

Interchurch Families

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Going beyond

We can perhaps apply what Pope John Paul II said in April 2001 about globalisation to the situation of interchurch families in the church. 'The person must prevail over structures', he declared, and added: 'Moreover, it is not enough to criticise; it is necessary to go beyond; it is necessary to be builders.'

Here are themes dear to interchurch families. Caught within structural church divisions, these families witness to the priority of persons over structures. But criticism of the structures is not enough. Interchurch families have tried, over the years, to take upon themselves their 'difficult task of becoming builders of unity' (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 1975). Often enough they have done this by 'going beyond', mindful of the words of the late Francis Thomas, Bishop of Northampton, to a group of interchurch families: 'Going beyond the rules is not the same thing as going against them'.

In this issue of *Interchurch Families* there are examples of 'going beyond' accepted patterns that our divided church communities have inherited from the sixteenth century. Last year, on his first visit to the World Council of Churches as Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Bishop Walter Kasper (now Cardinal and President of the Council) said it is 'important to consider how far the significance of baptism as the sacramental basis of Christian unity can be expressed more clearly in liturgy'. He stressed: 'The question is how far we can celebrate our common Christian faith together' (*PCPCU Information Service*, 103 p.74). This question has preoccupied interchurch families for many years, in their celebrations of marriage, the sacraments of Christian initiation, and the ongoing celebration of the eucharist, and they have tried hard to 'go beyond' what most people have told them is possible.



In talking of social change in April 2001 Pope John Paul II went on to say: 'It is part of Christian realism to understand that great social changes are the result of small and courageous daily options.' Some of the actions recorded here are small, but they are courageous, and they have made their own irreplaceable contribution to the building of unity between our divided church communities.

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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



You and your children

In 1999 Fr Robert Murray SJ preached at the eucharist at the AIF Heythrop meeting (Interchurch Families 1999, 7,2, p.2.) He gave the following homily this year, on 24th February 2001; his introduction on admission to communion was similar to that printed two years ago.

**Readings: Ecclesiasticus 17: 1-15;
Mark 10: 13-16**

A sermon appropriate to interchurch families can concentrate on various aspects of the Christian reality that you represent and constitute within the whole, world-wide, Christian family. There is the tension within which you live, between the claims of the churches to which spouses respectively feel bound in loyalty. There is the other, more joyful, side of that division: the mutual enrichment that can come from discovering the spirituality of another Christian tradition. There is the serious question facing all who live in obedience to their own church's laws and feel bound to respect those of their spouse's church: namely, is there not a higher obedience which we must learn, and make the grounds for our decisions in conscience?

But isn't it curious that so many theological questions can be formulated without addressing the fact that interchurch couples become interchurch families? Today the lectionary decides the theme for me: *Children!* Jesus' love for children and his repeated call to his disciples to learn from them; his teasing conundrum about entry into the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) being conditional on receiving it 'like a little child'; the question of what aspects of a child's behaviour must be our model – simplicity? greediness? wonder? tantrums? living in the present?

Let us enter together into this scene. Jesus is sitting in the shade of a tree in the middle of a village, talking to the twelve men he is trying to train. Perhaps the women disciples are fetching water, or buying fruit; perhaps they are listening.

People have heard of this wonderful teacher and healer. It gets around the village. First one woman, then another, thinks how lovely it would be for their children to be touched and blessed by Jesus. None of the gospels mention sick children this time; the mothers just want Jesus to touch their little ones. But they have to get past these officious men who are surrounding Jesus like a bodyguard. What makes the disciples try to keep them off? 'Jesus is busy?' 'This is our hour with our Master?' 'I'm in the middle of asking a very clever question?' 'Jesus is tired. It's our job to protect him from these demanding women'?

Whatever the disciples' motive, Jesus is really angry with them. Mark is the only one who tells us this detail; he uses a strong word. Jesus' anger shows that he blames the disciples for not understanding that he will want the children to come to him. Why, it's not long since he gave the disciples a stern talking-to

for squabbling about who was to be number one, and sat a child on his knee to show who he thinks is most important!

This time he doesn't need to call a child; their mothers have brought them. Jesus is glad; he really wants to touch and bless the children, and once again make them an example to his disciples, who still think the Kingdom of God is some kind of royal court with different ranks in it. *No! The little children are the top rank: want to be like them, or you won't get in.* So Jesus doesn't merely touch the children with the tip of his finger. He picks them up and cuddles them (again, only Mark has this detail), lays his hands on their heads like a father and blesses them.

Let us join those mothers and children. Let us be bold to push past those officious disciples. Jesus wants you to bring your children to him, wants to bless them. He wants to do this for every mother and father among you; he knows you all love him and have made him the centre of your marriages. He has given you children to be the very cement in the house you have built together. How can he want the sacramental sign and means of union in your marriages to be the sign of division? I believe that you, members of the Association of Interchurch Families, together with your children, are also a sign, as Isaiah said. 'Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion' (Is. 8:18). You are a special sign of the Kingdom growing on earth, with a life that will have power to overcome disunity.

And yet you are members of separated limbs of Christ's Body, suffering because of the difficulties your situation brings. But through it all, remember Jesus' love for each and all of you, not a reward to be earned but an ever-present reality. There are always decisions to be made, decisions of conscience. Those decisions are to be taken in the presence of Jesus. Our conscience is the central moral organ of the nature God gave us, to guide us in his image. And here, once again, the lectionary reading for today hits the mark. In that passage Jesus ben Sira is really talking about conscience, though his Hebrew tongue didn't yet have a word for it: only 'heart'. I hope you will be able to read this passage again and think about it.

*It is God our creator who shaped our senses
and gave (us) a heart to think with.
He filled (us) with knowledge and understanding,
and revealed to (us) good and evil.
He put his own light in (our) hearts
to show (us) the magnificence of his works . . .
He set knowledge before (us),
he endowed (us) with the law of life.*

It is with this divine endowment that we stand before our Lord. May he bless you all.

Robert Murray, SJ



There is no blueprint for interchurch children

It is more difficult for the churches to share in celebrating the confirmation of interchurch children than to share in celebrating baptism. As early as the AIF conference at Spode House in 1972 the idea of a joint celebration of confirmation was raised, in those post-Vatican II days when everything seemed possible. A letter was sent to the British Council of Churches/Roman Catholic Joint Working Group asking for a study on confirmation. The subject of confirmation in interchurch families has been discussed by parents ever since. For well over a decade interchurch children themselves have talked about it.

Two years ago we recorded Karen MacRandal's dual affirmation (Interchurch Families 1999, 7,1 p.14), and then Linda Buchanan's dual confirmation (2000, 8,1, p.5). Sarah Mayles wrote about her desire for a joint confirmation in this journal (2000, 8,2, pp.8-9). Later Sarah wrote in the Interdependent, edited by and for interchurch children (no.21, October 2000): 'I don't think that joint confirmation is a realistic prospect for the near future, but I don't want to wait so long that being confirmed is no longer significant to me. The important thing is that my confirmation feels "joint" to me.'

A shared celebration of confirmation

Early in 2001 an Anglican bishop took part in a celebration of confirmation administered to two interchurch children in a Catholic church during the normal Saturday evening vigil mass. It was a remarkable coincidence of the right people being in the right place at the right time.

The two young adults had delayed their confirmation because they could not see how to recognise in the service the part that both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church had played in their Christian upbringing. Several years earlier they had followed preparation classes for confirmation in both church communities. They had talked with other young people brought up in interchurch families of the possibilities of a joint celebration of confirmation, but the idea had always seemed to present too many problems for the churches. They did not give up; they waited and kept on talking.

The confirmation of the two sisters, Sarah and Helena Mayles, was celebrated with great joy on 17 February 2001. It took place in their Catholic parish church, where the parish priest (until recently a vicar-general of the diocese) had been delegated by the bishop to administer the sacrament. It so happened that their Anglican vicar is a bishop, retired from an episcopal ministry in South America. He read the Gospel and preached a sermon at the celebration. He laid his hand as a sponsor on the shoulder of each candidate as they were confirmed, together with the Catholic sponsor that each had chosen.

Many representatives from their Anglican parish were present in the Catholic church. At the end of the celebration it was the Catholic priest who presented the newly-confirmed girls with copies of *Common Worship* and the Anglican bishop who presented them both with a Roman missal.

A joint celebration of affirmation

A month later, in different local circumstances but with a similar desire for her two churches, Catholic and Anglican, to be involved in the ceremony, Laura Finch arranged a joint Service of Affirmation on 18th March 2001. She had attended the AIF Confirmation Weekend held in May 2000 (*Interchurch Families* 2001, 9,1 p.8). 'Without the weekend, she wrote, I do not think I would have had the information and preparation to create a service. At present I cannot be confirmed by a bishop in a traditional confirmation service involving both churches, but I have devised an Affirmation Service, which will be for me an important step forward in the Christian faith.'

