

Ministering to Interchurch Couples – Help for Clergy

Ministering to Interchurch Couples: *Help for Clergy*

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The member churches of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting are:

*The Catholic Church in Ireland, The Church of Ireland, The Coptic Church in Ireland, The
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Ireland, The Methodist Church in Ireland, The Moravian Church in Ireland. The Non-
Subscribing Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Presbyterian Church in
Ireland, The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland and The Salvation Army.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This booklet seeks to provide practical information for clergy ministering to interchurch couples. Much of the contents were first produced in two leaflets: *Interchurch Marriage Services and Baptisms of Children of Interchurch Couples* (September 1997) and *The Pastoral Care of Interchurch Couples* (April 1998). It has been supplemented with some additional material.

It needs to be recognised that there has been increasing pastoral sensitivity since the 1960s and early 1970s in how interchurch marriages are dealt with, as is evidenced in successive reports of the Inter-Church Standing Committee on Mixed Marriage. This is a consequence of changed relationships between the churches and of changes in Roman Catholic regulations on interchurch marriage. However, there remain significant difficulties in the area of interchurch marriage and it is unrealistic to expect that these can be entirely eliminated. As the Report of the InterChurch Meeting (Ballymascanlon) Working Party on Social and Community Problems (1975) said about mixed marriages:

"As long as our churches remain divided mixed marriages will bring tensions, both for the marriage partners and their children. The acuteness of these tensions and of the problems they create is likely to be in proportion to the depths of the divisions between the respective churches and the degree of commitment felt towards their teachings and disciplines by the parties concerned"

Thankfully, joint studies by the churches have shown a considerable shared understanding of Christian marriage as an expression of the covenant love of God and his people, and of Christ and his Church. This has enabled a more positive approach to be adopted in dealing pastorally with interchurch marriages, in line with the overall spirit of co-operation that has developed as part of the improvement in interchurch relations.

2. THE PASTORAL CARE OF INTERCHURCH COUPLES

(i) Changes in Marital and Family Life

While interchurch marriages have their own particular challenges they cannot be dealt with adequately without considerable reference to issues that are common to all marriage. Marriages are lived out in social contexts and the social change of the last thirty years has meant that new patterns of couple and family relationships are emerging.

All churches are aware of the widespread marital and family breakdown in society today and Christians are not immune from the dangers that threaten stable relationships.

At the very least, therefore, it is vital not to put unnecessary stumbling blocks resulting from conflicting church loyalties in the way of marital and family unity. It is equally important to take positive steps wherever possible to help to overcome the difficulties that will inevitably arise in developing relationships due to the different backgrounds from which the couple come. Thus, it is important that interchurch couples who present themselves are welcomed, encouraged and supported. This is also important from a pastoral point of view because there is some international evidence that interchurch couples are most at risk of drift from church belonging and practice. Moreover, interchurch marriages are not likely to decrease, but to increase.

(ii) The Special Demands of Interchurch Marriages

While interchurch couples face the same challenges that any couple face, interchurch marriage brings added challenges to the marriage relationship. Some of these challenges come from the fact of different church allegiances. Some come from the way religious factors interact with non-religious factors, e.g. differences in culture and politics. And some come from unresolved differences between the churches on such issues as the nature of the church, and its teaching and lawmaking role.

Thus, in dealing with interchurch marriages there must be an awareness of the different understandings that the churches have of themselves, of the variety of church traditions, of their disciplines with regard to marriage and family life, and of the canonical and legal issues accompanying these disciplines. The integrity of the whole process of pastoral care can only be sustained by taking account of these issues.

(iii) Categories of Interchurch Couples

Three categories of interchurch couples can be distinguished:

1. Those where both partners are practising Christians and wish to remain faithful members of their respective churches. It is couples in this category who often experience most pain because of the very seriousness with which they live their Christian faith and strive to pass it on to their children. For these reasons they have a particular ecumenical significance.

