

Interchurch Families

Journal of the Association of Interchurch Families

VOLUME TWELVE

NUMBER TWO

SUMMER 2004

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

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"You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity." Pope John Paul II, York, 1982

THE JOURNAL

This is the last number of the INTERCHURCH FAMILIES Journal to appear in print.

Its work will be carried on in the following ways.

The kind of material that has appeared in the Journal will be placed directly on the international interchurch families website (www.interchurchfamilies.org).

A short email newsletter called *INTERCHURCH FAMILIES: Issues – Reflections – News* is to be produced several times a year by Ruth and Martin Reardon. It will have links to material on the website for those who wish to follow them up. You can subscribe to this Newsletter by sending an email to interchurchfamilies-subscribe@yahoo.com. You will then be notified when it appears, and you can read it either from an attachment or through a link with the website, where it will be posted.

Ruth and Martin Reardon are willing to send out a paper version to those who cannot access the web-site or receive email, but who would like to be kept informed about developments relating to interchurch family issues and concerns world-wide (see address below). There may be a request for a small contribution to cover production and postage costs.

The British AIF will publish resources from time to time. A well-produced and attractive booklet containing the ROME 2003 PAPER is the first of these. Information will be given in the Newsletter, and they will be obtainable from the Association's London address (see the foot of the next column). Payment for these can be made in Australian, Canadian and US dollars, as has been the case for the Journal, thanks to Ray Temmerman and Bev Hincks.

Back numbers of the Journal (while stocks last) can be ordered from the AIF office, and paid for as follows:

£ sterling: UK £3,
rest of Europe £4 paid in sterling

US \$8, Canadian \$11 to
Ray and Fenella Temmerman, 879 Dorchester
Avenue, Winnipeg MB, R3M 0P7, Canada

Australian \$10 to Bev Hincks,
PO Box 66, Swansea, NSW 2281, Australia

Multiple copies can be sent at economic rates
by surface mail.

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ISSN 0950-995X
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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.

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.

Contact:

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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 website 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

USA

Visible unity
Glorieta Conference Centre
Santa Fe, New Mexico
9-11 July 2004

Britain

Building bridges
Swanwick, Derbyshire
28-30 August 2004
(2005: 27-29 August)

Canada

Holiday weekend
Christopher Lake
Saskatchewan
3-5 September 2004

Austria

The ordained ministry
Götzis, Vorarlberg
23-26 October 2004

AUSTRALIA 2005

**11th English speaking
International
Interchurch Families
Conference**

*Sharing Our Dream
Downunder*

**Newcastle, Australia
18-22 August 2005**

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