agonising questions about eucharistic sharing in the community, as there are in an interchurch family. Nick had something in common with the children of interchurch families who cannot understand intellectually the reasons for Christian divisions, but can understand how important it is to be together at the celebration which is at the heart of Christian community and family life.

Nick would get upset by the fact that we went to different churches on a Sunday. He felt "we should do something about it" - "it" being the disunity he discovered existed between the churches and thus one very overt factor of disunity among those he loved. When asked what we could do about it he opined that we should organise a march to the Houses of Parliament, via Buckingham Palace. Nick was quite a political animal and his faith in the power of the monarch was unlimited.

No eucharist at all?
Most people in our community are either Anglican or Roman Catholic. Initially we had decided not to invite priests to celebrate the eucharist in the community because previous experience had shown how painful it was if eucharistic hospitality was not offered, or offered and not accepted. The different rules of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches meant that, having chosen to live with the Roman Catholic rule and the normal practice in the churches around us, we developed the tradition of receiving either communion or a blessing at each other's eucharist. After a number of years we decided to have community eucharists at l'Arche Lambeth: once a month an Anglican and a Roman Catholic eucharist were celebrated on different weekdays. This was the context in whichNick experienced division at the eucharist in a Christian community and family life.

For a period of about two years in the early 'eighties, Nick lived in a small flat with another man with learning difficulties, Brian, who was a Roman Catholic, and an assistant, Chris, who attended a local Baptist church.

Nick's initiative
When I was director of the community I came to the flat which these men shared as I usually did a couple of times a month to hear how things were going. We had supper, and then the tale unfolded...in the words of Chris, the assistant: "My recollection of the evening in question is vivid. We had finished our meal, and the room was lit by a candle as we began prayers around the table. Prayers were often a time of special closeness and reconciliation, although in the early days Brian's difficulties with speech sometimes disturbed him from it. This particular evening's prayers consisted of the usual blend of spoken and silent prayer. Towards what would usually have been the end of the prayer time, Nick rose solemnly from the table and went to the darkened kitchen. I knew something was about to happen. As the bread bin rattled and then the sound of the cold tap was heard, it dawned on me what it was.

"Nick returned to the table with a slice of bread and a glass of water, and after repeating Jesus' words from the Last Supper (which he had often joined in saying with the minister at the Anglican eucharist) he administered these to Brian, to me and to himself. Brian pronounced a reverent and solemn Amen and I did the same rather more quietly. After a further time of silence we joined together in the prayer of l'Arche...through the hands of your little ones bless..." The fact that all this had taken place in the ceremonial context of prayers around the candle, the focal-point of our life together, served to amplify its significance. It also made me feel powerless to prevent it happening without disrupting the special atmosphere of prayers. Who was I to say Nick was not acting under an impulse of the Holy Spirit to provide what was lacking in our community life? Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them. However, I was aware that this incident should not be repeated, and to my recollection it was not. I did not feel it was realistic to let Nick develop the idea that he could become some sort of 'community priest'. Later that evening, after the intensity had subsided, we talked it over, but a conflict remained in my mind."

Trying to understand
Nick, Brian, Chris and I talked about all this, trying to affirm what Nick had undertaken but also trying to help us all to understand what was and what was not a celebration of the eucharist. This was very delicate ground, and I'm not sure I handled it well. For instance, it was easy for me to speak of...
ordained ministers presiding at the eucharist in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, but for a Baptist, any Christian believer is able to preside at the Lord's Table, although usually this will be someone with some status within the local church.

Over and over again

It took me some time to understand more of the symbolism of what Nick had done. Chris writes that although the incident happened only once, he is sure it was Nick’s intention to make it a repeated occasion. He adds: “The incident was one of the most moving and challenging moments of my time in l’Arche. Nick had hit on several weak points simultaneously: that the eucharist and ignored Nick? At myself for ever having got involved in an interdenominational community and in respecting rules with all the divided feelings this left me with? Yes. And why not: with God?

And yet part of me knew and still knows that there is deep significance in experiencing and suffering these divisions in our hearts, in our guts: that in so doing (in the words of St John Paul II) we are, in our small way, “making up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ”. Then I remembered Nick struggling through a crowd of people who on this occasion neither saw nor heard him, and I thought of the obscenities shouted at him as he struggled to get on his feet after falling in the gutter. I began to see that division at the eucharist reflects and ultimately originates from all the other divisions, failings and faults of human beings. The divisions in each person, in myself, in our community, in our neighbourhood, in our society, affect all of us and especially those among us who, like Nick, live at the level of the heart with the profound need for unity, for communion between people that this implies.

Expectant open hands

Nick never missed a community eucharist and usually sat as close as he could to the celebrant. He was totally absorbed in what was happening. His attitude had a marked effect on the priests who came to celebrate with us. Canon Donald Allchin is an Anglican priest who has known l’Arche for many years. He writes about his experience during a retreat he gave jointly with David Standley in 1984 to a group of handicapped people and assistants. “What I remember about Nick was the extreme attention and reverence with which he brought up the hosts at the offertory, and also the way in which he affirmed me in my ministry (I was new to l’Arche) by his whole attitude and acceptance. It was very simple but very striking.”

David Standley is a Roman Catholic priest who has celebrated the eucharist in our community each month for many years. When he sent us his memories of Nick he began by mentioning his sense of humour, and then added: “For all his humour, Nick had gravity too; he was serious about things that mattered. He held on to truths that he saw and knew clearly. He found his own way of witnessing to that. His expectant open hands for communion at the Roman Catholic eucharist spoke of a longing deeper than in some who received. Nick’s longing rekindled mine.”

Bewilderment and desolation

These remarks of David’s remind me of a particular occasion, Nick loved to prepare the table and the room for the celebration of the eucharist. In his last years we would do it together and start well ahead of time because he needed time and prompting to remember what was needed. I reminded Nick that this was “David’s eucharist” and so it was Roman Catholic and he would receive a blessing and not bread and wine. “Oh yes, of course,” said Nick. I must have asked four or five times in the next hour or so if he knew which eucharist was being celebrated and of course he had forgotten, and forgotten I had asked him the same question ten minutes before. I saw him sit at David’s right and was certain that he would forget again and that this did not matter. Of course it did not matter, but what
Northern Ireland
MIXED MARRIAGE
A Association

A divided community
All Associations of Interchurch Families (like all interchurch families themselves) are unique, responding to the particular needs of their own country or locality. In NIMMA’s case this uniqueness is outstandingly obvious. Even the name of the Association makes it clear. Nowhere else does “mixed marriage” have just one meaning: a Catholic-Protestant marriage. Nowhere else does a mixed marriage (in that sense of a Catholic-Protestant marriage) impinge on the life of the whole community in the same way. In Northern Ireland there is a divided community, not simply a divided church, although the community division is classified by denominational labels. NIMMA’s role is clearly unique.

