From an address given to the Versailles meeting of foyers mixtes francophones in November 1995 by Fr René Beaupère OF, who re-read Luke 19, 1-10 in the light of the situation of interchurch families today.

There are no direct parallels. Few of us are tax-collectors, and no doubt we should like to be as rich as Zacchaeus.

But like him, we are small people in the crowd. To see Jesus, and to be seen by him, Zacchaeus ran ahead of the procession and climbed a tree. It wasn't done! A highly paid civil servant didn't run in the streets! Even less did he scramble up into a tree like a monkey.

But Jesus saw him. He understood. With no preliminaries, he told Zacchaeus to come down quickly and be ready to welcome him into his home.

The little foyers mixtes that we have are done things that aren't done. We have run ahead of the ecclesial processions - even looked down on them from above. The danger in doing this is that we may pass judgement on those below. Zacchaeus didn't; foyers mixtes may have done.

In any case, here we are in our tree, and Jesus is below. "Come down quickly!" Come and re-join the procession with me. There may be mitres and pectoral crosses, but the lame and the lepers are with me too. It's not a model procession; it's my people, my church.

So am I saying that Jesus is re-integrating foyers mixtes into the procession? Yes - but in order to give them a priceless gift.

Zacchaeus, said Jesus, I'm coming to your home. Note: today not tomorrow; to stay not to look in.

Sinner as he was, Zacchaeus may have hoped for a look from Jesus, a smile, a wave of the hand. He may even have imagined he might make a gesture - give to the poor, make restitution - so Jesus might think better of him.

But never could he have imagined that Jesus would invite himself to his home with such simplicity; with the speed which must have been quite an embarrassment to Mrs Zacchaeus. For while Mr Zacchaeus was settling his accounts with Jesus, by confession and conversion, Mrs Zacchaeus was busy preparing the meal. It wasn't an everyday occurrence to welcome a rabbi, the rabbi of Nazareth!

Theologians tell us it is Jesus who receives us at his table. But today it is the Zacchaeus couple who welcome Jesus, who prepare their home, their table and their hearts for the feast in honour of their unexpected guest.

As I think of the meeting of Jesus and Zacchaeus, sealed by that thanksgiving meal, I ask myself if we foyers mixtes think enough about the fact that - even if it is Jesus who presides over the eucharistic meal - it is up to us to prepare the table, with all that involves, and for each of us personally to prepare ourselves for that eucharistic sharing. On these two points, are we sure we are without sin? Are we sufficiently converted?

"Today I want to stay with you." Are we ready to receive together at our eucharistic table that visitor still unknown, even if, as for the disciples on the Emmaus road, our hearts burn within us as we begin to recognise him while he opens his Word to us?

Of course that impromptu meal shared by Jesus and the tax-collector did not please the Jewish authorities - no more than the relations between Jesus and the foyers mixtes always please the ecclesial processions.

But do they realise that what allows the friendship between Jesus and Zacchaeus is the conversion of heart of the tax-collector. He too, explains Luke, is a son of Abraham because - although a sinner - he is forgiven.

Yes, foyers mixtes sometimes do things which are not done; they take short-cuts by climbing into trees and leaping over barriers; they have won some rights and enjoy the fruits of them without shame. None of that is to be condemned so long as they remain Christians, forgiven sinners, members of the churches together on pilgrimage, for whom the criterion of belonging is conversion of heart in the light of and by the grace of the One to whom we must open wide our door. Amen.

In this issue: Sharing Communion pp.2-3; Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Interchurch Families pp.5-7; Interchurch Families around the World pp.8-11; Liberating the Church pp.12-15; Index to vols.3 and 4 p.15

"You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity." Pope John Paul II. York, 1982
FIRST COMMUNIONS
IN OUR FAMILY: A reflection

It is some years now since Ruth, now 15, and Matthew, now 13, made their first Holy Communion, but perhaps that makes it a good time to look back and share our experiences with others. These events took place in 1988 and 1990, well before the 1993 Ecumenical Directory was published.

Like other interchurch couples, we were concerned to make the occasions as meaningful as we could for Ruth, and later for Matthew. We started planning early, some eight months before the event. We have never been very involved in theological or doctrinal ecumenical debate. We have preferred to live as best we can as Christians in a Christian family, involving ourselves in local practical links with other churches and letting that speak for us. However, using the excellent book Sharing Communion, edited by Ruth Reardon and Melanie Finch (Collins, 1983), we spoke first to our assistant parish priest and, with his blessing, wrote to our Roman Catholic bishop requesting that John (an Anglican) should receive communion. In the letter we referred as fully as we could to the four canonical criteria mentioned in the book. The letter itself was a spontaneous request: we made reference to our spiritual need which could not otherwise be met and expressed a shared eucharistic belief. At that time, I don't think we dared to expect the answer we got. Our intention was to make sure that our bishop was aware of the problem and the needs of interchurch couples, and to stimulate thoughts about the issue. We already knew him to be sympathetic to the situation of an interchurch family. We were delighted when, a few weeks later, we received a personal reply in which our bishop suggested that John see it as God's will that he should receive at Ruth's first communion.

The day itself was a joyous occasion for us all, especially as so many of our Roman Catholic friends expressed their delight too. Those less enthusiastic were sensitive and did not let their feelings show. Ruth made her communion with the four of us all together at the rail in our local Roman Catholic church. Matthew received a blessing.

Two years later, we again planned early and made no assumptions that a favourable response would automatically follow. The response was the same, and so Matthew took his communion with all four of us now receiving. We were particularly touched that our parish priest himself gave us communion on this occasion.

There was, of course, the question of what would happen in John's Anglican church. Ruth and Matthew were much younger than, for example, the vicar's son who had not been confirmed. When we talked to the vicar, he spontaneously offered that Ruth, and then later Matthew, should receive, and indeed for each of them he devised a little "admission to Holy Communion" rite in the morning service. We shall long remember Ruth and Matthew replying, "Yes, please," to the question, "Do you want to take communion in this church?" As always, there was quiet, undemonstrative support from the congregation.

What stands out for us now is, first and foremost, the warmth and support we received from priests and friends alike. Because it has been so constant and positive, we almost forgot to mention the love and understanding we have both experienced from both our families. We also gained much from other interchurch families, and wonder if we would have been so fortunate without the information and support they have given.

We think that if there are any pointers here for others, they are these:

First, plan well ahead. Talk about the possibilities and sow the seeds, even years in advance. Talk to other interchurch families far and near. Asking at the last minute, or just presenting oneself at the altar rail may be appropriate, but it gives no one time to think about issues which they may not have fully appreciated, or have had to face previously.

Second, every situation is unique. Use all the resources within the interchurch family network to make sure you know the range of possibilities, and to help you to pray and decide what is the best approach for your situation.

Third (perhaps underestimated at the time), we believe that a key aspect of our case was that the whole family were fully active members of both communities. Margaret has been involved in events and worship at John's church, and John has helped on RCIA and First Communion programmes as well as flogging "win the bottle" tickets at annual fairs! Ruth and Matthew have been in Sunday School, acted as servers, helped and joined in social events. We are not theologians, but there is a strong sense in which receiving communion reflects and expresses our existing sense of community under God, as well as nurturing and developing our life together.

We have also experienced division at the eucharist. At our wedding, Margaret wanted a mass, and as it was a day of obligation that made sense. Neither of us, nor indeed many of the congregation, has forgotten the hurt of seeing one side of the church all going up to receive while the other, including many practising Christians, were unable to do so. Perhaps that is why we have taken so long to write this down, or perhaps it was that we did not want to embarrass any of those who had supported us so practically, or yet again perhaps it was because we felt almost guilty at being so blessed when many others are still unable to share as we did. Why should we have been so blessed when so many others still have to feel such pain and hurt? We pray that our experience may encourage others to ask and continue to point up the needs of interchurch families - and of course we pray that many more may share the joys which we experienced.

