

## **Interchurch Marriages**

Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for our Churches

Report of the National Dialogues between the  
Roman Catholic Church and  
the Uniting Church in Australia  
1999

This report has been examined by  
the Committee for Doctrine and for Christian Unity of the Catholic and Uniting  
Churches  
and has been approved by the highest national bodies of the two churches viz.  
the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
and the UCA Assembly Standing Committee  
on behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly.

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## Introduction

The subject of our work, *Interchurch Marriages: their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for our Churches*, comes from a number of contexts.

**First**, it comes from the context of the ongoing dialogue between our two churches. This began in Melbourne early in 1978, not long after the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia in June 1977, which was a union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. That dialogue was the continuation of two previous Melbourne dialogues, one Catholic/Presbyterian and the other Catholic/Methodist, which had preceded it by a number of years; members of both the previous groups became involved in the Catholic/Uniting Church dialogue from 1978.

During the fifteen years of the work (1978-1992) this Melbourne dialogue produced work in three areas. Initially, it re-examined the agreed statements on baptism made by the Catholic Church with the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. This then resulted in the issuing of an *Agreed Statement on Baptism*. It was this work which initiated the proposal for a common baptismal certificate to be adopted by the churches, and resulted in the concept subsequently being taken up by the Australian Consultation on Liturgy. Next, it produced the document *Make Straight His Way: Stages on the Road to Unity*. The production of this document came from the realisation that many in our two churches needed to rid themselves of misconceptions about each other, and it was an attempt to do so. Its production too was stimulated by contributions made by the previous Catholic/Presbyterian group to the World Council of Churches' Lima document (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*). Finally, it produced *Towards Agreement on Marriage* and the summary of it, *Moving Together on Marriage*.

In addition, the Melbourne dialogue provided some focus on the issues of authority, ministry, eucharist, the diaconate, and evangelisation. It was into this rich, wide-ranging, and at times innovative, context that the present phase of the Catholic/Uniting Church dialogue began in March 1993, after the dialogue had been moved from Melbourne to Brisbane at the beginning of that year.

**Second**, our work comes from the context of the pastoral needs of the people of our churches. If the historic context, outlined above, encouraged us to continue to engage intentionally with major theological issues between our churches, pastoral concerns encouraged us to deal with those issues as they presented themselves starkly in interchurch relations.

One issue which presented itself in this way was interchurch marriages. As has been seen above, work had, in fact, begun in Melbourne on some aspects of the issue. It might be said that, although our churches espouse that 'those whom God has joined

together, let no one put asunder', yet it is the churches which do just that. However, on the other hand, it must be said that, with dispensations, and with regulations being understood in more sophisticated ways, interchurch marriages have ceased to be the major irritant in relations between our churches which they were. Yet this is to put it too negatively. Rather, interchurch couples, that is those couples committed to their own churches and also committed to the ecumenical ideal, need to be seen as God's great gift to the churches' search for unity. As we said even thirty years ago, they 'ought not to be perceived as a problem for the churches, but as a gift for the restoration of the unity of the Church' [Editorial, *One in Christ*, 4/ 2 (1968); see George Kilcourse, *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity*, New York/Mahwah, N.J. (1992), p. 115; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (1993), 145, quoting *Families Consortio* 78 (CTS, P. 68)].

Such couples can see and experience themselves as belonging to both the churches which are represented in their persons, and they would wish their children, like themselves, to belong to both of these churches. Their ideals may include the joint celebration of the wedding, the joint celebration of baptisms, joint institutional belonging and participation, joint catechesis, and joint eucharistic sharing. Yet the reality of the situation of our two churches does not permit the carrying out of all these ideals which they may have. However, these ideals may point forward to the full *koinonia* to which God's Spirit is calling the churches. So the presence of such couples in our midst may be a sign of God's unnerving and grace-full call to us. Thus the pastoral context moves from a problem to an opportunity. It may move from our producing an answer to an issue to our being addressed by God's Spirit.

**Third**, there is the context of engaging in ecumenical theology (in word, in worship and in service) today. Involvement in the issue of interchurch marriage brings with it discussion of a range of major theological issues, including authority, ecclesiology, the eucharist, and ministry. These cannot be avoided; engagement must take place. Nevertheless, the issue of interchurch marriages is such that it may be possible only to open up some issues, and then to point to further questions relating to them.

Against the background of these three main contexts, it has seemed necessary to pursue the following pattern of discussion. After examining the current phenomenon of interchurch marriages in Australia, particularly involving the people of our two churches, we seek to explore the theological bases of marriage in these churches. It then seems important to give some explanation as to the ways in which the two churches respectively understand the relationship between the individual and the community, including the issue of belonging within the community of faith. From there it seems necessary to examine our two churches' perceptions of baptism, especially as they move towards consensus. Clearly the relationship between belonging and participation in the eucharist, from our churches' perspectives, needs to be examined. This leads on to the life-long pastoral

care of the interchurch couple and interchurch family. Topics for further dialogue need to be pointed to, as noted above. Finally, we draw our conclusions from this part of our continuing dialogue.

A Church of England report in 1918 stated: 'In the region of moral and social questions we desire all Christians to begin at once to act together as *if* they were one body, in one visible fellowship' [see R. C. D. Jasper, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester*, Oxford U. P. (1967), p. 25 (our italics)]. Sometimes the path to Christian unity is portrayed as of pilgrims journeying together to an as yet unknown journey's end. Another picture is of pilgrims accepting the reality of the *status quo*, the existing separation, and yet always living in the tension between that *status quo* on the one hand and the vision of unity on the other. Is it here that we see *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for our Churches?*

# Chapter 1

## The Phenomenon of Interchurch Marriage

### Definition

It would appear that in Australia there is a relative scarcity of marriages and families that would fulfil all the requirements for a marriage or family to be truly called 'interchurch'.

An interchurch marriage is defined here as the marriage of two baptised christians from different traditions, in which each spouse participates actively in his or her particular church, and in which each spouse takes an active, conscientious role in the education of the children. This definition is taken from George Kilcourse, *Double Belonging*, p.2.

There are of course any number of 'mixed' marriages – between christians from different religious traditions – being celebrated every week. In the majority of these cases, neither partner is a regular worshipping member of his or her church, except perhaps on special occasions like Easter and Christmas. In some instances, one partner may have strong affiliation with his or her church, and the other only a very tenuous one. In very few cases do priests, ministers and pastors encounter the situation where both parties are equally committed to their own religious traditions.

### Surveys

A survey of Uniting Church parishes suggests that interchurch marriage, as a phenomenon within the church, is not widespread. While there are some parishes where there are a significant number of such marriages, for others they are either rare or unknown. A survey of twenty Uniting Church parishes, drawn from urban, provincial and rural areas, and representing variously sized congregations, showed that in half of these parishes there were virtually no interchurch families, while in the remainder there were between three and eight such families, with over two-thirds comprising Roman Catholic/Uniting Church couples. Two other things also became clear from this survey. First, while a number of couples came together with strong commitments to different church backgrounds, one partner has often 'surrendered' his or her previous allegiance in the interest of real or perceived family and or domestic harmony. Second, some couples coming out of different church allegiances have actually adopted a third church alternative.

One of the reasons for the relatively small number of true interchurch marriages in Australia is the low level of active church affiliation among the population as a whole. There is reason to suspect that in many cases the choice of church as the venue for the marriage celebration depends on the extent of the church involvement

on the part of the parents and the degree of influence which parents are able to exert. Social and family considerations would thus seem to be a major factor.

While this may seem a depressing note on which to begin these reflections on interchurch marriage, there are some positive signs which give cause for optimism and hope. A preparatory part of this study which involved a fairly wide consultation among Catholic priests and Uniting Church ministers yielded some surprising and encouraging results.

In particular, a questionnaire sent out to a number of Catholic priests elicited responses that enabled the members of the dialogue to compile a picture of what is happening at the grassroots level. As might be expected, the sampling yielded an almost bewildering variety of attitudes and practices among couples involved in 'mixed' marriages and their families, with respect to church affiliation.

It is not possible to catalogue here all the situations and their nuances which the replies from about twenty parish priests involved in parish pastoral ministry described. We might, however, attempt to group under a few headings the different ways in which some 'mixed' families express their faith and attend to the religious education of their children:

1. Each partner attends his/her own church as a general rule, but attends the other's church on special occasions. The children attend both churches with each parent on alternate Sundays.
2. Each partner attends his/her own church, but as parents they have made the decision to raise their children in one tradition, and so the children attend just one church.
3. Each partner attends his/her own church, but their children are members of different churches: the parents decide to have one child baptised in one tradition, and the next child in the other tradition, and so on.
4. Both partners attend different churches on alternate Sundays. Decisions about the religious upbringing of their children may be any one of the above: 1, 2, or 3.
5. Both partners remain faithful to their own tradition, but leave their children unbaptised, so as to allow them the freedom to make up their own minds about their faith later. The children are given exposure to the different traditions in whatever way their parents see fit.