Over the last few years NIMMA has been developing in a remarkable manner. The catalyst was Gillian Robinson’s survey Cross-Community Marriage in Northern Ireland made in preparation for the international conference on “Marriage across Frontiers” which was held under the auspices of the International Union of Family Organisations in Newcastle, Northern Ireland, in May 1992 (see Interchurch Families, January 1993, pp.10-12).

One of Gillian Robinson’s paragraphs in her concluding section offered a challenge: “NIMMA has provided support and information to a few of our couples (i.e. those she had interviewed in her survey); however a majority were not aware of its existence. The booklet produced by NIMMA on mixed marriage is indeed a useful document but it is not widely enough available. As our findings demonstrate many couples do feel the need for more information and self-help groups. If NIMMA is unable or unwilling to become more public perhaps there is a role for another such organisation” (p.50).

Taking up the challenge
NIMMA’s members live in a much more difficult situation than interchurch families in other countries. It has not been easy to decide “to become more public” in the Northern Ireland context, because of the continuing need for discretion. NIMMA uses Christian names only whenever any publicity is given to members, and has used Corrymeela House in Belfast as an accommodation address from which mail was forwarded, or telephone enquires passed on, to NIMMA members on a rota basis.

However, long before the ceasefires, the process of raising the profile of NIMMA had begun. A “development conference” in 1993 (held like all NIMMA conferences at Corrymeela on the North Antrim coast) had the help of a facilitator from the Community Relations Council, and it was decided to plan for an office and a part-time worker. A proposal for core funding was put to the Community Relations Council and it was decided to plan for an office and a part-time worker. A proposal for core funding was put to the Community Relations Council in the spring of 1994 and was accepted. Funding has been secured for the start-up, running costs and staffing of the office (for three years). What NIMMA members continue to offer is their own experience and commitment, within a new framework which will make it easier for them to reach those who need their help.

NIMMA has been sending out posters with an accompanying note: “The office is open Monday-Friday 9.30-12.30 when our administrative secretary, Kate, will deal with enquires and where necessary co-ordinate with NIMMA members who will continue to be available to give advice, information and support. When the office is closed messages may be left on the answering phone or at the Bryson House reception desk. We hope that the new arrangements will lead to us being a more reliable and accessible resource for couples, clergy, groups and individuals who want to contact us about mixed marriages.”

English AIF may have been the first Association to open an office and thereby raise its profile, but NIMMA is the first to receive a grant which allows it to employ a worker. In Northern Ireland all cross-community ventures are being actively supported in order to create a foundation for peace and a collaborative society, so that NIMMA was encouraged to apply for this kind of funding. Its work is recognised as valuable to the community.

Church and community are very closely identified in Northern Ireland, so that reconciliation involves both church-goers and non church-goers. As a group involved in cross-community and inter-church activities NIMMA has a clear role to play in that reconciliation. Confidentiality and discretion are still guiding principles and will continue however well the ceasefires hold. It will take decades to effect a real reconciliation, but NIMMA hopes that its tentative step forward as a recognised voluntary group will assist this. They are glad that many clergy have responded well to the development; details of the office arrangements are appearing in a number of parish bulletins.

The prayers and good wishes of interchurch families around the world will be with NIMMA as it undertakes this new venture.
Pre-marriage Courses

For many years the Association of Interchurch Families in the Irish Republic (AIFI) has helped to run marriage preparation courses for interchurch couples in Dublin. At the 1994 International Conference at Bellinter, Mary Miller spoke about their experience. Here is a synopsis of her report.

What is a pre-marriage course?
The dictionary definition is “a series of lectures occurring before marriage”. The definition I like is “an education for marriage”. Through both formal and informal discussion, the objectives of these courses are to provide:

(a) the opportunity for engaged couples as individuals and as a couple to understand each other better, become aware of each other’s needs and qualities, and appreciate them;
(b) the opportunity to share with each other and other participating couples their expectations of marriage and how best they can achieve them together;
(c) help to each couple to understand that their marriage is a gift from God, and through both Christian Churches to grow together;
(d) advice on problems that may arise and how best to go about overcoming them, or even prevent them before they happen.

To reflect the different Christian backgrounds of each partner, the clergy attending will be Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist. They endeavour to explain the different approaches of the churches to an interchurch marriage, such as the need to request a dispensation from the Roman Catholic Church, advise how to fill in the Pre-Nuptial form which the Catholic Church asks each couple to complete, explain the “promise”, and what can or cannot be done at the marriage ceremony, baptism, etc. But most of all, an interchurch pre-marriage course tries to promote understanding between the couples, their families and their respective churches.

The pre-marriage course was formed so that the engaged couple would talk to each other about everything, from their individual beliefs to family planning, budgeting, and something as mundane (though some people would not think so) as who cooks the dinner or does the shopping. A pre-marriage course tries to impress on the couples that each marriage must be worked at and that there are TWO people in it ... not ONE.

History
Pre-marriage courses are very much a feature of Roman Catholic marriages in Ireland and have been around for the past 20 years. By 1982, it had become apparent that there was a need for a special pre-marriage course for interchurch couples. Discussions took place between the Catholic hierarchy, the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (CMAC), ecumenical officers, and the chaplains appointed by the churches to the AIFI. A group was formed which, after meeting for a year or so, asked the AIFI if it would help in hosting the courses and in giving a talk on “Living an Interchurch Marriage”. AIFI agreed, and in spring 1983 a programme was established and sent to the relevant church bodies for approval.

The first interchurch pre-marriage course was organised in the winter of 1983. It was held over five successive Wednesday nights in October and November and 14 couples attended. The church bodies were informed of its progress and development and in 1984 three interchurch pre-marriage courses were organised, held over six consecutive nights in February and March, May to June, and October and November; 51 couples attended.

From 1984-87 there were on average four courses a year, and since 1988 there have been five courses a year. In 1989 a weekend course was held over two consecutive Saturdays; this enabled couples living outside Dublin to attend. In 1992, there was an extra course, from Friday evening through Saturday, attended mainly by couples living outside Dublin. To date, 53 courses have been held.

Over the years, the number of couples attending a pre-marriage course has averaged 12 to 14. More recently, the courses seem to have attracted about 20 couples. In 1993, the total number of couples attending the course was 60, and this number was equalled in the first four courses of 1994. From 1983-93, the courses were held in various places within Dublin, but in spring 1992 the course was relocated to CMAC headquarters in Dublin City.