John and Margaret
EUCHARIST AND FAMILY

Essential to Communion

Catholic pastors need help in understanding the theological justification for the way in which the provisions of the Code of Canon Law on admission to communion (can. 844) as explained and spelled out in the Directory (129-31) have been applied to the pastoral needs of interchurch families in certain cases (Directory 159-60). We print below a large part of an article published by the National Pastoral Life Centre of the United States Bishops' Conference, in Church (Winter 1995), where Father Ernest Falardeau, Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, offers just such help.

The concept of the family as the domestic church is not new. It is found in a variety of statements, including Lumen gentium and Apostolicam actuositatem; two documents from Vatican II. Pope John Paul II has used the concept effectively in his encyclical on the family, Familiaris consortio. Following the papal lead, the US Bishops' Conference stresses the family as the domestic church in its recent pastoral letter for the International Year of the Family, Follow the Way of Love. In this article I integrate the concept of the family as domestic church with that of church as communion. Then I turn the notion around to entertain the following question: If the family is the domestic church and the church is a communion, then couldn't the family be considered a domestic communion?

The Church as Communion

"What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us. This fellowship (koinonia) of ours is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ," writes St John (1 Jn 1:13). The theology of communion is developed in St Paul's writings about the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12 and Rom. 12) and in other related writings. That theology is also at the heart of Vatican II (especially of Lumen gentium and the Decree on Ecumenism). Not only does the church describe itself as a communion, the documents explain the existence and purpose of other churches also in terms of communion. The Orthodox churches, for example, are said to be in "almost full communion" with the Catholic church. Protestant churches and ecclesial communities are said to be in "real though imperfect communion" with the Catholic church. And within the Catholic church itself are many particular churches or dioceses, including many Eastern Catholic churches with their own form of pastoral oversight, liturgical language and tradition (Byzantine, Coptic, Malabar, etc.). All of these are in full communion with Rome and each other. From an ecumenical point of view, communion is at the heart of modern understanding of the church as church (ecclesiology).

The Family as Domestic Church

Familiaris consortio calls the family "the domestic church". While the encyclical does not give a full development of the idea of the domestic church, the church of the home, it does begin to explain this insight. Pope John Paul puts it this way:

The Holy Spirit, who is poured forth in the celebration of the sacraments, is the living source and inexhaustible sustenance of the supernatural communion that gathers believers and links them with Christ and with each other in the unity of the church of God. The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called the "domestic church".

Two points in the quotation need to be underscored: (1) that the Holy Spirit is the source, through the sacraments, of the communion that gathers together husband, wife and children, and (2) that the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, which is why we call it the domestic church.

Communion in the Trinity

In the Scriptures cited above from St John and St Paul, it is communion in the Trinity that makes the church the fellowship of Christians. It is our communion in Christ that really makes us who we are. This is "eternal life", i.e. the beginning of our life with God forever. The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is the person binding the Father and Son together in the love of the Trinity. That same person binds us together in Christ and with one another. This is why Pope John Paul can say that the family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion. The family makes real and visible the church here and now.

The Eucharist and the Domestic Church

Another part of John Paul II's letter on the family concerns the Eucharist and the place of the Eucharist in the family: The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The eucharistic sacrifice in fact represents Christ's covenant of love with the church, sealed with his blood on the cross. In this sacrifice of the new and eternal covenant, Christian
spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and the soul of its "communion" and its "mission". By partaking in the eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the church. Their sharing in the body of Christ that is "given up" and in his blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family. (57)

This is a marvellous passage filled with allusions to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (especially chapter 10:16ff.), where Paul describes the Eucharist as the source of the unity in the body of Christ. It sets the context for his discussion, in chapter 12, of the church as the body of Christ.

What John Paul II is stressing is that Christian couples are not left to themselves to develop and nurture their mutual love and their love for their children. The Eucharist nurtures them. It is also the model and source of the marriage covenant. The Eucharist is the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which teaches us the Eucharist is a primary source of domestic love and its nurture, giving love "continual renewal and structure". No wonder that St Paul said of Christian marriage that it is a great mystery (mysterion), a great symbol (sacramentum) of the love of Christ for his church:

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:28-32)

Ecumenical Families as Domestic Church

Father John Hotchkin has written an article (Familiaris Consortio - New Light on Mixed Marriages, One in Christ, 1986) applying what the pope wrote about Catholic marriages to interchurch marriages. He singled out the need for eucharistic sharing by couples in ecumenical marriages. Obviously at this time such sharing can only be exceptional and must respect the established guidelines. However, the encyclical itself left to its readers to apply its teaching tellingly in its application to the Church at large, and it has since then been a major contribution to advance in ecumenical dialogue with other Christians.

Familiaris Consortio brings the same insight to bear on Christian marriage and the family. There is good reason to hope that this too may prove to be a similarly important contribution to ecumenical dialogue with other Christians on this sacred reality which is a part of all our lives.

The encyclical addresses itself to all Christian marriages. In the discussion about the education of children, it states that the basis for the rights of parents is the close connection between procreation and education. The right to educate arises from the very responsibility for giving life and nurture. In ecumenical or inter-Christian mixed marriages, both parents have an obligation to give religious instruction and to communicate religious values. It does not fall only on the shoulders of one of the spouses.

The Eucharist in Ecumenical Families

One of the great needs of interchurch couples is eucharistic sharing. This need arises from the church's conviction that baptism and Eucharist are intimately and inseparably united. Communion in Christ is deepened by the sacrament of marriage, which interchurch couples have also received. ...The Association of Interchurch Families in England and the foyers mixtes of France have long advocated special consideration for couples who seek to be faithful to their individual traditions, yet desire to celebrate their love together as a family. Cardinal Willebrands, too, asks if the pain has not been borne long enough. Is it not time?

Ernest R Falardeau, SSS

One of the great needs of interchurch couples is eucharistic sharing.

Clearly one of the most important insights affecting the life of the Church in these times is the perception of the Christian reality as a communion of persons enlivened by the Spirit, both reflecting and participating in the communion of the Persons of the Trinity. Lumen Gentium unfolded this teaching tellingly in its application to the Church at large, and it has since then been a major contribution to advance in ecumenical dialogue with other Christians. Familiaris Consortio brings the same insight to bear on Christian marriage and the family. There is good reason to hope that this too may prove to be a similarly important contribution to ecumenical dialogue with other Christians on this sacred reality which is a part of all our lives.

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Ernest R Falardeau, SSS
LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS & Interchurch Marriage

After sixteen years of working in the ecumenical environment of Milton Keynes, Fr James Cassidy moved to a smaller parish in Essex. This presented him with an opportunity to reflect on the theology of Local Ecumenical Projects (now called Local Ecumenical Partnerships), a neglected area, and to write a doctoral thesis for the University of Birmingham on Membership of the Church, with reference to Local Ecumenical Projects in England. Out of this experience, he contributes the article below.

One of the more interesting developments in British church life in recent years is the growth of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). They are specific areas (or special ministries) in which the denominations agree to work together, sharing worship, congregational life, mission, and not infrequently buildings. Their roots can be traced back to the 1964 Faith and Order Conference of the British Council of Churches held in Nottingham. Note that LEPs began slowly and expanded gradually. All the major Christian denominations (except the Orthodox) are involved. Roman Catholic participation is less full than that of other denominations because of the present regulations on sharing the eucharist, but in spite of this there are a number of LEPs with Catholic participation.

