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Eucharistic Sharing: Bridge towards Unity –  
Barrier to Unity?

Eucharistische Gastfreundschaft – Brücke  
oder Hindernis der Einheit?

| Review of Ecumenical Studies |



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Eucharistic Sharing: Bridge towards Unity – Barrier to Unity?  
Eucharistische Gastfreundschaft – Brücke oder Hindernis der Einheit?

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## Eucharistic Sharing: Barrier or Bridge?

RAY TEMMERMAN\*

*The question of the term “Eucharistic Sharing” being a barrier or a bridge to ecumenism calls for a wider review, as it is only one of several terms used to speak of eucharist across denominational lines. It is important to delineate between them, to determine which is more appropriate, and in what context. This paper presents the question through the hermeneutic of interchurch families, where the question of eucharistic sharing impacts Sunday by Sunday. The term itself, while valuable as a touchstone, demonstrates its full value only insofar as the hard work of discerning appropriate terminology takes place, by the couple together with their churches. It is that work, at once challenging and rewarding, which will build the bridge across ecumenical estrangements.*

**Keywords:** *Terminology, hermeneutic, interchurch families, discernment, estrangement*

Eucharistic Sharing is not presently a bridge toward Christian unity – but it can and should be.

When speaking about Eucharist beyond the borders of one’s own Christian tradition, several terms are used: “Intercommunion,” “Eucharistic Hospitality,” “Eucharistic Sharing,” and “Admission to Communion.” These terms are often used interchangeably, though they express very different theological and ecclesiological understandings. The differences are critical to ecumenical dialogue. As Vilmos Vajta says, “We should not neglect the fact that *terminology involves theological decisions*.”<sup>1</sup> Without appropriate differentiation, Eucharistic Sharing cannot be a bridge, only a barrier to unity. Equally, it cannot help the Church in its mandate to proclaim the good news to the whole world.

The challenge, then, lies not in Eucharistic Sharing itself, but in the facile way we interchangeably use words that revolve around the central reality of Eucharist. Our problem lies not in the terms, but in ourselves.

This paper will explore these terms through the hermeneutic of interchurch marriages. In addition, it will argue that a form of synodality is called for, a “walking with” these married couples by their churches, so that they and their churches may discern the term that is appropriate to their concrete, particular, personal situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Vilmos Vajta, “«Intercommunion»: A Terminological Problem,” *The Ecumenical Review* 22, no. 2 (1970): 126.

## Hermeneutic

The scriptures proclaim (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:5–6, Mark 10:8, Eph. 5:31), and the Church has always believed and taught (CCC 1614), that in marriage a man and a woman become *one*, and that “[t]hrough their union they experience the meaning of their oneness.”<sup>2</sup>

Prior to marriage, we have two unique Christians. Thereafter, they form a new reality, a new unity, that of a “domestic church.”<sup>3</sup> By the mysterious grace of God, the person who was “other” now becomes an extension of the self, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). It is true that spouses are and always will be in some sense ‘other’ to each. Without that, they could never retain their unique contribution to the marriage and to the body of Christ, the Church. Nor could they enjoy and nurture unity in difference, learn from each other, grow together; to err, change direction, and have the opportunity to be reconciled. We must, however, recognize this other-ness to be included in the *one-ness*, that communion of persons God has created, a *one-ness* understood to be so real, so profound, that nothing short of death can dissolve it.

There is also an expectation, from the church and the community, that they are and will remain always together, nurtured and supported in that togetherness.

What we know of same-church Christian marriage applies also to what is commonly known as “mixed religion” marriages (officially, *Disparity of Cult*). Such marriages are made of individuals from two distinct churches which are in imperfect but nonetheless real communion with each other within the one communion which is the body of Christ. Such couples may or may not see their respective faith traditions as a gift, may or may not be concerned to share their gift of faith with each other – or indeed, while of two different Christian traditions, may be nominal in their faith practice.

There is, however, a subset within that “mixed religion” group. These are “interchurch” families, whose spouses take seriously not only their own faith tradition but see the faith tradition of their spouse as a reality to be recognized, received, nurtured and celebrated as a gift from God, facilitating the journey to Christian unity. They raise their children under one roof, actively participating and worshipping together, to the extent they are able, in both their churches.

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<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, (1965), no 48.

<sup>3</sup> “Follow the Way of Love,” USCCB, 1994, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/follow-the-way-of-love.cfm>, accessed August 16, 2017.

They “live in [their] marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity.”<sup>4</sup> Their decision to marry “can lead to the formation of a practical laboratory of Christian unity.”<sup>5</sup> Such a laboratory can reveal much about what the churches, of which the spouses in their unity form part, must do to fully respond to the prayer of Jesus that all may be one.