Involvement of CMAC and AIFI
Each weekly course runs from 8.00 to 10.00 p.m. There is one topic per night - e.g. on the first night the counsellor may speak about the financial side of marriage, on the second about communication and relationships, and so on.

The administration is carried out by the CMAC secretary with the help of the AIFI pre-marriage co-ordinators. Couples telephoning CMAC are told of the dates of courses available throughout the year and an enrolment form is sent. The cost of a course is £30, payable to CMAC. The secretary organises speakers, and liaises with the AIFI co-ordinators who tell her who will be hosting each session and who will be giving the talk on “Living an Interchurch Marriage”. The “host couples” are AIFI members but are not necessarily married to one another, because it is getting more difficult to find host couples who can both come on the same evening.

The host couple’s function is to “act as hosts for the night, welcome the couples and speakers and try to create a warm and friendly atmosphere”. The hosts introduce the speakers and try to help couples with problems by answering their questions, or providing them with literature, or pointing them in the direction of someone who may be able to assist. The hosts provide a link with AIFI and during the five weeks which each course lasts they give information about the Association, through the quarterly Newsletters, through brochures, or by personal contact. If a host couple is hosting for the first time,
they are asked to attend two or three sessions of the previous course when they can be trained in their duties. A manual outlines their role and responsibilities, but to attend a session is more effective than reading about what to do and how to act.

The AIFI co-ordinators are the link between the courses and the AIFI committee; they report on progress, numbers attending, and any problems. They are in charge of the AIFI library of relevant material which is available to course members. AIFI is a voluntary organisation, and the smooth running of the courses depends largely on a considerable input of volunteered time and energy.

The AIFI co-ordinators also organise the speakers who give their experiences of “Living an Interchurch Marriage”. These speakers talk and discuss for about an hour and a half about their backgrounds, marriage, effect of children on the marriage, attitudes of the churches and of their respective families, raising their children, and how and why they became involved in AIFI. Couples attending the course find this a particularly interesting session.

Recently we have been approaching couples married about three to five years to act as hosts, and there has been a positive response. It is more difficult to find couples to speak, and we tend to keep asking the same “old reliables”. AIFI is reviewing pre-marriage courses and is setting up training for those couples who are interested in speaking but lack experience.

Format of the course

On the opening night, the host couple arrive about half an hour before the start, organise the library, and put out folders with name badges, an agenda for the five weeks with a list of speakers, a list of couples attending, and a questionnaire to be filled in after each session (this enables CMAC/AIFI to see if any improvements can be made to the courses). Couples are also given a copy of the latest AIFI Newsletter and current brochure.

At 8.00 p.m. the host couple briefly introduce themselves, welcome the couples, and explain that the course is entirely for them and that all the speakers are there to help them. They mention the library, explain that AIFI members are giving their time freely, offer some information about the Association, and introduce the speakers for the evening.

The sessions usually follow this pattern:

Night 1 - Introduction, speakers on Marriage and Money.
Night 2 - Communications and Relationships.
Night 3 - A Christian View of Marriage.
This is presented by the clergy who are chaplains to AIFI; it includes consideration of the pre-nuptial enquiry and a synopsis of Catholic regulations for mixed marriages. In my experience, this session can be full of surprises and horror both for the couples and for the clergy.
Night 4 - Sexuality and Fertility.
Night 5 - Living an Interchurch Marriage.
This is presented by AIFI members, and is followed by a concluding service.

A weekend course would be held on two consecutive Saturdays, from 10.00 a.m. to about 4.30 p.m., covering the same topics.

A personal note
In 1988 David and I were participants in one of these pre-marriage courses. I have only been involved as an AIFI co-ordinator since the beginning of 1994. I believe these courses are very important, making couples think about matters which might cause problems after marriage and helping them towards possible future solutions. The courses show the clergy what the problems are for the couples and perhaps when they report back to their respective churches, sometime, something may improve.

AIFI members believe that helping to run these courses is one of the most valuable activities to which they give their time.

A HOUSE BLESSING

This story is taken from the AIFI Newsletter, Spring 1995.

An interchurch House Blessing can be a visible outward sign of inward unity.

When John and I built our new house some time ago now, we felt we would like God’s blessing on it. However, it is not the actual house that receives the blessing, but the people who live and move in and out of the house. So it was that we arranged our House/Family/Friends blessing the following year.

We put a great deal of thought into the people we wished to invite, the respective clergy from our two main churches, the actual service and the food and fellowship afterwards. We gathered our closest family members and friends whom we knew would be sympathetic to our purposes, together with our son Shane (then 9) and our daughter Alyssa(6).

We stood in a rough circle around the sitting-room with the two ministers to one side. They had previously met and discussed who would say what and when from their respective books. It was a very simple service, with hymns which we all knew, some prayers, and we joined in the Lord’s Prayer all together. I read a passage from Scripture, and finally both priests blessed us simultaneously. A close friend remarked afterwards that it had been a relaxed and meaningful service, which is what we had hoped to achieve.

It was gratifying for us also that it was the first time that our two ministers, living not ten miles apart, had had any contact with each other, much less take a joint pastoral service together. We felt it had been richly rewarding, and subsequently found that the event had provoked much comment and discussion between our own families and friends. 

Julia Long
An address to the Silver Jubilee Conference of the Association of Interchurch Families, held together with the Group for Local Unity of Churches Together in England, Swanwick, Derbyshire, August 1994

In Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, readers arrive at the moment when Alice is lost and encounters the Cheshire Cat. She anxiously asks for directions: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" But the cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to go." "I don't much care where..." says Alice. "Then it doesn’t matter which way you go," says the Cheshire Cat. That encounter captures for me something crucial about ecumenism and the apparent stagnation within official ecumenical circles. Is it clear whether or not the churches or church leadership have a definite sense of where they want to go, let alone a perception of how to arrive at such a common destiny?

Some ridicule ecumenism as a naive Wonderland which is impossible to attain. But others of us envision ecumenism as a possibility of wondering if things might not be different from the broken and boundaried divisions which the history of the Church presents to us. Still others wonder, after three and four decades of labouring at ecumenism, whether energy or imagination are able to survive the fatigue we find around us like fog.

**Parables for ecumenism**

Let me begin this reflection on the connection between ecumenism and the role of interchurch families with a remembered experience from my own autobiography. My awakening to the call for church unity came as a ten-year-old fourth-grade student. My family attended the wedding of a Baptist couple who were - and are - dear friends. The year was 1958, and ecumenism in American Roman Catholic circles was hardly conceivable. One thought of ecumenism in those pre-Vatican II days more in terms of a "Department of Foreign Affairs". You needed a formal "visa" to enter hostile territory which the Pope and church Secretary of State had quarantined. My parents ventured to secure just such a visa to attend the wedding.

