Forty years on

This year we celebrate with joy the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of its Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council in 1964.

The Council (1962-65) was a climactic event in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. It was an exercise of teaching authority at the highest level in the Catholic Church: the Pope speaking together with his brother-bishops from all parts of the world meeting in Council. But into the life of the Council there was also integrated the active presence of observers from other Christian churches that were not in communion with Rome – an amazing new element in the experience of a Council.

The Council was the starting point for all the changes for the better that have taken place over the past four decades so far as interchurch families are concerned. The Decree on Ecumenism marked the official entry of the Catholic Church into the modern ecumenical movement; divided Christians could already recognise each other’s baptism into Christ. The Constitution on the Church re-thought the theology of the church in terms of the People of God and of communion, rather than in those of a perfect, hierarchical society. It became possible to think in terms of degrees of communion; the edges of the church became blurred; it was not simply a question of being ‘in’ or ‘out’. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World changed the church’s perspective on marriage from that of contract to that of covenant. Marriage between Christians came to be seen as a community of love, patterned on the love of Christ for the church; an intimate partnership of life and love in which the spouses were engaged on the work of mutual sanctification. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy focused on the community aspect of church worship. The Declaration on Religious Freedom was immensely important for mixed marriages; it required respect for the conscience of the other Christian partner committed to marriage with a Catholic.

And at the fourth session of the Council, many of the Observers broke the general rule they had agreed at the first session, not to make ‘common non-Catholic Christian statements’, when 23 of them signed a joint statement ‘on mixed marriages between baptised Christians’. The document was conveyed directly to the Pope (see ‘The Observers at Vatican II’ by Thomas Stransky CP, Centro pro Unione, Spring 2003).

One of the most significant texts to come out of the Council, so far as interchurch families are concerned, is to be found in the Decree on Ecumenism, n.8. It follows the call to the practice of ‘spiritual ecumenism’ – change of heart, holiness of life, and prayer for Christian unity. A decade earlier prayer with other Christians had been officially allowed (1949) but eucharistic sharing was entirely forbidden. Now, however, the Council stated that it could ‘sometimes be commended’. At the time this seemed unbelievable to many.

All the Council’s implications for the life and witness of interchurch families have not yet been drawn out. But we are on the way. And the fortieth anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism is a good time to give thanks, and to re-commit ourselves in the service of that unity for which Christ prayed.

RR
In the early 1990’s the Association of Interchurch Families decided to change the nature of its Newsletter. A decade earlier (in 1979) the Newsletter had first appeared in printed form. In 1981 the Association acquired a constitution and a defined membership as a step towards gaining charitable status. In 1988 the Association celebrated its 21st birthday, reflected on its first two decades, and looked forward to a new ecumenical situation in Britain. As a result of the ‘Not Strangers but Pilgrims’ process that had followed the papal visit to England, new ecumenical instruments were launched in 1990 with Roman Catholic membership (previously Catholics had only been observers with the British Council of Churches). As a ‘body in association’ with the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, AIF’s administrative centre moved out of a private house and into an office in the headquarters of the Council, alongside Churches Together in England, with whom it was also a ‘body in association’.

These developments gave the Association a much higher profile. A development appeal was launched to support the expenses both of the office and also of a publicity drive. The Association produced a video in 1992 and a whole series of leaflets (on interchurch families and the Association, on Getting Married, on Baptism and on Sharing Communion) intended for wide distribution.

The decision to change the character of the Newsletter, to make it a larger publication and to convert it into a Journal intended for a wider public, was a part of this initiative. The more domestic matters that concerned the life of the Association, news of members and of the activities of local groups, moved to News and Notes from the end of 1992. It had become clear that others besides the members of AIF valued the Association’s work and were willing to support it. From 1994 a printed Annual Review reported on the work of the Association not just to members but also to those supporters: to individuals, churches and other groupings, and grant-making trusts.

A global perspective
The Committee decided that the Journal should inform and reflect on the theological, pastoral and ecumenical issues that face interchurch couples and families as they live their family lives, and that it should do so in a wider international perspective. Of course the Journal continued to be addressed to members of the Association and to other interchurch families, but there were also three particular target groups. The line drawing by Margaret Battley (to whom we owe a great debt of thanks for all her design work for Interchurch Families over the years) in the January 1993 number of the Journal, its first, makes this clear.

The Journal was aimed at church leaders and clergy, and more widely at all who were, or expected to be, concerned with the pastoral welfare of interchurch families: theological students and seminarians, relatives and godparents, all involved in marriage preparation and counselling, teachers and catechists. Secondly, it was addressed to ecumenical officers, ecumenical commissions, local groupings of churches, indeed to all concerned with the movement for promoting Christian unity. In interchurch families the pain of Christian divisions and the celebration of Christian unity are focused at their most local level, and out of this experience such families can make a very real contribution to the wider ecumenical movement.

We were not only addressing such groups in Britain, however, for thirdly, the Journal was intended for English-speaking interchurch families and all who cared for their welfare world-wide. Its perspective was global, for interchurch families face similar issues wherever they live. In the Journal a list of interchurch family groupings around the world replaced the list of local contacts in England that had appeared in the Newsletter. Throughout the Journal’s existence it has given regular news of interchurch family groupings world-wide, and contributions have come from many parts of the world. These have included both interchurch family ‘stories’, so important a witness to the work of God in the interchurch family movement, and theological studies and reflections. All these can easily be traced through the very useful cumulative Index covering all twelve years of the Journal (see pp.14-15). We are very grateful to Helen Granger-Bevan for her biennial indices, and now for this final piece of work.
In the early and mid-nineties, a great deal of work went into making the Journal known to the three groups identified above, and the ‘targeted mailings’ certainly bore fruit (although never quite as much as was hoped, of course!). Through the Journal and the various Packs that were put together and could be sent out by the Association to enquirers (Packs on Getting Married, Baptism, Sharing Communion, Confirmation and Church Membership, Funerals, Christian Unity, Spirituality) information on interchurch family issues was spread, experience was shared, and reflection deepened. The Journal covered all these topics, and its articles provided many of the sheets in the Packs.

The right time
It seemed providential that the Association had taken on a higher and more public profile just as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity brought out its *Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism* in 1993. Unlike the previous Directory of 1967, it contained a whole section on Mixed Marriages, and there was much in it to encourage interchurch families. There was no new legislation, but the legislation was applied in a pastoral manner that gave much more attention to the needs of the other Christian partner who was about to marry, or was married to, a Catholic, and more attention, too, to the unity of the couple, not just to the interests of the Catholic partner.

