The January number of INTERCHURCH FAMILIES reported on the Virginia Conference of July 1996, which brought together English-speaking interchurch families from England, Ireland, the United States and Canada. The theme of the conference was “Interchurch Families - Catalysts for Church Unity”. This conference received some frank criticism from a young French couple who found it at times overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon. "The problem of eucharistic hospitality dear to the British and the Americans (some deeply moving stories were indeed told) progressively took over from the conference theme itself," wrote Benoît and Martine. "One of the Americans even said to us one evening that she thought, once that question was resolved, interchurch families would have lost their raison d'être." (Foyers Mixtes, 114, Oct.-Dec. 1996)

It is true that English-speaking interchurch families are devoting much time at present to the question of admission to the eucharist. This is reflected once again in this number of the Journal, and as Benoît and Martine noted, eucharistic sharing certainly became a major theme at Virginia. In England we may indeed risk being thought of as a one-issue group, which is far from our intention. But it seems to us necessary at present to continue to devote a great deal of effort to it. We are not in the same situation as foyers mixtes in France. Looking back in the AIF Newsletter I see that I wrote in 1982 after a visit to a French conference: "Because of the more relaxed and open position in France (e.g. on eucharistic sharing) I felt that the experience of interchurch couples and families was able to have a greater impact on the churches as a whole and that this was something of great value."

Almost as soon as the Code of Canon Law appeared in 1983, the French bishops brought out a document on eucharistic hospitality in which they identified "some foyers mixtes" and "some long-lasting ecumenical groups" as those who have a "real need" for eucharistic sharing, and to whom the provisions of the Code could therefore be applied. They asked Catholic ministers who admitted other Christians to the eucharist in such cases to keep them informed. This was not done in England, although some bishops realised that they were empowered to admit to communion in cases of real need by the Code, and used this power in a variety of situations, sometimes in the case of interchurch families.

It was not until the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism appeared in 1993, with its specific identification of some cases of mixed marriages between baptised Christians as in need of eucharistic sharing (the only specific identification of need at world level, besides danger of death) that the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales decided to produce norms on eucharistic sharing. This is taking some time. In the meantime, where there are no episcopal norms, the Directory states that it is for the Catholic minister who receives a request to judge particular cases according to the norms of the Directory itself. There is therefore much confusion and very different practices in different places.

AIF is happy to have been drawn into the consultation process which is going on at present, as the Episcopal Conference works on a teaching document on the relationship of the eucharist to the church. In this context the Bishops will set out the way in which they want the Directory’s norms to be applied.

It is therefore urgent and important for interchurch families to devote much time and effort to this subject at present, although the time for it in France may be past. We assure our French cousins however that we are as interested as they are in the wider aspects of the contribution interchurch families can make to promoting Christian unity. We are following with great interest the debate going on in France on the ecclesiological implications of interchurch family life (see below), and we shall continue to hold before our churches the recommendations made in the report Churches Together in Marriage: "That the churches explore together the extent to which the sense of dual commitment/double belonging experienced by some interchurch families can be recognised pastorally and given formal expression in church discipline and structures"; "That the churches look together at the 'double belonging' experienced by some interchurch children and address the ecclesiological questions which this raises."

Ruth Reardon

"You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity." Pope John Paul II. York, 1982
Cardinal Basil Hume talks to Interchurch Families

"We insisted and we insisted and we insisted, and we won in the end."

Cardinal Hume was asked what experience of an ecumenical nature had moved him most profoundly. One of his examples was the tremendous applause which greeted Pope John Paul II in the Anglican cathedral at Liverpool in 1982. "I have never heard such a prayer for Christian unity as was revealed in that clapping when the Pope walked up the cathedral with David Sheppard" (Anglican Bishop of Liverpool). It was Anglican and Free Church applause, he noted; the Catholics were at the other cathedral ...

He explained that it had not been easy to persuade those in Rome responsible for organising the papal visit that the Pope should go the Anglican cathedral as well as to the Catholic cathedral in Liverpool. But he will have been to the Anglican cathedral at Canterbury, they argued - that will be enough to show his ecumenical commitment. Clearly they didn't understand England, said the Cardinal; Canterbury is not Liverpool. But, "We insisted and we insisted and we insisted, and we won in the end."

Eucharist and Church

The Cardinal was addressing the Association of Interchurch Families at its annual Heythrop (London) meeting on 15th February 1997. He chose to tackle head on the subject of what he called "intercommunion". "I know this question touches you at a level which is very important for all of you", he said. He spoke with particular reference to the section on "Sharing Sacramental Life with Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities" in the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism issued from Rome in 1993. This Directory instructs Bishops' Conferences to apply the norms which it gives for sacramental sharing. The Bishops of England and Wales have decided not to repeat the norms, but to give the theological context so that the norms are seen to flow out of this context.

The Cardinal said that when he distributes Holy Communion his words are: "The Body of Christ". The response "Amen" is an affirmation of faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament, and also in the ecclesial body in which the celebration is taking place. "The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church."

The Cardinal stressed almost exclusively the first basic principle which governs sacramental sharing: the eucharist is the sign of unity in faith, worship and community life, and source of the unity of the Christian community so that eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression. "I cannot separate the eucharist from the Church", said the Cardinal. Catholic faith in the eucharist therefore implies faith in the Church which celebrates the eucharist. "There is pain, when we cannot share the eucharist, of course - but we need to remember that spiritual communion is very important: we can receive all the grace the sacraments give without actually receiving them. ("Is this an argument for co-habitation rather than marriage?" asked someone - and the Cardinal joined in the laughter.)"

When asked what support interchurch families might expect, the Cardinal spoke of the value of receiving a blessing at the time of communion. "I'm very moved," he said, "when people come for a blessing: it speaks volumes about the desire for unity and is a sign that we don't want separation. It is a sacramental - not a sacrament - but it is not without significance."

After listening to members of interchurch families briefly laying before him their own situations in a very personal way, the Cardinal also spoke very personally about his own deep feelings that intercommunion is negative - "a counter-sign to unity" he called it. "I have to be true to my own integrity. The most agonising thing for me is disunity in faith."

How can we come together and share in the eucharist and yet go away disagreeing on all the things underlying it?

We do not ask for "intercommunion"

The Cardinal was reminded that interchurch families are not asking for "intercommunion", but for admission to communion in certain cases. He was reminded of the second basic principle which according to the 1993 Directory governs sacramental sharing: that by baptism members of other churches are brought into an imperfect but real communion with the Catholic Church. This communion is deepened where couples not only share the eucharist, of course - but we need to remember that spiritual communion is very important: we can receive all the grace the sacraments give without actually receiving them. ("Is this an argument for co-habitation rather than marriage?" asked someone - and the Cardinal joined in the laughter.)"

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"I do see this point," said the Cardinal. "you are in a unique situation through the sacrament of matrimony - but then there are all the practicalities ... You here are all committed people, but if we say it's possible for you ..."

We were very grateful to the Cardinal for coming to talk with us and for sharing his own deeply-held convictions.

We were grateful for the way he led us in prayer into the Lenten experience of the Cross, helping us to feel that he, too, shared our pain - perhaps also that we shared something of his.
Personal reflections

It seems to me that the session left us with two specific challenges.