Ample warnings had been delivered to me and my sister from the parochial school principal. My parents received cautions from the pastor. We were instructed not to "participate" - just sit during the service and be "passively present". And by all means, we were repeatedly told, don't sing their hymns.

Duly briefed, we marched to the Baptist church. And then, as we were ushered down the aisle of that magnificent Georgian church, I did what every well-trained Catholic child would do upon arriving at the pew... I GENUFLECTED!

My mother was mortified as heads craned to notice my "foreign" behaviour. My father quietly reassured me it was "OK" after I got seated, but he did add: "You blew our cover!" From that moment on, my mind has wondered why baptised people have perpetuated fortress mentalities towards each other. Why have we erected barriers to the unity Christ has given and willed for the Church?

Now, over thirty-five years later, I find it intriguing that this early juxtaposition of marriage and ecumenical consciousness has matured into our focus on "interchurch families". If there is one thing which the growing number of interchurch spouses and children challenge us to do, it is to "blow our cover" and make visible the unity which Christ and his Spirit give to the Church.

What I ask you to consider is the message that the phenomenon of increasing numbers of mixed marriages and the success of conscientious interchurch families holds for the general ecumenical movement. Truly interchurch families are a small minority of all mixed marriages today. Yet the future of the Church is written in their flesh. The lives of interchurch families, I want to suggest, are *parables for ecumenism*. I will sketch three elements of this message: (1) the transitional moment within the general ecumenical movement; (2) the nature of parables and how they help us to understand the unique contribution of interchurch families; (3) a challenge both to the Church and to interchurch families; and then I will conclude with the suggestion that the interchurch family movement indeed "threatens" ecumenism with resurrection, with a new life and rejuvenation beyond the impasse and doldrums of the status quo.

**1 THE TRANSITIONAL MOMENT**

There is little doubt that the ecumenical movement stands at what Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, has described as a transitional moment. In 1993 in Santiago the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC had its first *full* meeting since 1963. It was time to catch up on and to incorporate the implications of three decades of lived ecumenism. Raiser elaborates on this transition when he describes it as bridging the division between Faith and Order efforts at dialogue and Life and Work activity. Is social ecumenism merely a "consequence" and not something integral to Faith and Order? In early 1993 in Denmark a WCC consultation offered a breakthrough report in which "costly discipleship" was included as a constitutive component of Faith and Order. (There seems to be an echo here of Pope Paul VI's insistence that justice is a constitutive element of the church's identity and mission.) Let me point to two of the implications of this transition.
First, the tried-and-true ecumenical method of dialogue comes to be seen as more than a method for exchanging information or achieving a goal. Raiser speaks of a change in method rooted in our understanding of Christ. It means that we make visible the unity given by Christ. "[I]t would have to be taken seriously that baptism and the baptismal confession of faith in Jesus Christ itself establishes that decisive communion (koinonia) in the body of Christ which precedes all our efforts for consensus in doctrine and order." This christological change, Raiser argues, led to a basically new direction in ecumenical theological dialogue. Unity, given by Christ and preserved through the Holy Spirit, determines our goal and destination (Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, WCC, 1991, 14-17). George Lindbeck has suggested a similar change in our understanding of dialogue with his recommendation of a "metalanguage" to move us beyond the impasse of our inherited, traditional language to describe the historic divisions between the churches.

Second, our paradigm, our normative frame of reference, for understanding the church and ecumenism has shifted, putting new light on the "crises" we face. This development reflects the conversation of academics who speak of a "postmodern" consciousness. We have seen the limitations of modernity's rational, progressive, optimistic, individualistic quest. We can depart from a modern passion for certitude and absolute statements of clear and distinct ideas - and also depart from the frantic concern with solving problems and overcoming crises. Raiser has argued (along with many others) that we are now free to concentrate on reformulating questions and to examine the causes of the present crises.

**Personifying a paradigm shift**

Interchurch families personify a "paradigm shift" as I have interpreted their contribution to ecumenism in *Double Belonging* (Paulist Press/Fowler Wright 1992). They present us with a new understanding of the ecumenical movement and the possibilities for church unity because they begin with the experience where such families live. Let me put it another way: the ecumenical movement has been described as "dead in the water". But if you analyze it closely, its dilemma is compounded. The ecumenical movement has been, not dead at the docks, but dead in mid-sea and without a compass; moreover, the crew - recruited during the euphoric enthusiasm of 1960s ecumenical "breakthroughs" - is aging and there is no generation of apprentice young ecumenists to overhaul the engines or even to rig sails for capturing the wind. Interchurch families long ago left this stalled ship and arrived on shore in small craft, navigating through perilous waters. But they have themselves become beacons to lead those on the ship to a frontierland, and in the direction of the future. It is a little like the moment in the Gospels, when the revelation of resurrection reaches the apostles: "Jesus goes before you into Galilee", meaning that the disciples must flee Jerusalem, the place of destruction, the locus of the old distorted religious order which Jesus challenged by his ethic.

**Experience**

In terms of concrete experience, authentically interchurch families are sometimes light years ahead of the general ecumenical discussions. They live the koinonia, a faith life of intimate community, which we only imagine. Pope John Paul II acknowledged the contribution of interchurch families when he spoke in 1982 in York, singling out their unique contribution: "You live in your marriages the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian Unity." Written in the life of the interchurch family is at least part of the future where the ecumenical movement is going.

**Experience** has come to be a primary ingredient of the new method of ecumenical dialogue. It is no longer true to say that we work according to a linear progression from (1) thought, to (2) choice, to (3) practice. Our thinking and reflection are, in fact, altered by our choices and decisive action. I want to suggest that this lived experience of the unity (koinonia) of interchurch families offers a model for the new method of ecumenical dialogue. Interchurch families struggle openly with the question of what they believe. They reflect conscientiously upon their marriage as an experience of grace, where they encounter the presence of God, the Trinity, in their fidelity and sacrificial commitments to family. When interchurch couples decide to remain faithful to their respective churches and that both spouses will take an active role in the religious education of children, they are deciding positively about a religious identity for the children. And when interchurch family members - both parents and children - decide to commit themselves to church activities of service and evangelisation, they undertake their responsibility as Christians in an enviable way.