Pastoral care must be adapted to the spiritual condition of both partners, and to the particular circumstances of their situation (n.146). The Catholic still had to promise to do all he or she could to see that all the children of the marriage would be baptised and brought up as Catholics. But it was explicitly recognised that ‘the non-Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his/her own Christian commitment’ (n.150). There is no canonical penalty for the Catholic partner if the children are not in fact brought up in the Catholic Church (n.151), and both clergy can take some part in celebrations of baptism (n.97). (Shared celebrations of baptism had taken place, of course, during the preceding two decades, but it was good to have official approval.)

Particularly encouraging to interchurch families was the fact that the Directory explicitly opened the way for the application of the rules on eucharistic sharing to those who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ (160). This possibility was taken up and applied differently in different parts of the world, and the Journal gave readers details of these different applications as information became available, so that they could compare and contrast them and see what was possible in terms of the norms. It also shared the experiences of interchurch families in the field of eucharistic sharing, and offered theological and spiritual reflection on the need for eucharistic sharing felt by some couples and families in the light of marital spirituality and the recognition of the family as a ‘domestic church’.

Growing children and young adults
A little before the Journal was launched, a new publication had appeared – the *Interdependent*, edited and produced by and for the children of interchurch families. They had come of age and found their own voice. It is difficult to overestimate the contribution of these young people to raising the profile of such families and getting the issues that concern them taken seriously. Over the years this has been chronicled in the Journal. Young people from interchurch families have made their unique contribution in ecumenical gatherings (as their parents have done), and have insisted on being taken seriously when they claim to belong to both the churches of their parents. On different occasions in the past few years both an Archbishop of Canterbury and a high-ranking staff-member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have fallen silent for an appreciable time as a result of their testimony. The Journal has chronicled the struggles of the children of interchurch families to express their double belonging, and Christian initiation as practised in interchurch families has begun to be taken seriously by the churches.

The Internet
We have now entered a new stage in global communications, and this affects the work of the Journal as an instrument for the international witness of the interchurch family movement. It was in late 1996, after the Virginia international conference, that the AIF Committee agreed to allow the Journal to appear on the website addressed to interchurch families world-wide set up by Ray Temmerman in Canada. This is in line with the policy of sharing our resources as widely as possible, but it has been a disincentive to those outside Britain from subscribing to the Journal, especially in view of the strong pound and of rising postage rates. We also find that many people seem to be accessing the Journal at the website rather than in its paper version, and web references are already given in books and periodicals rather than to the printed articles.

The Journal in its printed form now comes to an end. Its work will continue! The editor of the Journal and others will continue to collect together the kind of material that has appeared in the Journal. Thanks to Ray Temmerman, this will be put on the international interchurch families website (www.interchurchfamilies.org). In addition a free email newsletter will be produced two or three times a year by Ruth and Martin Reardon, to be called: INTERCHURCH FAMILIES: Issues – Reflections – News.

It will have links to material on the website for those who wish to follow them up. You will be able to subscribe by sending an email to interchurchfamilies-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The newsletter will also be a public document on the website. For those who cannot receive email or access the website, the Reardons are willing to send out a paper version.
Interchurch family groups in Europe and the churches

Following the discussions of representative interchurch families with the General Secretaries of the Council of Catholic Bishops Conferences in Europe (CCEE) at St Gallen and of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Geneva in October 2003 (see Interchurch Families, 12,1, January 2004 p.9) a paper was prepared for the CCEE/CEC joint committee which met in Opole, Poland, in January 2004. We give the text of this paper below.

A paper addressed to CCEE and CEC expressing some of our concerns

1 European groups and associations
We represent long-standing interchurch family groups in the following countries:

Austria: Interchurch family groups in Austria were formed in the late 1960’s. In 1991 the local groups came together in an Arbeitsgemeinschaft konfessionsverschiedener Ehen. It is now called, significantly, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft konfessionsverbindender Familien (ARGE Ökumene).

Britain: The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) dates from 1968. Since 1990 it has been a ‘body in association’ with Churches Together in England and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. There are about 300 members (mostly couples); many others support its work.

France: Groups of foyers mixtes or foyers interconfessionnels were formed in France (beginning in Lyon) in the early 1960’s. In 1995 regular meetings of all foyers mixtes francophones began, a comité francophone permanent was established in 1998, and at present an association is being formed.

Germany: Local groups met for many years (for example a group that met at Neresheim Abbey celebrated 30 years of annual meetings in 1999). In 1999 a national Netzwerk konfessionsverbinderender Paare und Familien was formed under the umbrella of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ökumenischer Kreise.

Ireland: The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) was formed in 1974, and holds an annual conference. It has particular problems, and its work is valued as part of the effort to create cross-community links. In 1973 an Association began in the Irish Republic, but is not now very active.

Italy: Famiglie miste interconfessionali have met together in Northern Italy, centred on the Pinerolo area, since the late 1960’s. Their initial inspiration came from Lyon, and they have met together every few years with French representatives of foyers mixtes.

Switzerland: Francophone Swiss foyers mixtes were in contact with the French in the late 1960’s, and since 1974 groups in Switzerland have organised conferences in turn every 18 months or so. At present a Swiss association is being formed.

The groups and associations listed above represent marriages in most of which one partner is a Roman Catholic and the other Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Waldensian or Baptist. We have a few Orthodox within our memberships, but not many. There are large numbers of mixed Christian marriages within our countries. We represent those interchurch families who feel called to work for Christian unity. In the summer of 2003 we met for a World Gathering in Rome with interchurch families from other continents, and (following separate meetings in October 2003 with the General Secretaries of CCEE and CEC) we would be happy to follow up this meeting on a European level. We were delighted that the Charta Oecumenica recognised that ‘couples in interdenominational marriages should be supported in experiencing ecumenism in their daily lives’ (II,4). We need support, but we also believe that interchurch families have a unique contribution to make to ecumenism. We would like to ask for pastoral understanding that appreciates both aspects.

2 Developing contacts with interchurch families in other European countries
We have been in contact with interchurch families in Belgium, Scandinavia, Croatia and Hungary, and would welcome opportunities to develop relationships with couples in other European countries, especially in Eastern Europe. Perhaps you would be able to help us in this? Our experience is that a very good way to support interchurch couples and families is to facilitate their meeting with each other for mutual support. They can then use their shared experience to help other couples who do not wish to join a continuing group. From such meeting a commitment to work for Christian unity also grows.

3 The Third European Assembly, 2007
We would be very pleased to explore the possibility of holding a European Gathering of Interchurch Families alongside/in conjunction with the Third European Ecumenical Assembly. We hold ourselves ready to work with you on this, if appropriate.

