

This last session consists of only one topic. It is suggested that if possible the group share a meal after the opening prayer. At the end of the session the group is invited to reflect and plan practical steps for the two communities to work together in the local area.

This last topic explores some of the areas of our separation and ways we are already working together. It acknowledges that there are continuing and not easily reconcilable differences, while we continue to pursue the goal of complete union of faith and sacramental life.

Story

Our last story is from Susan, a Roman Catholic, and David, an Anglican. Susan writes about the joys and challenges that have come along in their twenty years of marriage.

While we have many interchurch stories that we could tell, one area of significance for us has been that of the baptism of our children. During our courtship, we were having significant hassles over the issue about the church into which our children would be baptised. David's spiritual director arranged a joint meeting with the local Catholic priest (not the one who was to marry us) to help tease out some of the issues. At this meeting, Fr Jim made a simple statement that helped us move forward, which was something like: 'Now you are two independent persons, when you are married you become one flesh. There are some questions that cannot be answered until you start living as one flesh.'

We followed this advice. Some two or three years later, when we were expecting our first child, we still had not been able to resolve this issue. I could not accept the

possibility of our children being baptised outside the Catholic Church. David's parish priest suggested that sometimes compromise is important, and so we came to the decision that I would decide where the children would be baptised, and David would decide where they went to school.

Having always experienced baptisms in the context of the Eucharist in the Anglican Church, David wanted to be able to do this in the Catholic Church, too. Our first two children were baptised on Sunday morning at early Mass, as that was the service we most often went to. For Timothy's baptism, we wanted the Anglican priest involved as well. This meant having the baptism at Saturday vigil Mass to avoid clashing with his Sunday services. Rather than just say a prayer or two, he was invited to preach. Fr Bill started his sermon by saying that we had just been present at the 'birth' of a new Christian and drew parallels with him being present at his own children's birth. I'm not quite sure what the Catholic congregation made of this.

Two years later, the Catholic parish priest had moved on, and we were expecting our fourth child. We had not had much of a chance to discuss our interchurch journey with the new parish priest, so we invited him over for dinner. We spent a long time explaining the importance of baptism to us, and the significance of our interchurch journey and our education of the children in faith. He left, saying that he would reflect on this further.

Just four days later, our daughter, Elizabeth died during birth, and we were thrown into preparing for a funeral. To avoid complications, we asked our Catholic priest to say the Requiem Mass, and our Anglican priest to do the committal at the crematorium. Both priests attended both services, and we had tremendous support from TWO parishes (one of the benefits of being an interchurch family).

Growth towards full communion

Prior to the birth of our fifth child, eighteen months later, we had moved house, and were in a new Catholic parish. We needed to 'educate' yet another Catholic priest in the needs of interchurch families. During discussions with Fr Michael, when the question of raising our children in both churches came up, he said, 'But David would have promised that the children should be brought up Catholic.' We were quick to point out to him that the requirement for the non-catholic to make such a promise had been phased out more than 13 years previously. Possibly the threat that Rosemary might be baptised in the Anglican church resulted in Fr Michael becoming much more helpful. He even published a booklet for the baptism, which once again took place during Saturday vigil Mass with Fr Bill participating. Despite this shaky start, we have continued to have a good relationship with Fr Michael over the 12 years that have passed since then.

So, we have had mixed reactions and experiences over more than 20 years' journey as an interchurch family. All of our children are actively involved in Christian activities and social action, although in recent years, these have often more frequently centred beyond either the Anglican or Catholic churches. It seems that for our children, the interchurch journey has launched them into areas of Christian ministry with less regard of denominational boundaries than for us.

Susan and David are local contacts for the Association of Interchurch Families. See the Association's web site for other local contacts:
<http://www.aifw.org/>

Reflection and Discussion

- In countries where Anglicans and Roman Catholics live side by side, marriage between members of our two communities is no longer unusual. What has been your experience of the results of these marriages?
- What growth has taken place recently in our attitudes towards interchurch marriage? What could we do to support these marriages and encourage couples to affirm their own and the other's faith?
- In past generations cultural differences have served as barriers between our two communities. Reflect on the breaking down of these barriers.