The responses to the questionnaires sent out to Roman Catholic priests showed that the majority of 'mixed' marriages involving Roman Catholics were with an Anglican spouse. This is not surprising in the Australian context, given the high percentage of

nominal Roman Catholics and Anglicans (about 54% taken together) in the total population. This would indicate a relatively small number of actual Roman Catholic/Uniting Church interchurch marriages.

All of these scenarios emerged from replies to the questionnaire, and even further variations of practice were identifiable within these categories. What was found to be significant was that in the great majority of cases, the parents made these decisions without consultation with the pastor of either party. For the most part, pastors were presented with a *fait accompli*.

### **Potential Interchurch Marriages**

If not all the categories described above are examples of interchurch families at work, many of them surely have the potential to be so. If couples have made up their own minds about their religious practice and the faith education of their children without any consultation with their pastors, perhaps this was because they did not realise that their respective churches would be prepared to provide them with some options.

If pastoral care of 'mixed marriage' families - on an ecumenical basis - were given a greater priority in our churches, the partners in such marriages might well choose to maintain their commitment to their own church, instead of simply 'dropping out', as so many do. There surely are Christian spouses who, having 'married out' of their own church, and not feeling any great attraction to the church of their spouse, are not aware that they still have an option.

The encouraging thing about the responses of Catholic priests to the questionnaire and those of Uniting Church ministers to a less detailed one, was that so many revealed a high degree of awareness of this phenomenon, and a real desire to respond to it. The significant number of responses received gives us an appreciation of the work that is being done by priests and ministers at the local level, in dealing with marriages and families that at least have the potential to be truly 'interchurch'. Their responses were a source of admiration and edification for the members of the dialogue.

### **Pastoral Care**

On the whole, however, the responses indicated a low level of pastoral care for those interchurch families that do exist. At the same time, there were many expressions of regret or unease about the situation, indicating that pastors would welcome some help, in the form of guidelines, about how they might minister more effectively to those couples and their families.

This dialogue recognises the importance of providing such guidelines. We believe that, if this were done, many of those marriages which at present are only 'mixed'

marriages might grow into truly interchurch marriages and families, and be a real catalyst for ecumenism.

Pastoral care of couples involved in actual or potential interchurch marriages, or of couples preparing for marriages that have such potential, cannot be solely the responsibility of ordained priests and ministers. Priests and ministers are already overworked, and it is difficult for them to find quality time to devote to pre-marriage preparation, let alone continuing enrichment.

The problem is compounded, should it be thought desirable that pastors of both churches be involved jointly in pre-marriage preparation and follow-up formation. One has to be realistic about the limitations on a pastor's time and energy. At the same time, what the couples need most of all is pastoral sensitivity and, from time to time, a sensitive ear.

### **Ecumenical Implications**

The members of interchurch marriages and families could be seen as the human face and the cutting edge of ecumenism, and the increasing emergence of interchurch marriages as a gift of the Holy Spirit, moving us to closer unity.

Interchurch marriages might therefore provide our churches with a new paradigm for the restoration of christian unity and point out the urgency of seeking it, since the experiences of these couples and their children make manifest in less formal ways some of the principles and possibilities of church unity that are discussed and established at higher theological and authoritative levels.

### **Conclusion**

As divided churches, we acknowledge that we have departed from the will of Jesus that all his followers should be one. When couples from different Christian traditions are uncertain in which church they should be married, or in which church they should raise their children, they deserve to be received with compassion, because the fault is not theirs but the consequence of our division. The pain which this causes is not their fault, but that of our churches which have placed them in that situation.

It is a case not of the church having to forgive them, but of asking them to forgive the church. It is with this attitude that our churches should welcome candidates for marriage and, where appropriate, encourage – not impede - interchurch marriages.

## Chapter 2

### Marriage

The 1997 Assembly of the Uniting Church declared that marriage for Christians 'is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life'. Marriage 'is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and a man expressed in every part of their life together'. In marriage 'the man and woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship'. In the marriage service they 'make a public covenant with each other and with God in the company of family and friends'. In their sexual union,

... the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together; ...children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.

Also at the 1997 Assembly, the *Final Report* of the 'Assembly Task Group on Sexuality' was received. Referring to Ephesians 5:21-32 and Genesis 2:24 the *Report* argued that 'marriage is the unique sign of the unity which is promised us in Christ', and that the 'Christian understanding of marriage considers it to be a central symbol of God's gift in creation'. The *Report*, though fully aware of the particular cultural context of this passage, made important theological observations. The author of Ephesians compared the marriage relationship to Christ's relationship with the church, which becomes a central symbol, a guide as to how Christians understand and live out their marriage relationship. Marriage for Christians derives its essence from God's faithful covenant with his people, which is modelled again through Christ's commitment to the church. For the Christian, marriage gains its meaning from God's grace in Jesus Christ, and is to be seen as part of the new creation in him.

In regard to separation, divorce and remarriage, the Assembly declared:

In cases of the irretrievable break-down of marriage, the Church acknowledges that divorce may be the only creative and life giving direction to take, ...the grace and healing of God are available to people who are divorced, which may free them to marry again.

The Roman Catholic Church also has a covenant theology of marriage. 'Covenant' would be seen as a better word than 'contract' to describe the relationship between a man and a woman in Christian marriage. It is a particular way of viewing the human social reality of the union between a man and a woman. It involves permanency, mutual loving, exclusive faithful commitment and an openness to children. Such a covenant relationship is understood by Roman Catholics to be a sign and means of

God's gracious love offered and received. The covenant relationship of marriage is an image of and is sustained by the covenant relationship between God and his people, between Christ and the church. As such it is called a sacrament within the Roman Catholic Church.

The text of Ephesians 5:21-32 is used as a biblical point of reference for this inclusion of marriage among the seven sacraments of the church. Baptism and eucharist are fundamental sacraments for Roman Catholics. Marriage and all others are founded upon baptism and relate Christians to the eucharist in a distinctive way. The mutual consent of the man and woman in sacramental marriage is of such a character that it is caught up into the saving purpose of God for the spouses and for their children. Their love for each other, which finds physical expression in their many different acts of mutual self-giving, has its ultimate source in the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this smallest of Christian communities the love of God for all human beings and of Jesus Christ for the church is expressed through the mutual love of husband for wife and wife for husband. Pope John Paul II has said, 'By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the church' (see *Familiaris Consortio* 13). Because of their baptism, he had argued, men and women are definitively placed within a new and eternal covenant which is the covenant of Christ with his bride, the church. Because of this covenant relationship established by their baptism, their intimate community of 'conjugal life and love' is assumed into Christ's own love for the church, being sustained by it and enriched by it. Because marriage is indissoluble for the Catholic Church, it does not celebrate the remarriage of divorced persons unless the previous marriage has been canonically annulled or dissolved, though it does not prohibit the separation of married couples or even civil divorce in difficult situations.

The 1989 report of the former dialogue group, *Towards Agreement on Marriage*, had this to say about Christian marriage:

We are glad to say together that God's presence in marriage is never failing. It can be called sacramental, because it transcends human selfishness and brokenness in a continually redemptive way, transforming the dark side of marriage into light and truth. God's never failing truth deepens and sustains our ever failing love. Catholic conviction about marriage as sacrament underlines the importance of the Church's worship for that love. Reformed conviction about covenant underlines the faithfulness of God and the power of Christ's justification to change the spirit in which we use human institutions like marriage and family life.

While our two communities use the language of *sacrament* in different ways, members of both churches could find that in a covenant theology of Christian marriage many apparent differences implied in the language of *sacrament* are overcome. Much of what Roman Catholics endeavour to say when they call marriage a *sacrament* is already intended by members of the Uniting Church when they speak of marriage as a *covenant*, and of the centrality of God's grace in Christian marriage. The different approaches of the two churches to the indissolubility of marriage, or to the continuing significance of the couple's commitment to live together for life in those cases when marriage has broken down, do not mean that the original marriage commitment should be interpreted as any less complete for either church. There is sufficient commonality in Uniting Church and Roman Catholic approaches to Christian marriage for the couples to be able to presume a great deal about the commitment of the other and for them to build together on a common foundation in Christian faith.

## Chapter 3

### Belonging

Bill and Mary are engaged to be married. Bill comes from a committed Uniting Church family, and Mary from an equally committed Roman Catholic family. They themselves have been involved in the lives of their respective churches, and plan to have the ministers of those churches both involved in their wedding ceremony. But they have begun to ask where they will belong after they marry. Will they, as a couple, belong to both churches? Or must they decide for one church or the other? Or to avoid clashes in loyalty, will they drop out of church involvement altogether?

So how is 'belonging' understood in the two churches concerned?