4 Two issues of concern to interchurch families
As requested we would like to express to you two of our concerns as interchurch families. In both cases the pastoral and the ecumenical dimension are linked.
A The pre-nuptial promise
One concern is about the pre-nuptial promise required of the Catholic partner in a mixed Christian marriage, that he/she will do all he/she can to ensure the baptism and upbringing of any children of the marriage in the Catholic Church.

Before 1970 both partners had to make an absolute promise that all children would be brought up as Catholics, if the marriage was to be recognised by the Catholic Church. The changes made in 1970 were very welcome. But there is still a problem today. Couples still experience the promise as imposing a unilateral demand on a relationship that they are striving to make fully mutual. It can be presented in a way that appears to deny the shared responsibility of parents for the religious upbringing of their children. As such it appears to some Catholics entering marriage to deny the relationship of equality that is required both in ecumenical relationships (par cum pari) and in marriage. Unfortunately the intention behind the promise is not always explained to them in a way they can understand. A refusal to make the promise in these circumstances can lead to Catholics feeling rejected by their church and to great tensions in family and church relationships. It is a bad witness to all concerned for the well-being of the couple, many of whom will not be practising Christians.

Certainly many Catholic Episcopal Conferences in Europe have helped by modifying the wording of the promise over the years. In England and Wales the phrase ‘as God’s law requires’ has been replaced by ‘within the unity of our partnership’. The Austrian form of the promise includes the word ‘conscience’. In Ireland all Catholics getting married have to make a promise about the religious upbringing of their children, whether they are marrying Christians from other churches or not. But we would like to ask all our churches to re-consider together (CEC as well as CCEE) the pastoral and ecumenical aspects of this situation, since we hope that both parents can share their Christian heritage with their children.

B Eucharistic sharing
Another major concern is about eucharistic sharing in interchurch families.

Churches have different attitudes to admission to communion. Some, since Christ himself is the celebrant, ‘in his name invite all who love him’ to receive communion. Some, seeing baptism as orientated to the eucharist, feel able to welcome all ‘baptised communicant Christians in good standing in their own churches’ to receive communion. There are many different positions on the spectrum of admission to communion, although the values behind each one would probably be common to all. The Catholic stress (like that of the Orthodox Church) on the close relationship between ecclesial and eucharistic communion is obviously very important. However, the way it is often applied causes most difficulty for interchurch spouses who feel a spiritual need to express and deepen the unity of their ‘domestic church’ by sharing communion.

Is this really necessary? In principle the possibility of admission to communion in the Roman Catholic Church is established for interchurch spouses. We rejoice that those who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ are identified as in possible need of eucharistic sharing, and that by way of exception this need can be met in particular cases, on fulfilment of certain conditions (Ecumenical Directory, 60). We would like to see this possibility much better known, much better understood, and much more widely applied. We would like to see it applied not simply to ‘unique occasions’ (One Bread One Body, norms for Britain and Ireland, 1998). In his press conference of February 2002, Cardinal Lehmann spoke of mixed marriages as ‘a particular life-situation for Christians, whose communion in marriage is grounded in baptism and rooted in the sacramental nature of their Christian marriage.’ Their need, he pointed out, ‘is not so much a matter of unique occasions celebrated in the life of the family, such as First Communion, but more a matter of the constant striving of the couple to live their path of faith together.’

Permission to receive communion in other western churches is not given to Catholics because the Roman Catholic Church does not recognise the ordained ministry of other churches (except the Orthodox) as equivalent to its own. It can and has been recognised, however, that a Catholic who receives communion in the community of his spouse is doing so because of a conscientious decision in his special circumstances, and this decision need not cut him off from the Catholic Church (Synod of the German dioceses, Würzburg, 1976, repeated in the French Bishops’ Commission ‘Note’ in 1983). Again, we would like to see this discussed by the churches together, and much more widely accepted, understood and applied.

We feel that the pastoral understanding of interchurch families is a question that is best tackled by the churches together, since it is a shared responsibility, and not just a problem for Catholics and Orthodox, but for Protestants and Anglicans too. We think it would be good to discuss it at European level, and to share experiences. There is considerable variety in the way in which different European episcopal conferences apply the provisions of the Ecumenical Directory; there is variety in practice from diocese to diocese, and from parish to parish. There is a general uneasiness about the present situation; permissions are given at all levels and decisions are made that cannot be talked about. This is again a bad witness. Interchurch families often find it difficult to speak about their experiences openly, for fear of compromising others. They would like to be more free to witness to the joy of sharing together in church life, because of their privileged situation of commitment to one another in their ‘domestic church’. They feel they have an ecumenical witness to make that is hindered in the present situation, either because they are bearing the crushing burden of being unable to share communion except on rare occasions, or because they are unable to share openly their joy at being able to receive communion together. All Christians are called to suffer on account of divisions that are contrary to the will of Christ, but if growing understanding between churches can help to avoid unnecessary suffering, is this not to be celebrated?

Here we have simply picked out two issues of vital importance for interchurch families. For a wider view we would like to refer you to our paper Interchurch Families and Christian Unity: Rome 2003.

[An English text of this Rome paper is now being produced in booklet form; copies can be obtained from the British Association of Interchurch Families – for address see back cover. Ed.]
Why I receive communion at the Lord’s Supper

A Roman Catholic priest who has ministered to many interchurch families over a long period explains why he receives communion at the eucharistic celebrations of other churches at interchurch family conferences.

I do not intend in any way to act against the Church; for this reason I always write to submit my action and my motivation to the Evangelical, Lutheran or Anglican Church that welcomes me, as well as to my local Church and my Bishop, and to my parish community. I myself assume full responsibility in conscience for what I am doing … having prayed and examined myself fully.

Receiving communion in these circumstances, together with interchurch couples, whom I have accompanied and followed for more than thirty years, is something that is full of significance. It signifies for me an expression of the communion that already exists (although imperfectly) and a belief that the Spirit is continuing to lead us towards a communion that is ever fuller. We know that perfect communion will only be given as a gift at the end of time, when ‘God will be all in all’.

Also the Roman Catholic Church, which is my church … through which I feel myself united with all Christians throughout the world, in its conciliar decree Unitatis redintegratio, after having treated of the limitations of communion at the present time, makes some strong positive affirmations. I refer to two of them. In n.3 it is said that, in spite of all the limitations, ‘the Holy Spirit has not refrained from using the communities that stem from the Reformation as instruments of salvation’. In n.22 it is affirmed that these ecclesial communities, even if they have not conserved the full reality of the eucharist, ‘nevertheless when they commemorate the Lord’s death and resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and await his coming in glory’.