**Double belonging**

When Rene Beaupere began to use the term *double appartenance* or "double belonging", to characterise the experience of the foyers mixtes, or interchurch couples, in France, many people became uncomfortable. When I borrowed this term for the title of my book in 1992, this phrase and the paradigm shift it manifests was dismissed by some as an "impossibility". As I suggested then, paradigm shifts come slowly and are universally resisted. In 1492 the "flat earth" geography of many caused them to ridicule and dismiss Columbus and other explorers. Similarly, anyone who has watched the graceful hovering and flight of bumblebees knows that they defy physics when the bulk of their bodies is suspended by such tiny but active wings. The Wright brothers in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, faced a similar scepticism - or paradigm paralysis! - when they began their first efforts at aviation. I can tell you that the physiology of thoroughbred race horses argues that the delicate bones in their legs cannot support their weight, but come visit me for the Kentucky Derby and you will see the paradox in action. One hundred and thirty years ago it was impossible for blacks to be citizens in the United States; it took us a civil war to guarantee the principle of equal rights in our legal documents, and we still struggle to reach this ideal. In South Africa only this past year (1995) has the old paradigm of apartheid been shattered and blacks have registered and voted in unprecedented numbers, changing the political process with peaceful initiatives. In the past hundred years the practice of medicine has found new paradigms for healing and treating organic disease, from organ transplants and bone marrow surgery to genetic engineering that promises to eliminate conditions once considered irreversible. Every
instance, the doubters have been proved wrong. These breakthroughs and paradigm shifts in our understanding of what is possible and desirable have been lived into reality!

Will we, a generation from now, look back at the churches’ treatment of mixed marriages and interchurch families and see it as prejudicial and blinded, like the sins of racism or sexism that we recognise today? Bruce Cobourn, the Canadian rock lyricist and musician, offers a helpful insight with his recommendation that we look for insight to the so-called “abnormal” situations in our culture. Cobourn has commented that the trouble with “normal” is that it always gets worse because no questions are posed and no energy exerted to explore beyond the status quo. I suggested in Double Belonging that interchurch families provide us with “negative experiences of contrast” that prove revelatory. Or, in Edward Schillebeeckx’s words: “The constantly unforeseen content of new experiences keeps forcing us to think again. On the one hand, thought makes experience possible, while on the other, it is experience that makes new thinking necessary. Our thinking remains empty if it does not constantly refer back to living experience.”

In other words, our experience influences our ongoing reflection and interpretation. Such a critical consideration of our insights means seeing our interpretations in a different context which can correct, shatter, or give new direction. It shatters our norms and causes us to reconsider. Such was the Roman Catholic experience throughout the 1962-65 sessions of the Second Vatican Council. We looked again at revelation, at our attitude toward other religions (especially Judaism), and at other churches and ecclesial communities, and at our understanding of religious liberty and the church’s relationship to the political state. I agree with Father John Coventry’s keen perception that it was only a matter of time before the experience of interchurch families gave a human face and flesh to the eccumenical implications that are transforming dialogue itself. The recently published book Churches Together in Marriage (Churches Together in England and CYTUN, 1994) puts it well: “The loving commitment that these families can exhibit is both an inspiration and a rebuke to the churches in their continuing disunity” (59).

11 PARABLES FOR INTERCHURCH FAMILIES

The seemingly subtle parables of Jesus of Nazareth give us the backbone of New Testament theology. I call them subtle because in our own culture and era it becomes frighteningly easy to domesticate or distort the authentic stories of Jesus. John Crossan locates parables at the opposite end of the spectrum of storytelling from myth. Whereas myth attempts to construct a world of order and meaning, a cosmos, parables actually subvert and dismantle the prevailing socio-cultural order. But this does not mean that parables are anti-myth. Crossan describes the parable as holding us suspended in “a dark interval” between the death of the old myth and the birth of a new myth. I consider that this dynamic describes well the contribution of interchurch families to the eccumenical movement. As I will remark in a moment, interchurch families are exposing the flaws in our theologies of baptism (and confirmation), eucharist, and the nature of the church itself. We live together with them in the “dark interval” before the new paradigms for eccumenical theology bear fruit in the institutional church. But the truth to which interchurch families point (and the truth they incarnate) shatters our reflex myth and its paradigms like a parable that grasps us with humor and its unmistakable gravity that pulls us to recognise (re-think!) the reality in front of our eyes.

The mustard seed

We are familiar with the seemingly innocuous parable of the mustard seed. Jesus compares the reign of God to a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds which grows into a bush where birds take shelter. It seems so harmless. How often have we heard this parable preached as a summons to humility (but perhaps humility wrongly understood). But if we place ourselves in the context of Jesus’ hearers, we know that they were startled, their expectations radically reversed. They would expect this magnificent reign of God to be compared to the scale of the familiar cedars of Lebanon. They looked for colossal and ostentatious manifestation of political power. Jesus uses the metaphor of a lowly mustard seed, easily lost or discarded. But there is more: the very choice of the mustard seed as an image would be familiar in terms of the kosher laws of Judaism. It was explicitly prescribed that mustard seeds should not be introduced into the kosher garden in part because, weed-like, they would take over the space and other vegetation. Mustard was not desirable. Ironically, Jesus chooses the rejected, inferior “weed” to fashion a metaphor of the reign of God.

The Good Samaritan

A second parable has suffered less distortion in the preaching of our churches. We all know the plot of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The ethnic hostility between Jews and Samaritans comes through in most of our churches’ preaching about this parable. The irony of the story comes in our placing the adjective “Good” next to the name “Samaritan”. Perhaps it is because we are familiar with the episode of Jesus speaking to the woman at the well - a double risk, (1) because it was improper for any man to converse publicly with a woman other than his wife, and (2) because he defied the Jewish segregation from Samaritans and conversed with the despised and apostate mixed race of Samaritans. When we confront the scene on the Jericho-Jerusalem road, the fact that a priest and a Levite pass by the wounded man would confuse Jesus’s audience at one level because these officials in Judaism were presented as paragons of virtue - in the old myth! Moreover, when we consider an excuse for their hasty exit, the fact that they are on their way to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice places the temple cult in Jerusalem in striking contrast to Jesus’s own ethic. Rather than render themselves ritually impure (and have to undergo a three-day purification, and lose the proceeds from three days of stipends in the temple), the priest and the Levite neglect the victim of brigands. The Samaritan, by contrast, takes the initiative to help the wounded man. That he could have been a Jewish victim compounds the irony, and reverses the expectations of Jesus’s audience, who would expect only perverse things from Samaritans. Jesus’s question, “Who proved himself neighbor?” cools back on the hearers. “The one who passed through, looked on him” (Luke 10:33). The Samaritan with the premier virtues of the Jesus ethic. We are confronted with the bankruptcy of the religious officials and the exemplary conduct of the Samaritan - dismantling the myth of this early first century Jewish audience.