#### Fundamental Belonging

Primarily, by virtue of their baptisms within a local congregation, they are numbered with those who, in and with Christ, are 'children of God'. As such, they belong to the 'holy catholic Church', as the Apostles' Creed puts it. The catholicity, or universality, of this church extends across space and time, so that it may be described as 'one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth' (see *Basis of Union*\* para 7). God in Christ graciously has made us his own. Bill and Mary both belong to him. The two churches involved recognise this, and there is no dispute about such fundamental belonging.

\*NOTE: All quotations from the *Basis of Union* of the Uniting Church in Australia are from the 1971 Edition which is the version formally agreed to by the three churches entering into the Uniting Church. It sets out the basic positions of the Uniting Church on matters of doctrine, polity, and practice. In 1992 a modernised version was published, with minor linguistic changes but no substantial variations.

#### Belonging to the Church Universal

Mary's 'belonging' is related to the Roman Catholic Church, a church which exists on many different levels: universal, local or diocesan, parish, family and/or community. The very words 'Roman' and 'Catholic' indicate two different aspects of that belonging on a universal level. 'Catholic' indicates the conviction that the church to which one belongs is the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' church of Jesus Christ found in this place or culture. Roman Catholics, since the Second Vatican Council, have used the language of 'subsists' to describe the way in which this one church is realised in their church. This word was chosen during the Second Vatican Council to avoid the verb 'is' which would have drawn a simple equation between the church of Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. It means that the one church of Jesus

Christ continues to exist with all its essential elements in the Roman Catholic Church, and makes it possible to acknowledge that these elements are also found in varying degrees in other Christian churches. The adjective 'Roman' points to one of the means whereby this catholicity of the church is maintained. So ordinary Roman Catholics perceive the communion between their local church (or diocese) and the church (or diocese) of Rome, and the collegial and confessional relationship between their bishop and the Bishop of Rome, as an element of their own local church life integral to the establishment and maintenance of its catholicity. This is why the eucharistic prayer in Roman Catholic liturgy always refers to their communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The Uniting Church in Australia, in which Bill's primary 'belonging' is expressed, declares that it 'lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' (see *Basis of Union* para. 2). It 'enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed' (see *Basis of Union* para. 9)• And it 'acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ' (see *Basis of Union* para. 3). He is 'Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new mankind' see *Basis of Union* para. 3). It also acknowledges that 'the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because her Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work' (see *Basis of Union* para. 4).

Within the Uniting Church respect is accorded to those who preside over its councils at regional (presbytery), state (synod) and national (assembly) levels. However, there is no individual with a role which corresponds to that of the Bishop of Rome. At the same time, the Uniting Church 'remembers the special relationship which obtained between the several uniting churches and other churches of similar traditions, and will continue to learn from their witness and be strengthened by their fellowship' (see *Basis of Union* para. 2). So on the bases of collegiality and common theological convictions, the Uniting Church in Australia maintains its membership and participation in such worldwide confessional bodies as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches - to which both the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in Australia had belonged - and the World Methodist Council. In addition it belongs to the ecumenical World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Australia, the leaders of which are accorded due respect by members of the Uniting Church. The deliberations of such bodies influence the perceptions of the Gospel's demands and the worship, witness and service of the Uniting Church in Australia.

## **Belonging to the Local Church**

The second but not secondary level on which Roman Catholics belong to their church is that of the diocese, called by them the local or particular church. It is so

designated because, given that it is presided over by a bishop, it is able to be a full realisation of the church lacking none of the essential elements of the church of Jesus Christ. At the same time, one of those elements is its relationship with the church of Rome and the larger communion of churches. As with the name of the Bishop of Rome, the name of the local bishop is included in each eucharistic prayer, thereby indicating the particular local church gathered (at least partially) for the eucharist.

Bill and his family will have an awareness that there are national, state and regional expressions of the one holy catholic and apostolic church in the Uniting Church in Australia. In census and other such forms, they will enter their 'religion' as Uniting Church, while recognising that other baptised Christians who may use different 'denominational descriptions' are also members of the church catholic. For the Uniting Church 'recognises that she is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to unity and mission (see *Basis of Union* para. 2).

Mary, as a Roman Catholic, belongs to a stable eucharistic community called a parish, presided over by a presbyter who represents the bishop in that community. It is appropriately called a eucharistic community because its identity is established by the same people gathered each Sunday for a celebration of the eucharist. It is normally in this smaller community that ii and reconciliation, marriage and religious education, 'pastoral care and mission occur. On these grounds, it is proper to conceive of this level of church life as the most important for the Christian life of Catholics. At the same time, Roman Catholics do not formally join parishes or need to register when they change parishes. They would believe that they belong almost as much in any Roman Catholic Church in the diocese or even the world.

On the other hand, Bill's local membership in the church is expressed in particular ways with respect to a congregation (several of which may be found within one parish). That congregation is described as being 'the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ' (see *Basis of Union* para. 15a). So awareness of this one holy Catholic and apostolic church is fostered. Belonging is described at this level in terms of baptised and confirmed members, members-in-association and adherents. Confirmed members and members-in-association have rights and responsibilities for decision-making in the life of the congregation (and parish). So rolls of membership are maintained, thus providing a parallel in the Uniting Church to what elsewhere in this Chapter is called 'a stable eucharistic community'. Transfers of membership to other congregations, and additions to and removals from such rolls, are governed by regulations. Such membership provisions, seen as necessary for the government of the Uniting Church (see *Basis of Union* para. 15), in no way undercut the 'fundamental belonging' referred to above.

Within their stable eucharistic communities or congregations, Roman Catholics and members of the Uniting Church belong to their own family - in the Roman Catholic

Church it is customary to refer to such a family unit as a domestic church. It is on this level of church life that the first education in Christian life and prayer occurs and also the most fundamental exercises of Christian charity and service, especially to the sick and vulnerable.

## **The Church Catholic and the Churches**

Roman Catholics speak of the one church of Christ subsisting in the Roman Catholic Church but also speak of their communion, albeit imperfect, with all other Christian churches. While the Second Vatican Council believed that the one church of Christ was able to be found (subsists) in the Roman Catholic Church, at the same time it did not believe itself able to affirm at that point of history that all the essential elements of the church were surely found in other churches. The Council did not anywhere list all the elements which it considered essential. It is only in dialogue with other Christian communions that the precise nature of each element becomes clear, given the different form some elements take in different communions. However, clearly the Council would have believed that papacy was an essential element which was lacking in all other communions. This lack of certainty about the presence of all essential elements does not mean that the Roman Catholic Church does not consider the one church of Jesus Christ is also found in other communions. For example, Pope John Paul II said, 'To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them' (see *Ut Unum Sint* 1995).

The Uniting Church is committed to 'seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit' (see *Basis of Union* para. 1). 'Recalling the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries, she looks forward to a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and the Church's unity expressed, in similar Councils' (see *Basis of Union* para. 2). 'The Uniting Church affirms that she belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. She prays God that, through the gift of the Spirit, he will constantly correct that which is erroneous in her life, [and] will bring her into deeper unity with other Churches, ... (see *Basis of Union* para. 18).

## **Being Recognised as 'Belonging'**

It is at this point that we must return to the dilemma facing Bill and Mary. Their fundamental baptismal 'belonging to God' undergirds all other 'belonging'. However welcome Mary is made in Bill's congregation, clearly it is not yet possible for Bill and Mary to belong equally to both the Uniting and Roman Catholic Churches. Mary could become a member-in-association within Bill's Uniting Church congregation. That would enable her to be involved fully in that congregation, while, from a Uniting Church perspective, retaining her membership in the Roman Catholic Church. But the latter church does not consider itself able to give permission to its members to receive holy communion in most other churches at this point of time,

including the Uniting Church. Mary may well feel that such limited participation in the life of the Uniting Church has but partial attraction to her.

The Roman Catholic Church will make Bill welcome in Mary's parish and at any functions and services he attends. He will not have any official status but will nonetheless usually be acknowledged as the Uniting Church husband of a parishioner. He will not be offered holy communion during celebrations of the eucharist, though there may be occasions on which he could request it (as is discussed elsewhere). He could take the role of a godparent at a baptism, though he would be called a 'Christian witness' to acknowledge his membership of another Christian communion; and he could be a witness in the celebration of matrimony. If a Uniting Church spouse of a Roman Catholic attends mass every Sunday with his or her spouse, someone may end up inviting him or her to consider becoming Roman Catholic to make possible a complete participation in Catholic life. However, the growing awareness of the status of interchurch couples will increasingly enable an ecumenically sensitive pastoral response to occur.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

All of this throws into high relief another of the challenges and opportunities presented by ecumenism.