Thus the churches that stem from the Reformation, in the power of the Spirit, are recognised by the Catholic Church as ‘instruments of salvation’, and their Holy Supper is not void, but it is a great deal, it is the essential. The Lord’s Supper is not our property, but is a gift of the Lord. So I pay attention to the fact that the celebration always gives the necessary emphasis to the epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit), and to the memorial of the unique sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Equally important is the common liturgical profession of faith that we make in the Apostles’ Creed or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Together in celebrating the Lord’s Supper ‘we proclaim the Lord’s death and resurrection, and await his coming again’. Such a great and joyful awareness has become so rooted in me that it has led to a ‘serious spiritual need’. Because of this, in the particular circumstance of an interchurch family gathering, I shall participate in communion at the Evangelical and Anglican-Lutheran celebrations of the Lord’s Supper.

My experience of confirmation and membership

Martin was confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church several years ago, and in July 2003 was received into the membership of the local United Reformed Church in the north of England, which had also nurtured his Christian faith. Here he tells his story.

My background is an upbringing in the Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church (URC). As far as confirmation goes, my story is unremarkable. I went to a Catholic primary school, and was confirmed at thirteen. Thankfully, the URC acknowledges Catholic confirmation, so I was and am able to see my confirmation as into the ‘one holy, catholic and apostolic Church’.

Around three years later, the issue of confirmation in the URC would have been raised if I had not been confirmed already, and with it comes church membership. Normally, along with confirmation understood as being into the whole Christian Church, you are also received into the local congregation by the giving of the right hand of fellowship. As well as taking place for the first time at confirmation, this takes place ‘by transfer’ if you move from one URC congregation to another, or from another denomination to the URC.

None of these situations applied to me, as I was already confirmed, and I was certainly not leaving the Catholic Church. At this point the great URC word ‘normally’ comes into play (it or an equivalent is found all over URC documents and guidelines). My URC minister and I created a order of service based on the one used for reception into membership of a local church by transfer from another congregation, but with some of the wording omitted because I was not leaving any other congregation. I feel that what I have done shows that I am committed to both churches – confirmed in a Catholic church and ceremony, showing a commitment to that Church, but also a member of my URC congregation. While not perfect, it is very good and I am fortunate to have been able to do it this way.

Of course this raises issues about how to deal with being in both churches. One of these is communion, which is linked to the initiation issue and to the Catholic problem about eucharistic sharing. This I do not feel I need to face. Another is whether it is possible to belong equally in both, especially when the commitments made to the two churches are of different kinds. I do not know what my answer to that is, other than that I am seeking to belong permanently to both churches.
Swiss conferences 1974-2003

In our last number we gave an overview of the Franco-Swiss conferences for foyers mixtes that took place between 1967 and 1981 (12,1 January 2004, pp.10-11). We promised to follow it up with an overview of the series of meetings for the foyers mixtes of Suisse romande that were held in different venues in Switzerland, starting in 1974.

Charmey, Fribourg, 20-21 April 1974
Couples who met in several separate groups in the Lausanne area had met together once a year since 1968-69, and had thought of a wider Swiss meeting; since then groups had been formed in Geneva and Sion, and more recently in Monthey, Aigle, Bulle and Neuchâtel. It was the newly-formed Bulle group that particularly felt the need to meet other interchurch families, and this first Swiss meeting took place at a centre run by the Reformed Church of Fribourg, near Bulle. Fr Beaupère came from France to join the Swiss. The various groups prepared for the meeting by studying a dialogue text produced by church representatives in Switzerland: ‘For a common eucharistic witness by the Churches’. The intention was to celebrate a parallel eucharist at Charmey.

What happened was that the question of baptism took over: the concrete question of baptism in the course of the weekend for the child of an interchurch couple who had been refused permission for a Protestant pastor to share in her baptism in a Catholic church. After lengthy, intense and emotional discussion and prayer it was decided that she would be baptised by the Catholic priest who worked with the Bulle group, with the participation of the Protestant pastor who also worked with it. There had been no time to discuss the possibility of celebrating a parallel eucharist, and views were so diverse that in the end it was decided to have a eucharistic fast. However, in the celebration of baptism that took place at the end of the gathering, prepared by the children who brought water from the stream, flowers from the fields and candles that they had made, the participants experienced their unity in baptism as never before. They dispersed in profound joy, determined to meet again. (From an account by a couple from Vaud in Foyers Mixtes (FM) 24, pp.11-13, and memories from Pastor Richard Ecklin)

Mayens-de-Sion, Valais, 20-21 September 1975
The second Swiss meeting took place in the largely Catholic canton of Valais, in a house run by the Sisters of Notre Dame Bon Accueil. A hundred or so spouses came with pastors and priests who worked with them. They followed up the theme of Baptism that had dominated the first meeting by choosing to focus this time on the Christian upbringing of the children of foyers mixtes. Fr Beaupère came again, as did two catechetical experts from Paris. In Switzerland there was already good biblical catechetical material developed together by a Catholic-Protestant commission. There was much discussion around first communion, and agreement that its timing must depend on when the child was ready to make a personal commitment, rather than on local custom. Mass was celebrated on Saturday evening and a Reformed service on Sunday. ‘Together before the Lord, we proclaimed our faith and shared the bread of life.’ (FM, 30, pp.25-29)

Le Louverain, near Neuchâtel, 18-19 September 1976
The theme of the third meeting was ‘Looking for our identity as foyers mixtes’ and was reported under the title of ‘Dialogue with God and our confessional communities’ (FM 34, pp.21-24). There was a common search for a more serene and less combative way of being an interchurch family. ‘The suffering of division turned into grace’, is how Pastor Ecklin puts it, looking back.

Crêt-Bérard, near Lausanne, 10-11 June 1978
There are fewer reports of the Swiss meetings from now on, but their dates and themes are given in Foyers Mixtes. The fourth meeting took as its theme: ‘Christian witness and foyers mixtes: that they may be one so that the world may believe’ (FM 39, p.33). The unity of the couple was to be a parable in view of the unity of the Church, remembers Pastor Ecklin.

Foyer John Knox, Geneva, 15-16 September 1979
The fifth meeting asked: ‘Do foyers mixtes still have a role to play in the churches? The credo that unites us’ (FM 44, p.35).