'I wanted to show my two church communities that I was committed to church and God. I also felt it would deepen my relationship with God. I talked it over a lot with my parents and AIF mentor; they were very supportive and helpful. The next stage was to talk to my two priests. Both were very supportive although they had different ideas about what I should do.'

The service took place in Laura's Anglican parish church, with both priests equally involved, and an address given by the AIF Youth Officer. Representatives of the two congregations, family and friends joined with Laura as she solemnly re-affirmed her baptismal faith in their presence. As for Sarah and Helena, it was an occasion of great joy for the interchurch young adults who came to support their friends, and for all involved.

A one-church confirmation

A few months earlier, a confirmation had taken place of an interchurch child in one church that had not been experienced as cutting her off from the other. Her Roman Catholic father wrote: 'Our daughter was confirmed, at her request, in the Anglican church, and despite her learning difficulties appears to have had a simple, but firm, understanding of what she was doing. A few weeks beforehand we had spoken with our Catholic parish priest and were astonished at his pastoral sensitivity. In a nutshell he said that as she had asked for confirmation he would worry if anything were done to put her off, as it could prejudice her future journey in faith. He further said that her confirmation in the Anglican Church did not mean that she was no longer a Catholic. Since, if one was being tied by canon law, the Catholic Church did not recognise this as a valid sacrament, as far as he was concerned she should continue to receive communion whenever she comes to mass. It was a really joyous occasion.'

Celebrating 25 years



On November 1st 1975 John and Margaret were married at St Patrick's Roman Catholic church. John, then a lapsed Anglican, and his family watched as Margaret, her family and friends took communion at the nuptial mass. It was something Margaret wanted and John did not wish to start the marriage on a note of selfishness.

24 years on much had changed. In the 1980's, with two small children, John resumed activity in the Anglican church, becoming a PCC member and assisting at communion. With the help and support of the Association of Interchurch Families, John and Margaret worked hard to bring up their children to respect and understand their different traditions. Mass and Catholic primary school were complemented by Communion, Spring Harvest holidays and secular secondary schools. First communions in the Catholic tradition were accompanied by a warm welcome at communion by the Anglican congregation at John's church.

So what to do for our 25th celebration? Divisions remain but significant progress had been made. John had received communion at mass on a number of special occasions, including the first holy communions of both children. That experience was the key for what followed (see 'First communions in our family: a reflection' in *Interchurch Families* 1996, 4,2, p.2). One lesson we learned was to prepare well in advance; we wrote to the bishop nine months before the first communion. Another was to approach the clergy as pastors, not as interpreters of laws.

So in November 1999, a year before our 25th wedding anniversary, we set about planning our silver wedding celebrations. By then John had changed his allegiance from the Church of England to the local Methodist church. This was not least because its powerful ministry had given our children, Ruth and Matthew, a clear and distinctive Christian message and they both chose to worship there.

First we talked to our Catholic priest; we discussed with him the possibility of a parallel administration of communion at a combined eucharistic service. We thought this unlikely but needed to make the case, as we have always tried to push gently but persuasively at the barriers. The atmosphere was exploratory, with no feeling of threat or challenge. Father Joe offered to give John communion at Saturday mass on the day – something we had not asked for at that point.

Next we talked with Paula, our Methodist minister. Many things are possible in the Methodist church and Paula was keen to understand the situation so that she could discuss it with Father Joe. We still hoped for a combined eucharistic service.

There followed months of gestation. Finally it became clear that the joint communion idea would not work out. We needed to be more flexible. Slowly the idea evolved of John accepting Father Joe's invitation to take communion at Saturday mass in the morning, and then everyone attending a communion service with renewal of marriage vows at the Methodist church in the evening.

The new Methodist service book provided a framework. An order of service was drawn up and Paula discussed it with Father Joe to see whether he felt able to take part. We were delighted when he agreed to read the Gospel and lead the bidding prayers.

The day came. It was a disappointment that our children, Ruth and Matthew, did not come to mass – nothing very unusual there for 20 and 18 year olds – but the reasons are not without a positive side. At this stage in their own spiritual development they both feel unable to come to mass because of their strong evangelical commitment. Ecumenism in the Crossman family stretches many ways and we are strong in our defence of our children's deeply held beliefs. John's father and Margaret's mother read during mass and John, Margaret and their parents all took communion together.

In the evening a warm welcome awaited everyone in the Methodist church. A music group of regular players with Margaret at St Patrick's and John's friends from the Methodist group played in a harmony that belied their lack of practice together. The church was full, with family and friends from the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist traditions and members of the Association of Interchurch Families.

Ruth and Matthew, who had led John into the Methodist way, did the Old and New Testament readings. Father Joe read the gospel. He then led an inspired set of intercessions, including prayers for unity, for the work of AIF, for those contemplating marriage, especially where differences of faith or denomination create tensions and challenges, for those whose marriage is troubled, and for all who help and support married people. Then followed the renewal of vows.

At communion the words of invitation had been very carefully chosen. In the order of service was printed:

- *All those who love and serve the Lord are welcome to receive communion in this church.*
- *We recognise that for some there are reasons why they cannot accept this invitation.*
- *If you would like to feel a part of the celebration do please come and kneel at the rail and accept a blessing.*
- *Feel free equally to remain in your place.*

Our approach gave Father Joe and Paula the opportunity to meet, discuss informally well in advance and then to get down to detail nearer the time. We believe that the trust they built up in each other helped greatly and we are deeply indebted to them for the positive and creative way in which they approached our needs. We had a wonderful day. It wasn't all we wanted but it was a powerful expression of how we try to worship God together and of how churches can find ways forward.

John and Margaret Crossman

Making Love: the first rule of marriage

The British Association of Interchurch Families was very grateful to the Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson, Methodist Director of the Research Centre of the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham, for giving the Third John Coventry Memorial Lecture at Queen's College on 17th March 2001. We give here a shortened text.

I. God's relationship with the world

How important is our understanding of God and God's love if we are to avail ourselves of the riches of God's grace. God's love is neither demanding nor intrusive; it is spontaneous, gracious, utterly affectionate, delightful, and actively transformative in its continuously creative self-giving generosity. God is passionately in love with the world in all its wonderful, silly splendour and in all its awful dimensions. God is wholly committed to making a success of the world on which is lavished everything that God is. We could, in more theological language say, as Rahner does, that the world's nature is graced by God's presence; but the more immediately powerful way to say it is that God is passionately in love with his world.

The power of God

As with any lover who is really in love, God's purpose in loving will be to build the possibility of love, to 'make' love, to awaken the love of the beloved. It would be impossible for God to use power to compel rather than win the love of the beloved. God could compel our love. But God cannot nor will God ever seek to do so.

The object of God's power is not the world, but God's self. God has the power over God's self so that God is able to will to continue to be in relation with the world so as to awaken the love of the beloved. This is so whatever the pressures, demands or frustrations that flow from the misunderstandings, anger, selfishness and anxiety of the beloved. God is incapable of acting in a manner contrary to God's own nature and against the interests of the creation.

God's infinite power over God's self is the basis of God's freedom, and enables God to dare to give freedom to the world to recognise and respond to God's love. It is this self-directed focus of power that is the condition of God's ability to create and makes God the Creator. No power can take away from God the actuality that is God's self, and therefore God will be who God is – that is love – whatever may otherwise pertain. In contrast we are inclined to seek power over the other because we cannot imagine having power over ourselves or are self-deceived and assume we are in control of ourselves.

The knowledge of God

God must know absolutely everything – all the subtleties of the world discoverable by scientific enquiry, the technical potentialities capable of being devised by engineers and technologists, the secrets of every person's mind and heart, all that has happened in the past and will happen in the future. This is irrelevant and misleading when we focus upon the fundamental fact that God is passionately in love with his world. God's omniscience does not refer externally to other objects, but to God's self. It is even true for us – only the person

who has knowledge of his or her self can reasonably be said to have power over the self. God knows God's self utterly and absolutely. No one has knowledge of God that God does not have, therefore there is nothing that can be exploited by any other power or person that could diminish God or threaten to persuade God to act in a way that is foreign to God's nature. God is absolutely and utterly free and able to give everything that is God's self in a wholly non-self-regarding way to focus on what God wants to do. And what God wants to do, as Christians understand it, is to create. God wants to 'make love', to bring love into being.

Those who begin to understand this are led to want to grow in relation with God because there is nothing to fear. There is nothing calculating or subversive about God's love of us, which is why we call it passionate. God gives because God wants to give, not because God wants or needs anything. We, therefore, may be said to fall in love with God. God is love, to know God is to know that one is loved and in a special way. One is loved freely for one's own sake, not because of who one is, or even for what one might become; one is simply loved. And one can love because one is loved.