Interchurch couples are called to communion within their marriage, and together in and with their churches and the world. The desired end is communion with the extended self, so that the world may believe and be healed. It is that hermeneutic which we will employ.

We turn now to the terms we use.

### **Intercommunion**

This term has been used in several different ways over many years. For example, Miriam Wijlens, in the introduction to her detailed evaluation of post-conciliar legislation on the subject of “Eucharistic Sharing,” tells us of a letter, sent in 1970 by Cardinal Willebrands, President of the then called Secretariat for Promotion of the Unity of Christians, to Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State. It said:

The term “intercommunion” refers to an agreement between Churches that consider themselves sufficiently united in faith and constitution to admit members of other Churches in a normal and permanent way to Eucharistic communion.<sup>6</sup>

Walter Kasper, in his Synod intervention on 8 October 2005, presents another understanding:

...the terminology, which unfortunately is found also in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, that speaks about “intercommunion,” is ambiguous and in itself contradictory. It should be avoided, since there is not an “inter” communion, that is a “between” two communions (two Communities), but rather a communion in the communion of the one body of Christ, which is the Church.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Homily of John Paul II at York, UK, 1982, (1982),” [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1982/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19820531\\_famiglie-york.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19820531_famiglie-york.html), accessed October 14, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> “Pope Benedict XVI on Interchurch Families: «laboratories of unity»,” in *Interchurch Families International Reflections* (London: Association of Interchurch Families, 2006), <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/ifir/2006/ifir05-200611BenedictXVI.shtm>, accessed October 13, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist: A Theological Evaluation of the Post Conciliar Legislation* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2000), xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Reardon, “Sacramentum Caritatis: An Apostolic Exhortation issued by Pope Benedict XVI on 22 February 2007 reflecting the conclusions of the 2005 Synod of Bishops



There is a nuanced similarity between these understandings. Kasper is speaking of the theological reality of the one body of Christ, while Willebrands is speaking of the social dimensions of the parts of that institutional body. Both, however, are speaking of the Churches involved in the communion. That is quite different from an understanding which posits individual people as being in or out of communion with each other.

In 1970, the same year Cardinal Willebrands made his statement on “intercommunion,” the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales said in their *Directory concerning Mixed Marriages* that “at present ... inter-Communion is not allowed on the occasion of a mixed marriage.”<sup>8</sup> The intent of the language was to make clear that spouses of other Christian traditions were not able to be admitted to communion at the nuptial mass within which they were married.

Unfortunately, the wording is such that it sows confusion, in that it takes a term (intercommunion) appropriate to *churches*, and applies it to *individuals* who are and can only be members of distinct and perhaps estranged churches and ecclesial communities.

As Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi indicates, where interchurch families are concerned,

the Catholic position transposes the model of *real, yet imperfect communion* which the Second Vatican Council has developed to describe the relationship of the Catholic church toward the other Christian churches, on the conjugal relationship of interchurch couples.<sup>9</sup>

The result of such a transposition, as Knieps indicates, is that:

In this institutionally oriented approach couples from different denominations seem to be able to realize spousal unity only to the extent that the concerned church bodies are willing or able to admit ecclesial communion among their respective communities.<sup>10</sup>

Developing this ecclesial communion is beyond the scope of such families. They can, however, contribute to that development, exercising whatever influence is possible within their sphere of life. A good place to begin is by using, and insisting on, appropriate terminology.

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on the Eucharist,” <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/ifir/2007/ifir06-200704synod.pdf>, p. 2, accessed November 23, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, *Directory Concerning Mixed Marriages* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1970), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, “Interchurch Marriage: Conjugal and Ecclesial Communion in the Domestic Church,” in *Interchurch Families as Domestic Church*, eds. Knieps-Port le Roi and Ray Temmerman (Zurich: LIT-Verlag, 2015), 123–40, 125.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

As Ruth Reardon says:

Something which interchurch families can do is to be careful of their terminology, realising that the use of certain terms arouses quite unnecessary fears. Thus, we can agree that “intercommunion” is not a particularly helpful term to use; it can be gratuitously offensive to some people and can obscure what interchurch families are talking about when they ask for admission to communion as couples and as families.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the term “intercommunion,” while wholly appropriate for relations between churches, is inappropriate for application at the level of the domestic church of interchurch spouses. There is therefore no need for the churches to walk with individual couples in discernment. Leaving aside any discussion of ‘intercommunion’ where interchurch couples are concerned leaves the field open for other terms that more accurately reflect the baptismal, eucharistic, marital and ecclesial reality of interchurch families.