The Pharisee and the tax collector

Finally, consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. In this particular parable, Luke (18: 9-14) describes both the Pharisee and the tax collector going up to the temple to pray. What a contrast! The self-righteous Pharisee justifies himself by a catalogue of his virtues which make him more acceptable than the despised tax collector. (Remember, the tax collector is doubly despised because the taxes he collects go to fill the coffers of the Roman emperor: Palestine is an occupied territory exploited by a foreign power.) The very placement of the two characters tells us something; the
Pharisee took up his position (a position of honor in the temple), but the tax collector “stood off at a distance”, reluctant even to raise his eyes. His prayer was a sinner’s simple but poignant plea for God’s mercy. Luke concludes: “I tell you the latter went home justified, not the former.” That the despised tax collector becomes Jesus’s model for prayer and holiness and the Pharisee is exposed as a fraud and hypocrite subverts the norms central to the religious culture of Jesus’s day. The geography tells us everything: home - not the temple - is the place of holiness for this reconciled tax collector. It echoes the parable of the Good Samaritan in this regard, displacing the temple with an everyday environment. And humility is the way of love; it is a virtue acquired and negotiated in every home and family’s life. Here even family hierarchies unravel in the wake of a love that recognises the inherent dignity of every person. Its origin is in the only “head” of the Christian home, Christ who humbled himself as an example for us.

The marginalised and rejected
In these parables we find a new dynamic: those looked upon as outsiders, the rejected ones, the outcasts, and those marginalised (or made into exceptions) by the conventional norms become, in fact, the authentic teachers of the Jesus ethic. To suggest that the lives of interchurch families, marginalised and even rejected by the malpractice of some of our ministries, are a parable for today’s ecumenists is a potent challenge to the churches. But if we are to consider the parables as the living Word of God, open to ever new applications, then the sting of these parables calls us to ask what might be God’s message through the lives of interchurch families. It reverses our status quo expectations of how the ecumenical movement will arrive at its destination. The burden is no longer on the backs of interchurch families to prove the integrity of their faith; nor is theirs the burden to prove the fidelity with which they live the mystery of unity-in-diversity as a family while the churches remain divided. The burden has shifted (just as in the parables of Jesus) to the leadership of the churches and the ministry of the churches which must convert, recognise, and receive Christ’s grace where it is uniquely fruitful in the lives of interchurch families.

111 CHALLENGES
A two-fold challenge flows from our appreciation of the contribution of interchurch families to the wider ecumenical movement. I want to suggest that, from this point onward, both interchurch families and the churches will be challenged to new ways of collaborating and serving as midwife to the ecumenical future. Let me first consider three ways in which interchurch families will be challenged, and then propose four ways in which the churches also will be challenged.

THREE CHALLENGES TO INTERCHURCH FAMILIES
One of the themes of the Association of Interchurch Families has been “telling our story”. Many people are still unfamiliar with the possibility of two spouses remaining faithful to their respective churches and participating to various degrees in one another’s church. The idea of “double belonging” by parents or their children begs for narratives which illustrate and poignantly dramatise the humiliations, suffering and deep faith of interchurch families who are succeeding in living “the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian Unity”. So the need to chronicle various patterns of two-church family life has been a central task.

While this dynamic has repeated itself successfully in American interchurch couples’ groups, it reaches a point of diminishing returns. I have observed how all too often a group preoccupied with such selfconscious recitation of their individual case histories is left without a goal beyond itself. Even when initiating new interchurch families, the initial curiosity wanes and one looks for other dimensions of the family’s Christian identity. Early in John’s gospel, one of the disciples asks Jesus, “Rabbi, where do you live?” He responds with an invitation, “Come and see!” What follows throughout John’s gospel is a journey with the itinerant Jesus who seeks a place worth dwelling in. We find a surprising irony in Jesus who himself is the “dwelling place of God” and the places where he celebrates conversion and freedom.

Come and see
The first challenge for interchurch families will be to move beyond their own storytelling and to invite church leaders and persons in a variety of ministries into their homes and to their tables where they can witness your prayer, your family’s faith and how it is incarnated and lived out in service and witness to the reign of God among us. When church leaders are caught up in seeing interchurch parents actively educating children in the religious traditions, devotions and classics of spiritual life, the label of “double belonging” moves from an abstraction and becomes a possibility “lived into reality”. When a priest or minister watches interchurch teenagers involved in responding to third world missions and rehabilitation programs for addicted youths because they believe in Christ’s call to compassion, it is more difficult to pigeon-hole even a mixed marriage family and dismiss or marginalise them.

Language is power
Another challenge will focus on spouses and the now-articulate interchurch children developing more precise and reflective language to describe their identity, their gifts for the church, and their needs. In the past it has been too easy to discredit interchurch families for asking the wrong questions. For instance, when couples ask for “intercommunion” serious ecumenists interpret such a request as premature and out of order. After all, the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is a degree of consensus and mutual recognition of ministries sufficient to warrant formal approval of mutual intercommunion by the highest church authorities. We must be precise in naming and claiming the intermediate steps toward such full communion between the churches. These families must continue their education in ecumenical theology and the ongoing developments that contribute to the rich new methods of dialogue which I described earlier. But this requires ongoing teaching and collaboration with theologians and church officials. When an interchurch spouse understands the appropriateness of her request for “eucharistic sharing” (rather than intercommunion) on the occasion of a son’s first communion, then she can expect a more pastoral response. A priest who meets with a couple who refer to canon 844 will hesitate before dismissing such knowledgeable people. The same advice could be said for distinguishing
between a request for an "ecumenical baptism" (which could repulse some pastors) and a request to make the baptism of an interchurch family’s infant an occasion to make visible the foundational unity given by Christ in two, as yet divided, churches, and for other occasions when couples or their children might suffer indignities. Language is power.

**Bishops have hearts and feelings**

Third, and finally, I would urge interchurch families to resist making "umpires" out of bishops and other church leaders. I place the emphasis upon bishops (thinking especially of the Roman Catholic hierarchy) because on too many occasions we have unnecessarily alienated these institutional leaders by confrontation and what they perceive as unreasonable demands. When we put the uniform of an umpire on bishops, they no longer behave like shepherds. They become preoccupied with rules and making decisive, clear judgments. It is for this reason that I have proposed that inviting bishops, priests, and religious leaders to "come and see" where you live will have transforming results. These are people of faith who have hearts and feelings just as we do. And their theology also comes from experience. Have they the privilege of knowing how you live as an interchurch family? If they enjoy your company, it will be harder for them to ignore or to deny your legitimate pastoral needs.