Redemptive creativity

Such love is personally demanding, especially for God since God lives with the knowledge that things need not be like they are. For it to be effective such loving has to be renewed on a regular, indeed continuous basis. The beloved may appear to know that he or she is loved, but find that experience frequently brings it into question, so that God has to work at reassurance and even new beginnings. We refer to this quality of God's creative love when we talk of it as redemptive. I had this in mind when I said that God is passionately in love with creation. I wanted to underline the significance of this Christian claim by trying to tease out the relationship of God and the world so as to show that there are no possible or actual limits to God's commitment to us. God's omnipotence and omniscience are over God's self and therefore reveal God to be capable of freely giving God's self for the other that is God's creation.

To put it in a different way, we might say that God's creativity is redemptive; God creates redemptively. There are not two stages in the process of God's relationship with the world, first creation and then redemption, but one continuous commitment of God's passionate love of the world, which we should think of as redemptively creative. Moreover God knew that creating, since what God was doing in creating was 'making' love, would be demanding of everything which God had to offer namely God's very self. But since God knew God's self utterly, and God had power over God's self there was no doubt in God's heart that the passion was equal to the potential and actual demand. God was prepared. The gift of God's self is what God promises in his redemptive creating. That is God's

and the world's delight, to be celebrated and enjoyed forever. God because of God's very nature can and does 'make' love.

II. Our understanding of marriage

The way in which we think of God's relationship with God's creating is central to our understanding of marriage, especially marriages that include more than one tradition of the faith.

In a marriage service, the couple themselves are the ministers; the priest or minister is the witness of what the couple declare as they commit themselves each to the other in God's presence and to the world. One is celebrating the fact that one is in love, that one has something to give to the other, and that both have something to offer to God in response to God's love. There would be no love but for the fact that it has been called forth by God. But there is more to a marriage than that. One is mutually and individually, personally and together determined to 'make' love. That above all is what one is trying to do when one declares one's love for the other. It is not a state of affairs that one is reporting, but a determination to transform the present and the future by continuously making, developing and remaking the love you now know. 'Making' love is not a matter of exercising power, or exploiting knowledge; it is to do with learning how to exercise authority over oneself so as to win the affection of the other, and thus to be freed to make love in and for the world.

'Making love' can concern procreation. To be responsible for the well-being of the future through bringing up children to know God, to take delight in God's world and to enjoy working with others for the common good, is indeed worthwhile! But that is not all. There is something to give to the wider world; to make love in and for the world – not just for itself. If a marriage and family is to do this successfully, it will be because it is in love with the world. There is the world of other people in all its diversity and interest. Difference and diversity is not a threat to our well-being but a condition of it because it stimulates a sense of identity, of commitment, and of concern that draws us out of ourselves to be ourselves; it encourages us to make love. This making love brings us to a fuller awareness of our common humanity and the opportunities that flow from a commitment to the common good.

There is the natural world of the physical environment. It is impossible to love other people in some utterly spiritual sense without showing concern for their physical, moral, and personal well-being. It implies a concern for the whole physical environment in which we find ourselves. If we are truly to build a new world by making love with others, we must love the world, the real and physical world of which we are all a part. Loving the world involves knowing ourselves, and having power over ourselves in such a way as to give to the world its appropriate freedom to be itself for our sakes. Making love in and for the world is an inclusive matter, beginning with marriage and family, but embracing all other persons and the world of which we are a part. The vocation is one to which we are called by God and supported by God's grace; it is one to which God has committed God's self. It is one to which our respective Christian traditions are committed. As communities of faith within the one community of faith, they work to give persons, families and societies the freedom to be themselves and by so doing try to liberate the world, in both its human and

environmental dimensions to show the glory of God. They are witnesses to the ministry that the partners have in marriage.

III. Contributing to the coming together of the communities of faith

Called to make love in a marriage across the traditions, we bring to one another our own particular diversity of faithful community with all the opportunities to make love in them, for them, and with them. This is for some the most demanding dimension of the world in which they are called to make love. The Christian tradition in which each stands is of profound personal importance. There is a vast history the impact of which in families has often been destructive of faith and sometimes of love.

It is in this dimension of their world where married persons of diverse traditions of Christian faith are called to make love that suggested to me the title for this John Coventry Memorial lecture: Making Love: the first law of Marriage. A marriage that does not in the broadest possible sense 'make love' in the world is not a marriage. Every marriage must be open to the possibility of making love in the world with other people and with the world of God's creation. As members of different Christian traditions, we have an opportunity, a responsibility, even a duty to make love between our traditions.

This is not easy. There is a history of suspicion and tension between our traditions such that 'conversion' has often been assumed. Such a relationship is more redolent of omnipotence and fear and the pressure to take over and command than of the sense of making love. Yet where better than in a marriage between persons of different traditions of the faith to begin to work at the hard but vital task of making love between the traditions?

First, there is the fact of two persons who are in love, each from a different tradition. It could be that we are bearing witness not so much to the fact that it is possible to cross boundaries, but that in crossing boundaries we are bearing witness to a common humanity and in a powerful sense to a common faith. If this is so, then of course we are each in being ourselves with our tradition, giving and receiving something of each other's tradition that can confirm our common Christian faith.

Secondly, in talking through our personal Christian faith in the public and private context of our marriage we actually extend the possibility that traditions may become aware of their common origin and seek to make progress towards a common goal. By demonstrating the real possibility of conversation between and about the traditions in the context of a marriage, we can begin to incarnate, to realise, to make a reality of the love we have for one another in the love we show to our respective Christian traditions. And that is something that we can invite others to share with us as together we try to make love in the world.

Thirdly, as we become attentive to one another's traditions, and open ourselves to the depths of the loving truth which lies behind them, we are drawn to the importance of getting back to the origins of faith, to the sources of the traditions. We are drawn also to the huge hope that lies within them and in us, if only we could bring things together into a common focus.



Can we be in love with each other, can we want to make love a reality with others in God's world and not together bear witness to the God whose loving presence drew out the possibility of love within us and encourages us in our lives with one another? Does not God, therefore, live in our conversation and in our 'making love' both between and within the traditions? Certainly God does, as far as our experience is concerned. But it is very tough going, or can be. There are the suspicions, the anxieties, the hostilities, the misinterpretations, even the downright deception, as well as the natural perplexities and confusions. So we look for encouragement and support as we share in the work of redemptive creation.

So fourthly, there is the ecclesiastical perspective. The communities of faith in which we stand are powerfully important to us, and naturally it is to them that we look for nourishment and new life. Since the betrothed are the ministers of their own destinies in marriage, the faith communities in which each stand are the witnesses to the couple and the family, of their shared personal united ministry. The faith communities do not just witness independently to the one who happens to be the member of the Church whose priest celebrates the marriage. Each faith community is not only witness to the marriage of the couple, but wants to ensure its success. The communities must actually be trying to secure the success of the marriage, not just believing that with luck and against the odds it will succeed.

God is in love with the world and wants to make love. God knows that this is a matter of gaining the willing co-operation of his world because love cannot be ordered into existence, but only won. Marriage embodies the possibilities which God's loving presence offers. The betrothed are in love and by their loving want to make love, both in the world of human affairs and in the natural world which we properly think of as God's creation. By engaging in this process we align ourselves with the work of the Spirit of God. We share in God's purpose for the world. God's love is redemptive, that is, always willing to begin again, to try to win back what has been lost, and to give without thought of return. God does this because God is who God is; it is simply his nature to behave in that way. We, of course, are not always so inclined. However it is the power of

love in marriage that we are inspired to begin to understand that this is how we too would like to behave. We want to make love, to bear witness, if you like, to God's marriage with the world, and to live out that witness in all we do. In so doing we recognise the profound truth of the claim that the first law of marriage is love.

There are many who would find the Eucharist the happiest of contexts in which to share their commitment to God, their love for one another and their sense of faithful responsibility for making love in the world in Christ's name. It is only natural that we should look to our churches to encourage us in this witness. The Eucharist is the real sign of the redemptive love of God for the world that we believe we embody in Christian marriage.

A great deal can be said theologically, which is helpful. For example, separate celebration is impossible when we are talking about the Eucharist for there is only one celebration in which all share. But that raises the question if one is so inclined that can be even more disturbing – what is a valid celebration? Secondly, there is such a thing as a spiritual communion. Thus one makes one's communion without actually receiving the bread and the wine. There is a tradition here that is worth some time and study. Thirdly, the importance of the Eucharist might be hard to exaggerate, yet exaggerated it is when it is so emphasised as to diminish the importance of prayer, confession, spiritual reading, or other means of grace, including the grace of marriage. The reduction in the number of priests and ministers in the mainline churches may require a new approach to our understanding of the means of grace. Perhaps the fact that the grace of each celebration lasts until the next will be something that we have to begin to remember, even if the next celebration is a month away. This would not diminish the centrality of the Eucharist, but it would quite properly raise the importance of other means of grace.