### **Eucharistic Hospitality**

As Thomas Rausch reminds us, “eucharistic hospitality is different from intercommunion, since it is offered not to churches but to individuals in particular circumstances.”<sup>12</sup>

Ruth Reardon, in her commentary on the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, points to an affirmation of this understanding when she writes:

When the Synod of Bishops opened in October 2005, the report of the General Relator, Cardinal Angelo Scola, said that ‘intercommunion’ must be distinguished from the admission of individuals to communion, which it would be more exact to call eucharistic hospitality.<sup>13</sup>

Reardon is quick to point out, however, that “(Roman documents have traditionally not used the term «eucharistic hospitality», but spoken of «eucharistic sharing».)”<sup>14</sup>

Before we look at eucharistic hospitality, however, we would do well to look at “hospitality” in its own right.

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<sup>11</sup> Reardon, “Admission to communion in the Roman Catholic church for partners in Interchurch Families,” *Interchurch Families Journal* 2, no. 2 (1994): 10–15, <http://interchurchfamilies.org/journal/pdf/1994V02N02Summer.pdf>, p. 15, accessed November 23, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas P. Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic Hospitality: Revising the Question,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 400.

<sup>13</sup> Reardon, “Sacramentum Caritatis.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

The term “hospitality” carries multiple connotations today. Moreover, those understandings can also change over time.

A mass noun, it describes “the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers.”<sup>15</sup> To be “hospitable” is to be “friendly and welcoming to visitors or guests”.<sup>16</sup>

There’s a commercial understanding.

The hospitality industry is one that is primarily focused on customer satisfaction. For the most part, it is built on leisure or is luxury-based, as opposed to meeting basic needs. Hotels and resorts, cruise lines, airlines and other various forms of travel, tourism, special event planning, and restaurants all generally fall under the realm of the hospitality industry.<sup>17</sup>

*Hospitality* in this case is a marketable commodity, aimed at providing people, known or unknown, with their needs, real or perceived. One is trained to exercise hospitality, to market it as a product, to sell it, and to make a profit at it.<sup>18</sup>

In secular terms, as Newlands and Smith point out,

Hospitality is a concept with which we are familiar. In Europe and North America, we probably think first of who we would like to invite, who would fit in well with the other guests we have, issue an invitation several days in advance. ... After they have finally departed, we may ask ourselves whether we think the visit was as enjoyable all round as we had hoped it would be...<sup>19</sup>

In this sense, *hospitality* is carried out with people we know personally, or at least with a very small degree of separation. We may exercise such hospitality for several reasons, e.g. to create or strengthen relationships; to make or solidify a business deal.

John Chrysostom presents two different views of hospitality within one statement. We will treat both in turn, working from the second to the first.

Wherefore God bade us call to our suppers and our feasts the lame, and the maimed, and those who cannot repay us; for these are most

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<sup>15</sup> *The English Dictionary*, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/hospitality>, accessed September 24, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Wisegeek, “What is the hospitality industry?,” <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-hospitality-industry.htm>, accessed November 7, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. “Best Hospitality Degrees: The Authority for Hospitality Degrees and Schools,” <http://www.besthospitalitydegrees.com/top-online-hotel-management-programs/>, accessed November 7, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> George Newlands and Allan Smith, *Hospitable God: The Transforming Dream* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), 3.

of all properly called good deeds which are done for God's sake. Whereas if thou entertain some great and distinguished man, it is not such pure mercy, what thou doest: but some portion many times is assigned to thyself also, but by vain-glory, and by the return of the favour, and by the rising in many men's estimation on account of their guest.<sup>20</sup>

In the second sentence, we have a clear example of a sense of profit for ourselves in the exercise of hospitality. The people we invite have something to benefit us, be it some wealth they can bring, or the simple fact of their willingness to appear with us. Chrysostom is clearly against that.

The hospitality which Chrysostom portrays and espouses in the first sentence clearly shows no profit for the giver. The hospitality is entirely gratuitous. It is reflected in the address given by Pope Francis at the homeless shelter "Dono di Maria" on Tuesday 21 May 2013. Here, the poor are welcomed into "a dwelling, a pleasant human environment where one stays readily, finds oneself, feels inserted into a territory, in a community."<sup>21</sup> The poor have nothing whereby we may benefit, are "other" to those doing the welcoming, yet find themselves inserted into a community. It is important to note, however, that they are not expected to remain there. Rather, they will move on when they have found their own roots, their own belonging.

This is reflected in an Abrahamic understanding of hospitality, as seen in Gen. 18:1–15. Victor H. Matthews has drawn out the code of conduct involved.<sup>22</sup>

Abraham saw three men approaching, rushed out to meet them, and invited them to stop to eat, drink, and rest. They were strangers, not of his tribe, his kin. He did not know whether they would prove to be friend or foe, take their rest with him, or destroy him and his household. His welcome was an act of great risk, beyond his own area of control, beyond certainty.