Centre de Sornetan, Jura, 11-12 October 1980
‘Foyers mixtes, new communities at the heart of the Church: but at what cost?’ (FM 49, p.35)

Aigle, Vaux, 20-21 March 1982
7th meeting: ‘Communication with God (prayer), one’s partner, family, neighbour etc.’ (FM 54, p.43)

Charmey, Fribourg, 1-2 October 1983
‘Ecumenical catechesis: programme and resources; relations with families, parishes’ (FM 60, p.47)

Crêt-Bérard, Vaud, 4-5 May 85
The theme of the 9th meeting, was ‘Foyers mixtes: what is our future?’ This conference was reported in Foyers Mixtes, which reprinted a text put out by the Ecumenical Press Service from Geneva. Fr Beaupère told those present that he thought interchurch families had a pivotal role in helping theological agreements (such as BEM, the 1982 Faith and Order paper on baptism, eucharist and ministry) to be expressed in terms of catechetics, preaching and liturgical reform. Participants believed that their double belonging, lived out well, was a true witness to unity; when there were enough of them, the walls of separation would fall. They wanted no hindrance to be put in the way of double registration of baptism for their children, so that they would not be obliged to choose one confession. In closing Fr Beaupère asked the churches to make new laws for foyers mixtes, and recognised that until that happened they found themselves praeter legem, beside the law, not against its spirit, but unable to conform totally to it, because it was not written for them. (FM 68 pp.32-33)


Return to Journal index
Bex, Vaud, 5-6 November 1988
The theme of the eleventh meeting was ethical questions as they arose for foyers mixtes. Unusually, it was introduced by an Orthodox priest. A key-word for the group was ‘responsibility’. (FM 83, p.32)

Villars-sur-Glâne, Fribourg, 24-25 March 1990
‘Confessional roots and spiritual life: evolution and perspectives’ (FM 86, p.35).

Le Louverain, Neuchâtel, 21-22 September 1991
The theme of the thirteenth meeting was: ‘The good fortune to be a foyer mixte: dynamics of our situation’ A priest and pastor present both summed up their findings under the headings: openness and identity; discovery of complementary riches; the mission of interchurch couples – what they have to say; their mission to their children (FM 94, pp.30-32). A letter was sent by participants to the Swiss church authorities (text in FM 95, pp.30-31).

Delémont, Jura, 4-5 December 1993
‘Baptism and ecclesial attachment’ was the theme, with a plea for dual registration (FM 103, pp.30-31).

Delémont, Jura, 27-28 November 1994
The fifteenth meeting’s theme was ‘Foyers mixtes: catalysts for reconciliation?’ (FM 107, pp.27-28).

Les Rouges-Terres, Jura, 13-14 September 1997 (FM 114, p.27)

Arzier-sur-Nyon, Vaud, 29-30 May 99: ‘The future is ours to make’ (FM 123, p.4)

Sapinhaut-sur-Saxon, Valais, 23-24 September 2000
This eighteenth meeting took the theme: ‘The Trinity – source of family life’ (IF 9,1 Jan.2001, p.10)

Charmey, Fribourg, 17-18 November 2001
‘Handing on the faith’ was the theme of this nineteenth meeting. It was prepared by the Fribourg group of foyers mixtes, which had been re-launched three years earlier and consisted of ten or so couples who took it in turns to prepare and host a meeting. They met four or five times a year. One of the members described a meeting that took place during the period of preparation for Charmey, and picked out some of phrases used in the discussion. ‘Our aim is to live ecumenism, beginning with ourselves. We have a favourable context – we are a couple who love one another! First and foremost we concentrate on what unites us, on the certainty of our common ground. Usually an ecumenical group studies biblical texts and talks about different sensibilities. We talk about everyday ecumenism, lived out 24 hours a day.’ An eight-year old drew a picture of what it is like to be an interchurch child. The parents are walking up parallel paths to their respective churches; the children are running and dancing on the grass in the middle. (En Chemin/Auf dem Weg, Fribourg, September 2001, pp.4-6) When they welcomed the Catholic bishop and the Reformed pastor to Charmey, the couples explained that they had built their homes on two pillars, a double foundation on which their ground floor rested. But they wanted to build a new storey, truly shared, nearer God, where the children would not have to try to understand about divisions any longer. (Chrétien en Marche, 73, March 02, p.9).

‘Bishop, Pastor, do not ask our children which of their parents they prefer. Do not ask us to choose between you: our reply is clear, self-evident: we need you both! … Help us to prepare the marriage of our churches, to begin it …’

Delémont, Jura, 8-9 March 2003
As at Sapinhaut eighteen months earlier, there were participants from England. The theme was the Bread of Life (John 6).

Thus between 1974 and 2003 there were twenty meetings in different parts of Suisse romande, held every eighteen months or so, with a different region responsible each year for preparing the conference. Links with France have always been strong, through the review Foyers Mixtes and, since 1998, the Comité permanent francophone. In late 2003 a more formal association was established.

Thanks to Fr René Beaupère for information on the Swiss conferences in Foyers Mixtes, and to Pastor Richard Ecklin who participated in most of the conferences.

A SWISS ASSOCIATION
In November 2003 a Swiss interchurch family association was formed, constituted as a not-for-profit association under Swiss law. It is called the Association des foyers interconfessionels de Suisse (AFI-CH). It is hoped that this will give interchurch families in Switzerland a higher profile, and help them to make a more effective contribution to ecumenism. A number of church authorities who were circulated with information about the Rome Gathering in July 2003 had already asked to be kept in touch with post-Rome developments.

The Swiss Association will retain close links with French interchurch families, and with the Centre Saint Irénée at Lyon, which has been for so long an inspiration and a support for foyers mixtes francophones. Swiss interchurch families are being encouraged to attend the fourth Rencontre francophone at Rimlishof, Mulhouse, 22-23 May 2004, and the next meeting of Swiss interchurch families will therefore not take place until 2005.

It is hoped however that the work will extend to German- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, and that the AFI-CH will also become the Vereinigung der konfessionsverbindenden Familien in der Schweiz, and the Associazione delle famiglie interconfessionale della Svizzera.
In March 2004 the Revd David Coffey, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and as Free Churches Moderator a President of Churches Together in England and of the Association of Interchurch Families, addressed the London meeting of AIF.

The Association has been invited to take part in a small consultation in September 2004 that will follow up the effect of *One Bread One Body* and the responses to it made by AIF (see *Interchurch Families* 7.2 Summer 1999 pp.10-15), l’Arche and Hengrave, an ecumenical community. Two Catholic bishops will take part, and two representatives of each of the three groups.

The annual conference of the German network of interchurch families took place at Braunfels bei Wetzlar, 6-8 February 2004, on the theme: The Church: which paths lead to unity? Claire Malone-Lee represented English-speaking interchurch families. The main speakers were Pastor Manfred Kock, until recently Chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, and Dr Dorothea Sattler, a young Roman Catholic theologian who is Professor of church history and theology at Münster. Manfred Kock told the story of his grandmother, who had been Roman Catholic; her marriage had not been recognised by the Catholic Church and she had become an outstandingly devout member of her adopted parish. To her great joy, she was able to return to the sacramental life of her own church at the age of sixty. He spoke of five stepping stones on the path to unity. First, great gratitude for all that had been achieved since Vatican II. Second, to engage deeply with problems, not accepting superficial compromise. Third, greater understanding and respect for the way each church understands itself as church. Fourth, for each church internally to explore the positions of the other, and allow them to shed light on their own life. Fifth, to live the tension between the already and the not yet – and this is where he situates interchurch families. Professor Sattler followed this up by speaking of the existential importance of interchurch family experience in the ecumenical movement. There is now a small change in the official title of the network; it has become NetzwerkOekumene: konfessionsverbindende Paare und Familien in Deutschland.