This co-operation has grown as the members of the various denominations recognise each other as fully Christian and work out what this is to mean in practice. In theological terms, they see that they are part of the one Church of Christ, united in the fundamental sacrament which is baptism. It is the source of unity. The LEPs bear witness to this unity. They show that the Church as one fellowship of believers is no longer a matter of parishes or communities. They are now an integral part of the ecclesiastical scene, and thus bring their insights into all areas of church life.

Theological reflection and the calming of tribal fears
In LEPs we have denominations which used to be totally distinct but which are now united in prayer and mission. One can quote all sorts of anecdotes which highlight how different the relationships between the churches used to be. Two come to mind: brick-throwing in Liverpool on St Patrick’s Day and King Billy’s Day, and the episode in the Midlands when all the members of a factory workshop, and their families, changed denomination when a new foreman, who was church, not chapel, was appointed.

The growth of cooperation comes not through any change in doctrine by the denominations, but as a result of theological reflection and the calming of tribal fears. It is not a recent development to recognise the one baptism. From the third century, the Christian church had decided to recognise baptism by whomever it was administered. With the exception of the Anabaptists, the Reformers made no change; indeed, the Diet of Worms in 1529 made rebaptism a capital offence, confirmed at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530.

Denominations have changed their rules to cope with ecumenical developments; for example, Anglicans now have various Ecumenical Canons, and Methodists recognise other clergy as authorised to celebrate in their chapels and in LEPs where Methodists are participants. It must be clear that these are changes of rules, not of doctrine. We can see a similar development in the Catholic Church from the 1928 encyclical Mortalium Animos of Pius XI, which forbade ecumenical contacts to Catholics, to the openness of Ut Unum Sint of 1995. These developments have all come from theological reflection, not from a change of faith. There has been a growing together as hostility has diminished, and an awareness of what the unity of baptism means for church life, both locally and centrally.

LEPs and marriage: unity in diversity
We can see a parallel between the LEPs and marriage. There is a development from the meeting of two strangers to the growth of the total unity of persons which is true marriage: they become one unity from diversity. The common humanity of the persons is transformed in the unique personal relationship which reflects the unity of Christ and his Church.

This is given an additional dimension in interchurch marriage. It was noted by the American George Kilcourse in his book on interchurch marriages, when he wrote: “The phenomenon of interchurch families affords a new paradigm in the sense that the rules and boundaries which segregated the divided churches can no longer be persuasively applied when evaluating their unique needs or gifts.” (Double Belonging, Paulist Press, 1992, p. 129) His thesis is that the practices have changed, and that the regulations need to change to take into account the actions of the faithful, who are one in worship.

A couple of points can be mentioned regarding problems (or opportunities) which can arise in a Local Ecumenical Partnership. When there is a wedding, questions need to be asked as to the form and style of the wedding, and also the denomination of the minister concerned; those being married may not be members of the minister’s denomination. At a baptism in a LEP the baptised person is known as a member of the LEP congregation, the Christian church at X, but if the family moves to a non-LEP area, to which denomination does that baptised person belong? (An interesting theological question arises here: how can denominations which are united in a LEP be un-united a few miles away?) More positively, we can use interchurch marriage as a metaphor, and say that it is through the LEPs (a sort of
marriage of the denominations) that the denominations have grown together in the manner of married couples. Fr John Coventry, in the "Conclusions" to a book of experiences from interchurch families, wrote of the uniting power of such marriages. "Parents begin apart ... They learn to develop their own personal Christian unity within their marriage, and in the course of this process the differences move to the margin and the deep realities of their common inheritance become central. It is the unity which Christ gives ... which they pass on to their children." (Sharing Communion, ed. Ruth Reardon and Melanie Finch, London, 1983, p. 99) The denominations have moved together, not because of pressure from above, but because of the strength of local personal relationships. Partners in marriage must work at their marriage at their own pace, nobody else’s. The LEPs were encouraged and supported in a very "hands-off" way by the Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England (CICLEPE) of the British Council of Churches, which worked at a distance through local structures. (This Committee, it should be noted, also included a Catholic member, and used various Catholics as resource people.) Now, of course, Catholics are full members of the Group for Local Unity (GLU), successor to CICLEPE and one of the co-ordinating groups of Churches Together in England.

I am somewhat handicapped in pushing the analogy, for as a Catholic priest once involved in LEPs I do not have any personal experience of an interchurch marriage, although of course I do know interchurch families. However, from my own experience I can see the similarities as described by Fr Coventry. For those who are in interchurch marriages, I can see tensions which are similar to those of LEPs. First of all, there is an awareness that there is one Church. one Lord, one Spirit, one Baptism. There is also the denominational division which is the result of sin in the past, which endures and affects us all; and as with all sin, it has untold effects in time. Those who are working against these effects of sin, without any responsibility for the sin itself, feel frustrated. The mission of the Church (or the fully Christian life of the family) can seem thwarted.

But there must be hope. As the Consultation on the future of LEPs, held in 1994 under the auspices of Churches Together in England declared, perhaps in an idealistic way: "LEPs are grit in the system, irritants capable of producing pearls of reconciliation and renewal. Reconciliation will express the mutual acceptance of all members, ministries and sacraments in a form we cannot yet see in detail, but we are conscious that, as they are reconciled, the traditions of the churches will be reshaped by the Kingdom to come, and unite the Church in another dimension, and transform it by their common faith, which can overcome denominational division.

The prophetic dimension of the local church

The fact that LEPs grew from the local church, without being imposed from above, is important. It shows that normal members of the church are not blind to the dissonance between theology and the "real world". They seek unity between the churches, and, like good families, are tolerant of legitimate diversity rather than accepting either division or enforced conformity. This tolerance draws them together even more closely. The unity between the denominations in a LEP can be striking. This centripetal force in ecclesiology was observed by Pope John Paul II who said, while Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Cracow, at the 1969 Roman Synod: "Communion in fact designates unity in its dynamic aspect. It is this kind of unity that is obtained between diverse members by a communication that tends always to be more profound and abundant. Consequently, plurality, even diversity itself, is to be understood in relation to communion, with the tendency towards unity." (Cited by H. de Lubac in The Motherhood of the Church, San Francisco, 1982, p. 223) The sharing of the life of the denominations in LEPs is part of the process of the acceptance of plurality which leads inexorably to the desire for further unity, as indicated by the then Cardinal Wojtyla. The members of an interchurch family have their own contribution to make to this force for unity.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships are now part of the tradition of the Church in England. They show that the Church, the one fellowship of believers, is both of the locality and of the wider communion of the Church. Any division within any level of "Church" is a counter-witness to the unity of the Spirit, which is shared, and acknowledged to be shared, by all Christians. I would venture to say that both interchurch families and LEPs demonstrate the prophetic dimension of the local church in pointing towards the final unity of the eternal celebration in heaven, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

James M. Cassidy

Called to be One: Based on what member-churches say they mean by the visible unity of the church as well as on the experience of the churches working together locally (Churches Together in England 1994, pp. 35-41 Lower Marsh, London, SE1 7RL.}$
INTERCHURCH FAMILIES
A model for the LEP community

Our family belongs to a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), St Andrew's Shared Church in Cippenham, West Slough. We belong by choice, not only because it conveniently mirrors our church commitments, but also because it is a welcoming and loving community in which the sense of belonging is strong. There are a number of mixed interchurch couples who worship at St Andrew's, but Paul and I are the only couple who have chosen to be active participators in both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic communities, practising the double belonging that we feel as a sense of belonging is strong. There are a number of mixed minors our church commitments, but also participators in both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic of church publicity needed to be updated, including our entry an interchurch couple.