While this event is often seen as a model of Eucharistic hospitality, it's important to note the actual chain of events.

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<sup>20</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 20 on 1 Corinthians*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, trans. Talbot Chambers, ed., Philip Schiff, First Series, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), XII, 117, cited in Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 139.

<sup>21</sup> "Visit at the Homeless Shelter 'Dono Di Maria,'" 1, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130521\\_dono-di-maria.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130521_dono-di-maria.pdf), accessed October 5, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (1991):13–15, cited in "Theology of Work Project," <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-12-50-and-work/abraham-genesis-121-2511/abraham-and-sarahs-hospitality-genesis-181-15>, accessed October 2, 2017.

Having seen the men approaching, and invited them to stop, Abraham waits until they agree before moving to the next step of hospitality, that of preparing the very best he has to offer, giving the food and drink to his guests. He stands by, providing protection and ready to attend to their needs (Gen. 18:8). Note, however, that he does not actually eat with them! He also expects them to continue on their way (Gen. 18:5). A contemporary situation would be to invite people who are “other” to come into our churches, give them the very best we have (the Eucharist) – and then, instead of joining them in the meal, stand by as servants and protectors as they take and eat, take and drink, while fully expecting them to move on, remain “other” as they depart.

Another popular example of hospitality is that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Here a Samaritan, a person clearly not of the Jewish faith, comes across a Jewish man lying by the side of the road. Where the religious people have walked by, this Samaritan cares for the man, at some cost to himself. Here we have hospitality toward one who is completely unknown. What makes this situation particularly poignant and powerful, however, is that the one who is seen as “other” is the one extending hospitality to “one of us.”

In both cases, it is the one who is “other” who does good for “us,” in the Abrahamic case bringing good news of an impending birth (Gen. 18:10).

We need to look more closely at how these examples of hospitality may or may not fit with Eucharistic hospitality before we can determine if the term may be appropriate for interchurch families.

We can already see that in our churches, while we strive to be friendly and welcoming to visitors or guests, we do not train people to market and deliver hospitality, to keep customers satisfied, or to draw benefit from it. Nor do we determine who we will invite, how they will relate with each other, then after the event determine whether it all went as successfully as we had hoped. Those commercialized understandings of hospitality, then, are not what we think of as Eucharistic hospitality.

We have mentioned changes in understanding over time. Claudio Carvalhaes speaks of this in his own life. As a child, he understood hospitality to be for family. Then in his work as a pastor, he found that broadened, saying “I was constantly asked to offer hospitality to people with whom I had neither connections nor anything in common.”<sup>23</sup> He points to globalization as a potent force where such hospitality is concerned, as it brings together people from around the world, across multiple borders, into situations where they need to care for the other.

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<sup>23</sup> Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Borders, Globalization and Eucharistic Hospitality,” *Dialog* 49, no. 1 (2010): 45–55, 45.

In our present day, we are dealing with mass migration in the world, resulting from economic hardship, famine and war. Such “[m]assive human migration around the globe has a deep impact on the ways we understand hospitality, and on the ways we relate and connect to the Christian faith and celebrate the table of Jesus Christ in our bordered liturgies,”<sup>24</sup> liturgies which Carvalho suggests involve ecclesiastical, theological, liturgical, social/economic, and political considerations.<sup>25</sup>

Such migration also means that we find ourselves in a situation where Christians of one tradition are far more likely to meet, fall in love with, Christians of another tradition. As a result, we find ourselves being part of a Christian community where borders increasingly become questioned, challenged, and perhaps modified to meet the real needs of concrete human beings in the present moment.

Let us take some time, then, to look at instances of hospitality, to see if we might develop any understandings from them.

In 1999, the Diocese of Broken Bay, Australia, produced a document entitled *One Body Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality*.<sup>26</sup> It says:

In the post-New Testament period, communion was exhibited through visible signs such as eucharistic hospitality, letters of communion, communion between the bishops themselves, and as early as the third century, communion with Rome.<sup>27</sup>

In this case, “Eucharistic hospitality” is not specifically defined, though the context is that of being open to Christians from other places who could in some way demonstrate their *bona fides* of full ecclesial communion. The New Testament approach echoes the text of 1 Nehemiah 2:7-8, where the king gives the traveller letters for those in authority, within the king’s ambit of influence, whom the traveller will meet, vouching for the traveller’s *bona fides*, his being “one of us” though from afar.

It is questionable whether this should be considered Eucharistic hospitality, as the visiting person has demonstrated full communion.