The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) is celebrating its 30th year in 2004. Ken Dunn recalls 1974 in a short piece in NIMMA’s March *Update*. A weekend conference for mixed couples was organised by Corrymeela, and the couples were so pleased to meet that they immediately formed an Association. ‘We called ourselves ‘Mixed Marriage’ and not ‘Association of Interchurch Families’ because we wanted to be open to all sorts – both practising, one practising, neither practising‘. The first NIMMA residential conference was held in 1976, led by John Coventry, SJ from England and Canon Edgar Turner. 2004 is a year of celebration, with a Festal Evensong of Thanksgiving at St George’s church, Belfast on 25th January, and the launch of the new revised and very well produced version of the booklet *Mixed Marriages in Ireland* taking place in the Long Gallery at Stormont on 7th April. The revised leaflets ‘Introduction to NIMMA’, ‘Getting Married’ and ‘Baptism’ will also be distributed. At the annual conference 22-23 May on ‘Mixed Marriage and Identity’ the speakers will be Dr Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive of Community Relations Council and Dr Rosie Burrows of Barnados, who has recently done research on Parenting in a Divided Society.

Following the Rome Gathering in July 2003, interchurch families were determined to work together on a global level, although no formal international structures exist. An opportunity came when we were invited to respond as interchurch families to the Antelias report of the World Council of Churches concerning the re-configuration of the ecumenical movement. The network set up to respond to the ecumenical structures on the European level (see pp.4-5) has been extended to Australia, Canada and the United States. We hope to send a short response to the WCC by June.
Agreements on interchurch marriages in Switzerland

The Orthodox Church forbids the marriage of Orthodox Christians with heretics (following canon 14 of Chalcedon and canon 72 of the Quinisext Synod of 692). However, under the Orthodox principle of οἰκονομία (pastoral prudence) an Orthodox bishop may exceptionally give a dispensation to an Orthodox Christian by which a marriage to a non-Orthodox is recognised as valid.

With the twentieth century movement of populations and the Orthodox diaspora, the question of mixed marriages became more urgent for the Orthodox, as for other churches. When the Second Preconciliar Panorthodox Consultation met in 1982 in Chambésy, Switzerland, it stated: ‘Marriage between an Orthodox and a non-Orthodox is not permitted according to the Akribeia (strict) canon. However, it can be allowed to take place out of forbearance and love for humankind, under the express condition that the children of this marriage be baptised and brought up in the Orthodox Church. Local Orthodox churches can make this decision, using the οἰκονομία principle, in individual cases in which they undertake this as a particular pastoral obligation.’

The wedding ceremony must take place in an Orthodox church according to Orthodox rites celebrated by an Orthodox priest. However, another minister may offer a prayer, and give a reading or a homily.

Mixed marriages between Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians

Following the recommendations of the Chambésy consultation, the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Switzerland published a joint statement in 1985 under the title ‘Mixed marriages between Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians’. (The text is given in Présence orthodoxe en Suisse: Guide pastoral, Fribourg 1991, pp.34-37.)

Similarities and differences as to the way in which marriage is understood by Catholics and Orthodox are set out. Both believe that marriage between baptised persons is a sacrament. For the mutual recognition of marriage, it will be necessary to observe the rules of both churches, not just of one. So a marriage should be celebrated in church, and by a bishop or validly ordained priest. (The Roman Catholic Church allows marriage before a deacon, or exceptionally or other forms of public celebration.) For Catholics it is the couple themselves who are the ministers of the sacrament, when they exchange their consent in the presence of the priest and witnesses. For Orthodox the rite of crowning the couple by the priest, following their consent, is the essential element in the celebration of the sacrament, and makes it valid. Both churches believe marriage is indissoluble, but for pastoral reasons the Orthodox tolerate dissolution in certain circumstances, while Catholics declare a marriage invalid if it judges there has been a lack of consent.

Catholic-Orthodox marriages have become an increasing problem in Switzerland. This is particularly so because the Orthodox recognise the validity of a marriage only when it has been celebrated by an Orthodox priest (or bishop) using the traditional rite. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church has recognised the validity of a marriage celebrated by an Orthodox priest since 1967. However, such a marriage is only licit if the Catholic bishop has given his permission beforehand. In order to avoid the non-validity of mixed marriages, the Commission recommends:

either that a mixed marriage is celebrated in an Orthodox church in the Orthodox form, which the Roman Catholic Church can accept
or that there is a shared service in which the essential rites of the two churches are assured by the celebrants of each of them, without there being a second wedding.

(It is recognised that there is a lack of reciprocity here in the sense that the Roman Catholic Church recognises the validity of Orthodox marriage (and can give a dispensation from canonical form), whereas this is not so the other way round. These recommendations are based on what is permitted at present; it is hoped that in the future it will be possible to make more reciprocal arrangements.)

Mixed marriages between Protestant and Orthodox Christians

The Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches and the Orthodox Church in Switzerland set up an Evangelical-Orthodox Dialogue Commission (CDPO) in 1985. This Commission issued a ‘Proposal for the Celebration of Protestant-Orthodox Marriages in Switzerland’ in the late 1990’s (2nd edition 1999 published both in French and in German by the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches, 64 pp). It was signed jointly by the Orthodox Metropolitan and the President of the Federation.

The Commission stresses that its work is provisional. Its sets out its proposal for a two-part celebration of a mixed marriage, but hopes to work towards a more unified and ‘ecumenical’ celebration that would contain all the essential elements from both traditions. However, ‘the two-part ceremony as we propose it represents an agreement that goes further than those reached elsewhere in the present state of ecumenical dialogue. It seems to us a pastoral solution that we can recommend for Switzerland; thus we can avoid two independent celebrations following one another in two different churches and following two different rites – a practice that is considered normal, alas, in many places’ (p.7).

