From Rome with joy

The 2003 Rome World Gathering of Interchurch Families, prepared by four language groups working together, brought to the Mondo Migliore Centre at Rocca di Papa some 230 adults from 11 countries and three continents. With them came 100 or so children and young people, whose participation was an important part of the Gathering, and included an all-night vigil of prayer for unity organised by the young people. The rich fare included worship and discussion groups, addresses and informal exchanges, a visit to Castel Gandolfo for the Angelus – with a special welcome for interchurch families from Pope John Paul II – the visit of a representative group to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (and for English-speakers a visit to the Anglican Centre in Rome for tea).

Some of the texts of the Gathering are printed here, and more can be found on the English-speaking interchurch families world web-site (see back cover), along with the Country Reports prepared for Rome, and various accounts of the Gathering. The co-ordinators of the four language groups did a splendid job, and special gratitude goes to Andrea Lari from northern Italy, and for the English-speaking associations, to Melanie Finch from England. The Preroma committee transformed itself into a Postroma committee on the final afternoon, and gave some thought to the co-ordinating links that will be needed between the various groups and associations if the work of the Rome Gathering is to be carried forward.

Rome 2003 is an outstanding landmark in the history of the interchurch family movement. The Message of Cardinal Kasper was an encouraging one. Interchurch families left Rome re-invigorated, with renewed courage to face the particular difficulties of our situation, but above all with intense joy and thanksgiving for our particular vocation: united in baptism and marriage; called to a common life in the Church for the reconciliation of our churches.

RR

In this issue: Texts from Rome 2003 pp.1-8; Around the world p.9; Franco-Swiss Conferences pp.10-11; Interchurch marriage spirituality pp.12-15

“You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity.” Pope John Paul II, York, 1982
A message addressed by Cardinal Kasper, 
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 
to the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families

The Rome Gathering was delighted to receive a message from Cardinal Kasper, who was in Canada at the Lutheran World Assembly at the time of the meeting. Participants were particularly pleased that Mgr Eleuterio Fortino from the Pontifical Council was able to come to Mondo Migliore to present the Message, since Mgr Fortino has been very closely associated with the Council’s work on mixed marriages over many years.

Always rejoice
In an unscripted introduction Mgr Fortino recalled that forty years earlier he had made his retreat before his ordination to the diaconate at Mondo Migliore. He remembered the words of the retreat director: ‘Always remain in the joy of the Lord!’, and he urged interchurch families never to lose that joy, in the conviction that Christ is with us and is guiding us. Mixed couples have a founded reason to rejoice, because they profess together faith in the Trinity and in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour. They rejoice for the salvation they have received and for the transmission of the same faith to their children. Keep that joy as you study the questions that face the Church of Christ today, he said. Surely we have not yet realised all the consequences of our common faith for our life and society. There are indeed problems of division, both theological and disciplinary; but the ecumenical dialogue is a movement, called to change the present situation.

In Ut Unum Sint Pope John Paul II showed how this dialogue has made extraordinary progress, and insisted that it must continue. But dialogue does not only mean Joint Commissions and meetings of church representatives: it is more general, including the work of research institutes and also of groupings such as interchurch families. Then new things can arise.

In his latest encyclical Pope John Paul II quoted Ut Unum Sint, repeating his ardent desire to celebrate the one eucharist; this remains the final objective of all dialogue. You will see in Cardinal Kasper’s message that progress here is not simply a question of norms, but the wider one of the progress of the dialogues. It is becoming possible to find pastoral solutions in respect of particular people. The Pontifical Council works with the Bishops when they come for their ad limina visits.

Finally Mgr Fortino recalled his ‘ecumenical baptism’ which had taken place 39 years previously, at the theological course held at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, near Geneva. About eighty people took part, mainly Protestants; there were just four Roman Catholics, three priests and a laywoman. The four had to take their turn in preparing a denominational worship service. He remembered they had joked that three and a half people were doing it, because the laywoman was half of a mixed marriage, married to an Anglican.

[It may be that this early recognition that married couples are ‘one person’ across denominational divisions, one ‘domestic church’, has inspired Mgr Fortino in his work for mixed marriages ever since!]

The text of Cardinal Kasper’s Message

Grace and peace to you in the Father, who has made marriage a covenant of life and love, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is present in that love, and in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity who draws that human love into the divine life of the Trinity.

I wish I could have been present to greet you in person, but unfortunately that is not possible. I must commend you for your courage at the outset, for it is only courageous souls who come to bear the heat of Rome in July.

You are not a problem
I noted in your preparatory paper for this conference the statement that ‘in the past, interchurch families were often treated as a problem.’ You probably know Gabriel Marcel’s famous statement that ‘life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.’ I assure you that I do not greet those of you today who are in mixed marriages as a ‘problem’, but as people who in your marriages live – in many different ways – a concrete experience, an experience of sharing in the covenant between husband and wife which binds you ever more deeply in unity, while at the same time holding something of the painful divisions of Christianity within that unity.

On the one hand, each of your families is ‘a community of love and life’, a ‘school of communion’, the ‘primary place in which unity will be fashioned or weakened each day.’ Many of you share in what the Catholic Church understands to be a sacramental marriage; in this you share in a ‘great mystery’, which expresses the spousal love of Christ for the Church, and
which is called to radiate the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, in your marriages, husband and wife have been formed in and belong to different ecclesial communions, which are not in full communion with each other. You are not a problem, but you are living in the midst of the serious problem of the divisions within Christianity; in your marriages you have to face this problem daily, and face it with integrity.

**Live your identity faithfully and creatively**

I know that this experience you are living carries both opportunities and struggles. Where both husband and wife strive to be faithful to their respective Christian communities, the importance of our churches and ecclesial communities growing together, the pain of our division, the sense of urgency to recover full visible unity, and the hope and prayer which sustain the ecumenical movement, are all experienced in their depths.

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (n.78), wrote that ‘marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons... contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties.’ While not turning a blind eye to the serious challenges which can be faced by interchurch families, the main thrust in this text looks to your marriages in terms of their intrinsic value, and invites reflection on the contributions you can make to the respective churches to which you belong – by being who you are, and living that identity faithfully and creatively.

Your preparatory paper speaks of families embodying ‘a love that is not simply content with a parallel separate existence, but which yearns for, and therefore promotes, growth into deeper and deeper unity.’ Interchurch couples provide an ongoing impetus to the ecumenical movement, and keep us from acquiescing in our differences. Mixed marriages have an important role to play in ecumenical relations, and in our ecclesial lives.

**An exchange of gifts**

The Ecumenical Directory (n.66 b) speaks of mixed marriage families as having ‘the delicate task of making themselves builders of unity.’ In this regard, permit me to offer you three brief thoughts. Firstly, it seems to me that interchurch families have something to teach us in terms of an ecumenical exchange of gifts. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n.1634) speaks of the importance of placing in common what you have received from your respective communities, and learning from each other ‘the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ.’ You are uniquely situated to help the churches better see the authentic gifts which are to be found in and received from each other.

**Spiritual ecumenism**

Secondly, you have an important contribution to make in terms of spiritual ecumenism, which is the heart of the ecumenical movement. In addressing mixed marriage families during his visit to England in 1982, Pope John Paul noted: ‘You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity. Express that hope in prayer together, in the unity of love. Together invite the Holy Spirit of love into your hearts and into your homes.’ Praying together, reading and pondering the Scriptures together, encouraging others to do so, will have an effect within and beyond your families.

---

**Communion in mission**

Thirdly, in our present ecumenical context, wherein we have achieved a great deal over the last forty years and yet still have a long way to go in the restoration of full visible unity, we speak increasingly of the importance of communion in mission, to the extent that our shared faith makes that possible. As interchurch families, you are already engaged in a common mission, the mission of living deeply the covenant of love which binds you together. As churches and ecclesial communities seek increasingly to engage in common mission, we would have much to learn from the communion in mission reflected in your marriages and families.