1 Catholic faith in the eucharist

The spiritual need recognised by the Directory is the need of the married couple to share communion. The main focus of the Cardinal’s interest was one of the conditions which must be met by an individual who seeks admission to communion in the Roman Catholic Church, once such need is recognised as genuine. The Cardinal particularly drew our attention to the question of eucharistic belief, and to the Catholic understanding that eucharistic faith implies faith in the church which celebrates the eucharist - and the Roman Catholic Church is the “Petrine Church” as he expressed it.

Those baptised Christians who belong to other churches and ecclesial communities in particular need of admission to the eucharist are asked to “manifest Catholic faith in the eucharist”. This is usually taken to mean belief in the presence of Jesus in the eucharist. However, the married couple is not simply asking for an affirmation of eucharistic faith, but rather for an affinity of faith. The Real Presence of Christ in the church which celebrates the eucharist - in this case the Roman Catholic Church.

Clearly the baptised person who asks for admission cannot affirm his or her faith in the Roman Catholic Church in any exclusive way, since he/she is and remains an Anglican or Free Church Christian. But there must be a real desire for communion with the Roman Catholic Church, as it exists concretely at the present time, as well as in its potential for future development. This is asking for something more than a desire for unity with a spouse – though the motivation may well start there. It means also embracing the ecclesial communion of the spouse. I do not think that this is to make acceptance of the Pope’s position in the Roman Catholic Church, as it may be represented at this or that specific time in history, a criterion for admission to communion (although some who listened to the Cardinal may have taken what he said in this way and therefore have been very disturbed by it). Indeed it cannot mean this, since members of the Eastern Churches, with whom “there is still a very close communion in matters of faith” (but not agreement about the papacy!) are not asked for any affirmation of eucharistic faith if they are in need of admission to the eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church; the conditions are simply that they ask “of their own free will and are properly disposed” (122, 125). Nor can it mean that more is asked of the individual who seeks admission than is required of a Catholic.

However, it seems to me that it does mean an acceptance of the significance of the role of the Bishop of Rome as servant and symbol of the unity of the church on the world level and a willingness to explore this significance further, as indeed all Christians have been invited to do in Ut Unum Sint. This is to accept a duty, as well as to ask a privilege.

It is not easy to formulate what this means. But there is an underlying requirement here which interchurch families can perhaps understand out of their own experience of married life. In our commitment to one another we accept and love our partners as they are, with all their faults and failings as well as all the good things about them which we appreciate, with all their potential for growth. I think there is a clue here to the sort of commitment to the Roman Catholic Church which is required of those other Christians who, in their need, ask for admission to communion. If we are asked to love our spouse (our nearest neighbour) as we love ourselves, maybe we are called to love our partner’s church in the way we love our own. I think too that this is the sort of love and commitment which many interchurch partners belonging to other churches and ecclesial communities do actually demonstrate in the way in which they participate in the concrete life of the Catholic community of their spouse. In marriage the two partners are mutually committed to one another in a total way. Each embraces everything fundamental to the other. This goes for church-belonging too. Some interchurch partners experience and practise a mutual commitment not only to their partners but also to the churches which have nurtured and continue to nurture them in the one faith in Christ. It is surely this reality which has made it possible for the Roman Catholic Church to identify mixed marriages between baptised Christians as a possible situation of need for eucharistic sharing (the only specific identification of need, besides that of danger of death, which has yet been made at world level in application of the 1983 Code of Canon Law).

It is not easy to spell out what “to demonstrate Catholic faith in the eucharist” actually means. The French bishops, with specific reference to members of the Reformed Churches seeking admission to communion, asked for “an unambiguous faith in the sacrificial dimension of the memorial, in the Real Presence and in the relationship between eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion” (as well as “an active commitment in the service of the unity which God wills”). There is thus a clear reminder in the conditions they laid down of the eucharist/church relationship, without a specific reference to any particular element in the life of the church (Note sur l’hospitalité eucharistique, 1983). Certainly if the issue of the authority of the papacy is centrally exercised in the limits of the present moment of history were to be used as a test of Catholic faith in the eucharist, this would raise as many questions as another which (alas) is sometimes put to Christians seeking admission to the eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church as a test: “Do you believe in transubstantiation?”. The Council of Trent never insisted that transubstantiation was the only way to describe Christ’s presence in the eucharist.

2 Practicalities

The second challenge is a difficult one in practical terms: how can the deeply felt needs of certain particular couples be met without obscuring the witness of the Roman Catholic Church to the inseparable link between eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion? This is a real problem in a country like
England where there are so many “mixed marriages” and a great fear of “opening the floodgates”. We should not minimise the difficulty. But, if a genuine spiritual need is identified, once we move to the level of “practicalities” (and this is the word the Cardinal used) a way must surely be found.

We insist and we insist and we insist
Couples have to go on laying the deep needs they experience before our pastors. If we feel a real spiritual need, this is our duty to our marriages and to our families, and we can never give up (however hard it is to keep going, and however much we may be tempted to do so). Certainly unity in the Spirit is the fundamental unity which binds us together. But because we are creatures of flesh and blood we need the signs which assure us of that unity and at the same time help us to grow in unity.

Certainly interchurch families can, and many do, value very highly the receiving of a blessing, as a sign of our desire for fuller unity. But after many years this can sometimes be experienced as a rejection - a rejection of us as a couple - rather than as a welcome. So interchurch families have to go on saying to their Catholic bishops and communities: “Please understand that in some cases a sacrament is not enough. We need more. It is a sacrament which binds us in our marriage, and we continually need the sacrament of the eucharist to sustain, build up and deepen the unity of our marriage and family life.”

That is why we too have to go on insisting and insisting and insisting . . .

Ruth Reardon

“Spiritual Communion”: “a bigger blessing than we realise?”

Reflections following the Cardinal’s address

A busy Sunday morning at our Anglican church, and I am approached by the churchwarden. “Will you ‘do the chalice’ this morning, Bev? Sarah’s doing it too.”

“Of course,” I reply, and head into church. It is a lively service and we’re involved in other aspects too. My husband, Paul, and I are organising printed sweatshirts for the church and need to announce our progress. Paul is leading the intercessions, which we wrote together during the week. At the end of the service all the parents of young children will help us move the toys to another room where the creche (which Paul and I also organise) for Mass is held. We’re a team and there is a great feeling of togetherness.

We reach the Agnus Dei and as the congregation struggles with a new setting of ‘Lamb of God’ Sarah and I transfer our small children to their dads and approach the altar. Administering the chalice is something I consider to be a privilege, and I’m grateful to be one of eight people in our church with a Bishop’s licence to do it. The opportunity to pray for each person, joining their ‘Amen’ as they respond to the offer of ‘The Blood of Christ’, is very special. I try to use their names, and make a note when I don’t know a name to find it out. As Sarah and I get to the last communicants, we see our husbands and children side by side. Sarah approaches John, her husband, and offers him the cup. As he drinks, I think how special a bond they have in sharing communion in that way. I thank God for that blessing for my very dear friends. Then I walk straight past Paul. As a Roman Catholic he is not allowed to accept the cup that I am offering. That hurts. It cuts deep.

We replace the chalices on the altar and return to our seats.

I could stop here. This is an account of the regular experience of many interchurch couples. But, you see, Paul and I are not the only people in church, just the only interchurch couple.

Sarah and John are not the only Anglican couple, but they’re not typical either. As I reflect after communion, I consider the other members of the eucharistic ministry team. Some are single, some are married, but most sit alone in church. I think of Holly. I’ve never seen her husband. She doesn’t even get to walk past him with the chalice. How does she feel, I wonder? Is her pain as great as mine? I think of Caroline. I know she would love to share with her non-churchgoing husband, that she misses him in church on a Sunday. It hurts. It cuts deep.