The document explains that the two-part celebration will be regarded as valid by the Orthodox as being an Orthodox marriage; it will be recognised by Protestants as a marriage celebrated before God. The Orthodox can only recognise the Orthodox marriage as valid, because they believe it to be a sacrament. This is not the case with Protestant marriage, although discussions in the CDPO have shown that Protestants are not so far from Orthodox in their thinking about the sacramentality of marriage as some have claimed.
The marriage will be entered into both registers (in the hope that this will only be a provisional solution). In the Orthodox register, the marriage will be registered as Orthodox; in the Protestant register as Protestant or ‘ecumenical’. It is an ecumenical event, and the participation of both ministers is a pastoral necessity (this does not imply mutual recognition of ministry, however desirable that might be).

An equally provisional solution is proposed for the baptism and religious education of the children. The Orthodox and Protestant churches in Switzerland feel themselves to be co-responsible for these children. In the Swiss situation it is proposed to leave the couple free to ask for baptism for their children from either church. Both Orthodox and Protestant churches, however, ask the parents to make sure that each child gets to know the confession in which he is not receiving his religious upbringing.

The provisional character of this agreement does not mean that it is any less a step forward towards unity. We shall be able to find a more satisfactory solution when the theological and ecclesiological dialogue between our churches makes further progress. It is important to prepare the marriage with the couple and both celebrants together. These latter can explain the ecumenical context of the marriage. ‘Thus the couple can be made aware of their special ecumenical mission.’

A second section of the document gives something of the theology and spirituality of marriage in the two traditions, and a third section gives the proposed text of the wedding ceremony. The first part of the wedding (pp.19-30: the exchange of consent) is presided over by the Protestant minister, and the second part (pp.31-64: the ceremony of crowning) by the Orthodox priest.

With thanks to Dr Viorel Ionita, Study Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, for assistance in finding the Swiss texts.

Problems and passion

The usual response to problems is practical and pastoral. If you have a personal problem, you need care, perhaps even counselling. If the organisation has problems, you need review, reform, re-organisation. A lot of ecumenism falls into this pattern.

But an alternative approach begins not with problems but with passion. It is a passion that is lit by the experience of being together across the divides and realising, hey this is how it should be! It is a passion fired by the awareness that so much in the church, let alone the world, is not right, and God wants to change it. It is a passion – to use the word in a particular sense - that draws us into the passion of Christ. We have to ask: are we finding here a new way out of our crisis, or simply adding to his sufferings?

Now in ecumenism I am committed to dealing with the problems. As Convenor of the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England, and as chair of the Church of England’s Local Unity Panel, I spend a lot of my time trying to find a way through the problems of disunity to a more ecumenical way of doing things. Not least: why do we have separate national departments for areas of church life, like youth work, or social responsibility, or international affairs? Why aren’t we doing these together?

But this is not enough. It is not enough just to increase cooperation between churches. We need a passion for that visible unity of the Church that is the gift of God and the prayer of Christ himself.

In the world of interchurch families, I suggest that these two approaches may also have something to say. In one sense what brings you together are the problems and you seek a response that is pastoral and leads to new rules. But what also brings you together is passion: a passion for the renewal and unity of the Church, a passion for justice and, to use the word in another specific sense – your own passion for each other.

The church has never been very good at passion, whether the passionate love between two people, or the passion for change of the prophets, or the passion of Christ, challenging most of what we usually hail as success.

How can you, interchurch families, out of your problems and your passion help the rest of us to move from a problem-solving approach to ecumenism to a renewed passion for the visible unity of the Church?

From an address by Michael Doe, Anglican Bishop of Swindon, to the annual conference of the Association of Interchurch Families, Swanwick 2002
When You Intermarry: a Resource for Inter-Christian, Intercultural Couples, Parents and Families by Charles Joanides, published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America (New York, 2002, $14.95) is intended to help interchurch couples (here called inter-Christian or interfaith) and their pastors. Introducing the book, the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America (GOA) hopes that many lives will be blessed through its use, so that ‘the beloved families of our parishes become the wonderful and sacred reality that St Paul calls the “church in their house”.’

A research project
When You Intermarry is the fruit of work done by the Revd Charles Joanides for the Interfaith Research Project (IRP) of the GOA. Fr Joanides used focus groups and a website for his research, in which 376 intermarried couples (one spouse being Greek Orthodox) took part. Two-thirds of all marriages in the GOA are inter-Christian, and usually intercultural as well; the book intends to help them to see ‘their religious and cultural differences as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat to personal, marital, and family well-being’. It takes a stand against the negative view of intermarriage that was current until recently, and stresses the benefits, for both couples and their children, whose ‘lives are generally enriched, their perception of the world broadened’.

Of the 376 couples studied, Joanides found that most participants were positive about inter-Christian marriage, although they would be more negative about inter-religious marriage. Most valued religion and spirituality. Some were practising two different faith traditions, while others were essentially practising one, generally Greek Orthodox. There was widespread respect for the partner’s need to retain membership in his or her cultural and faith tradition. A few partners had become Greek Orthodox, and others were considering doing so, largely because they felt it would benefit the family.

Most did not regret being intermarried, but some – especially those with equally strong commitments to their faith traditions – felt a sense of loss. ‘I sometimes feel an emptiness when I’m at church alone. It is from feeling a bit distant from my wife and children in this part of our lives.’ Another spouse said: ‘When I started going to the Greek Church, I got rather resentful and frustrated because it just wasn’t the same and I felt deprived of something very important. This really affected us and I wondered what the consequences would be until I found a way to meet my own spiritual needs’.

What about the children?
Difficulties over the religious identity of children abounded, especially when couples had not discussed this before marriage. A non-Orthodox father said it became easier to co-exist ‘if we emphasise both the Greek Orthodox and Christian dimension of their religious identity. … We tell them that they are Greek Orthodox, but we also frequently just tell them that they are Christians’. An Orthodox wife said: ‘My church and parents taught me that Greek Orthodoxy is the one true faith, and I was insisting that our children receive this message … but it caused so much tension between my husband and me … We have compromised. We have agreed to tell our children that we are both Christians, but that they are also Orthodox Christians’.

Baptism was a huge problem for some couples, and so was the feeling of one parent that he or she was the odd person out in the family as the children grew up. Disagreements caused much tension in some families. The general feeling seemed to be that children must be brought up in one church (usually the Greek Orthodox) or their religious and spiritual development would be hindered. They should however learn to respect the Christianity of the other parent, and so gain a wider perspective. Parents found questions like ‘Why can’t Mommy and Daddy receive communion together in the Orthodox Church?’ and ‘Why do we celebrate Easter on two different days?’ difficult to answer. Extended families could cause a lot of problems, and the couple had to stand firm as a couple.

Arguing in front of the children was disastrous; one child said: ‘When I grow up I’m not going to church. It’s not worth it’. But most couples agreed that it was possible to negotiate their religious differences successfully, and raise religiously and spiritually committed children.