**The Pontifical Council encourages you**

Finally, I would take this opportunity to speak a special word of encouragement specifically to those mixed marriages where either the husband or wife is a Catholic. I want to assure you that the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has an ongoing and heartfelt concern for all of you. The Ecumenical Directory’s section on mixed marriages, lacking in the previous edition of the Directory, is one expression of that concern. Faithfulness to the guidelines set forth therein, especially pertaining to eucharistic sharing, will at times mean that you will feel more intensely the pain of division. The pain arises not from the current norms, but from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. Our ongoing dialogues, however, do give us grounds for hope. If they can broaden the foundations of our common faith, this would help us to take further steps towards the full visible unity we seek. While we continue to strive for that unity, it is our hope and prayer that your faithfulness, your patience, your efforts, will be an integral part of the healing process of the reconciliation that Christ calls us to and desires.

We appreciate that one of the aims of the Association of Interchurch Families is to work with the churches for Christian unity, and are encouraged that you see yourselves as called to become signs and instruments of the visible unity we seek. At the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, we would be most pleased to receive a report of your Gathering, and will study the issues and concerns you discuss with care.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Walter Cardinal Kasper*

President
Anglican greetings

The Gathering was delighted to receive letters of greeting both from the Archbishop of Canterbury and from the Co-chairs of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). The letter from IARCCUM was delivered by its Anglican Co-secretary, Canon Gregory Cameron, Director of Ecumenical Affairs at the Anglican Consultative Council, and the letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury was read by Gregory’s wife Clare, who is a Roman Catholic.

A Letter of Greeting from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the families gathered at Villa Mondo Migliore for the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families

I have known about the Association of Interchurch Families in the United Kingdom for some time, and the careful work it does to support and inform families who live out the joys of a family life rooted in love and mutual commitment alongside the pain of our ecumenical divisions. It is a particular pleasure therefore to send you my greetings as the Association joins with its sister organizations across the globe to meet in the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families in Rome this summer.

Doubly blessed
In family life, you are already experiencing the profound privilege of nurturing the lives of children and young people in the hope that, with God’s grace, they will grow up to be whole young people, enriched and supported by Christian faith, and the inheritance which our churches offer to them. We might even speak of your children as being doubly blessed, as they grow up able to draw on the strengths and wisdom of not one, but two Christian traditions.

You will know more keenly than most, however, that this is a double-edged inheritance to which you succeed. You bring a diversity of worship and the richness of two spiritual traditions into the life of one family, and you also need to balance your loyalties to both churches, as you seek to bring up your children in a faith that will commend itself to them as a basis for their lives.

Practical succour and support
In sending you my greetings, I want you to know that I believe that all the churches have a particular duty of care to families who live out the ecumenical endeavour in the way which you do. I hope that the work of such bodies that engage in formal dialogue between two traditions, such as the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, will offer you succour and support of a practical and direct kind.

I send you my warmest good wishes for your meeting - may God encourage and inspire you as you meet together, and bless you in your ministry to the wider churches in showing us that we can live and work together in unity in the most intimate of settings.

+ Rowan Cantuar

A Letter of Greeting from the Co-Chairs of the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

To live and to grow in a loving family is probably one of the richest gifts that we can experience in human life and we salute every one of you as each family represented at the Conference seeks to grow into the fullness of life that Christ wills for you as a family.

You have been called by God’s grace and through the commitment of individual men and women to marriage and family life into a special vocation to nurture and care for each other. This is a task which in fact goes beyond the limits of your blood relations, to the relationships which you are renewing or making at this time with each other, and ultimately to the life of the whole Christian family.

Pastoral understanding and action for interchurch families is included in our mandate

One of the main duties of the Commission which we chair together is to translate the fruits of ecumenical conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion into practical action. When the Conference of Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops, meeting in Mississauga in 2000, established the Commission, they included in its mandate a specific charge ‘to examine the range of possible ways, within current canon law provisions, to deal generously and pastorally with situations of interchurch marriages involving Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

In our work, we have not taken this charge lightly, and we bear in the forefront of our thinking the concern in both our churches to offer a ministry of support and care to all who live out their Christian calling in a family life which contains different denominational allegiances.

Patience and hard work

There may be times when you feel disappointed about teachings which seem to get in the way of your shared discipleship, but we ask you to be patient. The path to the unity of Christians is not easy, and rushing the process will not help to create a firm and durable unity of life and mission in which we can fully respond to God’s call. For our part, we assure you that we will be working hard to attend to the spiritual need of nurturing your family lives in the best and highest ways possible, for in your commitments to each other as families, we see the foretaste of the unbreakable commitment that Christ has for his Church, and for the unity of the Church, for which we all pray.

Good wishes then to you from all the members of IARCCUM, and may your family lives be blessed and enriched by Christ’s presence and grace.

Signed on behalf of the Co-chairs, John Bathersby, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, and David Beetge, Anglican Bishop of the Highveld, by Don Bolen and Gregory Cameron, Co-secretaries
An Address by Mgr Giuseppe Chiaretti, Archbishop of Perugia

Interchurch families at the World Gathering were grateful to Mgr Chiaretti, President of the Episcopal Commission of the Italian Bishops’ Conference for Ecumenism and Dialogue, for expressing his willingness to be present for a large part of the World Gathering. Mgr Chiaretti has been closely involved with the process that led to the agreements on mixed interconfessional marriages between the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Waldensian-Methodist Church in Italy (see Interchurch Families 1996, 4,1, pp.9-10, 1997, 5,2 p.9, 2001, 9,2, p.8). The conference was even more in Mgr Chiaretti’s debt when he agreed, at short notice, to address the Gathering. He faced head-on a question that has been and remains of great importance for interchurch families: that of eucharistic sharing. We give his text in translation here.

Greetings to you all!

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

A sign of contradiction

I am here among you as the episcopal delegate for ecumenism of the Italian Bishops’ Conference: a position which will shortly be coming to an end for me, but which has allowed me to conclude positively the Agreement with the Waldensians and Methodists on mixed interconfessional marriages. My being here is an indication of my interest in the particular religious problems which concern you, and testimony to a special empathy for your ‘domestic church’, called to live your experience of faith and marital holiness in a difficult context. You have entered the one Church of Christ through two different doors, and you have committed yourselves to marriage as a real area of grace, as a ‘sacrament’ or a ‘covenant’ with God. However, you find yourselves divided because of the eucharist, which should instead signify and, through grace, make real your full unity. It seems more of a contradiction than a paradox; but it is also in some way the sign of the contradictions among which we are called to live out today our common identity as Christians.

Explorers and prophets

You are carrying a kind of cross for us all: the cross which reflects the sin of divisions which are not yet healed, but which becomes for us all a warning and a reminder. ‘Explorers’, therefore, of new ways to unity in diversity, but also ‘prophets’ who urge us out of any possible indifference.

The message I can bring is that these problems are being taken seriously, so that you do not continue to suffer needlessly.

You well know how much the Catholic Church has developed its theological reflection about the sacrament of the eucharist. Let me say a little about this to try to clarify the meaning of the Church’s position.