Recently, on the arrival of a new Anglican priest, some aspects of church publicity needed to be updated, including our entry on the county viewdata system. The vicar asked that Paul and I should be the contacts on the system, and in some other general publicity for St Andrew's. Her view was that we as an interchurch couple were the only members who truly represented the whole church, and who could provide accurate information about both the traditions involved. On the face of it this seems sensible, and of course we agreed. But somehow it suggested to us that as a community we at St Andrew's have missed out on a fulfilling and loving part of belonging to a shared Christian community, and I wonder how far other LEPs might share the same story.

My question is: why is it only an interchurch family member who can be relied on to know and even understand the other partner in our church community? Should not all members of the LEP at least try to share in the life of, and understand the roots of, the partner church? But in a busy world, you may argue, that's a tall order! Yes, it is, but in our journey towards unity, a necessary one. And here the interchurch family members return, because they are, perhaps, a model for the LEP family.

Much of what I will say about an interchurch family applies, naturally, to any family, and therefore to the family of the church. But there are aspects of the relationship involving two churches that ask a little more of the interchurch couple - and, by my reasoning, a little more of the LEP member.

In preparing for marriage a couple eagerly find out as much as possible about one another, and about their hopes for the future. What is her favourite colour? Does he want children? What political party does she support? Why does he want to go pot-holing every weekend? When the two people involved belong to different churches it is important to explore that aspect of the relationship too. Why are you a Baptist? What is it about your church that attracts you? It may be important to affirm your own allegiance. As Paul and I prepared for marriage, I asked myself: why am I an Anglican, and what sort of Anglican am I? All sorts of things about Paul's church attracted and intrigued me, and helped deepen my own faith. My prayer life will always be the richer for my involvement with Roman Catholic spirituality. We shared and explored, and had to find out more about our own churches in order to answer the other's questions. I don't suppose many engaged couples spend an evening discussing what it means to ask the prayers of a saint, what incense is for, or what the word "priest" really means! We still share, and we are still growing in knowledge and respect for each other's churches. We now know why we belong to the churches we do; we also know where our beliefs differ (in a few, minor details) and where they are the same. The process strengthens us as a couple, and will help us as we raise our children towards being whole Christians in a two-church environment.

Discussion, honest sharing, learning about each other, how to treasure the similarities and respect and value the differences should be a part of life for all LEP members. Through such a commitment members will be more bound to each other, more likely to be one community that happens to include two congregations than two congregations who happen to share a building. Some LEPs, particularly where all worship is shared, are nearer to this than others. A strong sharing might lead to a deeper love and to a greater awareness of actions that might cause pain or division, however unintentionally.

For example, back at St Andrew's, Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve 1993 was an ecumenical failure. It was a Roman Catholic Mass; opportunities for Anglicans to be involved in the service were slight, and they felt excluded. So when Christmas 1994 approached, members of the Anglican church council said they wanted a service of their own. Perhaps it could be parallel, they suggested, happening at the same time in another part of the building - we could even coordinate the Christmas cards. I was a member of the council, and my vision of the service was quite different. I would be in one corner, Paul in another, and our daughter in a corridor in between, wondering where she belonged. Or would we choose one church to the exclusion of the other? This story has a happy ending - on my vision being tearfully explained to the other council members, a group was set up to share in the planning of the service. Soon Anglican members were saying, "Wasn't the sharing at Midnight Mass 1994 wonderful?"

It shouldn't have needed the prospect of a real family being divided at Christmas for church members to understand the need to share, to give and to take. If the church community saw itself as a family, and practised a family love, then such division would have been unthinkable, and unthought of. A family always wants to share its activities, both joyful and sorrowful, and would not consider leaving a family member out. So inviting sister Louise to Christmas dinner means making him promise to ration the blue jokes in front of the children - you still want them there, and make an effort to share together. Christian communities are the same, doubly so when they are interchurch communities. Effort and sacrifice is required all round, but with Christ's love to help us, every day is Christmas!

Beverley Hollins
ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE: ADMISSION TO COMMUNION

At Easter 1995 the Archbishop of Brisbane issued a document entitled Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality. He explained that two years earlier the Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism had raised the question and expressed concern about the amount of confusion existing among Catholics in matters of eucharistic hospitality, with so many people unsure of official Church teaching. He asked the Commission to carry out the consultation and research necessary to produce pastoral guidelines, which it did. He then offered his Pastoral Guidelines for Providing Access to Holy Communion for Christians of Other Churches to the clergy and laity of the Archdiocese as official policy, which "is based on sound principles of Ecumenism, will give adequate direction to the Archdiocese, and will further the aims of the Ecumenical Movement."

Following an introduction, a section on the Centrality of the Eucharist, and one on Unity in Faith, there are two paragraphs which relate directly to interchurch families. These are printed below. Of particular interest is the recognition that some couples will experience a need to share communion on a regular basis, and that this need can be met.

Eucharistic Hospitality

There are significant events in the lives of individual Christians and their families when requests to receive holy communion at a Catholic Mass will be made. If we consider the high frequency of marriage between Catholics and other Christians in Australia, the extensive sacramental preparation programs for children which require the participation of parents, many of whom are not Catholic, and the increasingly ecumenical climate in our Archdiocese, it is very likely that such requests will be forthcoming on a variety of occasions. This will be more so once our Church's openness to responding to the spiritual need of other Christians is better known. The following are some examples of possible spiritual need: for the partner at a marriage celebrated with a nuptial Mass; for the parent of a child baptised at a Catholic Mass; for the parent of a child receiving confirmation and first holy communion; for the family of the deceased at a funeral Mass. Similarly, requests may come from Christians who are denied easy access to a minister of their own Church because they are confined to a health care facility, or are subject to some form of institutional confinement.

There should not be a general invitation from the presiding priest for Christians from other churches to receive holy communion at a Catholic Mass. Each case must be considered on its merit. The person must make a request without any kind of pressure, must manifest the Catholic belief in the eucharist, and must have appropriate dispositions. In the Archdiocese of Brisbane it is sufficient for the presiding priest to establish, by means of a few simple questions, whether or not these conditions are met.

When a Christian from another Church makes frequent requests to receive holy communion, different circumstances prevail. In such cases joint pastoral care by the clergy of both Churches should be offered to help the person understand the significance of such requests.

Interchurch Marriages

The Directory on Ecumenism states that eucharistic sharing for a spouse in a mixed marriage can only be exceptional. The Directory, however, recognises a category of mixed marriages where each partner lives devotedly within the tradition of his and her Church. It sees such couples making a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement. A spouse in such a marriage, now commonly called an interchurch marriage, could well experience a serious spiritual need to receive holy communion each time he or she accompanies the family to a Catholic Mass. Requests for this kind of eucharistic hospitality should be referred by the parish priest to the Archbishop or one of the auxiliary bishops.
FRANCE

FERMENTS D'UNITÉ

The latest number of Foyers Mixtes (no.111, Jan.-March 1996) is almost entirely devoted to an account of the Versailles conference which took place in November 1995 (see INTERCHURCH FAMILIES January 1996) for all foyers mixtes francophones. Couples came from all over France (with visitors from England, Italy and Switzerland), together with some twenty or so priests and pastors involved in ecumenical activity. Some two hundred participants spent two days reflecting on the theme: Nous, foyers mixtes, ferments d'unité pour les églises. This theme was chosen to link up with that of the ninth English-speaking International Conference of Associations of Interchurch Families which takes place at Virginia Beach, USA, in July 1996: Interchurch Families: Catalysts for Church Unity.

We summarise below the account of the workshop reports as given in Foyers Mixtes. The workshop themes were:

1. A common profession of faith; (2) Eucharistic hospitality; (3) Belonging in the church; (4) And our children? (from baptism to profession of faith); (5) Action and witness together in the world.

Each group was asked to identify: (1) a stumbling-block which had caused suffering; (2) a recent event which had contributed to unity; (3) a step forward which we would like to see on the way to unity.

