

AN INTERCHURCH FAMILY CONTRIBUTION TO THE ‘RECEPTION’ OF THE IARCCUM REPORT *GROWING TOGETHER IN UNITY AND MISSION*

During the meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England in February 2008 one of the items on the agenda was consideration of the Report of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). This report was entitled Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue: an Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission. (For an interchurch family perspective on the IARCCUM Report see IFIR no.7, October 2007.) A new member of the Synod and a long-standing member of the British Association of Interchurch Families, Lucy Docherty, addressed the Synod on this subject. She pointed to the way in which interchurch families could make a contribution to local implementation of some of the IARCCUM suggestions for deepening relationships between the churches, and also spoke of the urgent pastoral needs of such families. We give her text in full.

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for calling me to speak. This is not only my maiden speech but also my first time at Synod, and I do not think that there is any other subject that could possibly have tempted me from the security of my seat in the back row. But on this subject I have felt compelled to brave the microphone to offer an experiential rather than a theological contribution.

I speak as someone who has a great personal interest in there being at some time a successful outcome to all the discussions and deliberations between our church and the Roman Catholic church. I have been married for nearly 28 years to a Roman Catholic and throughout our marriage we have continued to practice as both Catholic and Anglican whilst also supporting each other totally in our respective churches and their communities. Indeed we are what is often called an interchurch family – and here I want to pay tribute to the work of the Association of Interchurch Families which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and has been an absolute lifeline of support and encouragement both to my family and many others as they struggle to live out their marriages in the context of a divided church.

So I have a close and personal interest in the outcome of the various discussions and reports – and there have been so very many (some with remarkable acronyms) as our respective churches struggle with the complexities that divide us. There have been highs and lows, but on the whole, matters have moved forward, albeit at an achingly slow pace for those couples and their families who are living with the division on a daily basis and for whom there is a pastoral and personal urgency which does not allow for deliberation over the decades.

The Faith and Order Advisory Group's response to the report, *Growing Together in and Unity*, is measured – perhaps too measured – a breath of optimism for future processes would have been welcome, but perhaps I ask too much!

As it stands there can be little to argue with about this motion or the background report, but neither is there really anything to remember – nothing for Synod reps to write up and talk about with any great degree or enthusiasm on their return to their parishes.

So I am asking colleagues to remember that there are many things we can do at a local level to encourage better relationships between our churches - and some of these actions are helpfully listed in Part 2 of the IARCCUM report so I will not repeat them here.

But, one of the best things we can do is to make use of interchurch couples and families, if our parishes have this resource, for as Pope John Paul II said when he visited York in 1982 “You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian Unity”.

Colleagues, for many of you the disunity between our churches is, I am sure, a cause for concern, perhaps even shame; but for many, many others this disunity is a real and living pain which they live with every day, as we have already heard. I urge you not to forget the pastoral needs of these families, and to remember that we are encouraged to implement local initiatives which foster greater unity – and if you are in any doubt as to what you should do – ask an interchurch family!

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