Fourthly, we should be reminded of the importance and special character of marriage itself. Rather in the manner of Luther who, in doubt about his faith and above all perhaps his faithfulness, was driven back to the regular assertion: baptizatus sum. Perhaps we should affirm more regularly the fact that we know very well, we are married. The grace of Christ given to us in this ceremony, witnessed to at the time by the Church, is a fact of our continuing relationship. The grace of Christ allows us to bear witness to God's love of his world, and to share in the making of love to which God has committed God's self, and to which we are called. Of course we want to share in the celebration of God's presence in the Eucharist; we want to share the one bread and the one cup. We shall continue in conversation, in prayer and in making love between and on behalf of our traditions until and including such times when our unity is shared by the communion of the traditions in which we stand. We were never told it was easy; maybe this too is part of the way in which we share in God's redemptive creativity.

Kenneth Wilson

INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD

AUSTRALIA

Life after drowning is published by the New South Wales Ecumenical Council and the Victorian Council of Churches (80 pp., 2000) about different experiences of baptism. Eight denominations are covered in the first four studies. The final study is on baptism in interchurch families. Two stories are followed by notes, which refer to 'the deep theological conviction that baptism is not baptism into a "denomination" so much as baptism into the one Church of Jesus Christ, experienced in a particular church'. There is mention of the mutual recognition of baptism and Common Baptismal Certificate in use in Australia. The importance for many interchurch families of having clergy from both their churches taking part in the baptism is underlined – not for 'validity' but for its pastoral value. Registration in both churches 'also reinforces the concept of being fully accepted by both'.

BRITAIN

The link with Scotland has gone ahead (see *Interchurch Families*, 2001, 9,1, p.10), so 'Britain' replaces 'England'. In March Martin and Ruth Reardon received the papal award *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* for their work with the Association of Interchurch Families. Bishop Philip Pargeter presented it following the Third John Coventry Memorial Lecture, which he chaired. (They were previously awarded the Cross of St Augustine by the Archbishop of Canterbury for ecumenical and interchurch family work.)

FRANCE

Two double numbers of *Foyers Mixtes* covering 2000 appeared early in 2001. An initiative on eucharistic sharing proposed at the Melun conference in May 2000 (*Interchurch Families* 2001, 9,1 p.9) was taken up by local *foyers mixtes* with the Bishop of Lille. He celebrated a mass in January 2001 in which he gave eucharistic hospitality and a special welcome to interchurch family spouses of the diocese (*Foyers Mixtes*, 129-30, p.10). The French language web-site is at <http://foyersmixtes.free.fr>

GERMANY

A meeting of German interchurch families was held in Heilsbronn near Nuremberg, 26-28 January. Nicola Kontzi joined them from Lyon, and Melanie Finch and Claire Malone-Lee from England. The theme was 'Faith in the everyday life of interchurch couples and families', and the speakers were the Catholic Professor Otto Hermann Pesch, the Lutheran Dr Hövelmann, and the Reformed Professor Alasdair Heron. There is a German web-site at www.oekumene.net/konfessionsverbindend



IRELAND

Early in 2001 the Church of Ireland group Catalyst published *Interchurch Marriage in Ireland*, by Anne and William Odling-Smee (28 pp). It gives an overview of history, theological issues, social

questions, and the lived experience of interchurch families in Ireland, with special attention to the baptism and education of children and to eucharistic sharing. Appendices give the *Directory on Mixed Marriages* of the Irish Episcopal Conference (1983), and information on NIMMA (Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association). Philomena McQuillan has been for some time Administrator/Outreach Worker at the Belfast office of NIMMA. In December all couples who had contacted NIMMA during the year were invited to a Christmas social, and in February 2001 NIMMA organised a reading of love poems by local celebrities as a contribution to Community Relations Week. This brought NIMMA good publicity, and enquiries increased. The annual conference at Draperstown, April 28-29, was conceived as a planning conference, with a professional consultant helping the Association to work on a development plan for the next five years. The NIMMA web-site is at www.nimma.org.uk



ITALY

The *Testo comune* for the pastoral care of Catholic-Waldensian marriages in Italy (*Interchurch Families* 1996, 4,1 pp.9-10 and 1997, 5,2, p.9) has now been followed by a long-awaited *Testo applicativo*, approved by both churches. The two texts were jointly published early in 2001 by the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Waldensian-Methodist Church in an 80-page booklet: *I matrimoni tra cattolici e valdesi o metodisti in Italia*.

SCANDINAVIA

In September 2000 a first conference of Danish and Swedish interchurch families was held in Dianalund, Denmark. A group has existed in Sweden for four or five years, co-ordinated by Pastor Jean-Luc Martin of the French Reformed Church in Stockholm (married to Anna-Lena, a Catholic). At the conference the languages used were Danish and English, and the main theme was the religious upbringing of interchurch children in a secularised society (*Foyers Mixtes*, 127-8, pp.32-4).

UNITED STATES



In December 2000 the Center for Marriage and Family of Creighton University published *Time, Sex, and Money: the First Five Years of Marriage*. This follows up the Interchurch Marriage study (*Interchurch Families* 2000, 8,1, p.12), but is Catholic-based. It turned out that 34% of the sample were in mixed Catholic-other marriages, 27% of them in Catholic-Protestant marriages. It was not the focus of this study, but Michael Lawler writes that 'the statisticians found interesting correlations between this study and the interchurch study, specifically that respondents in interchurch marriages had on average lower scores on religiosity than respondents in Catholic-Catholic marriages. Having this replicated in two unconnected studies, I am satisfied that these religiosity findings indicate the actual interchurch situation, which means that the churches have much work to do.' It also means that interchurch family associations have much work to do, far beyond their own membership, in the field of marriage preparation and support geared to mixed families. The co-chairs of American AIF, Michael and Barbara Slater, were invited to give three workshops on the pastoral care of interchurch families to the countrywide Ecumenical Officers' conference at San Diego in April 2001.

Italian-French-Swiss conferences

What would have been the seventeenth meeting of interchurch families from the Lyon region, French-speaking Switzerland and northern Italy – three countries linked by the Italian Alps – is replaced 6-9 July 2001 by a planning meeting for the World Gathering of Interchurch Families to be held in Rome in 2003. English and German-speakers will join the French and Italians. This seems a good time to look back over the series of Italian-French-Swiss conferences that began in 1970.



Franco-Italian contacts began in the mid-1960's when Gianni Marcheselli, an Italian Catholic married to a Waldensian, Myriam, found a leaflet about correspondence courses in ecumenism run by the Centre St Irénée in Lyon. Waldensian communities date back to the thirteenth century; since the sixteenth they have belonged with the family of Reformed Churches. Catholic-Waldensian couples were in a very difficult situation

in Italy in the early 1960's, when Gianni married Myriam. When he contacted the Centre St Irénée he discovered that its director Fr René Beaupère, OP had organised meetings of *foyers mixtes* since the early 1960's (*Interchurch Families* 4,1, January 1996). In 1967 a first Franco-Swiss meeting of *foyers mixtes* was held near Geneva, and in 1968 the Centre St Irénée published the first number of the quarterly *Foyers Mixtes* to give a voice to the interchurch families of France and French-speaking Switzerland. The third number (April 1969) contained both a 'letter from England' by Ruth and Martin Reardon, and one from Italy by Myriam and Gianni Marcheselli.

In June 1969 a first small meeting of Italian *coppie interconfessionali* took place in Genoa, organised by the Marchesellis, with a pastor and priest from Genoa present. Don Mario Polastro came from Torre Pellice in Waldensian country, where obviously there were more mixed marriages than in most parts of Italy. The Marchesellis lived in Milan, but Myriam's family lived at Torre Pellice, and Don Mario was to prove a constant supporter of interchurch families over the next thirty years, for most of which time he was parish priest of Pinerolo. The couples who met at Genoa discussed the possibility of meeting with *foyers mixtes* from Lyon and Switzerland in Italy the following year. By the time the group met in Milan in November, this tripartite conference was planned for Torre Pellice, and they discussed publishing in Italian a quarterly on the lines of *Foyers Mixtes*.

Early followers of Peter Waldo had fled from the city of Lyon to escape Catholic persecution in the mountains of north-west Italy. In view of this ancient link, and the commitment of a

Catholic-Waldensian couple and Don Mario to help organise a meeting, it was not surprising that the next step for the Centre St Irénée should be a Franco-Italian-Swiss meeting in that area.