**A suggestion for pastors**

Along these lines, priests and ministers need to consider ways of circumventing the "umpire" identity for bishops. I have found it constructive to advise bishops about my ministry to various interchurch families—sometimes asking permission, but keeping them informed about how I am applying, for example, canon 844 on eucharistic sharing to a particular pastoral need. Bishops with whom I have dealt in this way have expressed gratitude that I did not force them to make judgments when they were removed from the immediate pastoral situation. I find that bishops respect and reverence the pastoral judgment of priests, deacons, and others who know intimately the people to whom they minister.

**FOUR CHALLENGES TO CHURCH LEADERS**

In turn, the churches must also be challenged to be midwife to the birth of the ecumenical future. As midwives, church leaders must realize that it will be others who are giving birth to this future. We rely upon the wisdom, the experience, and the traditions which church leaders personify. But ultimately it will be from the families that new faith emerges. We must finally take seriously the axiom that parents are the primary religious educators of their children.

**Two by two**

In this regard, the first challenge to church leaders will be to refrain from categorizing or stereotyping mixed marriages and interchurch families in some abstraction. I find it useful to borrow Karl Rahner’s reminder that there are and will be numerous "open questions" in theology. Here is the domain of pastoral care, which even our canon lawyers revere. Rahner cautioned us not to demand more by way of dogmatic certainty from those outside our own denomination than we can ask of those within our own tradition. We have, he argued, a tendency to inflate various degrees of church teaching to the caliber of dogma. We need a sense of what Vatican Council II described as the "hierarchy of truths".

**Intercultural commitment**

A second challenge to the church and church leaders concerns the nature of "commitment". Margaret Farley, Professor of Ethics at Yale University Divinity School, has written a compelling study entitled *Personal Commitments*. In this work she reminds us that: "The essential elements of interpersonal commitment are an intention regarding future action and the undertaking of an obligation to another regarding that future action." If the church sees itself as defender of the bond and covenant of marriage, then more must be done to support and nurture the lives of interchurch families and mixed marriage couples. Farley even argues that commitment does not restrict our freedom, but enlarges it. This truth deserves scrutiny by the church and its leaders on two levels: (1) How does the marriage commitment of interchurch couples enlarge the church’s freedom to move through progressive steps toward visible unity within the life story of these families, and (2) how does this understanding of commitment summon the churches and church leaders to take seriously their obligation to create a more visible unity with other churches? The pioneering of interchurch families presents valid alternatives that deserve appropriation by church leaders.

**Imagination and courage**

Third, church leaders need to be challenged for their failure of imagination and courage regarding the implementation of the vision of church unity which is being passed now to a fourth generation of ecumenically-oriented Christians. Since I am a Roman Catholic, I can best address this timidity and hesitation in my own church. Why do we not stop the "factory recall" on the ecumenical initiatives set in motion by the Second Vatican Council? Why are those who took the Council seriously reprimanded by officials for applying and living those clearly articulated principles of ecumenism and ecclesiology? Why are we faulted when we move toward the "future church"? And why are women religious, who took this vision of the church seriously and lived it into reality, reprimanded most for making such an effort?

**Towards an understanding of the 'exceptional'**

Fourth and finally, pastoral ministers must respond to interchurch families with an informed understanding of ecumenism and of the possibilities for visible unity extended by the various churches. Let me give a specific example from my Roman Catholic tradition. In 1993, the Vatican issued a revised *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Eucharist*. Its intention was to update the previous directory of almost twenty-five years earlier. One of the most encouraging aspects of the directory was the motive to revise "in light of the experience of the Church in the years since the Council and taking account of the present ecumenical situation ... " (n.6).

Of special interest to AIF and other national interchurch associations are specific guidelines on "Mixed Marriages". Those of us who followed the drafts of this section of the directory held our breath as it navigated through various Vatican congregations. The final text should, in my judgement, be read as an especially generous response to interchurch families when it addresses the possibility of limited eucharistic sharing. While the directory describes such eucharistic sharing as "exceptional", this nomenclature ought not to discourage valid requests. In fact, the official admission of the possibility of limited eucharistic sharing in the context of a sensitive treatment of "mixed marriage" is a step forward, especially in places where the issue has been nationalized and dismissed as absolutely impossible. Cardinal Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has commented on these guidelines, noting that mixed marriages "are constantly on the increase and ... create a
special challenge for the ecumenical movement”. The directory’s calling attention to canon 844 and this possibility is news to many Catholic clergy and will make the requests of interchurch families more palatable.

I have likened this “exceptional” status to the experience of a friend whose kidneys failed and who had to undergo dialysis twice a week. This medical procedure is certainly “exceptional” and no one would find it desirable. In fact, my friend anxiously awaited the call that a donor kidney had been matched with her blood type. The transplant succeeded and now she enjoys a normal, active life. The church, Body of Christ, suffers from the division of the churches. When eucharistic sharing is extended to interchurch families, it is an “exceptional” practice because the normal, healthy reality would be full communion among all the baptised. We have this exceptional practice, not because there is something wrong with interchurch couples or their children. What is imperfect is the quality of unity shared by the churches. The exception follows from this lack of communion by the churches, not from the status of interchurch families.

Let me quote from a letter which I received from an American woman in an interchurch family to illustrate her struggle with such a reality. (I have changed the names of the persons and parishes to protect the family’s confidentiality.) Let me call the woman Monika. She is Episcopalian. Her husband is a Roman Catholic. She described how she and her husband had wrestled with the question and occasionally taken communion at one another’s church. But at Christmastime the pain became unbearable. She planned to go to Midnight Mass with her husband and daughter at her husband’s Roman Catholic church; he participates in the choir and “the music is great” she described. At Christmas morning liturgy she was to be a reader in her church. At this point she had resolved herself to scrupulous abstinence from communion at the Catholic church. She would come to communion, fold her arms across her chest, and receive a blessing from the priest. But then she wrote about the Christmas Midnight Mass:

“I think I’ve figured out why I decided to quit receiving at St Martha’s and then why I wanted to do so again. I am kind of like a newlywed as an interchurch spouse, now participating in my husband’s church. A newlywed who goes to Mother’s house for dinner every day may be giving the wrong message to the spouse - indeed, may be signalling that the family of choice is less important than the family of origin. But when the holidays come, it would be really rude, and not much fun, to refuse to go to Mother’s house - both to my mother’s and his. The nuclear families that support us for most of the days of the year need to open up and join with the whole extended family of God to celebrate the feasts. At least, that’s how it’s working for me.”