Catholic eucharistic faith

If the sacraments are holy signs, the eucharist is for us ‘the most holy sacrament’, *culmen et fons totius vitae christianae*, as the Council said (that is, summit and source of the whole Christian life). Through the eucharist, in fact, the unique and unrepeatable paschal event of the Lord is made real for us today, that is, the gift of his life in the signs of bread and wine, and it was this gift which was offered in full on the cross in the sign of his blood, shed as a sacrificial seal of a new covenant with God. The apostle Paul, who was the first to speak to us about the institution of the eucharist, also speaks of it as the ‘form’ of the church, which is a diverse community, but a unity made up – like the bread and the wine – of many crushed grains. The eucharist, therefore, is also presented, (through the action of the Holy Spirit, in the twofold epiclesis), as the ‘ecclesial body’ of the Lord, through which he continues to be ‘bodily’ present among us across time and space as ‘the whole Christ’, as it is expressed by St Augustine. That bread of Jesus, therefore, is very precious to us, and the ‘twelve’ are called to renew the ‘memorial’ to him and to the paschal event, especially – as the first Christian community did – on the ‘day of the Lord’. So when Christians take from the hand of the apostle the bread that is offered and eat it, they also take and eat the mystery that these elements are representing, as Augustine also says. So the eucharist is an internal link not only with Christ, but also a communion with his church which is celebrating this event.

Forgive me for briefly reminding you of the Catholic understanding of the eucharist, but I have done this to clarify the reasons for the particular significance which Catholics give to this understanding.

No problem for admission in cases of real need, but one of reciprocity

As for the possibility of so-called ‘eucharistic hospitality’, I can say straightforwardly that in the Catholic Church there is no problem for the other Christian partner. Indeed, in cases of ‘serious spiritual need’ (the fairly comprehensive expression is that of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*), he or she may receive the Catholic eucharist under certain conditions (in particular, with a belief in the ‘real’ and not symbolic presence of the Lord). The problem comes rather for the Catholic who participates in the Protestant Lord’s Supper. Let us be clear that this is not because of a lack of salvific value in that eucharistic sign. ‘The Spirit of Christ does not refuse to use such good gifts as instruments of salvation’, says the Council (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22), but it is because of ‘a certain deficiency’ in the sacrament of Holy Orders, which has been so much talked about.
What can be done, then? In my opinion, we must calmly go back to the root of the problem, making sure the eucharistic action has an apostolic foundation.

More work needed on the apostolic ministry
Is this possible? Everything is possible. There is the very recent example of the controversial subject of Justification, which was resolved for the most part by the agreement of four years ago. So the experts are called to work in great depth on the subject of the apostolic ministry within a church-communion. I will leave aside any other observations on this subject, which I am not qualified to speak about: the work might be long and tiring, but the Holy Spirit will guide the church towards the horizons of a unity perhaps unthinkable today. On the other hand, we cannot be satisfied with a unity that does not take these difficulties into account.

Both thorn in the flesh and life together in joy
The mixed interconfessional family is in the vanguard of this undertaking. Perhaps this is its vocation, a difficult, but sufficiently clear calling. So I would say to you: ‘Courage! In your sufferings you will be ‘completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church’ (Colossians 1:24). In fact, you carry very visibly in your story a sort of ‘sign of contradiction’ which can be a warning to all Christians, a bit like Jacob’s ‘limp’ or Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’. You are in effect a continuous living and painful memorial of the torn robe of Christ … But even suffering is also a way of ecumenism, perhaps the most precious one!

And in any case much more is offered to you as a gift: the faith to live together in joy and to communicate that together to your children, as the most precious treasure. I am also thinking of that ‘spiritual worship’ or as others translate it – of that ‘living sacrifice acceptable to him … the true worship which is due to him’ (Romans 12:1). And this is the ‘sacrifice’ which you can celebrate through your baptismal ministry, together and in the name of your ‘domestic church’. This can happen every day and on the ‘day of the Lord’, through listening to the word of God, through prayer, mutual encouragement, forgiveness, reconciliation, through your undertaking to love and care for each other. When we look closely, this is a sort of ‘eucharist’ of the domestic church, the Pauline sacrifice of your own ‘bodies’; although it obviously cannot be a substitute for the public and communal memorial of the Lord’s Passover, entrusted not to individuals on their own but to the church in all the wholeness of its meaning.

May the Lord bless your waiting, your labours, your hopes. And may God make your love beautiful.

An Address by Professor Daniel Garrone of the Protestant faculty, Rome

The Gathering was most grateful to Professor Garrone for replacing the Waldensian speaker Paolo Ricca, who was prevented by serious illness from giving his promised address. Professor Garrone welcomed the preparatory paper and came to grips with its contents from a Waldensian point of view. We do not yet have a full English translation of his address, but we give an idea of what he said below.

Like Mgr Chiaretti, he spoke of the Italian agreements on mixed interconfessional marriages, and pointed out the immense importance of getting these texts known and received, rooted in the life of the churches.

Professor Garrone spoke of the identity of interchurch families, forged not in opposition but in mutual enrichment, both for the couple and for all those around the couple. An approach that takes both communities equally seriously can open up new possibilities, and help the churches towards a deeper, more open dialogue on sensitive questions. He asked interchurch families to take seriously the different contributions they bring, from their different histories, in which God had been at work. They need not be too preoccupied with what they have to do. Our hope is based on what God has already done, what God has already given.

Professor Garrone put four critical questions to interchurch families. They had not become a pressure group or a trade union fighting the bosses, but could they explore further how the churches can live in gratitude through their different experiences, could they share their hopes and anxieties in a way that would help the churches towards this gratitude?

Then, was there not a tendency in the paper to paint an idealised picture of interchurch families? Not all couples are fervent. Not all are outstanding people. We are all fallible; we share the weaknesses of everyone else in the world. We must not idealise the ‘domestic church’. Being two-church is not so important as being in Christ. The question for our children, as for us, is can we believe in God, not which church they or we belong to.

When it comes to ‘double belonging’, don’t try to be superhuman! Some families cannot manage it. I am not against it, said Professor Garrone, but do not let it become a chain. Some Christians are happy to belong to the church of their spouse. A man may say: ‘I remain a Catholic, but for the present, I live with my wife in the Protestant Church’. Or the other way round – but this raises the question of eucharistic practice.

On this difficult question, the preparatory paper is very sensitive. You must help the churches to get beyond resignation on this question. You are entitled to insist on your needs, that a way through may be found. Meanwhile, practise hospitality at home; open your family meals to others; offer people from different churches a way of enjoying a meal together, in the presence of Jesus. This can be a sign of God’s calling to the churches.
An address to the Pontifical Council

A representative group of some fifty participants from eleven countries was able to visit the offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity during the World Gathering of Interchurch Families. They were warmly received by Mgr Radano, Under Secretary for Relations with Western Churches, who spoke of the work of the Pontifical Council. On behalf of the Gathering Martin Reardon presented a copy of the preparatory paper in four languages, and asked whether a small representative group of interchurch families might discuss it with members of the Pontifical Council at a mutually convenient time. Following his presentation (see the text given below), there was an open discussion, during which some interchurch families asked whether it would be possible to have a continuing link with the Pontifical Council.

On the final morning of the Gathering the preparatory paper (for the text see Interchurch Families 2003, 11, 1, pp.1-7) was unanimously adopted as a statement endorsed by the Gathering. With this enhanced status it will be a basis for dialogue with church authorities at an international level, and as such breaks entirely new ground. The four language groups have been able to speak together in an unprecedented way. The Rome Gathering was not itself able to enter into dialogue with the Pontifical Council on the issues that are of particular concern to interchurch families, but laid a solid foundation for a follow-up. A report of the Gathering has been sent to the Pontifical Council as a basis for the continuing dialogue that interchurch families are hoping for.

We are delighted today to have this opportunity to thank the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity before it, for the encouragement and support you have given to interchurch families over the past forty years.

An historical overview
Before the Second Vatican Council mixed marriages between Roman Catholics and other Christians were forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church unless both partners made promises that were seen by other churches as violating the rights of their members. Mixed marriages were seen as a cause of conflict between the churches, and therefore as a major hindrance to Christian unity.