Bobbio Pellice 31 July-2 August 1970

It was held in a Salvation Army centre in Bobbio Pellice, using both French and Italian. Five Italian couples were there, with twice as many from Lyon, Geneva and the Swiss Canon de Vaux. Fr René Beaupère and Don Mario Polastro took part in the whole meeting, and there were visits from Waldensian pastors for part of the time; one gave a meditation on Saturday morning, and two others celebrated the Lord's Supper in the afternoon. Fr Beaupère and Don Mario celebrated mass on Sunday. Couples were present together at both celebrations, but there was no sharing of communion. The Italian group learned of the experience of French and Swiss groups over eight years, and felt they were far behind. The main focus of the gathering was the religious education of the children. Italians felt that what was already possible in France (shared or dual catechesis for the children, although a child was still to be given a clear identity in one community or the other) was simply not yet practicable in Italy. After the conference, however, the first number of *Focolari Misti* appeared, reporting the conference and French initiatives for the religious education of the children of *foyers mixtes*.

Agape, 16-18 July 1971

The second conference for interchurch families of Lyon, French-speaking Switzerland and Italy was held a year later at the ecumenical centre of Agape, at Prali in the province of Turin. It was dominated by the question of eucharistic sharing. In the end it was decided not to celebrate a eucharist at all, but to close with a service of prayer ending with an 'agape' for which a cake was bought from the village shop. A letter was sent by the Italian couples to the local priest, the bishop, and the president of the evangelical federation in Italy asking that mixed couples should be able to receive communion together both at Mass and the Lord's Supper.

Foresteria valdese, 1-3 September 1972; 6-8 July 1973

The third conference was held at a Waldensian conference centre in Torre Pellice. The papal *motu proprio* of 1970, *Matrimonia Mixta*, was studied; it had removed the obligation for both partners to make a promise about the Catholic baptism and education of the children, and the undertaking to be given by the Catholic partner was not an absolute one. The group also studied a Waldensian document on marriage produced in 1971; Gianni Marcheselli had recently written a commentary for the Catholic publication *La Famiglia*.

The fourth conference returned to eucharistic sharing. They decided that for Sunday worship the group would divide, half going to mass at the Catholic parish church and half to the Protestant service in Torre Pellice. The same message to both congregations, agreed by the whole conference, was read publicly in each case by one of the participants. It was an attempt to explain to the wider communities what interchurch families needed from the churches and what they believed

they could contribute to ecumenical progress. This began a lasting tradition of going to worship with the local communities when the Italians, French and Swiss met together.

Bobbio Pellice, 6-10 July 1974

It was decided in 1973 to hold a longer meeting the following year. 1974 was the eighth centenary of the Waldensian movement, and the conference took the Sermon on the Mount, so dear to the 'poor of Lyon' as its theme. In preparation the January *Foyers Mixtes* had an article on Peter Waldo by a Catholic priest and one on the Waldensian Church by the Dean of the Waldensian faculty of theology in Rome. Couples at Bobbio Pellice struggled with the question of how to live the Sermon on the Mount in their own situation. They visited the museum of Waldensian history at Torre Pellice, the historic sites in the mountains where Waldensians had fled persecution and trained their preachers, and the ecumenical centre of Agape. On Sunday the whole group joined in the Waldensian service at Torre Pellice, and read their message, directed particularly to that one community in their eighth centenary year. On Tuesday they met with the Catholic community of Torre Pellice, joined by the local Catholic bishop.

Luserna San Giovanni, 5-7 September 1975; 2-4 July 1976

The sixth conference was held near Torre Pellice at the house of a Catholic community of religious sisters, on the subject of ecumenical catechesis; the Italians were amazed by what had been achieved in France. The same venue was chosen for the seventh conference, on the theme of 'canonical and pastoral practice from the *motu proprio* Matrimonia Mixta to today'.

Pilgrimage 2-10 July 1977

The eighth meeting took the form of a week's pilgrimage in Tuscany and Umbria, with visits to Perugia, Spello, Assisi, with time for reflection on 'Francis of Assisi and us', tourist attractions and an exchange of information and views. Francis and Waldo had much in common; they were alive at the same time, and both laid great stress on evangelical poverty and sent out mendicant preachers. Whereas Franciscans were accepted by the Catholic Church, however, Waldensians were excommunicated.

Foresteria valdese, 13-15 May 1978, 14-16 July 1980

The following year the theme was 'Bible, Spirit and Prayer'. Couples talked about how they were able to read the Bible together, how they found they could pray together as couples and as families. There were suggestions of another week's pilgrimage, this time in the mountains of northern Italy 'in the footsteps of Peter Waldo'. This took place with only a small number of participants in July 1980, but those who went were delighted. A short stay at the *Foresteria valdese* allowed local participation. Pastors and priests came to meet the pilgrims, as did the Bishop of Pinerolo, and this was counted as the tenth Italian-Franco-Swiss meeting.

After a five-year gap, the pattern of a weekend conference held at the *Foresteria valdese* in Torre Pellice every two or three years was followed. In the meantime Italy was not forgotten in Lyon. Another suggestion for a pilgrimage came to nothing, but in 1983 the review *Foyers Mixtes* (no.61) devoted over half its space to interchurch families and ecumenism in Italy, with articles by Myriam and Gianni Marcheselli, Don Mario Polastre and others. Then two years later the tripartite meetings

were resumed, with the *eleventh meeting held 13-14 July 1985*. The theme chosen was 'ecumenical catechesis', a subject on which so much work had been done in France.

Two years later the twelfth conference was held 17-19 July 1987, with the theme 'ecumenical celebrations of baptism and their consequences'. Swiss and French participants described two shared celebrations of baptism which had taken place, one in Geneva and one in Valence. Fr Beaupère recalled the existence of a text published by the Catholic-Protestant Working Group in France in 1975: 'Note on the ecumenical celebration of baptism'. Interchurch couples from the Pinerolo region told how they had sent a request about baptism to the church authorities, Catholic and Waldensian. On the Waldensian side, the regional synod had welcomed it, and referred it to the national synod. On the Catholic side, the expression 'double belonging' had not been acceptable. They were advised to speak rather of a 'double recognition' and a commitment by both communities to nurture the child in the Christian faith in such a way that s/he would be able to make a definitive choice. There was a strong feeling that ecumenical catechesis should follow on from a shared celebration of baptism. When the group divided for Sunday worship, a good many of the Catholics went to the Waldensian service, while a good many Protestants went to mass.

A different kind of meeting took place in Torre Pellice in May 1989. The Waldensian district and the Catholic diocese arranged an official meeting on the subject of interchurch families, and interchurch couples were invited to share their experience (Don Mario's report in *Foyers Mixtes* 1990, no.88). It was several years before the tripartite conferences resumed.

The thirteenth meeting held 17-19 July 1992 returned to consider religious education of the children and interconfessional catechesis. An 'open evening' on Saturday gave an overview of the ecumenical situation from interchurch couples' point of view in France, Switzerland and Italy.

Three years later the *fourteenth conference held 7-10 July 1995* studied the 'Appel à nos églises' on the ecclesiological significance of interchurch families that had been put to the church authorities in France by Fr René Beaupère and Pastor Jacques Maury (see *Interchurch Families*, 4,1, January 1996, p.10). The overall theme was 'Interconfessional couples and local churches: what is the reality?' For the first time a representative from England was present at an Italian-Franco-Swiss conference.

The fifteenth and sixteenth conferences followed at two-year intervals, meeting at the *Foresteria valdese 11-14 July 1997* with the theme 'Confirmation and First Communion' and *9-12 July 1999* on 'the domestic church' (see *Interchurch Families* 1998, 6,1 and 2000, 8,1). On both occasions there were representatives from England, and there was a new departure in taking the 'message' of the conference to Catholic and Waldensian communities in neighbouring villages, rather than remaining in Torre Pellice as in previous years.

(For this overview thanks to Gianni Marcheselli, Don Mario Polastre, and to Fr René Beaupère for reports in Foyers Mixtes.)

Baptising our daughter



When our son was baptised in 1997 we had a Catholic baptism on Saturday in the chapel at the Catholic university where we married. Next day we had a ceremony during Sunday worship at my wife's Presbyterian church. The minister did not re-baptise our son but we professed our faith and the elder asked the congregation to promise to help raise him as a Christian.

A few years later when our daughter was on the way we got the AIF baptism pack and tried to create something more ecumenical. What started out as frustrating became very rewarding.

We presented a copy of the pack to the new Catholic pastor where we live and asked him to call us and let us know his thoughts. We told him what we had done with our son and wondered if we could do something more equitable this time.