Pastoral approaches
The second half of the book changes style, presenting ‘marital and family life cycle challenges’ in the form of fictional interviews with couples who are ‘composites of typical couples that participated in the IRP’. The interviews cover challenges that will face couples from the time they meet to the time when the children leave home, and each is followed by reflections and advice. The difficulties of non-Orthodox partners in adapting to their partner’s Greek Orthodox background are not underestimated. The ‘Greekness’ is often as much a difficulty as the ‘Orthodoxy’. Where church teaching and practice is concerned, the Greek Orthodox partners need to make big efforts to understand their own faith better so that they can explain it more adequately to their partners. They must also make a big effort to understand the cultural and religious background of their non-Greek Orthodox partners. Communication is vital. Couples must find a way of acknowledging and addressing the hurt feelings that may be caused by the Greek Orthodox Church not allowing the other partner to receive communion when the family attend the Divine Liturgy together. If the children have been baptised in the Greek Orthodox Church at the insistence of grand-parents, while the Greek Orthodox partner hardly practises, great resentment can be experienced by the other spouse as the children grow up. In such cases ‘it is important to identify the source of the problem without placing blame’. Parents need to be united and sure in their joint approach if they are to face the challenges presented by adolescent children, and if these latter are to develop personal faith and relate to a faith community. The tensions that may exist between parents and young adults are explored, as are those between a couple once the children

Return to Journal index
have left home and the ‘isolated’ parent feels able to return to his or her church of origin. At every stage prayer and Christian understanding are presented as key.

Next, ‘balancing strategies’ are described: communication, patience, exploration and experiment, mutual love, acceptance, minimising the differences and maximising the benefits of an inter-Christian marriage, focusing on what is shared rather than on what divides, compromise, humour, fairness, respect of each other’s freedom to choose, developing healthy boundaries between the couple and their extended families, praying together.

**Church regulations**

Then comes an explanation of the pastoral directives of the Orthodox Church. There is a strong preference for intra-Orthodox marriages, but because of the Orthodox concept of *economia*, the Greek Orthodox Church now permits inter-Christian marriages between an Orthodox Christian and another trinitarian Christian. Marriages must be celebrated in an Orthodox Church by an Orthodox priest, or the Orthodox partner will not be able to receive the sacraments. The couples must agree to baptise and raise their children in the Orthodox Church. A non-Orthodox clergyman can be present at a wedding, with the bishop’s permission. He can give a blessing and address the couple at the end of the ceremony, but he is not to be reported as ‘participating’ in the Sacrament of Matrimony, since the Orthodox Church does not allow this. Non-Orthodox partners who marry in an Orthodox Church do not subsequently have sacramental privileges, nor can they be permitted an Orthodox funeral service, be allowed to vote in parish elections or serve on the parish council, nor serve as godparents or sponsors at baptisms and weddings.

**Marriage preparation**

Finally, the importance of pre-marital preparation is stressed, and a list of questions given for prospective partners to discuss before marriage. Most deal with religious difficulties, but the fifteenth and final question deals with ethnic and cultural differences. Most are ‘we’ questions, but some are questions for the Orthodox partner to answer, for example: Do I know how my non-Orthodox partner will react when I burn incense? Do I know why my non-Orthodox in-laws cannot receive the sacraments in the Greek Orthodox Church? An assessment questionnaire is offered to help couples judge their readiness for marriage.

**Ministering to Intermarried Couples: a Resource for Clergy and Lay Workers** is a companion volume written by Charles Joanides and published by the GOA in 2004 ($15.95). It ‘encourages qualitatively different thinking with regard to the marriage challenge facing the GOA’, and urges an outreach to help stop the slow drift of intermarried couples and their families away from the GOA.

It uses the same material as the book for couples, but there is more technical information about the IRP and its methodology in the clergy manual. It presents ‘A Developmental Social Ecological Theory of Intermarriages in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America’ as emerging from the IRP. There are sections on dating couples, engaged couples, newly-weds, parents with maturing children, and couples whose last child has left home. Each section is followed by Guidelines to help clergy and lay workers in their pastoral task. The emphasis is on careful and respectful listening, and raising questions and offering information in a non-judgemental way. Pastors should certainly raise the question of becoming a one-church family, but not in a pushy or intrusive way. Counselling worried Greek Orthodox parents of intermarried spouses should be done in a way that does not undermine or alienate the couple.

There is a chapter on ‘Pastoral Approaches and Programs’. Clergy are warned that many changes that intermarried couples would like to see ‘either conflict with Orthodox theology or may take an extended period of time to resolve’. The desire of intermarried couples for the non-Orthodox spouse to have access to Holy Communion and non-Orthodox extended family members to be able to function as godparents and sponsors are examples of the former. There are also calls for ‘more English, less Greek’, and the ability for the spouse to vote and assume leadership positions. However, the GOA need not espouse or promote exclusive, ethnocentric perspectives, or disparage other ethnic and religious traditions. Churches must learn to be more welcoming to non-Orthodox spouses, and teachers must not tell their classes that interfaith marriage is a sin. Intermarried couples must not be discouraged from exposing their children to both parents’ ethnic backgrounds. Positive suggestions include the formation of intermarried couples’ support groups.

**Pastoral concern from an institutional perspective**

Much work and pastoral concern has gone into the preparation of these books. The viewpoint is strictly that of the Greek Orthodox Church; it is expected that couples will comply with the requirements of that church, which are expressed in as reasonable way as possible. The Greek Orthodox partner is in the position of being cut off from his or her church if the couple do not agree to these requirements, rather as a Roman Catholic partner in a mixed marriage was before the Second Vatican Council and the progressive changes in marriage legislation since.

The Greek Orthodox Church has kept to the logic of a ‘one true church’ approach, and shows no signs of the struggles that have taken place in the Roman Catholic Church to adapt legislation to a post-Vatican II recognition that Christian churches and ecclesial communities exist outside her own boundaries. In Catholic-Orthodox marriages it is now Catholics who can adapt more easily to their partners’ position (although, as we see, in some cases with much parental opposition and with a great sense of loss, especially when the Orthodox partners are less devout).

The GOA has a very strong ethnic and cultural identity, which compounds the difficulties for intermarriage, and it will be interesting to see the developments that take place in autocephalous Orthodox Churches in different parts of the world. The principle of ‘economy’ has already been used to allow marriage with non-Orthodox Christians, and no doubt there will be further applications in the future. Intermarriage is a real challenge to all communities; inter-Christian marriage offers an opportunity to make ecumenical progress.
The British Association of Interchurch Families 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.

Membership Details of membership, Friends, resources (publications, leaflets, AIF video), and a constantly up-dated list of Local Contacts throughout Britain are available on request.

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