As early as 1920 the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople had listed mixed marriages among the questions that needed 'settlement between the various confessions'. Dr Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, stated in 1963 that the ecumenical reality of the Second Vatican Council would be judged by two things. One of them was the removal of the canonical difficulties for Christians of other communions marrying Roman Catholics (Report to the Executive Committee of the WCC, 12 February 1963). Towards the end of the Council, the subject was referred to the Pope as one of pastoral urgency on which the Council had not had time to come to a common mind. This was an exceptional occasion on which a large number of the Observers from many different churches and confessions spoke together. Their joint statement on the subject of mixed marriages between baptised Christians was conveyed directly to Pope Paul VI by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The papal motu proprio Matrimonia Mixta was issued five years later in 1970. It brought in legislative changes, the positive significance of which was not at first fully appreciated by other churches. It also put forward a less negative view of mixed marriages. It did so in the characteristically understated way by which the Vatican heralds radical change. It said that ‘mixed marriages … do not, except in some cases, help in re-establishing unity among Christians.’ Most Protestant readers, unschooled in Vatican ways, failed at first to detect the positive smuggled in under cover of the negative.

Pope Paul VI spelled this out more positively in his encyclical Evangelii Nuntiandi of 1975. ‘Families resulting from a mixed marriage also have the duty of proclaiming Christ to the children in the fullness of the consequences of the common baptism,’ he wrote. ‘They have moreover the difficult task of becoming builders of unity.’

Pope John Paul II was even more explicit in Familiaris Consortio of 1981. ‘Marriages between Catholics and other baptised persons … contain numerous elements that could well be made use of and developed … for the contribution they can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties.’

Gratitude to the Pontifical Council
We know and appreciate how much this development owes to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Secretariat before it. We think of an example from 1980. The first English-speaking international conference wrote to the Synod of Bishops called in that year to discuss marriage and family life. Cardinal Willebrands made a powerful plea on behalf of interchurch families at that Synod. His intervention clearly influenced Familiaris Consortio and later documents. We are particularly grateful for the Pontifical Council’s work on mixed marriages in its pastoral application of Catholic norms on ecumenism in its Directory of 1993.
The formation of interchurch family groups and associations

Today we come to you from the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families, with representatives from eleven different countries. Our first multilingual World Gathering was held at Geneva at the Ecumenical Centre in 1998, when we were privileged to welcome Bishop Pierre Duprey and Dr Konrad Raiser and to hear their addresses.

But the coming together of interchurch families for mutual support goes back to the early 1960s when groups of *foyers mixtes* began to meet in France. Groups, associations and networks of interchurch families were formed in many European countries during the 1960’s and 1970’s. Associations in North America and Australia developed in the 1980’s and 1990’s. A common motivation in these groups has been a concern to promote Christian unity. This is reflected in the title of our Gathering: *United in baptism and marriage: interchurch families called to a common life in the Church for the reconciliation of our churches.*

Interchurch families from many countries of Europe, from North America and from Australia are represented here. There are those from Africa and Asia who would have liked to come, but sadly were not able to obtain visas. The thoughts and prayers of many other interchurch families around the world are with us as we meet in Rocca di Papa.

A contribution to Christian unity

We believe that as interchurch families we have a significant and unique contribution to make to our churches’ growth in visible unity. We have been greatly encouraged when our churches have seen us not as problems but as pioneers of Christian unity. As two Christians united in baptism, but members of two different, and as yet separated, Christian traditions, we have come together in the covenant of marriage to form one Christian family in our home. As we grow into our unity as a couple and family, we begin and continue to share in the life and worship of each other’s church communities. We develop a love and understanding not only of one another, but also of the churches that have given each of us our religious and spiritual identity, and we share that love and understanding with our children. In this way interchurch families can become both a sign of unity and a means to grow towards it. We believe that interchurch families can form a connective tissue helping in a small way to bring our churches together in the one Body of Christ.

We have set down on paper how we see ourselves and our role in the movement for Christian unity. We have it here in four languages, and we give you a copy for the Pontifical Council. We shall be pleased if you are able to consider it and to respond to it. A small representative group of interchurch families would be happy to discuss it with members of the Pontifical Council at a mutually convenient time.

We would like to express our good wishes and our prayers for the Council in all its work to promote Christian unity.

---

**A Message from the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families, Rome 2003**

To the churches within which we belong,
To all Christian believers, especially to interchurch families,
To those who long for ways toward reconciliation.

From 11 countries in 3 continents and at least 7 denominations we came together for our Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families held in Rome from 24th to 28th July 2003. We were more than 300 participants, interchurch couples, clergy, ministers and many children and young people whose participation was an inspiring and significant part of our gathering.

We reflected on our unity in baptism and marriage in which God calls us to a common life in the Church for the reconciliation of our churches.

We as interchurch families have a unique perspective on Christian unity from our privileged position.
We give thanks to God for the vocation to which we have been called.
We invite all Christians to explore with us the joy, enrichment and challenge of living our differences in unity under one roof.

We hope:

- to be recognised by our churches as committed partners in offering our experience as a modest but significant contribution to the ecumenical process.
- to become living bridges by exercising a ministry of hospitality at home and in our communities.
- that a growing number of Christians will share and feel more and more deeply the pain and scandal of division in order to be energised to work for unity.
- that the wealth of official ecumenical agreements between the churches, which we are eager to live in our families, may be fully received into the pastoral education and the life of our churches for the good of all.
- that as part of their advance in ecumenical understanding, the churches will work together on the pastoral issues of interchurch families, and for their pastoral care.
- that until full communion is realised, pastoral solutions will urgently be extended to meet the real need of interchurch families, and others in particular need, for reciprocal eucharistic sharing.
- that we can share the gifts we receive in our God-given diversity, and celebrate them together in the One Body of Christ, as a witness to reconciliation in the world.

*We offer these hopes to God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit.*
INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD

AUSTRALIA

Bev Hincks from Newcastle, New South Wales was unable to attend the Rome Gathering as she was in hospital for an operation, but earlier in July was able to meet Cardinal Kasper when he took part in the Conference of the Australian Catholic Diocesan Ecumenical Commissions in Melbourne. ‘We shall both be fortunate not to be in Rome in the late-July heat!’ joked the Cardinal. She organised a display for the Conference, including the Preparatory Paper for Rome, the Australian report for Rome and information about a possible English-speaking Conference in Australia in 2005/6.

AUSTRIA

The Arbeitgemeinschaft konfessionsverbindender Familien in Austria moves around the country for its annual conference. In September 2002 this was held in Innsbruck, on the theme of baptism, and in September 2003 moved to Feldkirchen in Carinthia and studied ‘Europe and the Charta Oecumenica’. Building on the tradition of international contacts at national conferences, there were participants both from England and Switzerland. The Austrian group at Rome brought little bags of salt with them – enough for all the families at the Gathering to take home.

BRITAIN

The Association of Interchurch Families’ annual conference in August 2003 gathered people responsible for the ecumenical work of their churches to discuss Christian initiation in interchurch families. Both Swiss foyers mixtes and the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association were represented at Swanwick. The office of the Association is moving with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland to a new address (see back cover). This move coincides with a reduction in the work of the office and more reliance on volunteers around the country and on electronic communications.

CANADA

Craig Buchanan of Montreal contributed an article on interchurch family experience to a number of Ecumenism devoted to catechetics (December 2002, pp.27-29). The Calgary group carried on the tradition of a weekend summer meeting, begun by Saskatoon in 2002, by preparing a weekend in Alberta in August 2003.

FRANCE

Many foyers mixtes were present at the celebration of the 50 years of the Centre Saint-Irénée at Lyon in mid-October, to pay tribute to its Director, Fr René Beaupère OP, who has led interchurch family groups in France since the early 1960’s.