He never got back to us. Each Sunday I would ask him and he said, 'I will read it; just give me time.' A month passed, then two. Our daughter was born. The Sunday after her birth he asked if the baby was here yet. I said yes. He did not say anything else so I asked about her baptism. He said that my wife's pastor could do a reading. Getting an answer from him was like pulling teeth. I would have preferred that the day after he received the pack he called and told me I was a very bad Catholic to present him with such a packet of nonsense. At least he would have taken the time to read and consider it. His total indifference to my needs left me looking elsewhere.

I had eventually called another Catholic pastor before my daughter's birth. This priest was the pastor at the university where we married and baptised our son. He was most helpful, and agreed to anoint our daughter with the *Rite of Bringing a Baptised Child to the Church* after her baptism at my wife's Presbyterian church. He invited my wife's pastor to take part and said he would certainly register our daughter's baptism.

Then I read a Canon Law Q & A at the Eternal Word Television Network. I became very uncomfortable with doing the baptism this way. Canon 1366 threatens a Catholic who hands over his child to be baptised in a non-Catholic religion with a censure. I felt I would never have agreed to this option if I had known that. Following the canon lawyers at EWTN I told my wife we could not do it. She told me, tough, we were going to do it. She said how can she compete when I can always say my religion does not allow me to do something?

I contacted AIF and learned that the 1993 Ecumenical Directory (151) says that canon 1366 does not apply to Catholics in interchurch marriages who despite their best efforts do not baptise or raise the children Catholic. However, I wish the AIF baptism pack would have included the information about canon

1366. [151 also says the Catholic should respect the conscience of the other parent and have regard for the unity and permanence of the marriage and the maintenance of the communion of the family. Ed.]

Interestingly, a month later, the EWTN Canon Law experts backed off the reality of the censure in the case of interchurch couples. They said the censure shows how serious it is that a Catholic baptise his children Catholic but that the writings on 'mixed marriages' indicate that a Catholic would not come under the censure and that the preservation of the marriage is important.

The Presbyterian pastor was most helpful and invited the university pastor to take part in the baptism. I informed him that our bishop forbids such participation by his priests but that he himself would be welcome to do a reading and blessing at the anointing. He agreed and volunteered that he would be comfortable performing an assisting role at future baptisms. He did not see the need to register the baptism in both churches, but said that was fine with him if we wanted it.

We planned the baptism for the Sunday during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for its symbolism. We had the baptism at 11 am and the anointing at 12:30 pm immediately following.

We discovered that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has a Book of Common Worship with a baptismal service very similar to the Catholic Rite of Baptism. We used some of the questions from the Book of Common Worship in the anointing where it said these 'or other suitable words'. We plan to have just one service for future children with both priest and minister taking part.

I wish the Catholic Church were more up front about the opportunities available to interchurch couples. The 1993 Ecumenical Directory 97 and 98 should be used often and not treated as pesky footnotes that if the couple pushes enough they can have. Baptism is the one sacrament mutually recognised between churches. There must be a way to celebrate a common entry into the Body of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1256) states that, 'In case of necessity, any person, even someone not baptised, can baptise, if he has the required intention.'

Since the Catholic Church now allows dispensations for a Protestant minister to perform a wedding recognised as valid and sacramental, can there not be a way to celebrate the baptism of a child of interchurch parents with such ecumenism? If an atheist can baptise out of necessity, why not a Protestant minister? Our needs are real. The Catholic Church may not be able to offer exactly what interchurch couples want but I believe there is a way to celebrate baptism in a more ecumenical manner. I wish our Catholic bishops would offer a set of baptismal ceremonies that involve the participation of both the priest and minister.

K. James Cassidy



Eucharistic sharing: forming our consciences

In February 2001 I was asked to speak to interchurch families about sharing communion, and wanted to use some material gathered from the Eucharistic Sharing/Authority (ES/A) study in 1999-2000 (Interchurch Families, 2000, 8,2, pp.14-15). A recent book by Linda Hogan, Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition (Paulist Press/Darton, Longman and Todd, New Jersey/London, 2000/2001) offered a framework within which that material could be understood. I spoke therefore about the role of conscience in the decisions made by interchurch families about eucharistic sharing. This is a shortened version of the talk. I am indebted to Linda Hogan for her stimulating study.

The framework of the ES/A study was authority as exercised in the Roman Catholic Church, because that was the concern of the overarching Authority and Governance Project. Now it is the constant teaching of the Catholic Church that conscience must always be obeyed, as the voice of God to us. Alongside that however, there is an expectation that the judgements of an informed conscience will be in agreement with church teaching. But what if they aren't? Is it a case of *either* obeying your conscience *or* obeying the teaching of the church, as if these are two authorities in opposition?

Linda Hogan proposes that we recast discussion of the role of conscience, following not a legalistic tradition but the personalist approach of Vatican II. Instead of asking, What is the status of church teaching? What kind of authority does it have? What kind of obedience is it due? she proposes that we ask firstly: How is the person to act on his/her conscientious decisions and what should his/her approach be when church teaching does not coincide with it? This avoids two distinct authorities vying with each other. I shall follow this approach in studying eucharistic sharing in interchurch families.

A decision to marry

We start with the person. The first decision in conscience to be made is whether to marry this other person with whom we have fallen in love, with whom we want to spend our lives learning to love. This other person is not a member of our own church communion – here I am of course thinking particularly of Roman Catholics marrying other Christians. We know this adds a complicating factor to an already hazardous commitment.

The decision to marry is made by two separate persons; the two *together* decide *what kind* of marriage it will be. In trying to tease out which decisions are made by the couple and which by the partners individually, I was struck by the couple who said: *We decided to be a two-church family, and all our other decisions stemmed from that.* I think they were saying that they

had decided to be a particular kind of interchurch family. They had decided to own their situation in a very explicit way, conscious that they shared the sacraments of baptism and of marriage, and determined to deepen and to express that sacramental communion as far as they could.

It is a matter of simple observation that this would *not* be true of all, indeed of most, marriages between Roman Catholics and other Christians. It seems to me that this fact makes sense of the approach taken by the 1993 Ecumenical Directory. On the one hand, it identifies those who 'share the sacraments of baptism and marriage' as an example of a possible circumstance of need for eucharistic sharing (alongside danger of death). On the other hand, it foresees that this need will only be experienced by way of exception in particular cases.

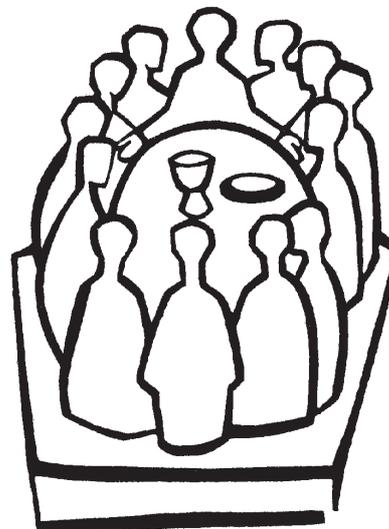
It is within the conviction that God has called us into this interchurch marriage, and in response we will endeavour whole-heartedly to 'become an interchurch family' in the fullest possible sense, that the *need* for eucharistic sharing is experienced, that married persons *want* to share communion. Yet even within this context the need is not always experienced. The very first ES/A group I went to included a young couple who worship together in both churches every Sunday; the Methodist husband said that it didn't particularly matter to him that he couldn't receive communion in the Catholic church. I had assumed that in AIF groups there would be that desire, but after that, I put a preliminary question in each group: have you *wanted* to share communion together?

Needs and desires

It seems to me that the language of the Code and the Directory in talking of 'grave and pressing need', and that of Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* in speaking of 'great desire' is trying to dig down to the level of conscience. If the need and desire is truly found at that level it seems to be recognised as having a certain binding force, to which church authority can and should respond. Is the desire to share eucharistic communion by those who already share the sacraments of baptism and marriage truly experienced as a conscientious conviction, at the level where the human person responds to God? The official Pastoral Commentary accompanying the Canadian guidelines on eucharistic sharing says: 'Ultimately, the non-Catholic spouses themselves will determine the occasions of ecclesial and family significance when they have a serious spiritual need for the Eucharist'. The implication is that nobody else can tell them exactly when they experience that need and desire as the voice of God.

How do we arrive at the point where we recognise our spiritual need, our deep desire, as of God, so that we have to be very

careful about what we allow to stop our response? I remember a Catholic wife saying, *Maybe what I want to do is more important than it should be – after One Bread One Body ought we to check with our parish priest because he’s definitely breaking the rules – ought we to check that it’s OK for us to continue.* This document from the British and Irish Catholic Bishops (*One Bread One Body*, October 1998) officially gave for Britain and Ireland a more restrictive application of the norms of the 1993 Ecumenical Directory from Rome than many had hoped for. Some couples who were receiving together on a continuing basis did check it out, and were usually reassured. *Our parish priest was not so anxious about OBOB as we were!* said one couple. Others felt that if the parish priest wanted to change his attitude on a matter so important to them, it was up to him to say so. Their responsibility was to continue a practice on which they had made a conscientious decision.