Many couples in this situation wish to share in the life of each other's churches and to nurture their children so that they have a knowledge and awareness of both traditions. It is these above all to which the term "interchurch marriage" may properly apply and to whom joint pastoral care may be offered most readily. Indeed, in these cases, the initiative often comes from the couples themselves.

2. Those where one of the partners is apparently a more committed Christian than the other but where there are nonetheless two denominational backgrounds.

It may seem a natural first step for pastoral responsibility to be undertaken from within the church of the more committed partner. But it should not be assumed too readily by whoever initiates the caring process that only one church need be involved in it. Firstly, it is difficult for the priest or minister to judge how committed the partner from the other church may be: churches do not have common criteria for determining this. Secondly, it is sometimes the case that the commitment of one partner will bring the more nominal partner back to a fuller faith, and the evidence is that where this occurs he or she seems as often to be restored to the communion of the church of his or her upbringing as to that of the marriage partner. Residual church loyalty must not, therefore, be overlooked.

3. Those where the partners are both only nominally Christians or appear very weak in the practice of their faith, yet, as in the previous cases, still come from two different church traditions.

The occasion of their marriage may be an opportunity to awaken them to the demands of the gospel. Care should be exercised to do this in a spirit of encouragement rather than proselytism. Even nominal Christians often retain emotional ties to the church in which they were brought up just as strongly as practising Christians.

(iv) Preparing for Interchurch Marriage

a. In the matter of interchurch marriages a great deal depends on the personal relationship between the clergy involved. Hence clergy ought to do their best to establish open and friendly relationships with each other. We recognise that the reactions of church members and of the wider community may inhibit what is possible in certain areas.

b. The clergy will be aware also of the special importance in the case of interchurch marriages of establishing a good pastoral relationship with the couples who come to them. This will involve true Christian respect, friendliness and helpfulness towards both partners to the marriage, as the clergy, in a spirit of ecumenical service, seek to help them prepare for their Christian marriage.

Clergy taking part in the marriage service, along with the couple themselves, all accepting the disciplines of their own churches, will speak volumes to their families and friends at the wedding.

c. The parties in an interchurch marriage should be encouraged to develop a good understanding of each other's family and church culture (if they have not already done so). Couples may need encouragement to explore one another's church backgrounds and to discuss their beliefs.

d. Many couples will face opposition from their families. Clergy, particularly if they work together, can help in reconciling the two families to the marriage. While the first responsibility is to the couple themselves, there is a ministry to parents of engaged couples. Not only clergy but also the whole parish or congregational community have a role to play in developing attitudes towards the partners of interchurch marriages.

e. Couples may need help to think through some of the sensitive issues that are now facing (or will face) them, e.g. the implications of the partners remaining attached to their own denomination, how each partner is to relate to the religious tradition of the other, the religious upbringing of children, etc. The clergy involved have an important role in this.

In some churches a particular minister or priest has been appointed to give advice and guidance in the area of interchurch marriage. These people can also relieve some of the pressures on individual clergy. Other clergy who have a lot of experience in this field can also help on an informal basis.

Interchurch couples can be helped a great deal in these and other matters by meeting

others in similar situations. Information should be given to the couples about the existence of the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association and the Association of Interchurch Families and encouragement given to make contact if they wish to do so.

f. In preparing for the wedding service clergy should look at the options available within the disciplines of the churches and everything should be done to make both partners feel at home. The section on **Interchurch Marriage Services and Baptisms of Children of Interchurch Couples** makes some suggestions.

g. In some places, e.g. in Dublin and Belfast, the four largest churches co-operate in providing marriage preparation for interchurch couples. These can relieve some of the pressures on individual clergy. Such interchurch preparation is to be encouraged.