The engagement of our churches in ecumenical dialogue is precisely to further the possibility of our complete recognition of the one church of Jesus Christ in each other so that when there is mutual recognition, then reconciliation and the restoration of full communion might be possible. No one of us ought to lay down too categorically what would be necessary for such recognition. Each church changes both in its perception of the other and its understanding of itself once it enters into that dialogue which is founded on the communion already shared in Christ. Only God knows the true requirements of being the church and where our dialogue will lead us.

## Chapter 4

### Baptism

#### Preamble

In 1979, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Roman Catholic Church in dialogue came to *A Common Understanding of Baptism*. Followed by a description of the administration of baptism, this common understanding enabled the mutual recognition of each other's baptism and acceptance of each other's baptismal practice:

In the sacrament of Baptism, God draws people to Himself through His action in Our Lord Jesus Christ. They share in Christ's suffering and glorification and so participate in that baptism of Christ which was accomplished on behalf of all in His death and burial and was made available to all when, risen and ascended, He poured out His gift of the Holy Spirit. God's grace is thus made manifest and available to His people.

Baptism, whether of infants or adults, is an expression of faith: we are washed by water and the Word, die to sin and are reborn through the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit enables us to address the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ as our Father and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. We are called and committed to live a new life before God, in faith and hope and love.

In Baptism, by God's grace we become children of God by adoption, members of one family of the Father of all, sharers in the divine life, and heirs to the kingdom living in the hope of the resurrection. Configured to Christ, dead, buried and risen, we die to sin and are made alive with Him to God. United by the Spirit in love, service, suffering and joy, we are incorporated into His Body, which is the Church, where faith is nurtured and deepened and we are enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit to the glory of God.

In Baptism we are initiated into Christ's life and mission in the world and become the living proclamation of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. The Christian life, begun in Baptism, is furthered in confirmation, and is nourished and drawn towards fullness in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. All Christians are baptised into the one Christ and share in the life of the Holy Trinity; their Baptism unites them with Him and with one another. Thus Baptism is entry into the One Church of Christ which is the great

sign of the unity of mankind. One in Christ, the community of the baptised is sent into the world to bear witness to Christ's redeeming work. The one Baptism which Christians share looks to its fulfilment in the one visible Church in which all will share the same faith, the same ministry and the same sacraments.

*A Common Understanding of Baptism (1979)*

The Uniting and Catholic churches now wish to see if they can build on the common understanding, to move beyond mutual recognition to a deeper level of baptismal sharing, particularly in the context of the interchurch family.

## **Converging Perspectives**

When the church celebrates baptism, God graciously acts. When 'baptism' is used in this statement, therefore, it refers not just to the ceremonies of the baptismal rite, but to the work of God, in Christ, accomplished through the church, by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### *Baptism and Church*

The churches are able to recognise each other's baptism because they accept the reality of the fundamental event which takes place in the rites of each church. The invisible reality is what God does by the gift of the Spirit, bringing a person into Christ, his saving death and resurrection. Baptism in either church brings someone into a new relationship with God, Father, Son and Spirit, and therefore into relationship with every other baptised person.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

However much Christians live in hopeful expectation of God's kingdom, the visible earthly reality falls short of this ideal. The Christian churches are separated, not just organisationally or institutionally, but also in their understandings of the faith, and their emphases and traditions. Naturally, Christians are also united by their belief in the gospel of Christ and the common tradition lived out in the church. We can say, therefore, that baptism initiates into the church but we are introduced into churches with real but incomplete communion between the members. When one becomes a follower of Christ, one is inescapably caught up in the harsh reality of an incomplete fellowship between the churches.

The rites and writings of the Catholic and Uniting churches on baptism look remarkably similar because they articulate the one spiritual reality; but they are written and read and celebrated in the actual context of partial communion. The

fullness and power of God's saving action in Christ are not compromised by this imperfect worldly reality, but it is not fully expressed in it either.

The understanding of baptism as a rite of initiation brings into play the ecclesial dimensions of this question which is where the greatest difficulty lies. If baptism is understood simply as the individual's passage from darkness to light, an individual's new relationship with Christ, then the church's rite would exist just for the sake of the individual's salvation. Such an understanding is inadequate. On the other hand, if baptism is understood as an ecclesial event, then incorporation into the Body of Christ and communion in the church become an integral part of the sacramental act. Despite the difficulty created here by our lack of full communion, both the Uniting and Catholic churches wish to affirm the ecclesial nature of baptism.

Both churches recognise that we cannot, on the one hand, spiritualise or idealise the church as a way of overcoming the divisions in the visible structures; but on the other hand, we know that, in the incarnation, the material world is transfigured and, in its limitations, the power of the transcendent God is discovered.

#### *Baptism and Eucharist*

Baptism initiates into the church which celebrates eucharist. The church celebrates eucharist in remembrance of Christ to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (see 1 Corinthians 11:25-26). As with baptism, so for eucharist, the Catholic and Uniting churches could probably reach substantial agreement on the invisible spiritual reality contained in the eucharist: for example, the reality of the sacramental presence of Christ in the event of the eucharist (see *Make Straight His Way: Stages on the Road to Unity*, 1980 Ia).

However, as with baptism, differences emerge when the visible ecclesial dimensions of eucharist are raised for discussion. Incorporation into Christ through baptism should find expression at a shared communion table. However the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia explain the relationship between eucharist and church with different emphases, and consequently understand the link between baptism and eucharist rather differently. For both churches, sharing the eucharist expresses the unity of Christians in Christ; for the Uniting Church, this unity is seen to exist already in such a substantial way that eucharistic communion between the churches is possible; for the Roman Catholic Church, this unity is seen to be still insufficient so long as the churches do not share a full unity in faith. For the Uniting Church, the language of 'Christian initiation' is not much used, and so baptism and eucharist are usually taken as distinct events, though there is the expectation that the gift of baptism will express itself in sharing at the eucharistic table where that gift is unfolded and nourished; for the Roman Catholic Church, eucharist is the culmination of Christian initiation and the fulfilment of God's gift in

baptism while, at the same time, being a lifelong source of nourishment and support in living baptismal faith. Both churches acknowledge the sovereignty of God and accept that our actions cannot be construed as limiting or controlling God's grace.

A starting point for both churches' understanding of the relationships between baptism and eucharist may perhaps be found in the early Christian practice of initiation. Usually involving the initiation of adults, baptism and admission to eucharist take place together in a single celebration. This is the practice today for adults in both the Uniting and Catholic churches.

### *Baptism and Faith*

God's grace calls forth a response in faith. Both Catholic and Uniting traditions agree that a mature Christian must make a personal profession of faith, though neither would see such an act as always a prerequisite for baptism, since both churches baptise infants. In the practice of infant baptism, both churches affirm that God takes the initiative in drawing human beings into eternal life, and that the church's profession of faith supplies a sufficient context for the baptism of an infant to take place. The nexus between faith and baptism therefore remains.

The personal reaffirmation of baptismal faith is the expected outcome of a baptism in infancy and a life of nurture in a believing community. However, for members of both Uniting and Catholic churches, such a personal faith is often linked to the structure of churches still in imperfect communion. This suggests that when those baptised in infancy come to a personal profession of faith, belonging to a particular tradition has already been achieved.

Confirmation is another element which enters into the delicate interplay between baptism, personal faith and belonging. In both Uniting and Catholic churches, confirmation is closely related to baptism and the profession of baptismal faith. Both churches understand confirmation to strengthen, by the Holy Spirit, the Christian's faithful witness to Christ.

In each church, however, confirmation is more firmly denominational than is baptism, though this is expressed differently by each church. In the Uniting Church, confirmation is linked with a promise to be a full and faithful member of the Christian community, sharing in the sacramental worship of the church, supporting its work, and participating in church governance. In the Catholic Church, confirmation is regarded as a sacrament of initiation, a process which is completed in admission to the table of the eucharist, and, as noted in the previous section, this eucharistic sharing presumes a complete unity in Catholic faith; confirmation is also tied to the visible structure of Catholic communion by the presence of the bishop (or his delegate) who ministers the sacrament.

## *Baptism and Ministry*

A key element in achieving a deeper level of baptismal sharing between the Uniting and Roman Catholic Churches will be some mutual agreement on ministry in relation to baptism. Baptism as a sign of the new covenant, the notion of a sacrament as an ecclesial act, and the terminology of 'Christian initiation', all of these emphasise a corporate understanding of baptism which both churches share. The minister of baptism, who washes with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, acts as a minister of the church *in persona ecclesiae* and, since in baptism it is Christ who acts to incorporate us into his death and resurrection, as a minister of Christ *in persona Christi*.