This Sunday morning I’ve shared with Paul in prayer and music, in the peace and in the blessing, in caring for our daughters and in meeting our friends. I know that later this morning Paul will receive communion at Mass, part of the eternal communion of the whole body of Christ to which we both belong, and I shall be there with him and shall receive a blessing, as he did at the Anglican eucharist. I remember the words of Cardinal Hume to interchurch families at Heythrop the day before: “You share in spiritual communion.” Yes, we do, and I thank God for that.

So many others in my church don’t share that joy, and that hope of heaven together. It makes me think that the Cardinal is right. I don’t want to belittle the desire to share in the eucharist, it’s desperately important. But it is our spiritual communion that takes precedence, our partnership as Christians. This, I suspect, is part of the gift interchurch couples bring to the churches, one of the reasons why our marriages defy the divorce statistics. We are truly blessed.

Beverley Hollins

(All names, other than my family’s, have been changed.)
Eucharistic Belief

In 1982 a questionnaire on eucharistic belief and practice was circulated among members of the Association of Interchurch Families (the result of the survey was published in 1983 by Collins under the title Sharing Communion: an appeal to the churches by interchurch families). Fr John Coventry, SJ, co-chair of the Association, realised that the replies of some couples raised the question of how far people were misunderstanding each other, or the doctrine of their own church, rather than disagreeing. He therefore wrote the following brief article as an attempt to clarify the meanings of “real presence” and of “sacrifice”. Many interchurch families have found it a great help to their understanding ever since.

As a Centrepiece it was reprinted and has been included in our Sharing Communion Pack. Supplies have now run out, and we are pleased to be able to reprint it here. At the same time we would like to pay tribute to Fr John Coventry for all he has done over the years to put his theological expertise at the service of interchurch families. We give thanks for his ministry in this year in which he celebrates his Golden Jubilee in the priesthood on 16th September.

The body of the Lord

Paul is the clue to the meaning of ‘body’ (soma) in the New Testament. He did not think in the Greek way of distinguishing one reality completely from another: e.g. body/soul. (And you cannot distinguish body and blood in that way as the body includes the blood.) Paul’s Hebraic way of thinking was in wholes or areas of experience. I experience myself as a body. (Well, I do, don’t I?) ‘Body’ is not the ‘I’ that experiences but the ‘me’ that I experience. I experience my body-self as ‘flesh’, i.e. fragile, mortal, subject to death, to law, to sin. But I also experience myself as ‘spirit’, i.e. open to the action of God.

There is no ‘is’ (copula) in Aramaic. Jesus said: “This my body-self given (broken) for you; this my blood (i.e. life) poured out for you.” Blood was thought of as conveying God’s gift of life, which is why Jews do not eat meat without first draining the blood. So Jesus was not distinguishing body from blood, but uttering parallel sayings as was common in his language and culture.

It is certain that Christian belief always was that it is the risen Jesus, the Lord (the title is always and only used of the risen Christ) who is present and is received in the Eucharist. When Paul says, “You proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (I Cor. 11:26), he is not saying that they proclaim the death of the mortal Jesus, but the death of the risen Christ: he is holding cross and resurrection together in one. And “the Lord” is the risen Jesus who pours out on us the Spirit he has received from his Father, the life-force of God.

The Corinthians had over-materialistic ideas of resurrection. Paul takes up most of I Cor. 15 dispelling these ideas and wrestling with the difficulties of finding adequate language to speak of the risen Christ. Flesh-body does not rise. The Lord is spirit-body (this would be a contradiction in terms to a Greek thinker). Paul even says, “the Lord is spirit”; but it is the Lord who is spirit, the risen Jesus. Jesus does not cease to be a man (cease to be incarnate) by being risen, exalted, glorified. He experiences himself as fully spirit-self or spirit-body. He gives himself to us as spirit-body.

Really present in and for receiving

The eucharistic belief witnessed in the New Testament is that the bread and wine are the risen body-self of Christ in the receiving. If you read the eucharistic texts of the New Testament carefully (Paul and John), you will find that there is no evidence for any further or more developed belief. This is already a very great deal.

This is called ‘receptionism’ and most Christians hold at least this belief. It was the belief of Calvin. Zwingle taught that the bread and wine were not more than symbols of the Lord’s
realities. Some individual Christians may not go further than this belief, but so far as I know it is not the doctrine of any main Christian communion.

By the third century the conviction had taken hold in both East and West that, if the bread and wine were the risen body of Christ in the receiving, and could be carried to the sick and imprisoned for communion, they must already have become the body of Christ for the receiving. There had been a mysterious change of the elements. It is noteworthy that this doctrine prevailed in the church without argument and remained unchallenged until the eleventh century. It is the doctrine endorsed by ARCIC. When it was challenged, this was because the fact had been lost sight of that it was the risen, not simply the crucified, Lord who was present and was received, and very crude and distasteful flesh-language was being used.

Language
That is really all there is to say about belief and doctrine in regard to real presence. All the rest is a matter of language in which to express that belief in a mysterious change. It is not a matter of more belief or extra doctrine.

There is no adequate language to express a mysterious change, because it is not the same as any of the situations from which language can be drawn. It is best to coin a new word and to stick to it. The presence of Christ is a sacramental presence, a mystery presence, the presence of the mystery of the risen Christ. Other language misleads.

The language of Aristotle was introduced to spiritualise what had become crude. Unfortunately that language in turn came to have a mechanistic flavour. The language of the Church was ‘reality’ and ‘appearance’: the reality of the bread and wine changes, the appearance does not. The language of Aristotle was ‘substance’ and ‘accident’ and introduced a refinement: the substance of the bread is changed but the accidents are not, so the whole reality is not changed: trans-substantiation. But of course in Aristotelianism ‘substance’ meant metaphysical substance. And who understands that now? Certainly not the ordinary lay Catholic who may insist on the use of the word. And among those who do understand it, many reject the implication of a misguided metaphysic or attempt to understand the constituents of reality.

The philosophy of Aristotle was never imposed as necessary to eucharistic doctrine. What the Council of Trent said was that the change of the reality (substance) of the bread and wine into the reality (substance) of the body and blood of Christ, while the appearances of bread and wine remained, was appropriately called by the Church ‘trans-substantiation’. It is a remark about language. Seen as appropriate then the language has ceased to be appropriate for three reasons: because people no longer understand the philosophical system to which it is attached; because it acquired a mechanistic flavour; and because at Trent ‘body’ and ‘blood’ were being understood in the Greek and not the Hebraic sense.

As ARCIC rightly says, and rightly puts in a footnote, the language does not purport to show how the mysterious change takes place.

The sad thing today is that Catholics who no longer know what the word means often say that ‘they’ (i.e. other Christians) do not accept trans-substantiation, and jump from there to imagining that ‘they’ do not believe they are receiving the body of Christ. They do. If they reject the language, this is because it seems to be trying to explain the change in terms of a philosophy of nature and so to de-mystify it and make it mechanistic.

Personally present
Other troubles are caused by other words. The ciborium is physically present in the tabernacle, but the body of Christ is not present in that way, i.e. not physically present. If the word is to retain any sense at all, it should be kept for the proper field of physics: a presence detectable by natural vision and natural sciences. Paul insisted that the risen body-self was not a physical (natural) body, but a spirit-body: 1 Cor. 15:44. Flesh and blood, i.e. the flesh-body-self which is buried in the ground, do not inherit the Kingdom.