IV A THREAT OF RESURRECTION

Let me conclude with a borrowed line of poetry. It comes from the voice of a Guatemalan woman, Julia Esquivel, who has suffered exile for her commitment to justice. (I am indebted to a Quaker, Parker Palmer of Wisconsin, whose book, The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring, introduced me to Esquivel’s work.) The title poem of her collection of poems is They Have Threatened Us with Resurrection. There is an intentional ambiguity about the identity of the “They” in the title of the poem. In one sense, both the killers and the killed threaten us with resurrection. Parker Palmer suggests that the killers test our convictions about resurrection and test our willingness to be brought into a larger life than the one we know. On the other hand, “They” are the friends who have died for their commitment to justice and peace; if we take their witness seriously, then we too will have to undergo some form of dying with confidence in our own resurrection.

This liberation song challenges us to inspired active lives. The alternative is to live in ignorance of the killers and the dead, in what Palmer calls “a conspiracy of silence”. The paradox lies in our taking both the killers and the martyrs seriously. Then we engage our own fear of resurrection and our lives open in witness and hope. When the poor of Guatemala or we ourselves - begin to live out this paradox, “we experience more comfort by far than when we try to live in the illusion that we can evade our dying”. In ways certainly less lethal, interchurch families live with the paradox of our Easter faith. But the witness is no less compelling, because the spiritual suffering proves just as real. So it is that interchurch families find themselves in special solidarity with Guatemalan campesinos.

The suffering and heroic fidelity of interchurch families poses a genuine threat to the church’s clinging to old paradigms and theologically obsolete methods of envisioning church unity. It is true to say that the faith does not change, but our understanding of the faith changes time and time again. A new understanding of the future church is the beacon of Easter light which interchurch families offer the churches. It means that we pass through “the dark interval” when inadequate understandings die. To admit this ongoing dynamic is to live-into-reality our resurrection faith. But that faith in the new life of resurrection threatens the patterns of the past. I find an echo of Julia Esquivel’s faith on the occasion of the joint conference of the Group for Local Unity of Churches Together in England with the Association of Interchurch Families in its twenty-fifth anniversary year. Together you sing with Esquivel:

Accompany us then on this vigil and you will know what it is to dream! You will then know how marvellous it is to live threatened with Resurrection!

May God who began the good work in you bring it to fulfilment!

George Kilcrease
INTERCHURCH FAMILIES is a twice-yearly journal which discusses the theological and pastoral issues raised by the existence of interchurch families (especially families in which one partner is a Roman Catholic and the other a Christian of another communion). It shares the experience of these families with a wider public, and helps readers keep abreast of developments which concern mixed marriages and interchurch families, in the context of the wider ecumenical movement.

Pastoral care
It is addressed to:
- interchurch couples,
- clergy and ministers,
- theological students and seminarians,
- relatives and godparents,
- marriage counsellors and teachers,
- marriage preparation teams,
- parenting teams,
- those preparing children for First Communion and Confirmation,
- in fact, to all who are or expect to be in any way responsible for the pastoral care of mixed marriages and interchurch families in all their variety.

Towards Christian unity
The journal is also addressed to:
- ecumenical officers,
- ecumenical commissions,
- local groupings of churches,
- in fact, to all concerned with the movement towards Christian unity, for in interchurch families the pain of Christian division and the celebration of Christian unity is focused at its most local level. An interchurch family is a "domestic church", and interchurch families are the smallest units of "Churches Together".

The journal is published by the English Interchurch Families Association, but it intends to serve the needs of English-speaking interchurch families and all who care for their welfare world-wide. It warmly welcomes contributions and editorial help from all parts of the world.

For parts of the world the annual subscription (Europe) to INTERCHURCH FAMILIES is £8 sterling or £12 for three years, and should be sent to the English Association at the address below.

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THE ASSOCIATION
The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) offers a support network for interchurch families and mixed marriages and a voice for such families in the churches. Most members are interchurch couples and families; some are individuals who wish to further the Association’s work.

Mutual support
AIF began in 1968 as a mutual support group, formed by couples who had found that the exchange of experience with others in similar situations could help each find its own way forward. There are local AIF groups throughout England. A national conference is held every year at Swanwick in Derbyshire.

An Association for others
The support network which AIF offers extends far beyond its own members. Many interchurch and mixed couples find information and a listening ear a great help in times of crisis. One of the Association’s most important tasks is to build up a support network of informed people who are ready to respond to enquirers.

Commitment to change
AIF members are also ready to work for increased understanding by all churches of the pastoral needs of interchurch and mixed marriage families, at local, diocesan, national and international level, as their own circumstances allow. The Association is committed to the movement for Christian unity; interchurch families suffer because of Christian divisions, but they also have particular incentives and special opportunities to work for the healing of those divisions. AIF is a "body in association" with Churches Together in England, and members will work for unity within their own families and at whatever level they can.

The Association is a registered charity (no. 283811) dependent on the subscriptions of members and the donations of others who wish to support its work.

Presidents are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, Dr Kenneth Greet, Bishop Alastair Haggart.

Members receive the Journal, AIF News and Notes and The Interdependent (written by and for interchurch children).

Details of membership, resources (publications, leaflets, AIF video), and a constantly up-dated list of Local Contacts throughout England are available on request to the Association at its London address.

AROUND THE WORLD
The Conference of Associations of Interchurch Families in Britain and Ireland includes the four English, Scottish and Irish sister-associations. It is a "body in association" with the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. AIF is also linked with other associations and groups of interchurch families around the world. Some contact addresses are:

- France
  Foyers Mises, Centre St-Irèneé, 2 place Gailleton, Lyon F 69002
- Irish Republic
  AIF, c/o Irish School of Eumenics, Milltown Park, Dublin
- Northern Ireland
  Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), 28 Bedford Street, Belfat, BT2 7PE
- Scotland
  Scottish AIF (SAIF), 2 Galston Court, Low Waters, Hamilton, ML3 7YH
- USA
  American AIF (AAIF), c/o Kentuckiana Community, 1115 South 4th, Louisville, KY 40203
- Canada
  Calgary Interchurch Marriage Support Group, 131 Bedford Cl.NE, Calgary, Alberta TK3 3L1
  Association of Interchurch Families in Montreal, 123 Arrowhead Cr., Pointe Claire, Quebec, H9R 3V4
  Interchurch Families - Saskatchewan 342 Guelph Crescent, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 4A9
- Australia
  Interchurch Families Association (Western Australia) (IFAWA), 62 Tweeddale Road, Applecross, Western Australia 6153
  Interchurch Families Association, Brisbane (IFAB), 409 Upper Cornwall Street, Coorparoo, Queensland 4151
- New Zealand
  Association of Interchurch Families (New Zealand), 15 Kelvon Road, Remuera, Auckland 5