A fundamental conviction

It seems to me that there is a fundamental conviction that has come over time to shape the conscience of some (not all) interchurch families in this area. It could be articulated something like this: God has led us into this marriage. God has not called either of us to change our church allegiance. God has bound us together in the communion of marriage as well as that of baptism. God has called us to be a domestic church. It is good for our marriage that we should receive eucharistic communion together; that is the normal way by which our domestic church can be sustained and built up. We must therefore share eucharistic communion so far as we can. We recognise this as a fundamental need and a deep desire. We shall try to articulate this fundamental conviction and to live by it, and make the choices we continually have to make in relation to it. It is not a question of keeping rules and laws, but rather of working towards what we have discovered to be good for us in our particular context – while taking account of the good of others.

Of course we must take account of the consciences of others – of clergy who celebrate, of members of the communities in which a eucharist is celebrated. As Fr Ladislav Orsy said at the Virginia conference, if we want to be healers in a wounded church, we can’t do it by taking short-cuts that involve pushing other people out of the way (*Interchurch Families*, 1997, 5,1, pp.10-11). There is the reciprocity of consciences involved.

But how have we come to our fundamental conviction, and how do we make the particular decisions that must be made over and over again? I follow Linda Hogan’s outline in suggesting that we use our intellect or reasoning powers, our intuition, our emotions, our imagination, our capacity for spiritual discernment. We are engaged as persons at every level of our being. We will look at each of these five elements in turn, but first there is another point to note.

A complicating element for us, as partners and parents, is the need to shape our consciences together. We come from different church traditions with different attitudes to eucharistic sharing; we aren’t always at the same point as one another; there is the continual need to dialogue, to be patient with one another. In the groups I noticed that sometimes one partner would want the other to be in a place where they weren’t. A

Methodist wife: *I wish he would receive communion in my church.* An Anglican husband: *I wish she would receive communion in my church, because it’s the only way we’re going to be able to share communion.* (They were both referring to the local church.) A Catholic wife: *I wish he would ask.* Even if we share a fundamental conviction that eucharistic sharing is right for us as a couple, we may differ quite a lot about how and when it is right to act on that conviction; how far the circumstances of each particular decision should influence us. There is also the question of a balance between the churches to be considered – a balance that affects our marriage.

1 Using our reason

There is much intellectual work to be done; some we have done together in the Association of Interchurch Families, and we cannot think of this without naming John Coventry, who laid a firm foundation. But we each have to use our powers of reason for ourselves, and I saw a lot of evidence in the ES/A groups of people doing this, struggling to define and redefine the problem, to be logical and coherent. I saw some looking at the decisions that face us in the light of church teaching at various levels and in the light of Scripture. I saw people prepared to ask advice and to take account of the views of others who were felt to be trust-worthy. I saw some taking account of the guidelines on eucharistic sharing issued in other countries.

Particularly interesting is the way people use Scripture in coming to their decisions. The bishops I interviewed went straight to John 6 and texts about the eucharist. They seemed to be much more personally involved in the first part of *One Bread One Body*, the teaching section on the eucharist, and not to have paid anything like as much attention to the norms in the last part. Many interchurch families went straight to John 17, and use the unity texts in support of eucharistic sharing – short-circuiting the existence of church divisions. There was also a strong focus on the words of institution, as used in the liturgy; and how hard it is to be part of a eucharistic assembly and not respond to the Lord’s invitation to eat and drink – all of you. A few interchurch families referred to texts such as the picking of corn and healing on the Sabbath (the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath), which didn’t occur to any of the bishops interviewed as relevant to eucharistic sharing.

2 Using intuition

In making particular decisions of conscience in particular circumstances we do not only use our reason; we use intuitive knowledge that we cannot test by purely intellectual means. We often think of women as more intuitive than men. Linda Hogan suggests that this may come from more careful attention to gestures, reactions, unspoken assumptions and valuations, through sensitivity to all that is implicit and unconscious in other people's behaviour.

Here is an example from an ES/A group. It concerns an Anglican wife and a Roman Catholic husband; his mother was very ill. A lady in the Catholic congregation was concerned that the Anglican wife should be able to receive communion at the Catholic funeral – check it out now with the parish priest, she said, because you will be in such an emotional state when it happens. So the Anglican wife did, and the parish priest said, yes she could receive communion when the time came. Not long after, the couple were with the mother when the Catholic curate came to give her communion. Clearly he was going to give communion to her son too. The Anglican wife said: *I saw the panic on his face when he looked at me. So I made things easy for him and said could I receive a blessing.* This was an intuitive response. On later reflection she felt it had been right in the circumstances, however much she regretted it for herself and her husband.

There was a discussion between a Catholic husband and an Anglican wife in another group. The husband said he would expect the parish priest to give his wife communion if the bishop said he could; he ought to obey the bishop. *Even if you know he still doesn't feel right about it?* asked his wife. *That's his problem,* says the husband. But the wife replies: *I wouldn't feel like that at all. I wouldn't feel happy about it knowing he was unhappy. You put him in a really difficult position – with God.* A questioning grunt from the husband, and the wife continues: *Well, if he feels God's saying – if he feels it's wrong – then for the priest it's going to be a barrier between him and God, and I wouldn't want to be putting him in that position. I don't think it's right.* (It is a hypothetical situation; none of the bishops I interviewed would want to put a priest in that position. But I use this as an example of an intuitive judgement that the couple could reflect further on together and evaluate.)

Sometimes it is quite a different scenario – when people feel intuitively that a particular priest would really like to give them communion together, but he doesn't want to be asked. Some couples are very happy with this and respond by going forward for communion together; others are not, and tend to want to push the priest to make a decision.

3 Using emotions

We also use our emotions in making particular decisions, perhaps especially (like using intuition) when it is a case of decisions that have to be made in a hurry. Do I receive communion at this particular eucharist? I was struck by the number of times in the ES/A groups that people described their really not knowing what they were going to do until the moment arrived, living through the eucharist in a kind of emotional turmoil. They might well have decided beforehand in a rational way what was going to happen, but when it came to the actual eucharistic experience, it was quite a different matter. This could happen to one partner, or to both partners at the



same time. It happened to whole families at the closing eucharist of the Virginia international conference, when we joined an Anglican-Roman Catholic parish for their usual format: a shared service of the Word, but two separate canons at opposite sides of the church. Families reacted differently – but were still talking about it months later.

As in the cases when we use our intuition, we need to evaluate our emotional responses to see what information and insight they offer in shaping our consciences. If we meet a similar kind of situation again, shall we decide in a similar way or differently? We can't decide how we feel, but we can decide whether we are going to act on our emotions.

Many described themselves as experiencing fear – fear of refusal from a priest if they ask, fear of disapproval from others if they go forward. One Catholic wife described an incident from many years ago. She and her Anglican husband had received communion together on one occasion, I think where they were not known. Soon afterwards they had been at a funeral mass, and at communion he had asked: *Can I come?* She looked at the priest and at the congregation; and said: *No, not this time.* She had gone up alone. Her neighbour at the altar rail had said to the priest: *I'm a Baptist. I should very much like to take communion at X's funeral.* He had given the Baptist communion. *I felt a terrible spiritual coward because I'd said my husband couldn't come,* said the Catholic wife. *I had just been assuming the answer no all the time, maybe that's not right, maybe we are moral cowards.*

Many described themselves as experiencing intense anger at the position of the Roman Catholic Church on eucharistic sharing. Some other Christians feel it is wrong to have to ask. One Anglican husband explained he made a great effort for his wife's sake. *Our wedding anniversary was coming up, and I wrote to the bishop. I didn't actually ask. I couldn't quite bring myself to do that. I said it would be good if my wife and I could receive communion together – I didn't even say in the Catholic Church. The bishop wrote back and said of course you may – he interpreted it as a request for admission.*

We cannot help feeling afraid, anxious, angry, resentful. But we can be sure that if we act under the impulse of our fear, our anxiety or our anger, we are not acting freely under the impulse of God's love.