‘Corporal’ presence causes further and similar trouble. It is the body (corpus) of Christ which is present, so the word seems at first sight appropriate. But it is the spirit-body-self of the risen Christ that is mysteriously present.

Just stick to ‘sacramentally present’!

One trouble about attempts to insist on realistic language is that one inevitably finds oneself treating the body of Christ as a thing: really, objectively, there, present, regardless of any personal relationship. It is not our faith that makes Christ the Lord present. But the risen Lord is personally present as a gift of his spirit-self to us. He is not effectively present to us until we recognise and respond to his presence in faith.

You are the body of Christ
ARCIC is a bit light on reservation of the elements for communion to the sick, and on the veneration, adoration, of Christ present and devotions to the reserved Sacrament. The place to start is with meditation on the mysterious unity of Eucharist and Church. The ruthless western mind came to make distinctions which were unheard of in the first eight or nine centuries and lost a good deal in the process.

First and foremost, it is we who are the body of Christ, we the baptised community. We are communion (koinonia).
Only we can celebrate the Eucharist and nourish the life already given us of the body of Christ. The Eucharist is a concentrated or crystallised expression of what we are all the time. If we think of the reserved Sacrament as the abiding sacrament of Christ’s abiding presence in us, his body, the different practices become intelligible. Certainly, the elements were at first reserved solely for communion to those unable to be present at the celebration. But, with a fuller understanding of both Church and Eucharist as communion, the reserved elements can rightly be seen as a focus for the Church’s daily, unceasing, life and prayer.

**Sacrifice**

Then there is sacrifice. This is a less difficult area for a couple who want to receive communion together, but it is within the field of eucharistic belief about which they would like to be able to agree.

At the Reformation the Protestants objected to chantry masses and so on, and cut the ground from under them by asserting that the Eucharist was not a sacrifice. The Catholics were sure it was, but did not have any clear idea how it was. There was no received theology of the Mass as sacrifice: Thomas Aquinas had said nothing about it, as he never got to that part of his **Summa**. Since then, various Catholic theologies of the Eucharist as sacrifice have developed. None of them is mandatory or ‘the’ Catholic theology of sacrifice. Trent said a certain amount, but it can fit into various theologies.

One argument has been futile: is it a sacrifice or is it a meal? There are many different kinds of sacrifices, but they are all meals. Sometimes the meal is wholly God’s (holocaust) and it is all put on his table: an altar is God’s table. Sometimes the meal is shared with God: his part is put on his table (perhaps burned there, perhaps carried off as the priests’ portion), and we take our part to eat at our table at home. Sometimes God shares our table at home (any Jewish sabbath meal).

Whether the Last Supper was the Passover meal or not, and for this purpose it does not matter, it was certainly a ritual meal of some kind, and so a sacrifice. And the Eucharist is certainly a ritual meal, a meal shared with God, and so a sacrifice. What is shared? Precisely the risen-body-self of Christ. So it is a communion sacrifice, a sacrifice because it is communion. More technically, it is a sacramental sacrifice, a sacrifice because it is communion. It is not a sacrifice plus a sacrament, so the priest offers a sacrifice and we others may or may not communicate in it. We only participate fully in a communion sacrifice by communicating. The priest must communicate and only celebrates this sort of sacrifice by doing so.

One can go further in constructing a theology of sacrifice, and it is then that the trouble starts. But I would suggest one doesn’t have to go further. The Church lived the Eucharist for centuries without drawing out all the theology. Indeed, has it done so yet? The point is, really, to do it, to share it. Which is what Jesus told us to do.

**Offered**

The ‘trouble’ does not stem from eucharistic theology at all but from theologies of salvation (redemption, atonement). At the time of the Reformation, both Catholics and Reformers were limited by the view that we are saved by an event in past history, the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The resurrection was not regarded as an essential part of the saving work of Jesus but as God’s reward to him. Some evangelicals today still wish to assert this (and ARCIC wobbles). And in that perspective it is extremely hard to see how the Eucharist could be a repeated series of sacrificial acts without adding to the self-sacrifice of Jesus, or suggesting it was incomplete or inadequate. Catholic theologies of the making present today of a past act in history, so that we can participate in it rather than add to it, are not entirely convincing.

But once you see that the resurrection, the risen-ness of Jesus and his sharing fully the life and power of his Father, is an integral part of his redeeming, atoning, saving work, and so of his sacrifice, then everything falls into place. The risen-ness of Jesus, his being ‘at the right hand of God’ (seated on God’s throne, and sharing God’s power with us, is what the image conveys), is not an event in past history; it is not in history at all, but outside history in God’s eternity. The risen Lord gives us the eternal life he draws from the Father in Baptism, in the Eucharist, and so on.

Now we can say (as the Epistle to the Hebrews keeps saying) that the sacrifice of Christ is an event that starts in time but is completed in eternity. Not a once-and-for-all past event, but an outside-time event, and therefore once and for all.

Then we can say that in the Eucharist Christ gathers us, in all times and places, into his eternal sacrifice so that we ‘enter into the movement of his self-offering’. The latter is what ARCIC says. But it is rather roundabout, and has the danger of making ‘we’ the subject of the sentence. If Christ were always the subject of the sentence, the difficulties would evaporate. **Not** ‘we offer’ or ‘we enter’. **Not** the Church offers’, though that is all right if you always understand by ‘the Church’ not us apart from Christ but the risen Lord present and active in his people. **But** in the Eucharist, precisely as communion, Christ gathers us daily and everywhere into his eternal self-offering. He is always living to make intercession for us.

*John Coventry, SJ*
AUSTRALIA

in Newcastle, New South Wales, Bev and Kevin Hincks are trying to set up an interchurch families’ group with support from their Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops. The Interchurch Families Association in Western Australia held its AGM at Perth on 24th May, with a new chaplain, Mrs C.O Malley, appointed by the Catholic Archbishop. It is still a small group, but is starting on a publicity campaign with leaflets for church notice boards. Mary Paton writes: “Our main concern is getting known, and getting the interchurch climate such that couples will not feel threatened by even facing their double-ness. Many couples seem to feel it is better not to rock the boat and let pain surface as that puts family peace and marriage stability in danger.”

FRANCE

The latest number of Foyers Mixtes contains a joint reply from the French Catholic Bishops’ Commission on Christian Unity and the Permanent Council of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in France to the Appel à nos Eglises made in 1993 by Fr. René Beaufére and Pasteur Jacques Maury. For details see elsewhere in this number.

A group of the children of interchurch families in the Paris region have come together to form a group officially called Des Enfants de Foyers Mixtes (EFM). Their parents belong to three different groups of foyers mixtes (Paris-Annonciation, Versailles and Sèvres). In September 1996 they spent a weekend near Paris working on such questions as: Are we obliged to choose a single confession, or not? Have we a role to play in our generation? What really are the differences between the churches, their common ground? Since then they have visited Taizé together, and have held a meeting in Paris. A further meeting dealt with a question raised by certain comments sometimes made by church members and leaders: “Are we really confusion (déséquilibrés)?” They planned to meet up with EFM from other parts of France at the second Rassemblement Francophone de Foyers Interconfessionnels held at Lyon 7-8 June 1997. Two young people from English interchurch families planned to join them there.

ENGLAND

AIF continues to work on the preparation of information packs, and two have been added recently. Confirmation, Communion, Church Membership incorporates some of the experience of young people growing up in interchurch families, and raises questions of “double belonging”: The other is a Christian Unity Pack.

The Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of England and Wales has been working on the preparation of guidelines on eucharistic sharing since the Ecumenical Directory appeared in 1993. AIF was encouraged to be drawn into this process in February 1997, when a meeting was arranged between a few representatives of the Association with two of the bishops and with the secretaries of both the Bishops’ Christian Unity Committee and also the Bishops’ Committee for Marriage and Family Life. The bishops intend to produce a teaching document on the eucharist and its relationship with the church, and in the context of this they intend to set out their guidelines on admission to communion. The whole process may take some time; interchurch families hope that they will continue to be drawn into it. Shortly afterwards Cardinal Hume addressed the Association’s annual spring meeting and chose to speak on “intercommunion”; a report is given elsewhere in this number.
IRELAND

AIFI has held a review meeting to assess the work of the on-going Marriage Preparation Group together with ACCORD (formerly the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council). An information evening was held for those interested in training to work as part of the Interchurch Marriage Preparation Team. Marriage preparation for interchurch couples is one of the most important activities of AIFI.

There is a sense that things are getting easier for mixed families and AIFI as a formal structure may therefore become less important. “Without having to fight so hard against the rules and regulations we are getting rather laid back.”

In an address to a Church of Ireland community during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 1997 one of the Catholic bishops in the Republic, Dr Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killalo. said that many Catholics would now want to apologise and ask the forgiveness of their non-Catholic brethren for the pain and hurt caused by the Ne Temere decree (in force between 1908 and 1970), which required that non-Roman Catholic partners in a mixed marriage should promise to bring up any children of the marriage as Catholics. The Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Walton Empey, welcomed this apology, and said that Bishop Walsh had put his finger on one of the most painful issues facing Church of Ireland communities in recent years.

In Northern Ireland the work of NIMMA in supporting mixed marriages was evaluated by the Community Relations Council, and NIMMA applied for a further 3-year grant from the Council to help it continue its work. One question raised was: “Should NIMMA develop a more advocacy and campaigning role?” Development of the Association was one of the themes of the annual conference held in Co Fermanagh in April. NIMMA has applied to the Inland Revenue to be recognised as having Charitable Status, this will mean that donations can be covenanted to NIMMA and income tax paid on the amount given can be reclaimed.

The NIMMA office in Belfast had a particularly busy time last December when the new Grand Master of the Orange Order declared that it was "disloyal for a Protestant to marry a Roman Catholic". NIMMA issued a press release regretting such remarks and got a lot of attention from the media in consequence.

“Can we all learn from the experience of interchurch couples - Share their Pain. Affirm their Joy. Strengthen their Hope?” was the title of an evening session held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January at which two NIMMA couples were invited to share their experience.

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting has a Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages. Last year a sub-committee produced some Suggestions for Inter-Church Marriage Services, and has followed this up with Suggestions for Inter-Church Baptism Services. Both are being discussed by representatives of the churches, and will be worked on further.

ITALY

In Interchurch Families, January 1996 (pp.9-10), we gave details of the joint study text and proposals for pastoral guidelines for interchurch marriages, Testo Comune di Studio e di Proposta per un Indirizzo Passionale dei Matrimoni Interconfessionali, which was agreed by representatives of the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist Church in 1993. Soon after its publication it had been "received" by the Synod of the Waldensian Church and transmitted to the local churches.

Three years later, this text was approved by a majority vote in the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Italy. Mgr Alberto Abboudi, Bishop of Leghorn and Vice-president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, wrote "an open letter to Waldensian and Methodist brethren" expressing his belief that approval of the text was "the result of commitment and is a promise for the future". Significantly, the Italian bishops had overcome "a traditional incompatibility in our society between religious and civil weddings" by recognising the validity of civil (registry office) weddings in the case of interconfessional marriages. Bishop Abboudi said that "no communion is possible without willingness to sacrifice something of oneself and one's convictions". He hoped that many interconfessional families would be helped to avoid a slide into religious indifference because of the agreement reached, but instead would be encouraged to build on their ecumenical experience. Working together on the text had been very positive for both churches: "to make their mutual relationship constructive both must continually purify their values in the light of Christ when they are confronted by human needs - this is in fact what happened in the preparation of this report on mixed marriages."

GERMANY & AUSTRIA

In the course of planning a joint presence at the Second European Ecumenical Assembly at Graz, 23-29 June 1997, French je-seux mixte and interchurch families from England discovered the existence of groups of interchurch families both in Germany and in Austria of which they had previously been unaware.

ARGE Ökumene

The Austrian ARGE Ökumene brings together interconfessional couples in Vienna, Oberösterreich, Salzburg, Tirol, Steiermark, Kärnten and Burgenland. They have expressed themselves in their "Salzburg Vision" statement. They say: "When we live out what unites us, then what divides us loses its power to divide." "We are trying to be a driving force for unity, to move from being the victims of church divisions to being agents of ecumenism."
"Our successes: ... the enriching of our own faith identity through the encounter with each other ... the enjoyment of friendship in our partner’s church as we come to belong there too...” “Our dreams: ... we dream of a transparency of mutual understanding in our relationship with one another; ... we dream of a right of domicile in our partner’s church ...”

AAIF held its first annual meeting at Spalding University, Louisville, Kentucky over the weekend of 23-25 May. It was a productive meeting, drafting the constitution, discussing the “division of labor” for future activities, newsletters, organising by regions and so on.

In our last number we promised more detail on the Guide for a Lutheran-Catholic Marriage which was the subject of one of the workshops at the Virginia International Conference of interchurch families last summer.

At the end of 1998 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis entered into a covenant relationship with the St Paul and Minneapolis Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This formal covenant was the outcome of many years of joint study, prayer and witness, with an ecumenical relationship dating back to 1965. One of the ten specific commitments made in this Lutheran-Catholic Covenant was to: Give special support to those who live a Lutheran-Catholic covenant in their families.

At Pentecost 1995, a Guide for a Lutheran-Catholic Marriage was published, with a preface signed by the two Lutheran bishops of the St Paul Area Synod and the Minneapolis Area Synod and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of St Paul and Minnesota. It was the work of the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant Commission, reviewed by the ecumenical commissions and other official bodies of each church: many people had contributed recommendations, suggestions and insights. The Archbishop and bishops hoped that it “will be a source of help to all those who assist in marriage preparation. But most especially we hope and pray that it will be a source of help to those who are to enter into Lutheran-Catholic marriage. Those who are married in our traditions need the support of the members of the Church in living their marriages in the fullness of Christ’s love and blessing. Finally, those in ecumenical marriages bring to the Church, by the testimony of their love and their vows, a call to all of us to continue to respond to the Holy Spirit’s present gift of unity and to collaborate with the Spirit and one another in the journey to full unity of the Church.”

There is a great deal of useful information for couples, but the final words are perhaps especially important: “Keep in mind that the Church – both Lutheran and Catholic communities – invites God’s blessing on your deliberation, your commitments and your hopes.”

Also from Minneapolis comes a very useful little booklet: Our Faith Traditions: a TalkTrip – prepared for couples in an INTERCHURCH relationship, published by TalkTrips Inc. in 1995. The TalkTrip format was designed “to create the kind of environment that encourages the growth of friendship and understanding between two or more people”, and the first titles were on Marriage, Marriage Enrichment and Baptism. This one for interchurch couples was prepared by Mitzi Knutzen (who was herself involved in preparing the Guide for a Lutheran-Catholic marriage). The formula lends itself very well to stimulating communication between interchurch couples before or after marriage. Copies can be obtained from Mitzi Knutzen, Fostering Christian Unity, 6391 Edgewood Avenue, Woodbury MN 55125 USA. The author hopes to write a TalkTrip for children and another for extended family members within an interchurch family.