(v) Continuing Support

a. A good relationship locally between clergy can be a vital element in the context in which an interchurch marriage thrives. Such a relationship gives the possibility of cooperation in the joint pastoral care of the interchurch couple.

b. Interchurch marriages do not escape the pressures that all marriages face. In practice couples who are fully committed to their beliefs and particularly couples who in any way pray together are less likely to have their marriages break down. Shared expectations and practice help strengthen and confirm their commitment. Clergy should do all they can to foster a truly Christian religious atmosphere in the home of the interchurch couple, e.g. by encouraging rhythms of prayer and spirituality, etc.

c. Clergy should welcome both partners into the life of their church so far as they wish to be involved, respecting the fact that there may also be a loyalty to another congregation.

d. Interchurch marriages involve not just the recognition of differences of belief and practice, but often more difficult differences in community and cultural background. Couples may need help to face up to these differences and to see them as potential sources of growth for their relationship. Difference does not necessarily bring divisiveness.

(vi) **The Religious Upbringing of Children**

a. The religious upbringing of children is a particularly sensitive issue and one that can bring strong feelings. Like all Christian parents interchurch parents are jointly responsible for nurturing their children in the faith of Christ and for introducing them into the Christian community. This is the context in which the Catholic partner is required to make a promise concerning the upbringing of children. In no way does this imply any diminution in the duties of the non-Roman Catholic partner. As the Irish Episcopal Conference *Directory on Mixed Marriage (1983)* says:

"The obligations of the Catholic party do not, and cannot, cancel out or in any way call into question the conscientious duties of the other party"

This issue has to be faced up to realistically by interchurch couples as soon as marriage becomes a likelihood. Many authorities advise that couples should have at least a basis for agreement on this question before getting married. Difficulties in reaching such a basis would indicate a need for further consideration before going ahead with a marriage.

b. Particular problems may arise at the time of baptism when there are conflicting pressures from family and from church. Whatever choices are made it is important that ways are found to accommodate the continued unity of the family as well as the possibility of allowing the family to be nourished by two different church communities. The section on **Interchurch Marriage Services and Baptisms of Interchurch Couples** makes some suggestions.

c. The decisions which interchurch couples have to face as parents fall into two groups. Some of the decisions revolve around how they celebrate important stages in the developing life of faith of their children and family. An example of such decisions is: Into what church community is the child to be baptised? Other decisions have more to do with the ongoing patterns of the life of faith. How are the riches of both traditions to be shared with the children? What school do they wish their children to attend?

Couples make these decisions on the basis of their own personal convictions within a context of the influence and guidance of their separate families and church communities. The strength of particular personalities may have a considerable effect on decisions taken.

There may often be a conflict of views that may not be easy to work through to some sort of satisfactory conclusion. There may be no easy answer but the starting point is not to ignore any of the parties who are naturally and deeply concerned. If

each of the groups feel respected, understood and supported by the others, tensions are lessened and a positive way forward may be found.

d. Some parents want their children to be brought up within the life of both churches. Churches have discouraged this, often feeling that children need a clear religious identity, and that if they are brought up in both churches, they will not know where they belong. This is a particularly acute issue in a divided society like Northern Ireland's. The position of the churches has been that a clear choice has to be made and it is better that the choice is made as soon as possible. If the choice is postponed there are difficult issues around schooling, First Communion and Confirmation.

Nevertheless, some parents choose to bring their children up within the life of both churches. This should not be undertaken without the parents having knowledge and regard for the teaching and practice of the churches concerned.

There is need for sensitivity to, and support for, parents in the choices that they make, while making it clear to them the difficulties involved. There is also a need to respect any feeling of double belonging on the part of the children, and for sensitivity to the choices that they are involved in making. (A sense of double belonging needs to be distinguished from double membership. It is not possible, for instance, for children to be Catholics and to belong to the denomination of the other parent in the sense of formal church membership.)

e. Families will find different patterns of religious upbringing that 'work' for them, which reflect the choices and commitment of the parents. It needs to be recognised that these patterns alter as the family develops and the children start to make their own choices. Church communities and clergy need to be sensitive to all of this. Interchurch couples need to experience that they are accepted, encouraged and supported by both their churches.

(vii) **In General**

Interchurch marriages by their very nature need joint pastoral care in their preparation, celebration and aftercare.