Both churches agree that ordained ministers may act in this way to celebrate baptism. The Uniting Church limits the ministry to the ordained or, in special cases, other authorised by the presbytery; further it presumes that the ministry is exercised in services of public worship. The Catholic Church, while accepting the communal nature of the sacrament, nevertheless allows, in cases of emergency, baptism to be celebrated in private by any person with the right intentions. This in turn means that recognition by the Catholic Church of Uniting Church orders is not an issue with regard to its recognition of valid baptism in the Uniting Church. Conversely, the difference in approach to ministry has not affected the ability of the Uniting Church to recognise as valid all Catholic baptisms. With regard to private lay baptism in emergency circumstances, the Uniting Church position could be summarised by saying that it need not have been done, it should not have been done, but it will not be done again (i.e. baptism will not be repeated).

These differences which exist, however, will not adversely affect ecumenical approaches to the celebration of baptism by ordained ministers in the midst of the Christian assembly. Practices of private baptism in both churches are exceptions for special circumstances and are not to be seen as normative.

### **Possibilities for the Interchurch family**

Although it will not be possible at present to achieve 'double belonging' through a jointly concelebrated baptism, there are a number of possibilities to explore with regard to a deeper level of baptismal sharing in an interchurch family:

- The baptismal rite in one church could make reference to the other church and their shared fellowship in Christ.
- One church could borrow elements from the rite of the other church in its celebration of baptism for an interchurch family.
- Each church could develop and celebrate a rite to welcome/ recognise/ bless a child and an interchurch family when the baptism has taken place in the other church.

- Representatives of the other church could be present at the baptismal celebration.
- Representatives of each church could participate official in the baptismal celebrations of the other church.
- Each church could baptise its own candidates in a single common ecumenical ceremony.

These steps may well take the churches in the direction of a single common ecumenical ceremony of baptism, in which a representative of either church can baptise all the candidates from both churches and commit them to membership in a specific denomination. There are still some unresolved questions in such a practice, for example, the church which promises to nurture the newly baptised in the faith does not seem to be adequately represented in the rite.

The churches recognise that, whole brokenness, separation and alienation are part of the world, there is a need to challenge this situation. To make a strong witness to Christ in the next century, Christians need to be prophetic. An ecumenical baptism may be such a prophetic act, which challenges the preconceptions and which allows the Spirit to create a wondrous diversity from our sinful division. Denominational tensions which may occur about baptism at the birth of a child are confronted by the triumphant assertion of the interchurch marriage, *What God has joined together, let no one put asunder!*

## Chapter 5

### EUCCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY

#### Introduction

While members of the Uniting and Roman Catholic Churches may attend services of worship in one another's churches and while people in interchurch marriages may do so very regularly, the present situation is that there is no intercommunion between the Uniting and Roman Catholic Churches. There is no agreement at this stage between the two churches to recognise and share each other's eucharist.

What is possible is a limited form of eucharistic sharing often called 'eucharistic hospitality'. The discipline of each church on this matter, however, differs. In a service of the eucharist in the Uniting Church, all are invited to participate in the prayers and the service of the word and the invitation to receive the bread and wine is extended to all the baptised of any church. Roman Catholics, according to their church's understanding, may not receive communion in such a service, but they may participate fully in the prayers and the service of the word. At a Roman Catholic eucharist, only in special circumstances may members of the Uniting Church receive communion.

#### The Importance of the Eucharist for Both Churches

The eucharist is of central importance to both churches, but this is expressed differently according to the distinctive emphases of each church's tradition. Therefore, sensitivity is required of both parties lest offence be given by receiving the eucharist in another church and not respecting that church's understanding of what they are celebrating.

'The Uniting Church in Australia acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper' (see *Basis of Union* para. 6). In the sacrament of Christ's broken body and outpoured blood, Christ is understood to feed his baptised people on their way to the final inheritance of the kingdom, as through faith and in the gift and power of the Holy Spirit they have communion with their Saviour (see *Basis of Union* para. 8). The epiclesis in one form (Alternative B) of the 'Great Prayer of Thanksgiving' in *Uniting in Worship, Leader's Book*, further points to how this communion is understood:

O God, by your word and Spirit  
bless and sanctify this bread and this wine, that they may be for us  
the communion of the body and blood of Christ,  
and that he may ever live in us  
and we in him.

The Roman Catholic Church sees the eucharist as 'the source and summit of the Christian life' (see *Lumen Gentium* 11; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1324), because communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh 'given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit', preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received at baptism' (see *Catechism* 1392; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5). The epiclesis from Eucharistic Prayer III of the *Roman Missal* further expresses this understanding of the eucharist:

And so, Father, we bring you these gifts.  
We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit,  
that they may become the body and blood  
of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
at whose command we celebrate this eucharist.

### **The Positions of Both Churches Concerning Eucharistic Hospitality**

The Uniting Church in Australia welcomes and invites Christians of all churches, who respond to Christ's invitation to his table, to receive the elements of bread and wine. The emphasis in this approach is to allow the decision to come to the table to be with the individual baptised person who hears the invitation as from the Lord and so responds to him.

The Roman Catholic Church does not consider itself able to extend a general invitation to those who are not Roman Catholic to receive communion at its eucharist. 'In general the Catholic Church permits access to its eucharistic communion ... only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life' (see *Directory* 129). However, by way of exception, its priests may respond positively to a freely made request by a member of the Uniting Church because of the baptised person's need for spiritual nourishment. Certain defined pastoral conditions apply (see below).

While offering this limited hospitality to Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities, the Roman Catholic Church does not find itself able to give permission to its members to receive communion in the Uniting Church at this point of time. It is recognised that this is likely to become problematic for interchurch families and to require pastoral sensitivity.

### **The Background Reasons for these Positions**

The Uniting Church understands itself as living and working 'within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church', and that the congregation is the embodiment in one place of that same church (see *Basis of Union* paras. 2 and 15a). For the Uniting Church, the word 'congregation' means the basic community of faith. The church is governed by a series of interrelated councils over which Christ is recognised as supreme and through which oversight is given to the church. In its structures and life it seeks to acknowledge God as faithful, gracious, sovereign and

free. Faithful preaching/teaching of the word and celebration of the sacraments (baptism and holy communion) have been regarded since the Reformation as the essential signs of the existence of the church. In this understanding, episcopate or oversight is exercised by councils of the church. Episcopate in this case is corporate rather than personal.

The presbytery is normally the regional council of the Uniting Church, and this is the body with the authority to ordain ministers of the Word and deacons and authorise lay persons to preside at the sacrament when the people otherwise would be deprived. The presbytery in this way has a sacramental role and the task of oversight of congregations /parishes.

Congregations gather to worship, to hear the word and celebrate the eucharist. An ordained minister, or other person appointed by the presbytery in the absence of an ordained person, presides. The focus is upon Christ who acts in this event and to whom people respond in faith as they come to the table. The table, as Christ's table, is thus regarded as open to all baptised christians. It is for christians of other churches to decide whether, in the discipline and belief of their own church, they are free to respond to the invitation to the Lord's table in the Uniting Church.

Two basic and inseparable principles are the foundation of the Roman Catholic approach to eucharistic hospitality.

First, the Roman Catholic Church sees eucharistic sharing as inseparably linked to its understanding of the church and of Roman Catholic identity, as well as to its understanding of the sacramental relationship of the individual believer to Christ. Eucharistic communion is not only communion with Christ and with others celebrating that eucharist, but also, for Roman Catholics, a sign and source of communion in faith with other local churches in communion with Rome.

In Roman Catholic terminology, the diocese is the local church governed by the bishop in communion with the bishop of Rome. Within each diocese are many worshipping communities under the oversight of the bishop and presided over by a priest. For Roman Catholics, eucharistic communion presided over by a priest is the visible sign and source of full ecclesial communion and full church membership. The Roman Catholic Church envisages open eucharistic hospitality as the final act signifying full ecclesial communion and not the means to achieve that full communion.

A second basic principle, however, must be taken together with the first. The Roman Catholic Church believes that 'by baptism members of other churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, even if imperfect communion, with the Catholic Church' (see *Directory* 129). It teaches that 'baptism, which constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn, ... is wholly

directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ' (see *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22).

From these two principles taken together come both the general rule that access to the eucharist only be permitted to Roman Catholics, as well as the exception that, for the spiritual good of the Uniting Church person, eucharistic hospitality can be extended under certain conditions (as listed below; see *Directory* 129). However, for all the baptised, eucharist provides necessary nourishment for acquiring fullness of life in Christ. Even when eucharist is celebrated in separate churches, because it unites these separated communities to Christ, it also draws them closer to each other.

For Roman Catholics, the validity of the eucharist is understood to be intrinsically tied to the validity of their priest's ordination. This church is not yet able to recognise *formally* the complete sacramental reality of the Uniting Church's celebration of the eucharist. In order to reach such recognition, dialogue needs to continue on those matters which still divide us.

## **Pastoral Approaches**

The Uniting Church would seek to assist interchurch families to understand its open invitation to the Lord's table, but also help all concerned to respond faithfully within the discipline and belief of their own church. A discussion with a minister or an elder would be an appropriate way of exploring how the family is best able to share most fully in worship.