In speaking about a common date for Easter following a meeting held in Aleppo, Syria on this subject last March, Dr Thomas Fitzgerald, a World Council of Churches official who took part in it, said that the Christian division over Easter is an “internal scandal”. Dr Fitzgerald is a priest of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of America. He pointed out that a common date would be of special importance in regions where there is a high level of inter-marriage between Christians from different traditions. In his own home parish in Manchester, New Hampshire in the United States, the Easter date is important because families with members in different traditions have to choose which date to follow.

**“Ecumenism begins at home”**

At the opening session, State President Benjamin William Mkapa delivered a 30 minute address which combined political analysis with sharp theological and ethical insight. A Roman Catholic married to a Lutheran, ecumenism for him literally begins at home. But he urged participants to carry their commitment to Christian unity further into the challenges of the wider human family, nationally and internationally, and to be “the moral crusaders for the unity and universality of humankind in its entirety.” This was not just a speech of welcome. It effectively became the keynote address for the entire meeting and during the second week a special plenary session was given over to discussing its implications. Perhaps more than any contribution from the Commission itself, President Mkap’a’s address ensured the continuance of the Ecclesiology and Ethics study. One wonders where in the western world could be found a political leader who would make a like impact on a theological gathering.

From a report by Keith Clements on the plenary meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, held in Moshi, Tanzania, August 1996
Marital spirituality can have a particularly practical relevance for interchurch families. It offers a language in which to explain the deep spiritual need which some interchurch couples experience for eucharistic sharing. It is perhaps not so surprising that others (including some celibate Catholic clergy) do not really seem to appreciate the depth and seriousness of that need on the part of some interchurch couples. If a different - more “disembodied” - spirituality comes more naturally to them, they may not have fully understood that marital spirituality is a different but equally valid way to God. Interchurch families may perhaps be able to convey the seriousness of the need which some of them experience for eucharistic sharing - food for their life journey together - by stressing the nature of marriage as a sacrament, and the specific spirituality of marriage.

We are very pleased to be able to print here a section of an article by Gisbert Greshake, who teaches dogmatic and ecumenical theology at the University of Freiburg in Germany. The article in its original French appears in the *Intams Review*, 2, 2, Autumn 1996, under the title ‘The One Spirit and Many Spiritualities’ (pp. 42-50). We give here in English translation and in slightly abbreviated form the second section of the article.

**Fundamental structures of marital spirituality**

1 Travelling together to God

Marriage means **travelling together in faith**. That implies two things. On the one hand, it involves a common life: married partners set out together in their search for God, together they try to be followers of Christ, they share their thoughts, they pray together and accomplish their mission in the world as a couple, their mission which is central to their faith. Thus marital spirituality stresses in a very special way the **community aspect of faith lived out together**. Indeed, the meaning of marriage is to be a sign of God’s own communion in Trinity.

But on the other hand, this life together remains a journey, a process, a reality which is not complete when it begins. At the heart of their love both partners have to discover - often painfully - that their partner always remains “the other”, not the product of dreams and projections, but a person to be respected absolutely in his/her individuality. This often requires long practice and patient perseverance. Marriage as process requires that the two partners talk about their legitimate needs, appreciate one another’s desires, recognise and formulate them with clarity, without wounding or dominating. All that needs learning!

2 Reconciliation

Whenever there is a commitment to travel together in as intense a way as that of marriage, it is inevitable, given the human condition, that there will be conflicts, quarrels, confrontation. But that also means that the way to reconciliation, the willingness to start all over again, to offer mutual acceptance and endurance, is of much greater importance within marriage than it is within the life of a single person. That is why it seems to me that **living out reconciliation** is drawing strength for this from the cross and resurrection of Christ, is one of the most essential focus points of marital spirituality.

3 Life-long faithfulness

Marriage is a commitment to life-long faithfulness. Each partner accepts the other unconditionally and for ever. This is a requirement and a challenge of the first order, especially today when the pace of life is so fast, and it is difficult to make commitments and far-reaching decisions. When in today’s society the partners live out their commitment in the light of their faith, or, better, in the perspective of God’s unconditional “Yes” to their life as a couple, they become a sign of the Spirit of God at work, enabling people to live together in faithfulness. So in our society today marital spirituality involves a conscious decision to live a spirituality of faithfulness which can be a sign for all to see.

4 Living invisible things in visible signs

The sacramentality of marriage invites the partners to discover and to live the love of God in the love of each other, in their mutual love. And if we take account of the fact that this mutual love is expressed in a bodily and sexual way, in a union in which love uses bodily language, then marital spirituality gives special importance to bodily signs, which are indeed the fundamental characteristic of the sacraments. The spouses are called to see and to discover in visible signs and actions the reality of something deeper, ultimately the love of God. And note that this is not only so for the area of life which is intimate and private; it is also true for the whole of creation and history. To **discover and live invisible things in visible signs**: this is the spiritual dimension which married people should live with particular intensity, for they are joined together in the sacrament which is a visible sign of an invisible reality.

5 The smallest cell of the church

Finally, marriage is the basic unit of the church. So marriage and family life are closer to the church and have a more obvious reference to the ecclesial structure of faith than does the life of a single person. So marital spirituality means to be the church in its smallest manifestation, and that the wider church is constantly experienced as offering a particular field of work to married people.

It seems to me that these five points contain the fundamental common elements and the constitutive structures for a spirituality of marriage. This marital spirituality can be lived out in very different ways in different married spiritualities according to the vocation of each couple, their situation at a particular time and the preferences and vocation of each partner, but nevertheless they offer a common framework and a common basis.

Gisbert Greshake
Ecclesiological Implications of Interchurch Marriages

**Appeal to our Churches**

In July 1993 Fr René Beaufèpè OP and Pasteur Jacques Maury, who have worked with interchurch families for over thirty years, addressed an *Appel à nos Eglises* directed to the churches in France and elsewhere (see *Interchurch Families*, January 1996). They were not making any requests on behalf of interchurch families; *they were asking the churches to recognise that the very existence of interchurch families, spanning the divide between two churches and living concretely within both communities, raised important ecclesiological questions for the churches to tackle.*

**A reply by the Churches**

They had received various provisional replies at an earlier stage. The Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Churches in France, however, took their request seriously, and after reflection and consultation sent a reply in December 1996 signed jointly by Mgr Gérard Daucourt, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Commission for Christian Unity, and by Pasteur Werner Jurgensen, President of the Permanent Council of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France. A synthesis had been made from independent replies received from the French Reformed Church, the Lutheran Churches in France, and the Catholic Church, which latter had organised some research among interchurch couples in the Paris region and had also consulted diocesan ecumenical officers through the Episcopal Commission for Christian Unity.

The churches agreed that it had been an opportunity to reassess the situation of mixed couples, so deeply affected by church divisions. On the pastoral side, they recognised that "consideration for people, for the couples themselves, is more important than purely juridical statements". The churches have different experiences here because of the numbers involved: only 2% of weddings in Catholic churches are of mixed couples (although in the diocese of Strasbourg it was 20% in 1994), whereas three-quarters or a half of the weddings in Reformed or Lutheran churches involve mixed couples, depending on the region. In both cases, however, it was agreed that pastoral care needed to be developed much more. "It is not a case of proposing ready-made solutions, but while respecting the liberty and responsibility of particular couples, and taking account of their personal history and situation, of helping them to make authentic choices, even if they are sometimes difficult."