3.INTERCHURCH MARRIAGE SERVICES AND BAPTISMS OF CHILDREN OF INTERCHURCH COUPLES

(i) Introduction

Regarding such services there are requirements of church law (which differ between the churches) and, in the case of marriage, state law which need to be fulfilled. There are sensitive pastoral and theological considerations which need to be taken into account. There are also issues concerning liturgy and practice in the different churches, and issues concerning the involvement of clergy of other denominations. All of these point to the importance of contact, communication, discussion and cooperation between the clergy involved and further, and most importantly, between them and the couples and their wider families.

(ii) Some Suggestions for Marriage Services of Interchurch Couples

a. Room should be made for significant participation by the visiting clergy in the liturgy of the host church in so far as legal requirements, either of church or state, makes this possible (the legal part of the service must be performed by the host minister). The spirit should be one of generous welcome to a colleague in Christ.

b. Participating clergy should discuss the part that each can be offered within the Order of Service, bearing in mind the couples' wishes and expectations, and that family and friends of the couple may expect to take part in the Readings. It is important that the clergy discuss all aspects of the service with the couple and that they give direction on lay participation.

c. All our communions share a heritage of hymnody. It is recommended that the hymns chosen for the marriage service provide an opportunity to celebrate the richness of our traditions. It is also important that they should be well known.

d. The ceremony and Order of Service for the marriage should be discussed or checked by both participating clergy before going to print to ensure that potentially embarrassing or divisive material can be avoided.

e. The celebration of the Eucharist requires careful and sensitive consideration. It is generally preferable that the wedding ceremony does not take place within the context of a Nuptial Mass. While, in certain circumstances, it may be possible for

an interchurch couple to receive Holy Communion together at a Nuptial Mass there is no provision, under existing norms on sacramental sharing, for including in the Eucharistic sharing guests not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, a section of the congregation may feel left out if the wedding ceremony takes place in the context of a Nuptial Mass. For some Protestant families this may not be a problem, but others can feel pain, often shared by the participating Roman Catholic family. Moreover, when the marriage does not take place within this context there is more scope for the involvement of clergy and lay people of other denominations. It would be helpful for the officiating priest to explain these reasons to the couples, and especially to the Catholic family who often have a strong expectation of a Nuptial Mass. Similarly, it is generally preferable not to have a Protestant communion service in the context of the wedding ceremony (although this expectation would be rarer).

f. At the actual ceremony the host clergy should ensure that the visiting family and their clergy are recognised and esteemed. For example, greetings and courtesies may be exchanged by the clergy at a time and in a fashion which do not compromise legal or liturgical necessities.

g. Suggested Scripture Readings

(These readings have been produced on the assumption that the service will follow the liturgy and practice of the host church).

Roman Catholic

O.T. Gen. 1:26-28, 31; Gen. 2:18-24; Gen. 24:48-51, 58-67;
Song of Songs 2:8-10, 16 & 8:6-7

N.T. Rom. 8:31-35, 37-39; Rom.12:1-2, 9-18; 1 Cor. 6:13-15, 17-20;
1 Cor. 12: 31-13:8; Eph. 5:2, 21-33; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Pet. 3:1-9;
1 John 3:18-24

Psalms 32; 33; 102; 111; 127; 144

(Note: These are the numbers from the Roman Catholic lectionary. Check that they correspond with the numbers in your version of the Psalms).

Gospel Mat. 5:1-12; Mat. 5:13-16; Mat. 7:21, 24-29; Mat. 19:3-6;
Mat. 22:35-40; Mark 10:6-9; John 15:9-12; John 15:12-16;
John 17:20-26

Church of Ireland

O.T. Gen. 1:26-28, 31a; Gen. 2:18-24

Epistle Rom. 12:1-2, 9-13; 1 Cor:13; Eph. 3:14-21; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:12-17; 1 John 4:7-12