The 1993 *Directory* outlines four conditions which must all be present for a Roman Catholic minister to extend the sacrament to members of other churches. These are:

- they are unable to have recourse to the sacrament from their own minister;
- they ask for the sacrament on their own initiative;
- they manifest a belief in the sacrament consistent with that of the Roman Catholic Church;
- they are properly disposed and in good conscience (see *Directory* 131; Code of Canon Law 844.4; Catechism 1401).

Although this may seem complicated, it may be sufficient for the presiding priest to establish, by means of a few simple questions, whether or not these conditions are met. One such situation where this need may arise could be in a caring institution where persons may lack access to a minister of their own church.

For an interchurch family some occasions for such a request might be:

- for the marriage partner within a nuptial mass;
- for a parent at the baptism of a child of the marriage within mass;

- for a parent at a confirmation or first communion mass;
- for family members at a funeral mass.

Such requests coming from interchurch families are recognised as in a special category. Should an individual repeat such a request frequently, it is a case for joint pastoral care by both churches. The pain of these people in their need for the eucharist calls for recognition and challenges both churches to do further work towards overcoming obstacles. There can be a serious crisis of conscience and pastors of both churches need to show sympathetic understanding. Pastoral approaches to eucharistic hospitality form part of a necessary overall joint pastoring for interchurch families.

The *Directory* recommends that each diocesan bishop set up general guidelines to assist priests in this sensitive pastoral area. Some dioceses have already done this.

The Roman Catholic Church recognises the value of all worship, including non-sacramental worship. Feeding at the 'table of the word' – listening to the scriptures read and interpreted – nourishes the faith of all who seek to hear the Spirit of God speaking in this way. Prayer together to the God of all strengthens the bonds of our common baptism.

## Chapter 6

### PASTORAL CARE

In Chapter 3 we saw that, upon marriage, the interchurch couple can be considered as a 'domestic church'. The pastoral care of this domestic church is important not only for the formation of the people involved but also for their witness to society and for their sharing in the life and mission of the church. This involves not only the constant enrichment of the lives of the parties but also the healing, reconciliation and personal discipline that human sinfulness requires. It is not possible to do any more in this Chapter than to emphasise the care which an interchurch marriage needs in addition to the pastoral care every domestic church receives.

#### Marriage Preparation

Both our churches offer courses in marriage preparation and it is assumed that the clergy who will be involved with the interchurch couple will be familiar with the courses and the other available material from diocesan and Synod offices. However it will be necessary to take account of any differences and to do this the following guidelines are suggested:

1. As soon as one pastor is contacted by the couple regarding the marriage, he or she should contact the pastor of the other church to discuss how the responsibility for the preparation and celebration of the marriage can be shared. It is important that such arrangements be conducted in a co-operative manner from the start. The two pastors may find it helpful to spend time discussing the section on 'Mixed Marriages' in the *Directory* 143-160;
2. A joint counselling session should be planned so that both pastors can be present with the parties to the proposed marriage. This session can plan the way in which preparation for the marriage is undertaken. It should promote an appreciation of the mutual respect which exists between the churches. The couple should have the opportunity to discuss differences and similarities in the way the two churches perceive and practise the christian faith and to explain how this is expressed both in the marriage ceremony and in married life;
3. In many interchurch families, concerns may be raised by devout parents and other family members. While the pastors' major responsibility is towards the couple, they may need to assist in retaining the goodwill and support of the couple's families;

4. Both pastors should stress the positive aspects of what the couple have in common as Christians. 'Each party ... should seek to foster all that can lead to unity and harmony' (see *Directory* 148);
5. If one of the pastors is unable to solemnise the marriage and the other agrees to do so, the two pastors should discuss the problem to arrive at some mutual understanding. Each should respect the decision of the other. Each has a responsibility to explain to the couple the reasons for recommending a particular course of action;
6. While the initial joint counselling session may have decided that one of the pastors will accept primary responsibility for the couple's marriage preparation, each pastor should have the opportunity to meet with the couple to discuss those particular areas which are part of his/her church's teaching and practice, particularly in respect of responsible parenthood, the Christian education of any children of the marriage, and the issue of divorce.

It is recognised that time constraints may make some of these guidelines difficult to carry out in practice. However, they are important as a witness to our churches' concern for the spiritual lives and the marriage of the couple, and as an expression of ecumenical commitment.

## **Planning the Ceremony**

### *Freedom to Marry*

Both pastors have a responsibility to establish that the couple is free to marry. This may involve considerations of church law as well as secular law. It is the responsibility of the Roman Catholic priest or deacon to seek any necessary dispensations.

### *Paperwork for Marriage*

The pastor who is to celebrate the marriage will prepare with the couple the paperwork required by the Australian government. After the marriage, the celebrant will send the paperwork to the Registrar-General so that the marriage can be officially recorded. A copy of the information is also entered into the official marriage register, signed by the parties at the wedding, and kept at the church or parish where the marriage takes place.

In addition, when a Catholic person marries, the Catholic Church has its own set of paperwork on the marriage and keeps it in its files. This paperwork is necessary for the marriage to be recognised by the Catholic Church, whether or not the wedding is celebrated in a Catholic church. The papers are as follows:

- The 'pre-marriage inquiry' form sets down the basic information about the couple and ascertains their freedom to marry. Recent copies of the couple's baptismal certificates are required.
- A second form seeks permission for the Catholic to marry another baptised christian, or a dispensation to marry someone who is not a baptised christian.
- In some circumstances, the bishop's permission may be sought for a Catholic wedding to be celebrated in a place other than a church building.
- When the wedding will not be celebrated in a Catholic marriage rite but in another christian or civil ceremony, a dispensation from canonical form is required.

The Catholic priest or deacon will help the couple with the Catholic Church's paperwork. When the wedding takes place in a Catholic church, these papers are filed at the church; otherwise they are sent for filing in the diocesan chancery archives.

#### *Children of Marriage*

Every Roman Catholic makes a promise in marriage to bring up children according to the law of Christ and his church. In the case of an interchurch marriage, that promise is made in a particular way. The *Directory* 151 shows what this involves:

In carrying out this duty of transmitting the Catholic faith to the children, the Catholic parent will do so with respect for the religious freedom and conscience of the other parent and with due regard for the unity and permanence of the marriage and for the maintenance of the communion of the family. If, notwithstanding the Catholic's best efforts, the children are not baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church, the Catholic parent does not fall subject to the censure of Canon Law. At the same time, his/her obligation to share the Catholic faith with the children does not cease. It continues to make its demands, which could be met, for example, by playing an active part in contributing to the Christian atmosphere of the home; doing all that is possible by word and example to enable the other members of the family to appreciate the specific values of the Catholic tradition; taking whatever steps are necessary to be well informed about his/her own faith so as to be able to explain and discuss it with them; praying with the family for the grace of Christian unity as the Lord wills it.

#### *Remarriage of Divorced Persons*

As explained in Chapter 2 the Roman Catholic Church does not permit any priest or deacon to celebrate the marriage of a person who has been divorced or to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people on the occasion of their remarriage,

unless the previous marriage has been canonically annulled or dissolved. However pastors and the whole community of the faithful have been called to help the divorced and 'with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptised persons they can, and indeed must, share her life' (see *Familiaris Consortio* 84). One way of showing this care is to encourage the formation of support groups for those affected by marriage breakdown.

In cases of irretrievable breakdown of marriage, the Uniting Church acknowledges that divorce may be the only creative and life giving direction to take. It has the responsibility to care for the people, including children, throughout the trauma of the ending of a marriage. It believes that the grace and healing of God are available to people who are divorced, which may free them to marry again.

### *The Marriage Service*

The marriage should be conducted according to the ritual and liturgy of the venue church. When both pastors participate, the one in whose church the ceremony takes place will be the authorised celebrant for the purposes of the *Marriage Act 1961*, and will usually preside. The other should be given a place of honour and should take an appropriate role in the liturgy. The respective roles should be clearly defined prior to the time of the rehearsal.

The orders of celebration for the Uniting Church and Roman Catholic wedding ceremonies (without eucharist) are:

#### **The Roman Catholic Ceremony**

*Introductory Rites*

Song

Greetings

Penitential rite

Prayer

*Liturgy of Word*

Scripture readings

Homily

*Rite of Marriage*

Questions

Consent

Blessing and exchange of rings

General intercessions

Profession of faith

#### **The Uniting Church Ceremony**

*The Gathering of the Community*

Greeting

Scripture sentence

Hymn

Declaration of purpose

*The Service of the Word*

Scripture readings

Sermon

*The Marriage*

Prayer

Declaration of intent

Affirmation by the families

Affirmation by the people

Vows

Nuptial blessing  
Lord's Prayer

Giving of the rings  
Proclamation of the marriage

The Blessing of the Marriage

Blessing  
Acclamations  
The peace  
Prayers  
Lord's Prayer  
Hymn  
Blessing

### *The Eucharist*

For Roman Catholics it is considered desirable for marriages to be celebrated within the context of a nuptial mass. However, current teachings and legislation make eucharistic sharing possible only under certain limited conditions (see Chapter 5). If a nuptial mass is held, a general invitation cannot be extended to members of the Uniting Church present to participate in communion. What should be a sacrament of unity hence becomes a sign of division. For this reason it is recommended that an interchurch marriage not be celebrated in the context of a eucharist.