When we begin to compare contemporary discussion with the wording of church documents, the situation becomes even more confusing. For

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> David Louis Walker, *One Body Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality* (Wahroonga, NSW: Diocese of Broken Bay, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> See: Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, trans. Jared Wicks (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1972), 23–26, cited in: Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church: An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 160.

example, Patrick Devine, writing on *Eucharistic Hospitality and Interchurch Families*, refers constantly to “hospitality.” The several church documents he quotes or refers to, however, never use that term, using instead (as per Reardon’s comment above) the word “sharing.”<sup>28</sup>

Against these documents, we have the explanation given by Cardinal Koch, of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Cardinal Kurt Koch explained that sharing Communion is a sign of full unity among Christians... He said that on some special occasions, such as a marriage ceremony uniting a Catholic and a Lutheran, the non-Catholic party might receive the Eucharist. But this, he said, would be a case of “Eucharistic hospitality” rather than “Eucharistic communion.” Eucharistic hospitality, he said, is offered in individual cases, and it would be “very difficult to give a universal declaration because the pastoral situations are very different.”<sup>29</sup>

I agree with Cardinal Koch that sharing Communion is a sign of full unity among Christians. That said, I must express a qualified agreement with his application of the term “Eucharistic hospitality.”

Eucharistic hospitality, as we have seen, is expressed toward one who is “other.” It may well be, therefore, that a Lutheran (for example) being united in marriage with a Catholic is in a significant way still “other.” The criteria of canon 844 § 4 are relevant here. Is the person in danger of death, or does the person have a grave/pressing/weighty need to receive? Is a minister of that person’s church available? Does the person approach/request the Eucharist of his/her own accord? Does the person have a Catholic faith in the Eucharist? Is the person suitably disposed to receive? All these are legitimate questions of ecclesiality, for which a universal declaration would be very difficult, as pastoral situations can be very different. This requires significant discernment, as the Episcopal statement ‘One Bread, One Body’ (hereinafter referred to as *OBOB*) says, “Each individual case in which admission is sought must be examined on its own merits.”<sup>30</sup> Sadly, this necessary process is seldom afforded the person of another Christian tradition seeking to receive the Eucharist in a Catholic church.

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<sup>28</sup> See: Patrick Devine, “Eucharistic Hospitality and Interchurch Families,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (June 1980): 133–45.

<sup>29</sup> “Cardinal Koch explains ‘Eucharistic Hospitality’ in Catholic-Lutheran marriages,” <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=29807>, accessed September 25, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “One Bread One Body”, Article 107, <https://cbcew.org.uk/plain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/one-bread-one-body-1998.pdf>, accessed January 17, 2022.

Thomas Rausch, as recently as 2013, asks whether, where “the Catholic Church can recognize participation in the life of the Trinity in these churches and ecclesial communities, could not those who want to live in communion with the Catholic Church occasionally be offered hospitality at its Eucharist?”<sup>31</sup> Of course, this is not a suggestion for ongoing reception, yet again the same understanding is present, of hospitality for those who, while recognized as being in a sense “of us”, are still “other.”

The Eucharist is far more than ordinary meal preparation, eating and drinking. Citing Augustine, Marianne Moyaert says

It is spiritual food that stills the hunger of the interior (though not completely) ... [and] nourishes our longing for Christ to return.<sup>32</sup>

Moyaert indicates that Eucharistic hospitality, a ritual act that is supposed to express communion and fellowship, is marked by Christian faith, i.e. there can be no sharing if that faith is not present.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, “Eucharistic hospitality” is a valid term. When used in situations where people are occasional visitors, without accepted *bona fides* of communal faith, discernment as to ecclesiality is called for; granting Eucharistic hospitality may or may not be appropriate.

Such discernment cannot be done separately from the couple themselves. It must be done in an active conversation involving them and the Church. In such a conversation,

it may become clear that it is better not to attend communion, because the Eucharistic belief is not fully shared, and another form of participation in Holy Mass would be more appropriate. It is then important to continue walking along this path with Christ so that unity in faith grows.<sup>34</sup>

But is Eucharistic hospitality the appropriate term when the person presenting is the *one* made so by God in marriage, with both parts of that *one* meeting the conditions of ecclesiality mentioned in canon 844 § 4 – a discernment which could be done once and thereafter accepted barring an evident change along the way? I would argue that it is not.

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<sup>31</sup> Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic,” 410.

<sup>32</sup> Marianne Moyaert, “Religious Pluralism and Eucharistic Hospitality,” *Liturgy* 31, no. 3 (2016): 46–56, 52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> “Walking With Christ – Tracing Unity, an Aid to Orientation by the Bishops of Germany, 2018”, 22, [https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/dossiers\\_2018/Walking-with-Christ\\_Tracing\\_Unity\\_Arbeits%C3%BCbersetzung-der-Orientierungshilfe\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/Walking-with-Christ_Tracing_Unity_Arbeits%C3%BCbersetzung-der-Orientierungshilfe_ENG.pdf), accessed January 17, 2022.