Gospel Mat. 7:21, 24-27; Mat. 19:3-6; Mark 10:6-12; John 2:1-11; John 15:9-12

Presbyterian Church

O.T. Gen. 1:26-28a; Gen. 2:4-9, 15-24; Ruth 1:16-17; Psalm 100

Epistle Rom. 12:1-2, 9-13; 1 Cor. 13:4-8a, 13; Eph. 3:14-21; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 John 4:7-16

Gospel Mat. 5:1-10; Mat. 7:21-29; Mark 10:6-9; John 15: 9-12

Methodist Church

O.T. Gen. 1:26-29a, 31a; Gen. 2:4-9, 15-24; Song of Songs 1:15 2:4; Ps. 23; Ps. 121; Ps. 127 or 128; Is. 61:10, 62:3-5

Epistle Rom. 12:1-2, 9-13; Eph. 5:21-31; Phil. 1:9-II; Phil. 2:1-11;

Col. 3:12-17; 1 John 3: 18-24; Rev. 19:6-9

Gospel Mat. 5:1-10; Mat. 7:21, 24-27; Mat. 22:35-40; John 2:1-11

Methodist Recommended Readings - one or more of:

Song of Songs 8:7; 1 Cor. 13:4-8a, 13; Eph. 3: 14-19; 1 John 4: 7-12, 15-17; Mark 10: 6-9; John 15: 9-12

(iii) The Baptism of Children of Interchurch Couples

a. Introduction

Often baptisms will be celebrated in a service specially convened for the families and friends of the couple and their child. The place where the baptismal service will usually take place will be the church of one of the parents with the priest/minister of the other invited to attend and to participate, where appropriate.

b. Sharing in the Celebration of Baptism

Couples often ask for a child to be baptised "into Christ" or "as a Christian". However, Christian baptism is both into Christ and into his Church. And Church has to be expressed in a visible Christian community.

Baptismal faith implies that we must regard the church as one (there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" - Eph. 4:5). However, so long as there is division between the churches a child must necessarily in practice be baptised into a Christian community, which belongs to a particular tradition. And because of the reality that baptism is necessarily in practice into a particular Christian community it may not be conferred jointly by two ministers belonging to different churches. Moreover, according to Roman Catholic liturgical and theological tradition the act of baptism is celebrated by just one celebrant.

However, in a context where there is mutual recognition of baptism, and where the couple are active members of their churches, the celebration of a baptism can be **shared**, with the participation of a priest or minister from the other church. This may be very important for the couple concerned and may bring together not only families, but congregations in a joyful celebration of a child's baptism into Christ and his Church. What appears to be excluded by the Roman Catholic Church in a shared baptism is the joint pouring of water and the saying of the baptismal formula by two ministers. The rest of the service can be shared by the ministers of the two faith communities.

• Suggestions Concerning the Service

1. Each step in the liturgy and practice of the host church should be simply described and explained. In particular, the rites and symbolism which are not common to both participating traditions should be interpreted so that the visiting family and their friends can understand and appreciate the significance of what is happening. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the parent who does not belong to the host church is included and involved.

2. The visiting priest/minister should be made welcome and given a significant part to play in the Service provided this participation does not give the impression of a joint baptism. Some suggestions are: Scripture Reading/s; a share in the homily or exhortation to the parents; a part in the blessing of the child, especially by touch if that is included in the ceremony; a part in the intercessory prayers for the child, the parents and their families.

3. Suggested Scripture Readings

(Note: These readings have been produced on the assumption that the service will follow the liturgy and practice of the host church).

Roman Catholic

O.T. Exodus 17:3-7; Ezek. 36:24-28; Ezek. 47:1-9,12

Psalms Ps. 22; Ps. 33:2-3, 6-9, 14-19; Ps.26:1, 4, 8-9, 13-14

(Note.: These are the numbers for the Roman Catholic lectionary. Check that they correspond with the numbers in your version of the Psalms).