GERMANY

The annual conference of the German Netzwerk konfessionsverbindender Paare und Familien (a network that comes under the umbrella of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ökumenischer Kreise, with no formal membership of its own, but with its activities organised by a committee of nine) was held in February 2003 at Burg Rothenfels. The theme was ‘Differing Understandings of Authority’. A couple from England took part. A great deal of effort went into an interchurch families stand at the Ecumenical Kirchentag held in Berlin in June 2003, and the Netzwerk now has a greatly increased number of people on its address list.

IRELAND

Mixed marriages (Catholic-Protestant) in Northern Ireland have a high profile because of the nature of the two communities there. The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) has its place in research work (as in the international conference run by the Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity and the Institute for Conflict Research in November 2001). In 2003 the Community Relations Council again promised NIMMA funding for another three-year period, although the terms were more restrictive than before. A third edition of NIMMA’s booklet Mixed Marriage in Northern Ireland is in preparation.

EUROPE

The Comité francophone permanent was formed after the First World Gathering of Interchurch Families in Geneva in 1998; following Rome the Comité may develop into an association, both in France and Switzerland. The quarterly review Foyers Mixtes, published at Lyon, is run by a Franco-Swiss editorial group.

Following the Rome Gathering Jean-Baptiste Lipp of the Swiss foyers mixtes organised a meeting in October 2003 with the Secretary of the Council of Catholic Bishops Conferences in Europe (CCEE) to see how contacts between interchurch families and church authorities at European level could be developed. He was joined in St Gallen, Switzerland, by representatives from Austria, Germany and England. Interchurch families had been encouraged by the reference to them made in the Charta Oecumenica, signed jointly by the Presidents of CCEE and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in 2001 (see Interchurch Families 11,1, Jan 2003 p.10).

A meeting took place a few days later with the Secretary of CEC in Geneva. CCEE and CEC are planning a joint Assembly in 2007, probably in Romania, a follow-up to the Graz Assembly of 1997. At Graz the French- and English-speaking interchurch families, who had got together to run a stand at the agora, found themselves next to the Austrian and German stand. This began the relationship that led to the preparation of the Rome Gathering by four language groups (including Italian).
Franco-Swiss conferences 1967-1981

Previously we gave an account of the series of sixteen Italian-French-Swiss conferences held in Italy between 1970 and 1998 (Interchurch Families 9, 2 Summer 2001 pp.9-10) and of the series of ten English-speaking international conferences held between 1980 and 2001 (IF 11, 1 January 2003 p.11). Here we give an overview of the Franco-Swiss conferences that took place between 1967 and 1981 (holding over an account of the Swiss conferences held in Suisse romande between 1974 and 2003).

1967: the first Franco-Swiss conference
The earliest international meetings of interchurch families were the Franco-Swiss conferences that began in 1967. The original inspiration came from Lyon, where Fr René Beaupère OP, Director of the Centre St Irénée, had organised meetings of foyers mixtes since the early 1960’s (IF 1, 2 Summer 1993, p.8). The publication of the ‘Charter of Lyon’ in 1965 stimulated the development of groups of foyers mixtes both in France (especially in Paris and the south at first) and in Switzerland (to begin with, around Lausanne and Geneva).

The first Franco-Swiss meeting was held in 1967, and in 1968 the first number of Foyers Mixtes (published at Lyon) contained an interview introducing the interchurch families of the canton of Vaud in Switzerland (FM 2, pp.15).

Voirons, near Geneva, 24-26 May 1969
At the first meeting in 1967 it was resolved to make the Franco-Swiss conference an annual event. A series of meetings took place at Voirons at Pentecost. The third meeting at Voirons was planned for the Pentecost weekend, 1969, the theme to be decided together (FM 3, p.14). About thirty French and Swiss Catholic-Protestant couples from Lyon and the Rhone-Alps region, and the cantons of Vaud and Geneva (with forty or so children) met at a centre run by Dominican sisters, half-way between Lyon and Lausanne, just over the Swiss border in France. A compromise was reported between the expectation of the sisters that retreatants would keep silence at meals, and the desire of the families to get to know one another! The two themes of the conference were intercommunion (‘with a particularly rich double eucharistic experience – without intercommunion’) and the religious education of interchurch family children.

A text drawn up at the end of the meeting focused on the two eucharistic celebrations, the Lord’s Supper celebrated on Pentecost Sunday morning and Mass in the evening. Only recently, the text pointed out, had couples been present together at the eucharist; in past years they had gone to church separately. At Voirons they had a particularly profound experience of being together, a fervent and joyful experience of spiritual communion; paradoxically they suffered all the more when they could not receive communion together. ‘The exclusion of one partner from the eucharistic meal was painful in the measure to which the couple had realised its own spiritual unity; in fact the one who received communion felt closer to his or her spouse who did not receive communion, than to the other communicants.’ They assumed this suffering as of spiritual value for themselves, while hoping that it would contribute to making the churches aware of the urgency of tackling the problem of intercommunion. They wanted the churches to consider the possibility of reciprocal eucharistic sharing for couples, at least at high points of the liturgical year (FM 4, pp.16-23).

When the quarterly Foyers Mixtes celebrated its first anniversary with the October 1969 number (5), a new development was announced. The editorial group was to include couples from the cantons of Vaud and Geneva as well as the original Lyon team. Subsequent numbers gave news from groups in Vaud and Geneva, as well as reflections from a Swiss pastor and a priest. There was also news of how the Voirons 1969 text was being made known to church authorities in Lyon and Geneva, and to the Catholic bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg (FM 7, pp.17-19.).

Voirons, 16-18 May 1970; 29-31 May 1971
The fourth and fifth Franco-Swiss meetings returned to Voirons for the Pentecost weekends of 1970 and 1971. ‘Two events were outstanding this year: a double baptism and eucharistic hospitality’, said a report of the 1971 conference. This gives documentation and an account of what happened at Voirons under the title of ‘Eucharistic Hospitality’ (FM 12, pp.11-18). The word ‘intercommunion’ had been dropped. The report begins with the text of three letters. The first was addressed by French and Swiss couples intending to meet at Voirons to the local Catholic and Reformed authorities, identical letters sent to Pastor J.P.Monsarrat, President of the Council of the Centre-Alps-Rhone region of the French Reformed Church and to Mgr J.Sauvage, Bishop of Annecy. In carefully thought-out wording they asked for the authorisation of reciprocal eucharistic hospitality on the occasion of the meeting at Pentecost 1971. The replies of Pastor Monsarrat and Bishop Sauvage follow.

The report continues with an account of the intense and lengthy discussion of those replies. It then explains what different couples decided to do in practice (with their reasons) in the face of authorisation from the Reformed Church, and the Bishop’s offer of eucharistic hospitality to the Protestants but refusal of permission for the Catholics to receive communion from the Reformed pastor. A first reaction to the Bishop’s letter was negative, because reciprocity was felt to be so important by married couples. They were helped by both Fr Beaupère and Pastor Bruston to appreciate the profound pastoral reflection with which Bishop Sauvage had approached
the traditional position of the Catholic Church. They became more aware of how the Bishop had recognised the existential communion of the couple in its relation to the objective communion of the Church, and the prophetic character of this half-acceptance of their request. About two-thirds of the couples present received communion together at the morning Mass, and the Catholic partner respected the Bishop’s decision not to allow them to receive at the evening Lord’s Supper. For the rest, six couples kept to the practice of each partner receiving only in his/her own church; four couples received together in both celebrations, and one couple were united in receiving at neither. Afterwards they explained their reasons to one another.