In the case of marriage across denominational lines, the reality of the unity created in baptism and marriage, accompanied by an active discernment of ecclesiality, should be sufficient to determine where it is appropriate to go beyond hospitality (where we welcome the “other”), to a practice in which we recognize the one who was at one time “other” as now being “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” both conjugally and ecclesially.

In the case of interchurch couples, such a change requires another ecclesiological model, another term.

### **Eucharistic Sharing**

Eucharistic Sharing is best understood as that which takes place between brothers and sisters in Christ, gathered together as family at the Eucharistic table. Admittedly this understanding faces challenges.

Among these challenges is the question of where hospitality ends and sharing begins. This is accompanied by the question of intent: do we happen to be receiving at the same table in the same place at the same time? Or are we intent on nurturing and enhancing our unity, however estranged we may be?

When friends or neighbours come to our home for a meal, we extend hospitality to them. There is no expectation beyond having a good time together, after which they will depart to their own home.

On the other hand, when we, along with my siblings and their spouses, gather for our quarterly “pot-luck sibling dinner,” something qualitatively different happens. We do more than simply extend hospitality to each other, giving to the other a portion of what we have. Instead, we come together to share whatever each has brought, gathered as we are for the express purpose of nurturing and strengthening familial bonds.

When families gather in their own home, the members of that family don’t extend hospitality to each other. Rather, they recognize each other as family and share what they have so that the family may be nurtured and strengthened.

We are dealing with a qualitative difference, not a quantitative one. Its value and importance are experienced as something even greater than hospitality. Sharing enables us to be who we are, brothers and sisters in the same family.

This desire for “oneness with” may also be in evidence in situations where brothers and sisters who may belong to ecclesially-estranged communities gather together in events such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals. It is not the event that determines the level of familial bonding, and hence of sharing instead of hospitality; rather, the event becomes the situation in which the real or desired level of familial bonding is expressed, the sharing of Eucharist being a key moment of such expression.

Eucharistic Sharing is qualitatively distinct from eucharistic hospitality. And its importance is most readily seen in the life of interchurch families.

When people of other traditions happen to gather to worship with us in the same service, it may be appropriate to extend eucharistic hospitality. We make them welcome, feed them, then expect them to go on their way, back to their churches. We may see them again, we may not, but seeing them again is not the point of the exercise.

On the other hand, when we gather as interchurch couples, with spouses from different Christian traditions, we move from guests to family, from “other” to “one of us.” We have every hope and expectation that we will continue to see each other, continue to worship together – and to be nurtured by our churches in that unity even as our lived unity enables and encourages our churches to grow in unity. In this, we live a communion ecclesiology, a belief in “oneness with,”<sup>35</sup> where unity, though it may be imperfect, is nonetheless real, and which together we are called to real-ize.

This shows up most clearly in the domestic church that is the interchurch family. Having become with each other, in marriage, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” the spouses seek to nurture and enhance their god-given unity, real-ize it in and through the Eucharist.

It is the *one* made so by God who longs to take and eat, take and drink, in communion with the whole church, and to do so on an ongoing basis, in order that the unity and stability of their marriage may be strengthened, made more visible, serve as a sacrament of unity for the healing of the family, their churches, and the world.

In their physical homes, they share in common, living under the same roof, experiencing together the joys and difficulties of their life together. In their ecclesial homes, they seek to share the “pearl of great price” (Cf Matt. 13:45-46), the gift of faith which has made them the persons they are, drawn them together to be the *one* made so by God, to be recognized and treated, not as “other,” but as flesh and blood, members of the same family, sharing in the gifts the family brings to each other and to God, and in turn receives from God.

Such Eucharistic sharing is not to be done lightly, as though it is of no consequence.

According to *Unitatis Redintegratio*, one of the documents of Vatican II, Worship in common [*communicatio in sacris*] is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately [*indiscretum*] for the

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<sup>35</sup> See: *communion*, used by Augustine, in belief that the word was derived from *com-*, “with, together” + *unis*, “oneness, union”. <http://www.etymonline.com/word/communion>, accessed October 24, 2017.

restoration of Christian unity. There are two principles governing the practice of such common worship: first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace.<sup>36</sup>

At first glance, it would appear from the English translation that worship in common is not something to be practiced without discretion, willy-nilly. This understanding appears to be further strengthened by Benedict XVI when, quoting John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*, he says “the respect we owe to the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood prevents us from making it a mere «means» to be used indiscriminately in order to attain that unity.”<sup>37</sup>

George Tavard, who helped draft this section of *UR*, is helpful in this regard. He says

*Indiscretum* does not mean that *communicatio in sacris* may be practiced, not indiscriminately but discriminately or with discretion; it means that the two aspects of communion (means of grace, and expression of unity) cannot be separated.<sup>38</sup>

It is true that eucharistic sharing has on several occasions been reaffirmed as generally impossible.<sup>39</sup> As well, Cardinal Koch has stated that baptism is an insufficient ground for eucharistic communion.<sup>40</sup> We must bear in mind that “generally” is not „invariably,” nor is being an insufficient ground the same as not being a ground at all. Rather, it can be an indicator that *additional* grounds are required, over and above baptism, with baptism being a *sine qua non*. What might such grounds be?