It was agreed that in many cases partners already play important roles in the church of their spouses, and share in many ministries. "Thus there is already a recognition of the presence of mixed couples in each of the churches." On the juridical side, however, there was a marked reluctance to make changes in canon law and church discipline to take account of their experience of "double insertion" in the life of the churches for fear that their challenge to the churches to come closer together – a challenge needed by the churches on their road to reciprocal recognition – would be weakened. If interchurch families become comfortable in their "double insertion", they might cease to exert pressure for closer unity.

"There could be very little difference between a 'reconciled island' and a 'ghetto'."

The fundamental ecclesiological differences between the churches has led to the adoption of very different positions in practice, and the letter repeated what these positions are. The Catholic Church judges that the conditions do not exist in France to go beyond what the Ecumenical Directory of 1993 has established at world level. The French Reformed Church thinks it is possible to live together as companions in faith without obliterating differences nor trying to get beyond them in an institutional way. "The Lutheran Churches of France think that the way forward is not towards a "double ecclesial belonging" but through effective participation in the life of the communities of the two partners. But the churches are not satisfied with the present situation, and realise that they must follow up the ecclesiological debate together."

**Comments**

Both Fr René Beaufèpè and Pasteur Jacques Maury expressed their gratitude for the reply. They want "to continue to pursue this essential dialogue". Fr Beaufèpè points out once again that ecumenical relationships are too fragile, too easily reversed by a change of minister who interprets church documents differently from his predecessor - or indeed, is unaware of their existence. "What has been gained needs to be fixed in church practice and structures. But above all, the ecclesiological questions remain to be tackled. The replies only recognise some exceptions, some adaptations, some tolerances here and there, an acceptance that there is sometimes an active presence of a member of another church in the confessional bodies. But instead of reflecting on this lived experience and drawing out the canonical consequences, the churches start from their classical theological positions and so have little difficulty in showing it is not possible to go further, at least for the moment."

"But true ecumenism begins when the principle of *conversion* is accepted – a conversion which includes ecclesial structures. This is where we need to make progress. This will not make *foyers mixtes* a "special case" of a different nature from that of other ecumenical groups of theologians, of the faithful, even if *foyers mixtes* do represent an extreme situation. But none of these groups are to placed in a 'ghetto' – it needs to be recognised that without breaking with their mother churches they are spiritual places where reconciliation operates more effectively than in the rest of the ecclesial body."

*It is necessary to analyse why this is so. … Unity will not fall ready-made from heaven … it is being restored step by step, and communion will spread like an oil spill … But the church authorities need to integrate these ‘islands of reconciliation’ where they appear into the life of the churches at the structural level too – otherwise they risk becoming only temporary manifestations, a sort of cancerous growth which will only add to division. This is the way, it seems to Jacques Maury and to myself, that we need to move forward in reflection and action; there will be no ecumenical advance without this new effort."

(The full texts can be found in the review *Foyers Mixtes Chrétiens*, no.115, Jan-March 1997)
The Association of Interchurch Families in Montreal was asked to make a presentation to the national annual Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops’ Dialogue, a group charged with establishing pastoral guidelines for interchurch families, during their three-day meeting which took place near Montreal in late November 1996. It was an honour that the Association immediately accepted. Three couples represented the Association before fifteen bishops from the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches across Canada. (In 1987 this group produced the document Interchurch Marriages between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada.)

Not having any Anglican members in the Montreal Association, we contacted friends in Manitoba - Ray Temmerman, a Roman Catholic, and his wife Fenella, who is an Anglican. To our great satisfaction, they had a wealth of personal testimonies from other Catholic-Anglican couples, testimonies of complete acceptance in some church communities and terrible rejection in others.

Living actively in two churches
The message we brought to the bishops is that some interchurch families are living active lives in two churches and sharing those church lives with their children. We presented the concept of dual registration of baptism, a practice that is very new in Canada. The bishops had a few questions regarding what the future would hold for the children.

In which church would they become communicant members? One bishop felt that if the child’s baptism is recorded in the Catholic church, then he would consider the child a Catholic. Our experience is that children are welcome and active in both churches, and the concern over their official membership does not affect their contribution to the life of either community. The bishops also asked what would happen when these children themselves get married. Our group has no previous experience of interchurch children growing to adulthood. But what do we know of any child’s future? The most that we can do is to raise children in the Christian faith, nurture their young beliefs and love them. If we prepare them as children, we must have confidence that they will make good decisions for themselves when they grow up.

A change of priest can be devastating
The ninth International Conference of Associations of Interchurch Families, held in Virginia last summer, stated that the most immediate concern for interchurch families is their overwhelming spiritual need to receive communion together, and that this need cries out for a more generous pastoral interpretation of the rules on eucharistic sharing. We brought this to the bishops along with personal experiences from across the country. We reported that in one area an Anglican spouse was welcomed with open arms by the Roman Catholic community, invited to the table, and given opportunities where she could share her gifts in the liturgy. That same couple, after sharing with a community in communion and the life of the church for several years, was devastated when one day a new priest arrived and opened the liturgy with the statement that while all were welcome to be at the liturgy, only those who were Roman Catholics were allowed to receive communion. Such experiences cry out for a more pastoral approach to the situation.

The bishops expressed their own pain at not being able to share communion with each other. They described how they lived this separation during their annual meetings: that morning one of the Anglican bishops had presided over communion and while the Anglican bishops went forward and received, their Catholic brothers remained seated. The next morning a Catholic bishop would say mass and the Anglicans would remain in their seats.

One of the Anglican bishops shared the story of his daughters. Both daughters were educated in a Catholic school, and both followed the normal first communion classes with their classmates. The elder received her first communion in the Catholic church, but with the younger came a change of priest and two days before the communion service she was told that she would not be permitted to receive. For a young child to be denied just two days before the celebration, after months of preparation is a very difficult thing to accept. Her pain was deepened by knowing that her sister had been allowed to receive only a couple of years earlier. How do you explain to a child that she was an exemplary student throughout the preparation classes, but she would nevertheless fail to experience first communion with her friends and classmates? How do you explain that she didn’t fail: it is the churches that have failed for the last few hundred years? As adults, though we find it hard to accept the scandal of our division, at least we can understand our brokenness. A young child cannot understand our problems.

The challenge not to go away
As interchurch families, we meet priests who do not understand, or do not want to understand, our double belonging. The bishops admitted that they have similar problems with some of their own confreres. At all levels of the church there are people who continue to see interchurch families as oddities and problems that, if ignored long enough, will go away. This is perhaps our greatest challenge today.

Our meeting was, I hope, a blessing for both groups. The bishops got a glimpse of what it is like to live an interchurch life and we met in the bishops partners who will walk with us on our journey towards church unity. It allowed us to add a human dimension to the ecumenical movement.

Craig Buchanan
What it means to us

"Double belonging" is a term which has been used by some interchurch couples and families to describe their lived experience in their marriage and family life. We use it for lack of a better one. In this brief article a Roman Catholic wife from Cornwall explains what "double belonging" has meant for her family.

For us, double belonging focuses very sharply what it is to be joined by the sacrament of matrimony. Our marriage means that we share each other without reservation, giving to each other our strengths and attractive qualities as well as our faults and weaknesses – conferring on each other an opportunity for growth and liberation because we live in an environment of constant love and commitment.