**Voirons, 20-22 May 1972; 9-11 June 1973; 1-3 June 1974**

In 1972 and 1973 French and Swiss foyers mixtes returned to Voirons; in 1973 the theme of the meeting was ‘The Holy Spirit: the Spirit’s work of renewal in the Church and the meaning of the feast of Pentecost’. A new departure for the review *Foyers Mixtes* in 1973 was a list of regional Correspondents who would promote the publication; for Switzerland it was not only the cantons of Vaud and Geneva that were included, but also those of Neuchâtel, Valais and Zurich. In 1974 the cantons of Berne and Fribourg were added to the list.

Clearly the question of eucharistic hospitality was constantly referred to in these meetings at Voirons, and the distress experienced by couples was so great that in 1974 the eighth conference decided on a eucharistic fast. A letter written by the meeting explained that on one occasion during the eight years they had been meeting they had been able to share communion at a Catholic Mass. They had not asked again, since reciprocity had been forbidden, and *foyers mixtes* need to express the fact that they belong in two communities. They hoped that their decision for a eucharistic fast in 1974 would show church authorities the seriousness of their pastoral need, so that in 1975, a Holy Year, they would be able to take a positive step forward towards reconciliation with reciprocal eucharistic hospitality for *foyers mixtes* at Pentecost. There were plans for a large gathering in 1975, including French, Swiss and Belgian interchurch families, and for preparatory work on recent theological agreements on the nature of the eucharist (*FM* 24, pp.22-23). (There had already been indications in *Foyers Mixtes* that ‘reciprocal eucharistic hospitality’ was being practised on some interchurch family occasions, for example in Geneva and Neuchâtel: 20, p.5; 25, p.21.)

**Pentecost of the Holy Year 1975**

An explanatory document entitled ‘Pentecost of the Holy Year 1975: an Appeal from *Foyers Mixtes* to the Churches’ was sent to the Correspondents in January 1975, and appeared in the review *Foyers Mixtes*, no. 27. The Pentecost 1975 weekend, 17-19 May, was again to be held at Voirons. A ‘Letter from Voirons’ (*FM* 28, pp.5-8) told what had happened.

There had been much correspondence beforehand with various ecclesiastical authorities. Some had replied with sympathy; some had not. Mgr Le Bourgeois, President of the French Bishops’ Committee for Christian Unity, had been favourable to the request, saying that although a Catholic could not participate in the Lord’s Supper without question as if it were normal, one could not forbid a sincere and enlightened Christian from following his conscience. This was especially true for *foyers mixtes*, who lived division daily, in the measure to which the partners respected one another and remained faithful to their churches. He realised that on the occasion of Pentecost in the Holy Year, they were not saying that unity had been achieved, but expressing the dynamic character of a lived ecumenism and their desire for reconciliation. The Bishop of Annecy, however, while being happy to offer eucharistic hospitality to the Protestants, as he had done earlier, said he believed strongly that reciprocity was not the way forward. However, if individual Catholics decided to participate he would not reply to ‘that violent gesture by another: the breaking of ecclesial communion’. But he thought it was not the right way to go.

Another text which Catholic participants had in mind was that of the Swiss synodal Assembly of March 1975. This had been approved by the Swiss bishops and promulgated in the diocese of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, signed by the bishop. It stated that if a Catholic was convinced in conscience that he should receive communion at the Lord’s Supper, this did not necessarily imply breaking with his own church, although eucharistic sharing remained problematic so long as the churches were divided.

On Pentecost Sunday, therefore, Protestants were free to accept eucharistic hospitality at Mass in the morning, and most did so, while Catholics decided in conscience whether they would receive at the Lord’s Supper; most did so. The sisters in charge of the centre did not attend this evening celebration, sharing the bishop’s feeling that reciprocity was not a positive way forward. The couples present experienced Voirons 75 as a defining moment and a true Pentecost.

**Francheville, 5-7 June 1976; Voirons 28-30 May 1977**

The tenth Franco-Swiss meeting moved to Francheville, on the outskirts of Lyon, with the theme ‘Mary, Mother of God’. In 1977 they were back at Voirons, with the theme ‘The Communion of Saints’ (*FM* 31, p.33; 35, p.32).

**Torre Pellice, 13-15 May 78; Voirons, 2-4 June 79; Voirons 16-17 May 81**

The Pentecost weekend of 1978 was used for a meeting of French, Swiss and Italian interchurch families at Torre Pellice, near Turin (see *Interchurch Families* 9,2, Summer 2001,p.10) on the theme of ‘Bible, Spirit and Prayer’. It was counted as the ninth in the series of meetings in Italy, but also as the twelfth of the Pentecost Franco-Swiss conferences.

Back at Voirons in 1979 the theme was ‘Christ’s Resurrection and ours’ (*FM* 43, p.39) and the fourteenth meeting in 1981 was on the theme of ‘Love God with all your heart’. This was the final conference in the series of Pentecost meetings between French and Swiss *foyers mixtes*. Links between Lyon and the French-speaking Swiss remained strong, particularly through the review *Foyers Mixtes*, and some Swiss participation in the series of annual weekends on ecumenical catechetics that began in Lyon in 1975, for priests, pastors and interchurch couples.

Meanwhile, another series of meetings for the *foyers mixtes de Suisse romande* had begun in 1974. We are holding for our next number an overview of the twenty Swiss French-speaking conferences that took place between 1975 and 2003.
Learning to forgive

As a Protestant, it was not easy for me to decide to marry a Catholic. I did a great deal of research on Catholicism before marrying the man I love, because there were several aspects of Denny’s faith tradition that troubled me. But after nearly ten years of happy marriage, I’ve made my peace with most of them.

Being barred from communion is one of those troubling aspects.

When we were first engaged, Denny’s priest explained the meaning of sacramental marriage, and how the sacrament of marriage is administered by the couple to each other. I was (and still am) awed by this concept, which was entirely new to me. I envisioned our future together with Christ as the Head of our household, granting each of us the grace we needed to fulfill our vows to love, honor and cherish the other.

I wanted to support my husband in his faith

Then the priest kindly informed us of some of the technical difficulties of a Catholic-Protestant wedding. The Catholic Church accepted our baptism, our faith in Jesus, and our sacramental marriage as signs of unity, albeit incomplete. However, there were a number of extra things we needed to do. An uneasy feeling began to grow in the pit of my stomach, but I wanted to do all I could to support Denny in his faith. Out of deep love for him, I submitted to his church’s canon law, but my fiercely independent spirit was irritated. As I saw it, these ‘extra things’ were just hoops we had to jump through on our way to becoming one in the eyes of the Church.

First, as the custom in the States is to be married in the bride’s church, Denny had to obtain a dispensation from form, even though we planned the ecumenical ceremony to be administered by both my pastor and his priest. Then we attended excellent marriage preparation classes at both churches, which took about six months. Finally, Denny signed the promise that expected him to do all he could to raise any children in the Catholic faith, which I felt completely disregarded the value of my own faith tradition. Even though there was some discussion about ‘exposing’ the children to experiences in both churches, I could feel anger rising as I placed my signature under his, as a witness. It was as if I were signing away my own identity and taking on his.

To my further dismay, I had to go through the wringer washer of an annulment because of a previous (and disastrous) marriage. I had already had Christian counseling years ago at the time of my divorce, but now I had to go back into my past and dredge up all those abusive memories again! I felt like the Catholic Church was ripping out all my stitches and making me do things ‘their’ way! Furious at having to submit, yet again, to the canon law of the Catholic Church, I completed the gut-wrenching process out of love for Denny so he would be free to participate fully in his Church.

A positive outcome


Through the writing of this book, I came to understand the true meaning of forgiveness. It doesn’t mean ignoring the offense and ‘sweeping it under the rug,’ so to speak. It doesn’t mean that everything is all right, that something hurtful didn’t really happen.