One example can be seen in the *Rites of Baptism for Children*, no. 3, which states

To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized. The foundation of this formation will be the sacrament... Christian formation... seeks to lead them gradually to learn God’s plan in Christ, so that they

<sup>36</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (1964), no. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, (2007), no. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic Hospitality,” 401, citing George Tavard, “Praying Together: *Communication in Sacris* in the Decree on Ecumenism” in *Vatican II By Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (London: Chapman, 1986), 212–14, at 214.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), no. 45; Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007) no. 56.

<sup>40</sup> Kurt Koch, “Recent Ecumenical Progress and Future Prospects,” *Origins* 41 (2011): 395–402 at 400; also “The Relation between Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion: An Ecumenical View”, [http://blog.radiovatican.de/die-einheit-der-kirche-und-die-gemeinsame-kummion](http://blog.radiovatican.de/die-einheit-der-kirche-und-die-gemeinsame-kommion), both cited in Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic Hospitality,” 402.

may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized.<sup>41</sup>

In this, we can see that Koch is correct: both baptism and community of faith are needed. Baptism, essential as it is for eucharistic communion, is not by itself an act automatically leading to that communion. What is needed as well is participation in a community of faith, being nurtured to fullness of faith.

Vatican II “recognized that all the baptized have been incorporated into the body of Christ and thus share in the communion that is the life of the Trinity, even if from an institutional perspective that communion is only partial or incomplete.”<sup>42</sup> This institutional reality is reflected in legislation, which develops at a different pace than does the theology, and as a reflection/expression of it. As Myriam Wijlens argues, “legislation ... has not yet taken account of the council’s dialectic between the Eucharist as a sign of unity and as a means of grace...”<sup>43</sup>

James Cassidy succinctly outlines this theological development, from the caution of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, with its acknowledgement that while “Witness to the unity of the church generally forbids common worship”, “the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice,”<sup>44</sup> through to “*Walking With Christ – Tracing Unity*” in 2018 by the Bishops of Germany, which “moved the discernment from the bishop, or the Bishops’ Conference to the recipient, helped by his or her pastor, again subject to the Code.”<sup>45</sup> He likewise points to the movement from *OBOB* to *Walking*: “In the earlier one the bishop, or his delegate is in charge, in the later it is the couple, their discernment has priority, reached in conversation with the priest or pastor.”<sup>46</sup>

Where the Eucharist as a means of grace toward unity has usually focused on individuals belonging to other ecclesial communities, sharing the Eucharist can be, also for Catholics, a means of grace toward visible unity, drawing us more readily into recognizing and affirming Christians of other traditions

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<sup>41</sup> *Rites of Baptism for Children*, no. 3, from the edition found in *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*, The International Commission on English in the Liturgy, trans., vol. 1, study edition, Pueblo (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), cited in James F. Puglisi, “Rite[s] of Baptism in the Catholic Church: A Theological-Pastoral Commentary,” in *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas F. Best, (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 29–44, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic Hospitality,” 409.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist*, 364–65.

<sup>44</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8

<sup>45</sup> James Cassidy, “The German Bishops and the Development of Understanding of Intercommunion,” *One in Christ* 53, no.1 (2019): 31–45, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Cassidy, “The German Bishops,” 43.

as true brothers and sisters, though our traditions are mutually estranged. Recognition, reconciliation and a corresponding growth in unity with these brothers and sisters is as needed for Catholics as for other Christians.

Susan Wood reminds us of “the historical emphasis on the local church within communion ecclesiology”<sup>47</sup> when she says

[T]he Eucharist represents not only the presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine but also the unity of the baptized in the body of Christ and the communion of churches.

She goes on to say

Inadmission to the Eucharist is a statement about the relationship of ecclesial communities as well as about the presence or absence of grace or incorporation into the dead and risen Body of Christ.

I agree but must also ask what that statement is saying, who is making the statement of inadmission, and on what grounds that statement is being made.

Woods’ response appears to be that “Having lost the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist, we tend to forget that we are baptized into specific faith communities...”

I would argue that the reverse is equally true, i.e. that having lost the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist, we tend to forget that, while we are baptized into specific faith communities, we are baptized into an Ecclesia that can be fully Catholic only by recognizing within itself all the other ecclesia, in imperfect but nonetheless real communion.