Just as part of us is our extended families, our friends and respective communities, and of course our church families and traditions, so also for each of us the welcome into all of these communities has been a consequence of our union, and an overwhelmingly enriching one. Malcolm has discovered a perspective of the Roman Church which goes beyond the English experience both in terms of geographical and historical diversity to something much more culturally varied and developmental in nature; as for me, I have discovered the joy of a Church much more rooted in my own Cornish and Celtic culture and appreciate greatly its immediacy even in the small communities of this place – the Church of England is much more locally present. I have also been able to develop my relationship with Our Lady more fully in sharing attitudes which are different from the piety in which I was brought up.

But what level of belonging do we each acquire by virtue of our marriage? Malcolm is still an Anglican and I am still a Roman Catholic and we would not pretend to have become the other. But just as neither of us becomes genetically part of each other’s family and yet find that we are not entirely separate either, our respective church communities likewise increasingly become something without which we are incomplete as worshipping and committed Christians. It is indeed true that we bring our churches’ divisions into our marriage just as we bring our other sins, but it is our experience that the grace of the sacrament by which we live on a daily basis gives us a perspective on those divisions which enables us truly to know a degree of unity which is far, far greater than the areas which divide us. Inevitably then for us this unity is passed on to our son. The love, differences, misunderstandings which we share as a couple, our extended families and our church families are all part of the legacy which we pass on. It is difficult for us to see how it could be otherwise. Within this context we feel that our spiritual need to share sacramentally is both serious and a special case. In the reality of our marriage God joins us in both body and spirit and so we feel that this sharing becomes essential, as an expression of unity already achieved as well as food for the ongoing journey. I am sure that others will claim similar exceptional status, although it is difficult to imagine large numbers coming forward with such restricted conditions in place.

We understand that the Roman Catholic Church claims that "the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church" (Directory, p. 18), but also that "human folly and human sinfulness however have at times opposed the unifying purpose of the Holy Spirit and weakened that power of love which overcomes inherent tensions in the ecclesial life" (ibid.); perhaps interchurch couples can live a prophetic witness which is more consonant with that unifying purpose as we work to overcome those tensions within our domestic church and beyond, bearing more of the pain in being privileged to experience the vision of unity a little more fully.

Kathy Pope
A Letter to Methodists

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote a famous “Letter to a Roman Catholic”. The text which follows is a message from a Roman Catholic, Stephen, to the local Methodist community to which his wife Gill belongs. It was printed in The Link, the magazine of Orpington Methodist Church, Sevenoaks Road.

A guest made welcome
I am prompted to write by something that my friend John Bailey said to me after a communion service at Sevenoaks Road. “It saddens me,” he said, “every time I see you go up to the rail at a communion service and not take communion, but just receive a blessing.” Which led me to think that perhaps I owe John - and the rest of you - an explanation of what some of you think is odd, even insulting, behaviour on my part.

Many of you know the bare bones of the story. I am a Roman Catholic, a member of the community at Holy Innocents. But it is my good fortune that I am married to Gill, who is proud to be a Methodist and is, of course, a member of Orpington Methodist Church. We are an “interchurch family”, committed to two Christian churches.

Every interchurch family that we know - and we know quite a few - establishes a different pattern of Sunday worship. We wanted to worship together. We also wanted our daughters to be settled in the Sunday school. So we fell into the pattern of coming to Sevenoaks Road on Sunday mornings. This pattern was reinforced when Gill started to lead the beginners’ Sunday school. I tend to go to Holy Innocents for Mass on Sunday evenings, sometimes with the girls and/or Gill.

For me that was, to start with, like playing away in the mornings and at home in the evenings.

But I have been and am made to feel so welcome here that it now feels like home, too, and I guess that Orpington Methodist Church has never had a prouder honorary member than me! It is easy to accept good things without ever stopping to say “thank you” for them. So I am glad to have this chance to say “thank you” to everyone for making me feel such a welcome guest. God knows how grateful I am.

If I feel so much a part of this community, you might ask, why do I not express that feeling by taking communion here? Am I not, in fact, insulting you all, my brothers and sisters, by not doing so?

The simple answer is that I am obeying the rules of my own church. The Roman Catholic Church sees eucharistic communion as a sign of visible unity between churches - and so eucharistic sharing is seen as an end-product of the quest for Christian unity, rather than as a means to that end. The Roman Catholic Church takes the view that to allow eucharistic sharing now would signal a premature end to the efforts being made to bring about visible unity between the Churches. Accordingly, communion is not generally offered in Roman Catholic churches to Christians of most other denominations, and we are enjoined not to accept eucharistic hospitality elsewhere.

So my not taking communion here is not intended as a denial of the unity that already exists between us. I rejoice in that (and never stop reminding my friends at Holy Innocents of it!). In fact, I think that our family is living proof of that unity, like a bridge across a divide, or - better - like stitches in a healing wound. Nor is it intended as a denial of the meaning and importance of the Methodist communion service.

It is painful to me not to be in a position to share fully at the Lord’s Table here. That pain acts as a reminder to me, at each communion service, of how important the work of Christian unity is. That is one of the reasons that I am prepared to accept the Roman Catholic rules, subject to an important qualification.

The qualification is that, as some of you may have noticed, I do take communion here when I am sitting with Gill. We need to take communion together. It is important to us as an expression of our unity as a married couple - our “one-fleshness”. I find it difficult to accept that we should be separated - our oneness rejected - at the very centre of our Christian worship. And so when we can, when it would not cause trouble or offend people, we take communion together.

In taking communion together we are, arguably, remaining within the letter of the Roman Catholic Church’s rules, which allow for some exceptions to the general prohibition. We are certainly, I believe, remaining within the spirit of them.

Next time you see me receiving simply a blessing at a communion service, then, spare a thought and a prayer for Gill and me and for the many other interchurch couples in the Orpington area. And join again in Jesus’s prayer for his followers, "That they might all be one."

Stephen Walsh
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 marriages and families, in the context of the wider ecumenical movement.

Pastoral care
- interchurch couples,
- clergy and ministers,
- theological students and seminarians,
- relatives and godparents,
- marriage counsellors and teachers,
- preparation 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 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.)

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, informed by the work of others who have found that the exchange of experience with others in similar situations could help each find its own way forward. The Association established 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 levels, 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 Westminister, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, Dr Kenneth Greig, 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.

THE ASSOCIATION

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), 14 Sandhead Road Strathaven ML10 6HX

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-Irène, 2 place Gailleton, Lyon F 69002

Italy
Coppie Interconfessionali, via Sciopio Stalpera 13, 28125 Milan

USA
American AIF (AAIF), c/o Kentucky Community, 1115 South 4th Street, Louisville, KY 40203-3101

Canada
Canadian AIF (CAIF), c/o Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, 2003 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Québec H3H 1G6

Australia
Interchurch Families Association (Western Australia) (IFAW), 62 Tweeddale Road, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

Canada
Interchurch Families Association, Brisbane (IFAB), 409 Upper Cornwall Street, Coorparoo, Queensland 4151

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

http://www.aifw.org/aif/aif.htm

AROUND THE WORLD

The university for the Millennium

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
at the Ecumenical Centre
Geneva
23-28 July 1998

Interchurch Families and the Churches
les foyers mixtes et les églises
l'au 2000

Toward the Millennium

Further information from:

Peter Millar, Centre Sint-Irène
2 place Gailleton, Lyon F 69002

AIF/AAIF

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