

News from Australia for ICF Newsletter, October 2009

We who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us Rom 12: 5-6 Nov 2nd Weekday Lectionary. Paul then cites the gifts and a commentary from Irish Jesuit Publication *Sacred Space* then suggests *these gifts are in no way stationary, but ACTIVE, given to each of us but differently!*

Interchurch families are joined closely in the Spirit by this reading, which began my day today in far away Australia. For the past three days I was privileged to represent my Catholic diocese at a meeting of representatives from Australian Catholic Diocesan Ecumenical Commissions in Brisbane, Queensland. I flew 800 Km from Newcastle for this uplifting and energising event. Like interchurch families, some members of whom were present, people who think ecumenically share their Sacred Space in a very special manner. It is a joy to be in their presence. The Conference Programme covered many issues which affect interchurch families.

- Pat Mullins, a Brisbane pioneer of interchurch families, helped me set up an ICF display which came from the 2005 International ICF Conference in Newcastle. It included copies of the Icon and post card, the Rome Document, and pamphlets on Baptism and Marriage for distribution. Bishops collected too! Posters from AIF UK's London Office were displayed. Many conversations ensued, with questions on world-wide Sacramental Guidelines and Eucharistic Sharing. As each Diocese brought a Report, all of which were published and circulated, that of Maitland- Newcastle included the ICF Website and how to locate information there.
- Msgr Juan Usma Gomez from PCPCU gave a Public Lecture at the Catholic College at the University of Brisbane on *Pentecostal and Evangelical Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church; the current situation and hopes for the future*. He has been a member of this Dialogue for many years. He was from Colombia, quite young or appears so, his English excellent, very friendly and made a huge impression with his content and clarity. The topics of infant and adult baptism, baptism by water and the Spirit, speaking in tongues and charismatic Catholics, because of whom this Dialogue became possible in the first place, were thrashed out in subsequent sessions. This included one on *Grassroots Issues in Pentecostal/Evangelical Dialogue*. This should provide a profound and positive outcome for many interchurch marriages. There was much information about relations with the *Assemblies of God* and the *4 Square Gospel Churches* which exist in Australia. I was very positively enlightened. The latest Vatican document, on the 5h Dialogue, can be found at the website <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/pe-re/doc/e-pe-re-5-contents.html>.
- He also suggested a book on this topic: *On Becoming a Christian - Insights from Scripture and the Patristic Fathers*. Sorry – details not provided.
- *Current issues in Inter-religious Dialogues* was a topic on the Agenda which affects the increasing number of inter-faith marriages in Australia, as elsewhere, but is beyond the scope of this Newsletter.
- The 10th Anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, between the President of the Lutheran World Federation and Cardinal Cassidy of the PCPCU in Augsburg, 31st October 1999, was celebrated on Saturday evening, the exact date. It was indeed a privilege to be in a Lutheran Chapel at a Brisbane Lutheran College for this event. The Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, Archbishop Bathersby, long a supporter of ecumenism and interchurch families, (he wrote in 1995 the first Diocesan Norms (*Blessed and Broken*) after the publication of the Directory for Ecumenism) joined the President of the Lutheran Church of Australia, Queensland Branch, Rev Noake and the Moderator of the Uniting Church of Australia, Queensland Branch, Revd Johnson, to lead the Liturgy. The Anglican Primate of Australia, Archbishop Philip Aspinall was unable to participate as Anglicans celebrated that day the 150th Anniversary of the first Anglican Diocese in Queensland. How different our ages are here to the Middle East and Europe! But thankfully the Primate was able to join the congregation for the event. The crucifer and bible bearer were young school students, and youth involvement was marked which was a joy to many. Since Cardinal Cassidy is an Australian who has retired and lives in our Diocese, where he is a generous supporter of ecumenism, including interchurch marriages, it was very special occasion for me
- Archbishop Darwish, head of the Australian Melkite Church, from Sydney, provided excellent information on Orthodox Christian Churches, including the 21 which are in communion with Rome. It was an excellent exposé of the history, culture and doctrinal differences between all Orthodox and Roman Catholicism. Conference participants will all receive a copy, as it was very complex. Again, though, a huge source of information was provided which could be such a help for interchurch family relationships in this domain.
- There were Reports from Australians involved in International Dialogue with Anglican (IARCCUM, and ARCIC), and the International Methodist Dialogue, as well as our Australian National Dialogues with the Anglican (AustARCC), Lutheran and Uniting Churches. Questions about the Anglican Dialogue led to much discussion on the new opportunities for some Anglicans to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. The consensus was that nobody really knows the answer until the Apostolic Constitution is published. It seems that here in Australia where we are the world centre for the Traditional Anglican Church, which around my part of the world is called the Anglo-Catholic Church, there is some interest. It seems the impetus has come from groups such as this. We do not see Anglicans flocking to become Catholic Bishop Michael Putney who heads our Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) on Ecumenism, suggested *Watch This Space!*
- The long-standing Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue was reported by Revd Dr Gerard Kelly whom some of you readers met at the *Receptive Ecumenism* Conference in Durham, UK, Jan 09. One result of the dialogue has been that NSW Lutherans, where ecumenical outreach has been slower than in Queensland and South Australia, have recently joined the NSW Ecumenical Council of 13 Churches.
- During discussion and questioning on the Catholic/Uniting Church Dialogue, the topic of Marriage surfaced. Fr David Pascoe from Brisbane spoke about the Conference to be held from 10-13 March 2010 on the theme "The Household of God and Local Households – Revisiting the Domestic Church" at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. This presented an opportunity for me to briefly speak about the Rome Document, the informal meeting with the PCPCU in Rome

in 2005 and the decision taken there to explore the topic of *Domestic Church*, to be led by Thomas Knieps. Appreciation was expressed for this by Bishop Putney. It was agreed that the Belgian Conference will be of particular interest also for interchurch couples and their families.

- The outreach from Australian Interchurch Families continues, albeit slowly. Phone enquiries occur from people seeking help as they locate us on the Diocesan or the interchurch families website. We are grateful for the Listserv.
- Throughout this Conference time I felt a new wind blowing, of freshness, energy and youthfulness not only from throughout Australia, but also from beyond, with Msgr Gomez. May the Holy Spirit continue to breathe upon us all wherever we are in the world.

Bev Hincks, Belmont NSW, Australia.

Return to [IFIN 2009](#)