I would further argue that we are called to share the Eucharistic banquet with brothers and sisters who, being suitably disposed, having a Catholic faith in the Eucharist, and of their own free will expressing, through entering our home to eat and drink with us (and consequently not having access to a minister of their own tradition), have a deep need for mutual reconciliation.<sup>48</sup> This is most clearly so when spouses in an interchurch marriage, coming as *one* to the Eucharist, seek to take and eat, take and drink, together.

Here we have at work a communion ecclesiology, in which we recognize ourselves as being *one* within the body of the *One* who is the Christ, the revelation of the Father.

This is the place for Eucharistic Sharing, where interchurch families, in the form of the two who come forward to receive, are in fact the *one* made so by God, who must be able to take and eat, take and drink, to be nourished for their and the Church’s journey to fully real-ized unity.

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<sup>47</sup> This and the following quotes are taken from Susan K. Wood, “We’ve lost the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist,” *Compass: A Jesuit Journal* 15, no. 1 (March-April 1997): 30.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 844 §4.

## Terminological Summary

The term “Intercommunion,” despite its various uses, is appropriate for relations between Churches, not between Christians of varying traditions, and especially not between spouses in an interchurch marriage.

The term “Eucharistic Hospitality”, while used in an even greater variety of ways, leans predominantly to the sense of hospitality being toward those who are “other,” even if that “other” is of another Christian tradition but without significant ties to the Catholic Church. It is less likely to apply to those who are “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” where one of the spouses is Catholic and the other is thereby inextricably linked to the Catholic Church.

“Eucharistic Sharing” is the one term especially appropriate for interchurch families, where the spouses share a common baptism and have been made *one* in marriage, provided they meet the criteria of ecclesiality given in canon 844 §4.

## The Crux of the Matter

I return to the statement posed in the introduction, namely that the problem lies not in the terms, but in ourselves.

While “Eucharistic sharing” is usually the most appropriate term where interchurch families are concerned, it is irrelevant unless the challenging and rewarding work of discerning its appropriateness is done. This is what the German Bishops’ 2018 document on interchurch marriages and sharing in the Eucharist calls for in quoting Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia* (AL 300):

Neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases.<sup>49</sup>

As Ruth Reardon points out, *Walking* puts stress on the needs of the couple and family, on faith, and on conscience. The bishops’ response to those stresses is an invitation, to

all interdenominational married couples to seek a conversation with their pastor/priest, or another individual appointed to provide pastoral

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<sup>49</sup> “Walking With Christ”, 22, [https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/dossiers\\_2018/Walking-with-Christ\\_Tracing\\_Unity\\_Arbeits%C3%BCbersetzung-der-Orientierungshilfe\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/Walking-with-Christ_Tracing_Unity_Arbeits%C3%BCbersetzung-der-Orientierungshilfe_ENG.pdf), accessed January 17, 2022.

care, to come to a decision which follows their own consciences as well as preserves the unity of the church. (54)<sup>50</sup>

That conversation is expected to bear fruit which has its own consequences. Reardon continues:

There is a really striking insistence that when a conscientious decision to receive communion has been agreed upon in the course of the kind of “spiritual conversation” proposed, the interdenominational spouse should be openly accepted by the community, led by the bishop.<sup>51</sup>

Such discernment requires receptive listening and receptive learning on the part of all, in effect an exchange of gifts,<sup>52</sup> whereby couples and their churches, working *together*, arrive at a determination of which term is most appropriate in their concrete, particular, personal case.

This is, in fact, a work of evangelizing, of being evangelized in order to evangelize. As Christopher Cimorelli says,

In other words, the shepherds of the church – its pastors and teachers – must know their flocks and their concrete circumstances in order to fulfil their task of authentically proclaiming the Word of God, so that the entire people of God may likewise preach the good news through word and deed.<sup>53</sup>

The term ‘Eucharistic Sharing’ can be a valuable reminder of what we are about, yet it is the listening and learning we do in the process of discernment that will form the true bridge to the unity for which Christ prayed and the resulting unity of proclamation of the good news.

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<sup>50</sup> Reardon, “German Bishops’ Guidelines on Eucharistic Sharing in Interchurch Families 2018: What’s New?,” *One in Christ* 52, no. 2 (2018): 339–58, 354.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 357.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, (1995), no 28.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Cimorelli, “«Herald and Servants» An Open View of the Magisterium for the Promotion of Christian Unity” in *One Bread, One Body, One Church: Essays on the Ecclesia of Christ Today in Honor of Bernard P Prusak*, eds. Cimorelli and David Minch (Leuven: Peeters 2021), 117–40, 133.