Of course there are the positive emotions too: *I was overjoyed. It meant so much to us.* Such joy is not only expressed by the

partners, but by local communities. One Catholic wife said: *It took us about ten minutes to get out of the church – people wanted to kiss him and hug him and said you don't know what it means to us that you've taken communion here tonight – you are part of this community and we've always felt it wrong you couldn't take communion with us.* Where there is so much positive emotion, there can be an incentive to try to find other occasions. There have been occasions recently when a celebrant has made it clear that on this particular occasion, close family and friends are invited to communion, and has let it be understood that nobody will be turned away. We may not approve of the limitation of admission to 'special occasions', but they are particularly joyful when they can go beyond the immediate interchurch couple or family and extend experience of eucharistic sharing to whole congregations.

4 Using imagination

Linda Hogan suggests that the use of the imagination is the most difficult aspect of the integrated activity of conscience to discuss; it is so nebulous and hard to quantify. But the imaginative, abstract stage can be very important in allowing one to see possibilities that are not immediately obvious. There are always new possibilities that we have never thought of. Here is an example of a Catholic husband who imagines himself into his wife's situation: *It suddenly dawned on me that in the Anglican church I never felt upset, rejected, because the decision was mine. I suddenly appreciated that the problem in the Catholic Church is officialdom saying you're not welcome – this is the heartbreak. Now I position myself behind my wife and if she doesn't receive communion I don't either – just a blessing.* It was a totally new decision made as a result, I think, of using imagination.

In the groups I noticed a number of parents with small children imagining ahead to the time when these children would be ready for first communion – the crisis point for very many interchurch families.

We can use our imagination also to envisage the variety of responses that may be made to particular requests or actions of ours, so that we are as prepared as possible for whatever may come – there will always be surprises. We can never simply assume we know what another person will do or say.

5 Spiritual discernment

We have seen that our decision making is not an exclusively rational process. Our emotions, intuitions and imagination are involved. So also is the capacity for spiritual discernment; its importance in the traditional Christian understanding of conscience has been clear from earliest times. It stresses the role of the Spirit as an internal teacher. I was struck in the groups by the number of times people referred to the leading of the Spirit as against 'man-made rules' – a phrase that came up over and over! What *God* has joined together, let not *man* put asunder. We must obey *God* rather than *man*. In dealing with spiritual discernment, Linda Hogan gives interesting quotations from the moral theologian John Mahoney, that 'conscience is important in discovering where the Spirit is leading individuals in the context of an overall vocation'. (For us, the overall vocation of being an interchurch family, and moving forward within that vocation.)

So the moral insight that comes from genuine and prayerful

spiritual reflection forms a significant part of the Christian understanding of conscience. Mahoney describes this interior moral discernment in terms of a taste or a feel for that which is good in a particular context. It is difficult to describe, difficult to have confidence in, ambiguous. Mahoney acknowledges that 'the moral "feel" for a situation which Christians are believed to possess by reason of their personal adherence of faith may be unashamedly of the character of insight in search of arguments or, in terms more generally applicable to theology as a whole, of Christian experience seeking understanding.' *Interchurch family experience seeking understanding*: that seems a good way to describe 30 years of AIF!

We must recognise the inevitability of moral failure, the danger of self-deception, the incompleteness of our knowledge and understanding, the immaturity of our emotions. We can never be certain we're right. Yet we have to act on the truth as we know it, and do the best we can to act with integrity and pursue what we believe to be good. In the end that is all that is asked of us.



Change and development

A positive and rounded view of conscience sees it as engaging the whole person (indeed both partners), with our first concern being how best to understand and articulate the good and loving thing to do in each situation. The next question is how to understand ourselves – or our partners – as loyal and committed members of the church while at the same time disagreeing with a particular teaching or discipline. With a personalist view of conscience differences of opinion between individuals and church authorities can be seen as inevitable – and indeed as *valuable* – within a dynamic approach to human growth and understanding. They arise necessarily from the unity-in-difference that is the essence of living communities. They contribute to change and development in church tradition. We can move beyond (to quote Linda Hogan) 'the conventional model of the individual conscience up against the weight of tradition, since the conscientious judgement of the individual, too, is part of the tradition. Indeed, the individual's insight may have an important function in prompting a particular development or change in the church's apprehension of value.'

So the conscientious judgement of interchurch families is a part of, and can influence, church tradition. So let us form and reform our consciences. Let us respect one another's consciences and good intentions, the consciences of our clergy and bishops, and the consciences of all our fellow-Christians, and pray that God will lead us all together into the wholeness of the kingdom.

Ruth Reardon

THE JOURNAL

INTERCHURCH FAMILIES is a twice-yearly journal which discusses the theological and pastoral issues raised by the existence of interchurch families (especially families in which one partner is a Roman Catholic and the other a Christian of another communion). It shares the experience of these families with a wider public, and helps readers keep abreast of developments which concern interchurch families, in the context of the wider ecumenical movement.

Pastoral care

It is addressed to all who are or expect to be in any way responsible for the pastoral care of mixed marriages and interchurch families in all their variety.

Towards Christian unity

The journal is also addressed to all concerned with the movement towards Christian unity, for in interchurch families the pain of Christian division and the celebration of Christian unity is focused at its most local level. An interchurch family is a "domestic church", and interchurch families are the smallest units of "Churches Together".

The journal is published by the British Association of Interchurch Families, but it intends to serve the needs of English-speaking interchurch families and all who care for their welfare world-wide. It welcomes contributions and editorial help from all parts of the world.

The annual subscription (England, Scotland, Wales and N.Ireland) is £6 p.a. or £16 for three years; for the rest of Europe it is £7 p.a. or £19 for three years; for other parts of the world (sent airmail printed rate) it is £8 p.a. or £22 for three years. Subscriptions can be sent in sterling to the AIF London address given at the foot of the next column; in American or Canadian dollars to R and F Temmerman, 19 Stephen Street, Morden, MA, R6M 1C5 Canada; in Australian dollars to B and K Hincks, PO Box 66, Swansea, NSW 2281 Australia.

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THE ASSOCIATION

The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) offers a support network for interchurch families and mixed marriages and a voice for such families in the churches. Most members are interchurch couples and families; some are individuals who wish to further the Association's work.

Mutual encouragement

AIF began in 1968 as a mutual support group, formed by couples who had found that the exchange of experience with others in similar situations could help each find its own way forward. There are local AIF groups throughout England. A national conference is held every year at Swanwick in Derbyshire.

An Association for others

The support network which AIF offers extends far beyond its own members. Many interchurch couples find information and a listening ear a great help in times of crisis. One of the Association's most important tasks is to build up a support network of informed people ready to respond to enquirers.

Commitment to change

AIF members are also ready to work for increased understanding by all churches of the pastoral needs of interchurch and mixed marriage families, at local, diocesan, national and international level, as their own circumstances allow.

The Association is committed to the movement for Christian unity; interchurch families suffer because of Christian divisions, but they also have particular incentives and special opportunities to work for the healing of those divisions. AIF is a "body in association" with Churches Together in England, and members will work for unity within their own families and at whatever level they can.

The Association is a **registered charity** (no. 283811) dependent on members' contributions and the donations of others who support its work.

Presidents are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Free Churches Moderator, Dr Kenneth Greet, Dr Ruth Reardon.

Members receive the Journal, *AIF News and Notes* and *The Interdependent* (written by and for interchurch children). Details of membership, resources (publications, leaflets, AIF video), and a constantly up-dated list of Local Contacts throughout England are available on request. Contact:

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AROUND THE WORLD

The Conference of Associations of Interchurch Families in Britain and Ireland includes the three British and Irish sister-associations, who are together a "body in association" with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. AIF is also linked with other associations and groups of interchurch families around the world.

A constantly-updated list of contact addresses for English-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking interchurch families in different parts of the world is available on request to AIF-Britain at its London address.

A web-site for interchurch families worldwide is run by Ray Temmerman of Morden, Canada. It is to be found at <http://www.aifw.org>

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Italy

International planning meeting for the Second World Gathering, Rome 2003

Torre Pellice, Turin
6-9 July 2001

CANADA

International Conference

Living the Path to Christian Unity

United in Baptism and Marriage
Dr Eileen Scully, Canadian Council of Churches
Darrel and Maureen Chastkiewicz,
Catholic/Lutheran, Regina, Sk

Unity and Communion
Br Gilles Bourdeau, OFM, Canadian
Centre for Ecumenism
Craig and Michele Buchanan,
United/Catholic, Montreal

The Path Travelled – Past and Future
Bishop Marc Ouellet, Secretary of the
Pontifical Council for Promoting
Christian Unity, Rome
Martin and Ruth Reardon
Anglican/Catholic, England

EDMONTON, Alberta
1-6 August 2001

Britain

Christian Unity: Why, What and How?
Swanwick, Derbyshire
25-27 August 2001

Austria

Deutschfeistritz nr Graz
26-28 October 2001

Switzerland

Charmey nr Fribourg
17-18 November 2001

Rome 2003

**Second World Gathering/
Rassemblement Mondial**