It simply means giving up my right to get even and leaving that up to God to complete in his time and in his way. It carries the thought of ‘setting free’ or ‘releasing’. Forgiving my former spouse released my own anger and changed my attitude toward the past. If I had stubbornly held on to my anger, letting it deteriorate into bitterness, I would not have been a good testimony to the world of God’s life-changing power. In a very real sense, learning to forgive set me free, emotionally and spiritually, to grow in Christ.

Forgiveness is not an emotion; it is an act of the will. After facing my past realistically and calling out to God for help in letting it go, I wrote down everything my former spouse had ever done to hurt, belittle, or humiliate me. Then I took a red marker to symbolize the blood of Jesus, poured out in love to pay the price of forgiveness for my sins and the sins of my former husband. I drew a red line through each of the abuses, saying aloud, ‘It’s under the blood. I choose to forgive it, to release it, and let it go.’

After making the choice to forgive, I turned to the scriptures for further guidance. Philippians 4:8 instructed me to let my mind dwell on what is good. To do that, I learned to use my God-given will to replace bad memories with good ones. Now, when painful thoughts come unbidden to my mind, I can remember the hurt without being devastated because forgiveness has defused the potency of the memories of my past. I can forgive others, including myself, as God forgives me for Christ’s sake – not because we deserve it, but because the price for that freedom has already been paid.

Forgiveness did not change the offender or the offense. It changed me.
Forgiving the Roman Catholic Church
This is how I have been able to forgive the Roman Catholic Church for making me go through the annulment process and how I am able to forgive it when Denny and I are separated at every communion. But it took a long time for this change to take place. Let me give you an example.

Denny and I believe we have a Christian ministry together and we serve in both our churches. In our Catholic Church, we are in Couples’ Ministry, which is marriage preparation for engaged couples. Occasionally we work in our diocese’s Cana II days, which is marriage preparation for couples who have been widowed or divorced. We speak on sacramental marriage, interchurch issues, annulment and forgiveness, and sometimes lead small discussion groups. Other couples on the team speak about finances, prayer, or blended families. This is an all-day seminar, requiring much preparation.

I distinctly remember one particular Cana II day. We had spoken twice, helped clean up after lunch, and led two discussion groups. We had been able to help several interchurch couples iron out some difficulties. I was feeling so much a part of the Catholic team, elated to be serving God and his people. Afterwards, as part of the Cana II day, we all went to mass together. We sang and worshiped and rejoiced in the love of our Lord. Then the team members, including my husband, left me to go forward for communion.

It hit me full force, like a slap in the face. The feeling of rejection was overwhelming. Physically and emotionally exhausted, I cried all the way home in the car.

It didn’t matter that I still felt such a strong connection with the other team members. It didn’t matter that I had counseled Catholics to continue living their faith in the difficulty of an interchurch marriage. It didn’t matter that I had submitted to an annulment for the benefit of my husband at great emotional expense to myself. It didn’t matter that I had spent the entire day serving the Catholic Church. I felt belittled and ignored—and very, very hurt.

No one but Denny knew how this affected me. I never told anyone else because I didn’t think it would make any difference. As a Protestant, I was simply not accepted at communion. That was that, as it had been for centuries.

Why we need to receive communion together
Receiving communion as a couple is important to us for a number of reasons. For one, it shows our unity as believers. We receive communion together at our Protestant church, but there all believers are invited to share and Denny is always welcomed. His faith in Jesus and a good conscience before God are the only prerequisites. In my opinion, this is what Jesus intended when he instituted the eucharist—a unity of faith and heart that takes precedence over a unity of doctrine.

Another reason is that it brings us closer to our Redeemer. Together we worship and praise him in humble thanksgiving for all he has done for us. The focus is on Jesus, on his sacrificial death for us and on his triumphant resurrection that gives us new life and the promise of heaven. When we are separated, the focus tends to shift just a bit, and I find my thoughts straying. I lovingly watch my husband go forward to participate fully in his faith tradition while I sit alone, being comforted by my Lord.

The last reason has to do with our sacramental marriage. I feel closer to Denny when we receive together. At our wedding, the Catholic Church had pronounced us ‘one’, but it continues to separate us at our Lord’s table. To me, this seems like a contradiction. In every aspect of our marriage, Denny and I have upheld our vows, administering the sacrament of holy matrimony to each other daily as we rely on God for wisdom. If the Church teaches that receiving communion gives strength and grace for living the Christian life, why deny one Christian partner access to this resource?

Receiving communion together
There have been a few times Denny and I have been able to receive Catholic communion together and they have been touching and memorable. One Easter, the deacon gave my husband two pieces of the sacrament and Denny brought back one piece and placed it quietly in my hand. At first I stared at it, stunned and thrilled. Choking back sobs, I pretended to cough and placed it in my mouth. Later, Denny told me he felt God was saying it was all right this time because it was Easter and he had never before been given two pieces of the host. How wonderful if it could always be all right.

As a couple, we received the eucharist openly for the first time at the interchurch families conference in Virginia, USA, in 1996. The entire atmosphere was one of welcoming all to receive at the Lord’s table because we were all believers bound together by faith and baptism along with the sacrament of marriage. Feeling suddenly welcomed by the Catholic Church to the Lord’s table was an experience I will never forget. My heart was overjoyed and tears stung my eyes as I walked up the aisle in front of my husband. His hands on my shoulders felt warm and loving as he led me to the sacrament that means so much to him.

After receiving, I returned to my seat to contemplate the sacrifice Christ accomplished on my behalf, as I always do after receiving communion in our Protestant church. The gratitude and love I felt toward my Savior were no different than any other time I had received communion. I had seen both Protestants and Catholics receive communion with grateful hearts and genuine thanksgiving for the incredible love God shows them. To my mind, the Catholic and Protestant
experiences are the same because the God we worship is the same. Faith is what makes communion life-changing.

At that same interchurch families conference, Father Ladislas Orsy, a canon lawyer and keynote speaker, noted that God’s grace is never banned from those who seek it, even if they are banned from receiving the actual sacrament. This statement has helped me greatly in coming to terms with the stance of the Catholic Church on eucharistic sharing.

I know how traditions get started. I’ve made a few of my own. When the recitation starts ‘I am not worthy to receive you’, I join in on ‘only say the word’. Even though I cannot receive the sacrament, God is still ready and willing to bless me as I wait on him in worship. When the priest holds up the elements, intoning, ‘This is Jesus’, I place my hand over my heart, signifying that Jesus is here, within me, loving me, accepting me, and welcoming me as his child. I can sit in contentment, praising my God for all he has done for me, grateful for the sacrifice of his Son that has brought me salvation, opening my heart to his Holy Spirit—and receiving God’s grace needed for my daily life. Because of this comfort and this closeness, I haven’t felt the need to go forward with my husband for a blessing. I have made my peace with not receiving communion and have dealt with my feelings of anger, disappointment and sorrow by learning to forgive as God forgives for Jesus’ sake. I am happy that Denny is able to participate fully in Catholicism because of my support.

Presently, we have not pursued eucharistic sharing in our local parish for two reasons. One, we feel it would cause division. Our parish is made up of five mission churches which are served by three priests. Although we are in close friendship with all three priests, they are not in agreement on eucharistic sharing and we don’t wish to create unnecessary difficulties for the one priest or invite whispers among the congregation.

The other reason is that I am not sure that I have a belief in the ‘real Presence’ of Christ that would qualify me to receive. I wasn’t raised that way. I would interpret the ‘real Presence’ spiritually rather than literally.

To me, the communion elements are symbols and yet vastly much more. Let me explain. My engagement and wedding rings contain settings that hold gems inherited from both sides of our families. The smaller diamonds were in a ring given to Denny by his Aunt Dorothy, who told him to give it to the girl he loved. The larger diamond was in the engagement ring my father gave my mother over fifty years ago. If I lose a stone, the insurance company will replace it - but it won’t be the same. There are emotional ties, memories, and relationships bound up in each diamond that can never be replaced.