Stumbling blocks

1. A partner's ignorance of the other's confession.
2. Regret and sorrow at the lack of official authorisation of eucharistic hospitality (only foyers mixtes have some rights here).
3. Some would have wished for a single eucharistic celebration during the weekend, rather than both Mass and the Lord's Supper.
4. The churches' difficulty in recognising that the double belonging of our children is a living reality. (Many young people suffer from being "forced to choose". "Forced to choose" is a phrase which often comes up. A profession of faith in the two churches is accepted, but not confirmation.)
5. When people are simply labelled "Protestant" or "Catholic" in the other church, there are institutional stumbling blocks.
6. Young people regret that confirmation forces them to make a choice.
7. The catechism is not always taught very positively in our Catholic schools.

Recent events which have contributed to unity

1. Shared celebrations on certain occasions in prison and hospital chaplaincies.
2. Our children gladly given eucharistic hospitality.
3. The existence of ecumenical catechetical formation in several places (Lyons, Geneva, Neuchâtel...).
4. The presence of interchurch children in catechetical groups is a stimulus for Catholic and Protestant children from monoconfessional homes. (At Sévres there is just one interchurch child. Thanks to him, contacts between the priest and pastor have led to exchanges between various groups of monoconfessional children.)
5. Exchanges of catechists between the churches which encourages mutual understanding.
6. Common witness undertaken locally (e.g. in the shopping centre of Vélizy Catholics and Protestants run a stand during Advent).
7. Shared celebrations of baptism which give a public witness in the communities.
8. Shared catechetical formation: a witness and an enrichment.
9. Sharing together in the Lord's Supper and the Mass. The fact that each of the two partners participate in both eucharistic celebrations is a witness to the two communities. (I am sad that this is only for foyers mixtes. My parents, my parents-in-law, my grandparents also suffer from these divisions when they come to church with us.)

A step forward which we would like to see on the way to unity

1. Representative interchurch families in Catholic and Protestant councils.
3. Mutual recognition by the churches.
4. Recommendations at a more international ecumenical level.
5. Make eucharistic hospitality for foyers mixtes official - not just a half-authorisation.
6. The importance of informing young couples, ministers, churches. (I would like to think that, in so rich a gathering, you are also concerned for interchurch families who don't know that that is what they are. My concern as a pastor is not for you but for the others, those for whom it is not so easy to be both Protestant and Catholic.)

NIMMA

The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association also chose the theme of its annual conference, held at Corrymeela 12-14 April 1996, to fit in with the Virginia International Conference: Mixed Marriage - a Catalyst in the Community. It was not that the subject of interchurch families as catalysts for church unity was ignored, but in Northern Ireland religious identity has much wider cultural and community implications than in many other countries.

NIMMA has launched a publicity campaign, with a new logo and brochure, and the volume of enquiries has doubled since the opening of the Belfast office.

FINLAND

At its Annual Assembly on 14 March 1996, the Finnish Ecumenical Council accepted Recommendations to the Churches concerning Interchurch Marriages, a document which has been under preparation for some time (see INTERCHURCH FAMILIES, January 1996). We give an English translation below.

The churches regard marriage and Christian family life as important and wish to support and inspire couples in the establishing of a stable Christian family unit. Interchurch marriage creates a bond between couples from different Christian churches. The goal of these
recommendations is to set out common practice for the treatment of those entering interchurch marriages, and to help the churches to support those of their members who are living in interchurch marriages.

I Pre-marriage preparation
Pre-marriage preparation should not only be concerned with the wedding: the couple should discuss the nature of marriage, family life, and their rights and responsibilities in their own churches. Ideally, when a couple comes to discuss marriage, both churches should be involved.

In these discussions, the views on marriage of both churches involved need to be considered. They hold that marriage is a holy, life-long commitment; some churches regard it as a sacrament. There should be discussion about the church membership of any children born of the marriage, and about godparents.

The rights of both parents to their respective convictions, as well as their right to build up a common Christian family life, should be safeguarded.

II Christian family life in an interchurch marriage
An interchurch marriage, at its best, will be supported by the church life of both denominations. The traditions of both parents will enrich the life of the children as well as that of their parents. Just as the family has the right to build a family life formed from both traditions, so the parents have the right to worship in the style of their respective traditions.

Families are recommended to become familiar with the worship and church life of both traditions. If eucharistic sharing is not possible, it is possible to receive a blessing.

The churches are recommended to examine possibilities for arranging common family camps and meetings for spouses in interchurch marriages.

Both partners should have equal access to counselling and/or family therapy in both traditions.

III The rights and responsibilities of spouses in their own church
Spouses belonging to different churches have rights and responsibilities in relation to their own churches. They both have the right to take part in the work of their own church. The spouses also have spiritual and financial responsibilities in their own churches. They need to discuss these when preparing for an interchurch marriage.

IV Interchurch wedding ceremonies
Couples are recommended to contact both churches involved.

The wedding ceremony should follow the liturgy of the church in which the ceremony is performed.

If the couple planning to marry wish to have a pastor present from both churches, these pastors should be in touch with one another. The pastors and the couple should all agree on the eucumenical elements to be added to the marriage liturgy, using what is possible from the churches' point of view.

When, using the forms of both churches, a wedding is to be celebrated, followed by a blessing, these two elements can be performed during the same ceremony, but according to the traditions of the two churches.

The couple should be able to decide in which church the marriage is to be celebrated.

The Creighton research on marriage preparation
The Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, (of which Michael Lawler is Director) has recently published a report on Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting it Right. It researched the perceived value of marriage preparation by couples married between one and eight years. The study was based on a proportional random sample drawn on a demographic basis from a national total of 72,725 couples who over a period of seven years had used a particular communication understanding inventory during their marriage preparation programme which had been processed by Creighton, and who had given permission to be contacted for future research. An initial sample of 2,800 couples was supplemented with a selection of special couples, e.g. older and younger than average, interchurch, etc., to ensure adequate representation. One of the interesting findings was that satisfaction with marriage preparation, high in the earlier years, declined markedly over time. The study also perhaps surprisingly concluded that the fact that the programmes were mandatory did not appear to prevent the participants finding them valuable. Satisfaction increased with the number of sessions, up to eight or nine.

The Creighton researchers concluded that marriage preparation was indeed useful and should continue to receive the support of the churches. Indeed a recent national survey in America found that more than half (57%) of three thousand young adults polled rated marriage preparation as one of the "very important" ministries of the church for them. Further research is needed to discover why its perceived value declines over time, and if it is the benefits, or only the memory of the benefits, that erode. There is a need to try to ascertain whether marriage preparation prepares couples for the early years of marriage, admittedly the most vulnerable years, but not for the later ones of parenthood.

Interchurch couples at risk
Of particular interest to those concerned with marriage preparation for interchurch couples is the following finding: Interchurch couples, who comprised 27% of respondents, are most at risk for drift from church belonging and practice. They come to marriage preparation with lower levels of belonging and practice, and lower expectations of the value of marriage preparation. They leave it with a significant positive shift in attitude, indicating that marriage preparation has served them well, and yet they drift further away from the Church. The study showed that women in interchurch marriages drift further away from the Church than men, a disturbing fact given the research that indicates that mothers may be the strongest influence on the faith development of children.

(The term interchurch as used here refers to all Catholic/other marriages, those that in England would usually be referred to as mixed marriages as well as to interchurch marriages in the more specific sense.)
Further research planned on interchurch marriages

The Creighton study concludes: "The challenge is clear. Those who provide marriage preparation programs need to understand better the dynamics and needs of interchurch couples so that they can respond to them better and offer them programs more suited to the demands of their situations. The Church is challenged to make interchurch couples a priority and to create for them marriage programs that will make religious faith and practice a strong, ongoing factor in their marriages. The Center for Marriage and Family is proposing a follow-up study on interchurch marriages, national and ecumenical, to gather and analyse data on them, and to create and pilot models of marriage preparation fitted to their situations."