In order to avoid undue tensions, both parties should be made aware of the current situation on eucharistic hospitality during marriage preparation.

## **Living as a Domestic Church**

### *The Shared Faith*

In describing the 'Phenomenon of Interchurch marriage' in Chapter 1 it was said that our churches should welcome candidates for marriage and, where appropriate, encourage - not impede - interchurch marriages. This is often not a difficult task when dealing with the couple, for their love fills them and their pastors with hope. However other members of the local community or congregation may not be at all enthusiastic. Some remember past hurts that arose from mixed marriages. Others may feel a sense of disappointment or even betrayal. The pastors can best deal with this by promoting a proper understanding of the faith our two churches share in common.

Particularly in the Uniting Church, the minister should ensure that the elders of the congregation are aware of the growth in the ecumenical vision. Elders may have a significant role to play in the pastoral care of the couple, particularly when the Uniting Church partner is placed under the pastoral care of an elder. It is important that the elder understands the breadth of the shared faith and respects the reasons for the beliefs upon which the churches are divided. The experience of the ecumenical movement has been that learning about other christian traditions

also involves discovering the treasures of one's own tradition.

The *Directory* speaks of the importance of prayer and the reading of scripture together in helping interchurch couples to live the christian inheritance they have in common and to achieve spiritual harmony.

Couples are also encouraged to learn more about each other's religious teachings and practice as a way to reaching greater unity and understanding (see *Directory* 149).

### *Christian Nurture*

Our common understanding of baptism was discussed in Chapter 4, and suggestions were made about how the celebration of baptism can be an expression of our ecumenical commitment. In varying degrees other important milestones in the interchurch couple's life as a domestic church can express the ecumenical vision. Education, both religious and secular, confirmation and receiving the first eucharist are matters upon which the couple will jointly make important decisions, and those responsible for their pastoral care should encourage them to express to the fullest extent the faith and practice we share. The things upon which we remain divided should not alone control decision making.

Because parents are the primary religious educators of their children, interchurch families have a unique opportunity to integrate an ecumenical dimension into the religious development of their children. At times this can become difficult. Adults may be able to bear the pain and difficulties of some forms of separation arising out of their belonging to different churches, but it is tragic that these are imposed on children who are too young to understand. However, children learn very quickly within the family context. Sometimes, practical compromises have to be made. Mutual respect between partners demands such compromises. That is the point at which the real challenge of living in an interchurch family is met and lived.

### *Use of Time and Resources*

By definition, each partner in an interchurch marriage will be committed to the life of a different community or congregation. At the same time they may be partially involved in the congregation of their partner. This will mean that together they will have to make decisions about their use of time and resources which may disappoint others in their community or congregation. It is necessary in every ecumenical activity that we respect the decisions others make as an expression of their faith in Jesus Christ, the one Lord of the church.

Christian communities and congregations should be encouraged to welcome and support the participation of a partner from another tradition in the life of the community, particular) in the area of faith formation of the children of the marriage

## Chapter 7

### Topics for Further Dialogue

One of the most positive outcomes of our dialogue over some five years has been the rediscovery of how much our two traditions have in common. This commonality, as it is called in Chapters 2 and 3 of our paper, became apparent again and again as we explored together the following:

- our common acceptance of the significance of marriage:  
  
[for] there is sufficient commonality in Uniting Church and Roman Catholic approaches to Christian marriage for the couples to be able to presume a great deal about the commitment of the other and for them to build together on a common foundation in Christian faith (see Chapter 2);
- our understanding of the centrality of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper / eucharist (see Chapter 4 and 5);
- our shared concern for the pastoral care of interchurch families (see Chapter 6), coupled with a frank admission that we had not carried through on such pastoral care as we ought to have done (see Chapter 1);
- the challenge and opportunity for progress in ecumenism which arise from interchurch marriages (see Chapters 1 and 3).

So there is commonality, not only in much of what we profess - to our joy; but also in the sinfulness we each confess - to our shame. As we report in Chapter 1, interchurch families face problems which are not of their making.

They deserve to be received with compassion, because the fault is not theirs but the consequence of our divisions. The pain which this causes is not their fault, but that of our churches which have placed them in that situation.

It is a case not of the church having to forgive them, but of asking them to forgive the church.

What follows here in the way of our agenda for further dialogue must not in any way be seen as diminishing such treasured 'commonality'. However, it is clearly impossible to engage in frank dialogue like this without being made aware, acutely at times, of areas in which agreement is not yet possible. Generally, these disagreements derive from the traditions in which we stand and with which we are deeply involved. Our incapacity to reach agreement is in part rooted in the seriousness of the issues, a seriousness which itself is part and parcel of the

international nature of and lines of responsibility within the Roman Catholic Church (see Chapter 3), international to a degree not matched by the Uniting Church in Australia, which has a greater measure of national autonomy.

Among the challenges and opportunities before us is a series of topics demanding further dialogue. The significance of each topic which appears below is illustrated by quotations from our agreed report.

## **The Indissolubility of Marriage**

The 1997 Assembly of the Uniting Church has affirmed that:

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life ... (and) is intended to be the mutually faithful life-long union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together.

However, when speaking of separation, divorce and remarriage the Assembly affirmed that:

In cases of the irretrievable break-down of marriage, the Church acknowledges that divorce may be the only creative and life-giving direction to take, ... the grace and healing of God are available to people who are divorced, which may free them to marry again.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church, regarding marriage as a sacrament, sees it as indissoluble:

[So] it does not celebrate the remarriage of divorced persons unless the previous marriage has been canonically annulled or dissolved, though it does not prohibit separation of married couples or even civil divorce in difficult situations.

It must be noted, however, that:

The different approaches of the two churches to the indissolubility of marriage, or to the continuing significance of the couple's commitment to live together for life in those cases when marriage has broken down, do not mean that the original marriage commitment should be interpreted as any less complete for either church.

## **Sacrament and Sacramentality**

Our differences concerning the sacraments are not focused primarily on the differing number of sacraments recognised by each church. Rather, they focus on what it is

that constitutes a sacrament. This comes into sharp relief when we see how each church understands marriage. However,

While our two communions use the language of *sacrament* in different ways, members of both churches could find that in a covenant theology of Christian marriage many apparent differences implied in the language of *sacrament* are overcome.

*Chapter 2.*

## **On Baptism**

The commonality in understandings of baptism is not to be discounted in any way at all, for both churches acknowledge that through baptism,

God has graciously made us his own, and that all who are baptised belong to him. ... The two churches involved recognise this, and there is no dispute about such fundamental belonging.

*Chapter 3.*

There is complete agreement that

... baptism initiates into the church, but we are introduced into churches with real but incomplete communion between the members.

... Incorporation into Christ through baptism should find expression at a shared communion table.

*Chapter 4*

but at that very table the partners in an interchurch marriage are divided one from the other.

We need to dialogue further on the possibility of an ecumenical baptism which

... may be such a prophetic act, which challenges our preconceptions and which allows the Spirit to create a wondrous diversity from our sinful division. Denominational tensions which may occur about baptism at the birth of a child are confronted by the triumphant assertion of the interchurch marriage, *What God has joined together, let no one put asunder!*

*Chapter 4*

Even after this dialogue we repeat what we said in response to the achievements of 1979 *A Common Understanding of Baptism*, namely, that the churches still wish to see

... if they can build on this common understanding to move beyond mutual recognition to a deeper level of baptismal sharing, particularly in the context of the interchurch family.

## **Intercommunion**

While

... the eucharist is of central importance to both churches, ...[though] expressed differently according to the distinctive emphases of each church's tradition,

*Chapter 5*

yet there is no agreement at this stage that the two churches mutually recognise and share each other's eucharist.

There is common acknowledgement of 'one Lord', one 'baptism', and 'one God and Father of all', but there is as yet no agreement on 'one faith' (Eph 4:5-6). So intercommunion is not possible at present, since

In general the Catholic Church permits access to its eucharistic communion ... only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life.

*Chapter 5*

Further,

... the Roman Catholic Church does not find itself able to give permission to its members to receive communion in the Uniting Church at this point of time. It is recognised that this is likely to become problematic for interchurch families and to require pastoral sensitivity'

This position is taken while acknowledging that

For both churches, sharing the eucharist expresses the unity of Christians in Christ; for the Uniting Church this unity is seen to exist already in such a substantial way that eucharistic communion between the churches is possible; for the Roman Catholic Church, this unity is seen to be still insufficient so long as the churches do not share a full unity in faith.