This is how I view communion. The bread and wine are definitely more than mere symbols. My Savior’s very life is represented there and as such, it must be held in deep reverence. Whenever I receive communion, I spend time in prayer and grateful contemplation of his amazing love. It makes me want to serve him with my whole heart.

This is why eucharistic sharing is so important. When we receive together, we are attuned to the same faith, the same Lord, and the same life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

Kay Flowers
A spirituality for interchurch marriage

Extracted from an address by Fr Tom Layden SJ to the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association's annual conference, April 2003

An interchurch marriage is a sign of the unity already there in the Body of Christ and is at the same time a means to assist the growth towards unity. It is a reminder of the unity already achieved and also a summons towards visible unity in its fullness that we do not yet have.

There is no blueprint for such a marriage. Each one is unique. Each couple follow their own path. But they do not travel alone. Their pilgrim way is in solidarity with other couples in similar situations and with others (lay and clerical) in the various Christian communions who are cheered by their witness and feel moved to offer support.

What kind of spirituality would be supportive and workable for partners in an interchurch marriage who find themselves sharing a common heritage but coming to it with distinct denominational identities? This begs the question of what we mean by spirituality? Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of our awareness and of our lives as outcomes of that experience.

Christian spirituality is life in the Holy Spirit who incorporates the Christian into the Body of Christ, through whom we have access to God the creator in a life of faith, hope, love and service.

A spirituality for those united in Baptism and Marriage would need a number of elements.

1. An attitude of respect
   - for the tradition of the partner
   - for my own tradition.

2. A willingness to put a good interpretation on the action/attitude of another Christian. As St Ignatius puts it in his Spiritual Exercises: ‘… it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false’. (Exx.22)

3. A capacity for discernment in choices that need to be made about many matters, including religious upbringing of offspring, key moments (baptism, first communion, confirmation and so on). A willingness to discuss, dialogue with the other and others on these.

4. Patience for the long haul and a sense of humour to be able to face the adversities one will encounter and to enjoy the possibilities and moments of breakthrough which will also be part of the process.

5. A gritty sense of determination. It won’t always be easy. You don’t need me to tell you that! There will be obstacles along the way. But they don’t have to overcome us. In our facing into them and coming through them we can and will grow.

6. An understanding of how God works in the world and through history. God works through the others too. God can work through/in spite of our divisions. God is greater than our denominational realities (which is not to say that God does not work through particular denominations).

7. An awareness of being on pilgrimage. Here we have no abiding city. We cannot just settle down in our little self-contained denominational ghettos. We must take the others seriously. Nor can we accept as either normal or permanent the state of division and disunity our churches find themselves in. We must be on the move, but we can only start from where we are.

8. An ability to dream about how things could be otherwise. Change is possible by the grace of God and our being willing to work along with that grace. An openness to being part of the expression of God’s prophetic voice in history calling us to leave the familiar territory of the land of slavery of our divisions. That same voice summons us to the promised land where there is deeper unity, but we go by way of a desert.

9. A new beginning! The kingdom comes in a new way through the life of each interchurch family. You have the opportunity and the responsibility to fuse together in creative ways in your own household the traditions of the church communities you both come from. There is something exciting about this.

10. A sense of opportunity. Let’s not let it pass us by! In the past interchurch marriages were sometimes regarded as a problem. A problem for the couple, their families, their churches, their friends. ‘Why can’t you stay among your own?’ ‘One of your own not good enough for you?’ Do some forms of positive thinking not persuade us to see in any so-called difficulty an opportunity? Are interchurch marriages not an opportunity for partners to grow in faith through direct personal contact with another tradition in the Christian family? Is it not the case that sometimes children in an interchurch family feel a little sorry for their same-church cousins who seem to lack some of the ecclesial variety that is part and parcel of their everyday experience?

Every marriage starts with two persons who become one couple. They have to remain two persons, each with his/her own identity, if they are to blend healthily as a couple.

Similarly partners in an interchurch marriage have to remain true to their own identities and involved in their own church tradition so that there can be a genuine equality of partnership between them. But they are more than the sum total of two individuals. They forge something new in and through their partnership. Their household is one domestic church with two streams in it. In faith we believe that the Spirit of God is at work in this new creation, the Spirit who inspires and enthuses, who comforts and consoles, who teaches and guides.
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 interchurch families, in the context of the wider ecumenical movement. The views expressed in the journal are not necessarily those of the Association of Interchurch Families.

The journal is published by the British 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 welcomes contributions and editorial help from all parts of the world.

PLEASE NOTE

We are not expecting this Journal to continue in its present form after the Summer 2004 number. We hope to explain in that number how we shall continue the work of the Journal, largely in an electronic form, but not forgetting the needs of those who cannot access the internet.

Subscriptions for 2004:

£ sterling: UK £6, rest of Europe £7, rest of the world £8.50, to the London address at the foot of the next column.

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF LONDON ADDRESS.

US $15, Canadian $22 to Ray and Fenelle Temmerman, 979 Dorchester Avenue, Winnipeg MB, R3M 0P7, Canada

Australian $25 to Bev Hincks, PO Box 66, Swansea, NSW 2281, Australia

Editorial correspondence and exchange periodicals should be sent to:

Ruth Reardon
Little School House
High Street
Turvey
Bedford MK43 8DB, UK
Tel. 01234 888 992
Email: aifreardon@talk21.com

ISSN 0950-995X
© Association of Interchurch Families 2004

In all its activities, the Association of Interchurch Families is working to strengthen marriage and family life and to promote Christian unity.

It offers a support network for interchurch families* for partners and parents, for growing children and young adults - and an information service to all concerned for their welfare (clergy and ministers, relatives and others).

It gives interchurch families a voice in the churches: this is done by articulating the experience of these families in all their diversity; by focusing attention on interchurch couples’ need for pastoral care and understanding which takes seriously both their marriage commitment to one another and the fact that two churches** are represented in their family; by affirming at local, national and global level the gifts of interchurch families and their potential as a catalyst for wider church unity.

It undergirds all its activities with prayer and worship.
* where the partners belong to different denominations – often a Roman Catholic and a Christian of another communion.
** both in the sense of denominations and local congregations.

The British Association is a registered charity (no. 283811) dependent on members’ contributions and the donations of others who support its work. Friends of Interchurch Families give regular support.

Presidents are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Free Churches Moderator, Dr Kenneth Greet, Canon Martin and Dr Ruth Reardon.

Members receive the Journal, AIF News and Notes and The Interdependent (written by and for interchurch children). Details of membership, Friends, resources (publications, leaflets, AIF video), and a constantly up-dated list of Local Contacts throughout Britain are available on request. Contact:

Association of Interchurch Families
2 Paris Garden
London SE1 8ND, UK
Tel. 020 7654 7254 Fax 020 7654 7222
E-mail info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk

AROUND THE WORLD

The British Association of Interchurch Families is linked with other associations and groups of interchurch families around the world.

A constantly-updated list of contact addresses for English-speaking, French-speaking, German-speaking and Italian-speaking interchurch families in different parts of the world is available on request to The British Association of Interchurch Families at its London address.

A web-site for interchurch families worldwide is run by Ray Temmerman of Winnipeg, Canada. It is to be found at www.interchurchfamilies.org and a listserv at aifw@mylist.net

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Germany
The Church – which paths lead to unity?
Braunfels, nr Wetzlar
6-8 February 2004

France
4th rencontre francophone
Spreading the Word together
Centre du Rimlishof, Mulhouse
22-23 May 2004

Northern Ireland
Identity
Derrynord Rural Centre
Draperstown
22-23 May 2004

Britain
Building bridges
Swanwick, Derbyshire
28-30 August 2004

Austria
Voralberg
22-23 October 2004