Those concerned with interchurch family life will look forward with eager anticipation to the results of the proposed three-year study.

Special marriage preparation programs needed for interchurch couples

In a presentation during a seminar related to this report Sr Barbara Markey, one of the Creighton team, commented that the Creighton study found that 45% of couples marrying in the Catholic church in the national sample had only one partner who was Catholic, and noted that in some Southern dioceses it may be 90%. She adds (using the term interfaith in the sense in which interchurch is used in the report): "What do we know about interfaith couples? Greeley's early study (1980) indicated that couples who do not share religion tend to be less satisfied in marriage and rebound more poorly from deterioration than couples who share faith. Dr Dean Hoge's study on interfaith marriage (1981) lists interfaith marriage as an accompanying factor for the drift from all faith; interfaith couples often solve their differences by ignoring religion as far as possible. My experience has been conducting workshops for Catholic-Lutheran couples as part of a larger dialogue with persons who are all intensely involved in their own faith. I don't know when I have been in a room where pain was more physically felt than with that last group of couples who were struggling to get past misunderstandings and family and church differences and wanted desperately to share something as central to themselves as their faith with the person they loved."

She adds: "Marriage preparation programs ordinarily ignore the issues of interfaith couples. Few resources are available for them, even though these couples are both high-risk and represent nearly one of every two marriages. They need skills, resources, and leaders who believe that finding ways to share faith builds marital strength."

During the same seminar, Dr James Healy, Director of the Center for Family Ministry of the diocese of Joliet, Illinois, also picked up the theme of interchurch marriage. He explained that in addressing interchurch couples, he uses a good news, bad news approach.

The good news is that interchurch couples are living out in a very concrete, day-to-day way, the ideals of the ecumenical movement. We might think that the ecumenical movement has stalled at the official level, but at the level of the domestic church - the family - ecumenism is going forward. However, grassroots ecumenism often looks different from official ecumenism. Interchurch couples don't have centuries to work out the details. They have one life time and, in terms of raising children, they have a window of about ten to fifteen years. During this short period of time, they must find ways to emphasize the commonalties and respect the differences in their faith traditions. So the good news is that, when they pull this off, they really have something of great value to teach us. They are pioneers, and we need to cherish them and listen to their experience."

The bad news is, life is tough on the frontier. Pioneers are at risk. What Sr Barbara was talking about is very true. These couples experience a double whammy. They are more likely to divorce, partly because they lack the bond for dealing with the stresses of married life that a shared denominational faith offers. They are also more likely to stop participating in their respective faith traditions, probably because what should be a bond - religious participation - has become for them a stressor. If there are too many problems associated with accommodating one or both persons' traditions, many couples make the decision either explicitly or tacitly to remove the source of the tension. So, these couples are at greater risk both for losing their marriages and their faith traditions.

Marriage preparation and support: a common task for the churches

Dr Healy then returns to the good news: there are many ways we can help and encourage these couples. The first is to distinguish, at least theoretically, between three different types of interchurch couples: those where both partners have solid commitments to their own respective faith traditions; those where one partner is actively involved in their tradition, but the other has less or no involvement in theirs; those where neither cares very much about their faith tradition. These three require a shared focus, but also more attention to their specific needs as well. More than anything, we need better cooperation among the churches. Most of the time, interchurch couples must take the lead in explaining to their churches what their needs are and what kind of support they need. In some ways this is appropriate, but few couples are equipped to do this. He then points to the "community covenant approach" to marriage preparation (see INTERCHURCH FAMILIES January 1994, p.9) where all the churches in an area agree to a common policy on marriage preparation. Early indications are that such policies strengthen Christian marriages, including interchurch marriages, and have a salutary effect on the divorce rate. He cites the value of shared marriage preparation for interchurch couples, to help empower them as co-pastors of their little domestic church.

Dr Healy concludes: "The American Association of Interchurch Families has offered a number of other suggestions. In the sacramental area, there is need for further reflection on how more clearly to show liturgically our belief in a common baptism, and a need to reflect further on the possibilities for limited eucharistic sharing. At the parish level, there can be a need for support groups, information sessions, and times when interchurch couples in our midst can be held up and welcomed. In brief, we need to view interchurch couples not as problems, although there are problematic aspects to their situations, but as people with both common and special needs, and with resources and gifts of their own."
INTERCHURCH FAMILIES:
Ecumenically liberating the Church

Extracted from the annual ecumenical lecture given at Lourdes College, Toledo, Ohio, February 1986.
The full text will appear in One in Christ.

Paying dividends
If you are involved in pastoral ministry and are wondering what problems interchurch families will cause you, let me offer you a story to convert you to seeing how we underestimate the role of interchurch families. Jane is a Roman Catholic, a professional woman; her husband, Ronald, is a member of the United Methodist Church and a businessman. Jane describes a surprising conversion she experienced when she attended her husband's church one day. (They regularly attend services at one another's church.) At collection time she noticed his monetary gift to his church and remarked, "That's what you are giving for the month." He replied, "No, this is what I am going to give every week." Jane said, "We can't afford that." "Yes, we can," he said. Jane added, "I don't give that much." "You should," Ronald replied. Jane said that not only her husband's financial support for his church, but also his involvement in the Methodist church in terms of time and talent had a surprising effect on her. "I said, if he is going to give that much to his church, I'm going to give that to my church." It was not a competitive response, but rather a matter of her learning from her interchurch spouse about stewardship. The moral of this story is for Catholic pastors and pastoral ministers to recruit interchurch spouses on their building committees and appoint them to direct your next fund-raising effort. I know of instances where this happens. On the basis of research comparing Catholics' lower levels of financial support with the markedly higher levels of financial support in other churches, ecumenism promises unexpected "dividends"! So now, pastors. I have your attention about interchurch marriage.

Today in the United States 40 per cent of Roman Catholics are marrying persons either from other Christian traditions, or from other religions, or who claim no religious identity. We are probably at the point in most parts of the United States where Catholics are just as likely to marry someone who comes from a different religious heritage as to marry a Catholic mate.

Contrary to those who interpret this phenomenon as a sign of the further disintegration of Catholic faith, I ask whether God might not be doing something constructive, even revelatory, in these new patterns of intermarriage. More succinctly, what does it mean when the "mixed marriages" which constitute a covenant between two Christians from now divided churches mature to become "interchurch marriages"?

Interchurch families and understanding church unity
Eighteen years ago I began serving a ten-year tenure as Research Director for the Office of Ecumenism in the Archdiocese of Louisville. We claimed a healthy Catholic presence in our city. We were 12 per cent of the population and had 30 Catholic parishes, 12 Catholic elementary schools, 6 Catholic high schools, and 4 Catholic colleges. In 1974, when I arrived, there were 160,000 Roman Catholics in our diocese. Today 750,000 people belong to the Archdiocese of Louisville. We are a sleeping giant. In 1984, I collaborated with a colleague from the Bellarmine's sociology department to survey the presbytery and to examine chancery records about the numbers and patterns of "mixed marriages". The result became page one news in The Louisville Times. Forty per cent of local Catholics were marrying persons either from other churches, or other religions, or (a definite minority) of no religious practice.

With the assistance of the National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, I undertook a pilot study of local couples involved in religious intermarriages. Two groups of Catholic-Protestant couples met regularly. It became more and more apparent that a significant majority of these married couples (and their children) were conscientious - at times, even heroic - about their faith lives. Their stories amazed and alarmed me. They had met one obstacle after another. Pastors' indifference to their identity as "interchurch couples" often proved more damaging than outright rejection.