*Chapter 4*

At the same time

by baptism members of other churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, even if imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church, ... [for] Even when eucharist is celebrated in separate churches, because it unites these separated communities to Christ, it also draws them closer to each other.

*Chapter 5*

## **Mutual Recognition of Ministers**

For Roman Catholics, the validity of the eucharist is understood to be intrinsically tied to the validity of their priest's ordination. This church is not yet able to recognise formally the complete sacramental reality of the Uniting Church's celebration of the eucharist. In order to reach such recognition, dialogue needs to continue on those matters which still divide us.

*Chapter 5*

Clearly the fact that there is no agreement at this time between the two churches which would allow the complete recognition of their ordained ministries remains a major stumbling block to full communion. This is related to differing understandings of succession in apostolicity.

## **The Fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ**

The Roman Catholic Church sees eucharistic sharing as inseparably linked to its understandings of the church and of Roman Catholic identity ... [and] envisages open eucharistic hospitality as the final act signifying full ecclesial communion and not the means to achieve that full communion.

*Chapter 5*

Such Roman Catholic understanding, following the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, holds that

... the one church of Jesus Christ continues to exist with all its essential elements in the Roman Catholic Church. ... [while it remains] possible to acknowledge that these elements are also found in varying degrees in other christian churches

*Chapter 3*

The essential elements are not listed anywhere by the Council, but certainly they do include the papacy and the institution of diocesan bishops.

And Pope John Paul II has declared that

To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them.

*Chapter 3*

However, it is clear that a difference remains between these statements and the declaration of the Uniting Church which affirms that it

... lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and

Apostolic Church, ... [and] enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed ... [and] acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.

*Chapter 3*

## **Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families**

It is gratifying to conclude the agenda for further dialogue with a topic on which both churches are in full agreement. That they have to find better ways of exercising pastoral care for interchurch families is made clear in Chapters 1 and 6.

So, for example, when requests for eucharistic hospitality come from interchurch families, they

... are recognised as in a special category. Should an individual repeat such a request frequently, it is a case for joint pastoral care by both churches. The pain of these people in their need for the eucharist calls for recognition and challenges both churches to do further work towards overcoming obstacles. There can be a serious crisis of conscience and pastors of both churches need to show sympathetic understanding.

*Chapter 5*

*It is at this point, given the constraints on the time available to pastors, that greater use of the elders in the Uniting Church and of lay ministers in the Roman Catholic Church needs to be explored by both churches.*

Throughout,

The members of interchurch marriages and families could be seen as the human face and the cutting edge of ecumenism, and the increasing emergence of interchurch marriages as a gift of the Holy Spirit, moving us to closer unity.

*Chapter 1*

## Conclusion

When our Roman Catholic-Uniting Church dialogue team met for the first time in 1993, it decided to build on the excellent work already completed by the previous team in Melbourne. Marriage is a critical issue for Australia and it seemed entirely sensible to take the insights gained by the previous dialogue and develop them further for the benefit of our respective churches. One important type of marriage in both our churches is the interchurch marriage and we decided to explore this comparatively new phenomenon for ecumenical purposes.

Despite our enthusiasm about the subject, we needed some hard data to enable us to commence our dialogue. This we obtained by conducting a survey of Catholic and Uniting Church pastors who might be in contact with interchurch couples, mostly young, who explained to us the joys, the pains, the satisfactions and challenges of their relationships. The information gained in this process convinced us of both the importance of these marriages, as well as their potential for instructing and enthusing the churches about lived ecumenism. Indeed such marriages seemed a microcosm of ecumenism itself, where couples experienced both satisfaction and anguish as they sought ever closer union, while being supported by their commitment, love, and common faith in Jesus Christ.

Equipped with this information we eventually chose a seven- chapter format and began by discussing prepared papers that, after critique and further exploration, provided the basis for the chapters that were later written by Catholic and Uniting Church people working together.

Our study of interchurch marriages indicated that the phenomenon, although not wide-spread, was nevertheless significant. We also realised that with adequate preparation many 'mixed marriages' could become genuine interchurch marriages. Sometimes through ignorance or overwork, pastors seemed reluctant to encourage couples from different churches to consider that possibility. We hoped that this dialogue might help pastors to communicate more clearly the religious options available to such people, and that materials developed from that dialogue might assist them in that task.

The respective theologies of marriage and baptism indicated substantial areas of agreement as well as questions that needed further exploration. Much common ground was discovered in covenant theology of marriage. We realised also that, although the sacrament of baptism cannot provide 'double belonging in our respective churches, nevertheless creative and ' sensitive possibilities are available for interchurch families and their friends when they gather to celebrate the baptism of their children.

We also discovered different understandings of 'belonging', regarding membership in the one church of Jesus Christ and membership in our respective churches. As we

indicated in Chapter 3 we look forward to that day when there will be complete recognition of the one church of Jesus Christ in our two churches.

Different approaches appeared also regarding the hospitality that may be offered to other Christians in the eucharist/Lord's Supper, but these differences were balanced by possibilities for participation in this sacrament that are already available, but eagerly unknown. Recent progress made in the area of eucharistic hospitality fills us with hope that further progress will continue in the future for the benefit of interchurch couples.

The chapter on pastoral care emphasises the special care that is deserved and needed by interchurch families. It would be a tragedy indeed if these marriages were to fail through insufficient pastoring, or through lack of support by the wider church communities.

Finally, Chapter 7 indicates areas of study that need further development.

As we come to the end of this dialogue on interchurch marriages, we look back on an experience that has been educational and, in the best sense of the word, ecumenical. We hope that the information obtained may be of benefit not only for our respective churches but for other churches that are also aware of this phenomenon and are looking for some understanding and direction in dealing with it.

However, most importantly, we hope that the study will be of benefit to interchurch families themselves. All of us finished the dialogue with enormous admiration for the generosity and commitment of these families. Their presence in our churches needs to be recognized and celebrated. They are living ecumenism on behalf of the churches in the most significant manner possible, often without sufficient recognition and support. Their 'togetherness in separation' makes us more than ever aware of the urgency of the ecumenical task of bringing our churches ever closer together for their sake. The pain of separation that we all experience is particularly focused in the intimacy of their lives, and we need to do everything possible to assist them by promoting ever closer unity in Christ. May the Holy Spirit of God assist us in this task as we begin the new millennium.

## Participants

### Roman Catholic Church / Uniting Church Dialogue

1993-1999

**Joint Chairpersons:** The Most Reverend Dr John Bathersby and the Reverend Professor James Haire.

**Joint Secretaries:** The Most Reverend Dr Michael Putney and the Reverend Dr David Rankin (1993-95), the Reverend Professor Bruce Upham (1995-97), the Reverend Professor Han Spykerboer (1997-99).

#### **Appointed by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference:**

The Most Reverend Dr John Bathersby, Archbishop of Brisbane; former Spiritual Director at Pius XII Seminary.

The Reverend Dr Tom Boland (1993-96), Church Historian; former Rector of Pius XII Seminary.

The Most Reverend James Cuskelly MSC (1993-96), former Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane; former Superior-General of the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

The Reverend Dr Tom Elich, Executive Secretary of the National Liturgical Commission; Director of the Liturgical Commission, Brisbane.

Mrs Elizabeth Harrington, Education Officer of the Liturgical Commission, Brisbane.

The Reverend Bill O'Shea, Parish Priest; former Rector and Lecturer in New Testament at Pius XII Seminary; former Lecturer in New Testament in the Department of Divinity, the University of Queensland.

The Reverend Dr David Pascoe (1997-99), Academic Dean and Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Pius XII Seminary.

The Most Reverend Dr Michael Putney, Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane; former Vice-Rector and Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Pius XII Seminary

The Reverend Dr Ormond Rush (1997-99), Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Pius XII Seminary.

#### **Appointed by the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Commission on Christian Unity**

Mr Justice Alan Demack, Judge in the Supreme Court of Queensland.

The Reverend Dr Ian Gillman, Former Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Studies in Religion, the University of Queensland; former Secretary of Uniting Church Assembly Commission on Liturgy.

The Reverend Professor James Haire, President-Elect of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia; Principal and Head of the Department of New Testament in Trinity Theological College.

The Reverend Dr David Rankin, Academic Dean and Head of the Department of Church History in Trinity Theological College.

The Reverend Professor Han Spykerboer, Former Principal, Academic Dean and Head of the department of Old Testament in Trinity Theological College.

The Reverend Professor Bruce Upham, Former Principal and Head of the Department of Systematic Theology and Lecturer in Church History in Trinity Theological College.

The Reverend Geraldine Wheeler, Parish Minister; former Secretary of Assembly Commission on Liturgy.