N.T. Rom. 6:3-5; Rom.8:28-32; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:26-28;
Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10

Gospels Mat. 22:35-40; Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 1:9-11; Mark 10:13-16; Mark 12:28-34; John 3:1-6; John 4:5-14; John 3:16; John 6:44-47; John 7:37-39; John 8:12; John 9:1-7; John 15:1-11; John 19:31-35

Church of Ireland

Alternative Services Book - Rom. 6:3-11; Mat. 28:16-20; Mark 10:13-16
(As also in Book of Common Prayer)

Alternative Occasional Services

O.T. Deut. 30:15-20; Isa. 11:1-9; Jer. 31-34; Ezek. 36:25a, 26-28

Psalms Ps. 119:33-40

Epistle Rom.6:3-11; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 4:4-8;
1 Peter 2:4-10

Gospel Mat. 5:1-10; Mat. 16:24-27; Mat. 28: 16-20; John 15:1-11;
John 15:12-17

Presbyterian Church

O.T. Gen. 17:7; Isa. 43:1-2a; Ezek. 36:25a, 26a

N.T. Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 18:15-17; John 1:26-27, 33; John 3:5-7; Acts 2:38-39; Rom. 6:3-4; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9

Methodist Church

O.T. Ezek. 36:25-28

N.T. Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 1:9-11; Mark 10:13-16; John 3:1-7;
Acts 2:38,39, 41-42; Rom. 6: 2, 4-5 (or Rom. 6:3-11)

d. Registration of Baptism

There is a Common Certificate of Christian Baptism produced by SPCK. The Catholic Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Moravian Church and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are on the list of recognising churches. Copies are available from the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, BT9 6AZ. The couple may have the hope or the expectation that the baptism can be registered in both churches. Different understandings concerning the relationship between baptism and church membership, and issues of church law, regulations and practice make this extremely difficult.

4. KEY CHURCH DOCUMENTS

The Roman Catholic Church: *Directory on Mixed Marriage, 1983*

The Church of Ireland: *Inter-Church Marriage - Church of Ireland/Roman Catholic, 2000*

The Methodist Church in Ireland: *Conference Statement on Mixed*

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: *Inter-Church Marriages - Presbyterian and Roman Catholic, 1984*

The Methodist, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland documents are reproduced as appendices, as is an outline of canon law and regulations concerning interchurch marriage in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association's publication *Mixed Marriage in Ireland: A companion for those involved or about to be involved in a mixed marriage* gives useful practical information, e.g. on getting married and bringing up children.

5. USEFUL ADDRESSES

Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association
28 Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7FE.
(Tel: 028 9023 5444)
[email: nimma@nireland.com](mailto:nimma@nireland.com)

Association of Interchurch Families
c/o Irish School of Ecumenics
Bea House
Milltown Park
Dublin 6.
[email: aif@connect.ie](mailto:aif@connect.ie)
website: www.connect.ie/users/aif

Produce a leaflet of contact names throughout the Republic of Ireland

EMBRACE/Inter-Church Marriage Preparation Group
39 Harcourt Street
Dublin 2
(Tel: 01-4784400)

ACCORD (Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland)
ACCORD has specific courses for interchurch marriage
Headquarters: All Hallows, Gracepark Road, Drumcondra, Dublin
9 (Tel 01-8371151) or
Cana House, 56 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 6AF (Tel: 028 90 233002)

6. NOTES

a. The use of material in the section on Pastoral Care from *Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families*, published by Churches Together in England and CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales), 1994, is acknowledged.

b. Much of the material in the section on Interchurch Marriage Services and Baptisms of Children of Interchurch Couples was produced by a group consisting of Rev. Hugh Kennedy, Rev. Dr. David Lapsley, Rev. Brian Mayne and Rev. Kenneth Thompson. Some of it has been reworked.

Appendix One

Canon Law and Church Regulations Regarding Interchurch Marriage in the Roman Catholic Church

a. If a Catholic wishes to marry a baptised member of another Christian church permission is required from the local bishop. The application by the couple wishing to marry should first be made to the parish priest where the Catholic partner lives.