One young couple, Rachelle and Mike, who worked closely in a pilot group, described their search for both a parish and a church where they could feel comfortable. They were welcomed into a Catholic parish where the priest encouraged them. In searching for an evangelical church in Rachelle's tradition, they recounted the harrowing experience of identifying themselves as an interchurch couple to a pastor after the worship service, only to have the pastor put his arm around Mike and boast, "That's OK, we have lots of ex-Catholics here!" Rachelle lamented that she was more hurt than Mike because her husband's identity as a Catholic was not respected. I can relate other stories where the Catholic priest has been equally offensive.

We define an interchurch family as one in which both partners remain active in their own respective churches, they participate to varying degrees in one another's church, and both are actively involved in the religious education of their children. In the interchurch family movement we speak of "double belonging". This sometimes provocative term does not mean that spouses are 50% Catholic and 50% Presbyterian, for example. It suggests that by virtue of marriage, they belong in "real but imperfect communion" with the church of their partner. By virtue of baptism (mutually recognised by most of our churches) and what Catholics claim to be the sacramentality of their marriage, these couples already live more fully the unity that our institutional churches seek to restore. One of the interchurch children was asked by a reporter whether he belonged to his father's church or his mother's. Without a moment's hesitation or any coaching, he responded, "I belong to both!" He had instinctively refused to be confined to the categories of the reporter's question, or our churches' static ecclesiological paradigms. And he shows every evidence of a healthy resilient faith - he has not dropped out of church, and he is not bored. Life in his authentically interchurch family has made faith part of the family's natural conversation.

Interchurch couples rightly resist any suggestion that there is something inherently wrong with their marriage. All too often in the past this is the message that the institutional church and
its pastoral ministers have communicated. I conjecture that interchurch families have suffered unnecessarily from a mixed message: on the one hand, we tell them (albeit in reluctant syllables) that they can marry and that their exchange of vows as baptised Christians constitutes a sacrament; but on the other hand, we treat them as if they were a "problem" and confront them with one obstacle after another. Is it any wonder that so many "mixed marriage" couples never mature to the point of becoming interchurch families? Or that they haemorrhage cynically discredits the multifaceted love of spouses where they experience the transforming grace of Christ present. Their marriages are sacred, and rather than prejudge them we should be defenders of their bonds. No, the problem is the scandal of our living as separated churches. Once we more adequately relocate the source of the problem, we cannot but exercise a totally new pastoral response to these marriages.

Interchurch families and those who struggle to mature to such an identity refocus for us many of the questions of church unity. Let me briefly identify two of their contributions: (1) a contextual theology of interchurch family life; and (2) an appreciation of how the churches might live an ecumenical future celebrating the "unity in diversity" of our churches.

(1) Contextual Theology. The question of "method" in theology has radically reoriented not only biblical, systematic, and fundamental theology but also ecumenics. Albert Nolan of South Africa is a prominent contextual theologian who can help orient us to the task. It seems appropriate to speak of interchurch families contributing a unique contextual theology to ecumenism. From their perspective, they bring new questions. And from that particular vantage of lived faith as interchurch families, they perceive and see what we look at with our sometimes blind eyes. Nolan reminds us that the introduction of new questions raises the more important issue about who does theology. Witness the controversy surrounding Liberation Theology in the Third World, where base communities implement such a contextual theology. Nolan alerts us that professional theologians (and church leaders, I would add) have a great deal to learn from the questions that people in different situations ask and from the answers they discover for themselves.

The predicament of interchurch families does not fit neatly into the categories or the structures of our scandalously divided churches. They are conscientiously pressing questions that lie even beyond the frontiers of current ecumenism. A twenty-two-year-old woman who is the daughter of a Catholic mother and an Anglican father refuses to be confirmed in either church unless she can be confirmed in both. She asks, "If the Holy Spirit creates unity in the church, then how can I celebrate a sacrament that forces me to decide between these two traditions which have and will continue to nurture my faith?"

She questions the church in ways that remind me of Solomon. She asks the churches, as did Solomon the disputing women, whether they want to divide the child with a sword. It occurs to me that we might expect that a contextual theology of interchurch families could give rise to a Kairos Document in some ways analogous to South Africa's famous liberation statement. From their suffering as Christians who are denied full participation in the life of divided churches, interchurch spouses and their children are reclaiming theology and reappropriating it as an activity of the people. The focus and intensity of interchurch families' questions challenge us to move away from the abstractions of our ecumenical statements and the ecumenical impasse and to discover what is actually happening in their predicaments and their unique circumstances. Then we can come to recognize patterns of domination (indeed, of unnecessary oppression by the church) and patterns of salvation in interchurch family life.

(2) Unity in Diversity. Raymond Brown's classic and brief New Testament study, The Churches the Apostles Left Behind, is a neglected ecumenical gem. In surveying the distinctive local churches of the first and early second centuries, he dramatises their different ecclesiologies and yet celebrates their "unity in diversity." More recently, Jon Nilson of Loyola University in Chicago has built upon Karl Rahner's ecclesiology that carefully reminded us how we cannot force more certain dogmatic claims upon other Christians that we Roman Catholics demand intramurally of ourselves. Nilson's book, Nothing Beyond the Necessary, is a meticulous reconstruction of Rahner's argument, his critics' rebuttals, and Rahner's replies. Nilson is a dialogue member on the United States Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation, and he points to an important distinction they made four years ago in response to the Lambeth and Vatican Responses to the international ARC dialogues.

"One way of dealing with this puzzle of doctrinal language is to accept orthopraxis as the test of orthodoxy: that is, to recognize that doctrines are expressions of the communal life of the church and that shared life may make differing doctrinal formulations intelligible and reveal them to be compatible and even identical in intent.... Attempts to share life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrinal statements. It might even suggest that shared sacramental life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrines on sacraments."

There is no better way to describe the witness and ministry of interchurch couples and families. Such is contextual theology - theology which is "a reflection upon real life in concrete circumstances from the point of view of faith." (Nolan)

Interchurch Families and the Broader Cultural Crisis

The churches' response to the needs and gifts of interchurch families does not happen in a vacuum. I propose that the broader cultural crisis in which we find ourselves makes it all the more urgent that the churches honestly and constructively address their needs and gifts. I want to situate the phenomenon of authentically interchurch families in terms of two larger cultural shifts: (1) signs of antisocial individualism; and (2) signs of a deeper appreciation of the nature and complexity of dialogue. The first of these proves dangerous, if not lethal to culture; the second offers perhaps a cultural antidote to the toxins of our time.

(1) Individualism. Since Robert Putnam, the Harvard political scientist, wrote his now famous "Bowling Alone" article a year
ago, a cottage industry has burst forth with articles and commentary on the phenomenon he named in his wry metaphor. Putnam surveyed the serious decay of civic institutions and social trust in America, from the demise of parent-teacher associations and fraternal groups, to the spread of interpersonal relationships, and other organisations and institutions. Whether fuelled by technological distractions (witness the replacement of television viewing with hours before the computer screen "surfing the net"), or the widespread failure and cost of communal activity. The rise in interpersonal relationships, Americans appear to prefer "surfing the net"), or the widespread failure and cost of communal activity. The rise in interpersonal relationships, Americans appear to prefer technological distractions (witness the replacement of television viewing with hours before the computer screen "surfing the net"), or the widespread failure and cost of communal activity. The rise in interpersonal relationships, Americans appear to prefer technological distractions (witness the replacement of television viewing with hours before the computer screen "surfing the net"), or the widespread failure and cost of communal activity.

The reason I point to these works is twofold. First, the metaphor of "bowling alone" could also function to describe the loneliness of many partners in interchurch marriages. How many faith-filled couples have been mutually exiled to "go to church alone" and rarely - if ever - connect with one another's community of faith? How blindly have the churches or their pastoral ministers recommended such a model? How many marriages have found one partner abdicating any religious practice in order to "keep peace" in the family? Such an attitude not only impedes a full development of the spouses as marriage partners, but it has also robbed our churches of the witness and gifts of authentically interchurch families whose orthopraxis gives us the contextual theology that can model an ecumenical vision of "unity in diversity". But a second reason harbours in the same culture of individualism. The past decade's introspection within denominations impress me as a subconscious retreat in the direction of individualism. The effect is to diminish either a need for, or an interest in, relating to those outside the religious tribe of the denomination. The churches' lack of interest in visible ecumenical collaboration on "faith and order" concerns (sacraments, worship, and theological reflection on ecumenical interests at popular levels) mirrors the dangers of a rampant individualism. We need to assess the cost of such forms of religious and spiritual isolationism, both in terms of our ecumenical commitments and to a wider view of social justice, inclusiveness, and pluralism.

(2) Dialogue. At the very time when we lament an epidemic of individualism, a strong counterforce has emerged in the form of a deeper and more complex appreciation of dialogue. The work of Georgetown University's Deborah Tannen, a linguistics professor and sociologist, has captured the imagination of marriage counsellors. Her books, That's Not What I Meant! and You Just Don't Understand, have revolutionised our appreciation of interpersonal conversation. I suggest that her insights into gender differences and our communication across two distinct gender cultures deserves to be read more closely by theologians and, in particular, by ecumenists. If such insights can save marriages, could they even salvage the unity of divided churches? What would happen if we re-examined the differing theologies of our Christian churches and traditions, using her advice: to listen more carefully to what others are saying, and to be more sensitive to what others are hearing. Could we not perhaps better decipher the miscommunication between the churches, our failure to listen and to hear what is being articulated in doctrine and at the level of faith experience? What if we could translate the language and customs of the different churches in a way that helps us to understand what our partners in ecumenical dialogue are saying? How might theologians utilise Deborah Tannen's original analysis to help us find a "metallanguage" such as George Lindbeck has suggested ecumenism so desperately needs? And who better to "speak the faith" of our religious traditions in this new phase of dialogue than wives and husbands in interchurch marriages? What if the churches allowed a truly contextual theology to transpire, enlightened by the dynamics of Tannen's linguistic theory?

While there is not time to develop these suggestions more thoroughly, I am reminded of Reinhold Niebuhr's classic study, The Social Sources of Denominationalism. Let me add that the progress in a dialogue such as the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic consultation deserves to be analysed along the lines of Tannen's theory. To what extent has the ability of a feminist theologian like Elizabeth Johnson, a member of that ecumenical team, enabled this dialogue to overcome obstacles that were intractable even a decade ago?

Conclusions: Making visible the unity

Now to muse. What might the future promise as roles for interchurch families in the Catholic Church and by way of our ecumenical agenda? Since it is best to be modest, I offer two thoughts.

There is a danger that not only church officers but officially appointed ecumenists (ecumenicrats!) think and act predominantly in linear patterns. Their modernist perspective leads them to speak the language of "steps" and "increments" in implementing a masterplan of "stages" of unity. I am reminded that my teacher, Avery Dulles, in his now classic Models of the Church, cautioned that the only model of the church which cannot be primary is the "institutional" ... it must always be subordinated to the church as mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and disciple. But the Holy Spirit has ways of disturbing our diagrams and paced schedules. Those surprises of the Spirit can be humbling. Without such a faith, there would not have been a Second Vatican Council. I propose that we reflect upon the role of interchurch families as a postmodern phenomenon: an unexpected, surprising, and even disruptive event that does not fit the rationalist, clearly conceived and propositionally articulated norms of institutional ecumenism. Such is the contribution of a postmodern phenomenon: an unexpected, surprising, and even disruptive event that does not fit the rationalist, clearly conceived and propositionally articulated norms of institutional ecumenism. Such is the contribution of a
A second thought is an insight which I have learned from Diana Eck’s important book, Encountering God. In the broader inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism, she has highlighted a learning experience that we need to apply to our ecumenical project. There is a danger that in our trendy quest for pluralism and multiculturalism we will overlook the distinction between remarking our differences and discovering our diversity. But she goes on to say that the goal is not diversity but the dialogue that follows our recognition of diversity. Such dialogue need not compromise or confuse the identity of the partners in the dialogue. The effect will be not a melting pot, but a marbling of traditions - where each remains distinct, in its unique integrity, but now in intimate contact with the others.

The climax of the afternoon comes at the interchurch picnic. The ecumenical covenant has given us a new perspective on “unity in diversity”. Is it possible that we might see them not as a “problem”, but as a dance which we might make them more than a scapegoat? Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, retired president of the Vatican’s Council on Christian Unity, once reminded us of an ecumenical axiom: “There are no vagrant baptised.”

Let me tell you a story, my favourite from my book Double Belonging. Each Pentecost Sunday, the ecumenical covenant between two large suburban parishes, one Episcopal and the other Roman Catholic, is celebrated with a picnic. Hundreds of people gather for a potluck dinner under shady trees, passing the late spring afternoon in games, conversation and laughter. It is grassroots ecumenism, marking 20 years of life together in a broad spectrum of joint activities. The climax of the afternoon comes with a tug-of-war game. Members of the two churches stretch across the parking lot and compete, lined up behind their respective pastors. The interchurch mother narrated her experience on such a Pentecost.

His oral personaifies the unconscious ways in which even the most ecumenically active churches have marginalised and excluded interchurch families. Now, the climax of the annual picnic is a dance - a dance in which members of both parishes mingle and hold hands in a giant circle. They whirl and sing in a new pattern, making visible the church’s “unity in diversity”. For they have come to believe more fully in the liberating promise of Christ to the church: “I make all things new!”

George Kilcourse
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THE JOURNAL

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,
- bishops and archbishops,
- 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 offices,
- 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 Association of Interchurch Families, 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.

The annual subscription (Europe) to INTERCHURCH FAMILIES is £5 sterling or £15 for three years, and should be sent to the English Association at the address below. For other parts of the world the annual subscription (airmail printed rate) is £7 or £20 for three years, to be paid by cheque or money order expressed in sterling and drawn on a British bank. (If payment is made in US dollars, add $15 to cover bank charges.)

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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 encouragement
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 Swanswick 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 contributions 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, and Bishop Alastair Haagert.

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:

Scotland
Scottish AIF (SAIF), 28 Galston Court, Low Waters, Hamilton, ML3 7YH

Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), 28 Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7FE

Irish Republic
AIF, c/o Irish School of Ecumenics, Milltown Park, Dublin

France
Foyers Mixtes, Centre St-Irénée, 2 place Gaillotin, Lyon F 69002

Italy
Coppie Interconfessionali, Via Scipio Stataler 13, 20125 Milan USA
American AIF (AAIF), c/o Kentuckiana Community, 1115 South 4th Street, Louisville, KY 40203-3101

Canada
Calgary Interchurch Marriage Support Group, 131 Bedford Cl. NE, Calgary, Alberta T2K 3L1

Australia
Interchurch Families Association (Western Australia) (IFA WA), 342 Guelph Crescent, Saskatchewan STH 459

AIF Associated with the Canadian Conference of Churches, and the Canadian Council of Churches, Ottawa.

The Interchurch Families Association of Australia (IFA), 96-98 York Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

The Interchurch Families Association of New Zealand, 6 Beatrice Road, Remuera, Auckland 5

NINTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ASSOCIATIONS OF INTERCHURCH FAMILIES at Virginia Beach USA 24-28 July 1996

Speakers include:
Fr Edmund Orsini, St Michael's Cathedral, Virginia Beach USA
Fr Robert Bradbury, OP, St Michael's Cathedral, Virginia Beach USA

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