Annex I contains an extract from the Catholic Pre-Nuptial Inquiry Form ("Document B"). This document is presented to all Roman Catholics getting married and not just to those entering on interchurch marriages. The promise in relation to the upbringing of children is contained in Question 8. Questions 6, 7, 8 are not put to non-Roman Catholics. All the others are put to both.

(Note: The Supplementary Oath in the document does not refer to this part of the Inquiry Form but to "Document A" which deals with the parties' freedom to marry).

The celebration of marriage between a Catholic and a baptised Christian of another tradition is regarded as a sacrament by the Roman Catholic Church. Wedding Mass may be celebrated at the wedding if the couple want this. However, the recommendation is that it is generally preferable that the wedding ceremony does not take place within the context of a Wedding Mass (see 3. ii.e.).

b. If a Catholic wishes to marry someone who is not baptised a dispensation is required from the local bishop. The declaration and promises made by the Catholic partner take the same form as above.

The celebration of a marriage between a Catholic and someone who is not baptised is not regarded as a sacrament by the Roman Catholic Church; Wedding Mass is not celebrated.

c. The Roman Catholic Church requires that in all normal circumstances, when a Catholic is being married, the exchange of consent must be made before a properly authorised Catholic bishop, priest or deacon, and two witnesses. This "canonical form" is required for the Church to recognise the marriage as a valid marriage, in the case of a marriage of a Catholic with a Christian from another Western church tradition.

For "serious pastoral reasons" a couple getting married can request a "dispensation from canonical form" from the Catholic's local bishop. A dispensation will generally be granted to allow the wedding to take place in the church with which the bride identifies.

If the wedding takes place in a Catholic Church, the Catholic minister will preside, but can invite the other Christian minister to take part in a number of ways. If there is no nuptial mass the minister may be invited to proclaim the Gospel, give the homily and share in the blessings. This can happen in similar circumstances the other way round (i.e. not in a context of a communion service), with a Catholic minister taking part when the wedding takes place in the church or chapel of the other partner, with dispensation from canonical form. (It is not legally necessary for the Catholic minister to be present in this case, but it may be pastorally appropriate.)

d. Both parties are recommended (and in some places required) to do a pre-marriage course. Certain documentation will also be required. The Catholic partner will be asked for a certificate of Baptism and Confirmation and recent proof of freedom to marry. The other partner will be asked for proof of Baptism (if applicable) and evidence of freedom to marry.

Annex 1

Document B: Questions to be answered by the candidate following appropriate course of instruction.

(The priest should interview each candidate separately and alone)

1. What marriage preparation have you undertaken?
2. (a) For how long have you known your partner?
(b) When did the courtship begin?
3. Are you entering marriage free from any kind of pressure from parents, fiancé or anyone else?
4. (a) Do you intend to enter a permanent marriage that can be dissolved only by death?
(b) Do you accept that marriage involves a lifelong responsibility to love and support each other?
(c) Do you accept that being married means being faithful to each other for life?
(d) Do you understand and accept the rights and duties of marriage in relation to having and rearing children?
(e) Are you quite sure that you are giving full consent to this marriage without reservation?
5. Have you and your partner discussed future married life seriously?
(The following questions are to be asked of all Catholics)
6. Do you accept that marriage has been instituted by God and made a sacrament by Christ?
7. Are you resolved to remain steadfast in your Catholic faith and to practice it regularly?
8. Do you promise to do what you can within the unity of your partnership to have all the children of your marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic faith?

Signature of party

Declared orally (and signed) by the party in my presence.

SEAL

Signature of priest

Date

SUPPLEMENTARY OATH

I hereby confirm the above declaration on oath

Signature of party

SEAL

Signature of priest

Date

Annex 2

Extract from the Irish Episcopal Conference's *Directory on Mixed Marriage (1983) Regarding the Catholic Party's Obligations in Relation to the Religious Upbringing of their Children.*

It should be noted that the obligation of the Roman Catholic partner is the same whether they marry a Roman Catholic or a non-Roman Catholic. It is also placed within the context of the unity of the partnership (see Annex 1).

7.4 The Catholic partner promises to do all he or she can to have the children of the marriage baptised and raised as Catholics. How he or she succeeds in practice in the particular marriage depends not only on the Catholic's efforts, but also on the agreement and co-operation of the other partner.

8.1 The religious upbringing of the children is the joint responsibility of both parents. The obligations of the Catholic party do not, and cannot, cancel out, or in any way call into question, the conscientious duties of the other party. This was clearly stated in the *Joint Statement on Mixed Marriages* issued by the Catholic Church and the Irish Council of Churches at Ballymascanlon in 1975 and published in our *Directory on Ecumenism in Ireland* (1976):

"Full recognition should be given to the basic principle that in a mixed marriage husband and wife alike have a Christian duty to contribute spiritually to the marriage, to their children's upbringing and to the general life of the home. Their obligations in conscience towards God and in relation to Church membership are essentially of the same nature, whether explicitly declared or not. Each party must respect the inviolability of the conscientious convictions of the other and seek to resolve conflicts with the fullest regard for Christian truth and love."

8.5 The undertaking made by the Catholic expresses a serious obligation, honestly and sincerely acknowledged and accepted. It implies no mere irresolute wish or hope, but a willingness and resolve to do all that is humanly possible. Nonetheless, as we have said, the decision about the education of the children does not belong to the Catholic party alone. The actual circumstances of the marriage form the context in which this obligation must be carried out, and these circumstances are bound to vary considerably. The possibility exists that, despite his or her best efforts, the Catholic will be in a situation where some or all of the children are brought up in the denomination of the other party. In such circumstances, the obligation of the Catholic party to share the Catholic faith with the children does not cease; it still makes its demands. These would include 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 or her faith in order to be able to explain and discuss it with them; to pray with the family for the grace of Christian unity as the Lord wills it.

Norms Regarding Eucharistic Sharing

Extract from "One Bread One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church and the Establishment of General Norms or Sacramental Sharing" Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland (1998).

"Admission to Holy Communion and to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick may be given to baptised Christians of other faith communities if there is danger of death, or if there is some other grave and pressing need. This may at times include those who ask to receive them on a unique occasion for joy or for sorrow in the life of a family or an individual. It is for the diocesan bishop or his delegate to judge the gravity of the need and the exceptional nature of the situation. The conditions of Canon Law must always be fulfilled. "

"The exceptional nature and the purpose of the permission should be made clear, and appropriate preparation should be made for the reception of the sacrament" (para 106)

(Other norms apply to Christians from Eastern Churches para 102/3)

The first approach regarding the possibility of eucharistic sharing should be made to the Parish Priest to whom the situation should be explained. In most cases he cannot give permission but may pass on the request to the local bishop or his delegate.

Appendix Two

Inter-Church Marriage Church of Ireland / Roman Catholic

[The following is an extract from an appendix from the Church of Ireland Council Clergy Resource Pack Towards Marriage, 1999]

The last few decades have seen dramatic changes in interchurch relations, and one of the most visible effects has been the attitude of both Churches to "mixed marriages". The harshness of the former decree *Ne Temere* has been replaced by the much more liberal *Matrimonia Mixta*. Once mixed marriages were hidden and ignored: today they are visible and being accepted by most congregations of both churches. People are discovering that for a member of the Church of Ireland to marry a Roman Catholic may become an enriching experience, though sometimes difficulties can be encountered along the way.

As a couple you may already have had considerable discussion about your religious traditions. Here is some information and some comments which may assist you as you come to make your marriage plans.

Planning the wedding

It is recommended that both clergy should be consulted at an early stage. The wedding can take place in either church. Once the church has been chosen the actual ceremony and the administration of the vows can, for legal reasons, only be performed by the clergy of that church according to the rites and ceremonies of that church. If it is desired and agreed, the clergy of the other denomination can be invited to assist with prayers and readings.

If the wedding is to be in a Roman Catholic church it need not be a nuptial mass - in fact many couples prefer that it should not be, because then the Church of Ireland clergy are free to take a fuller part in the ceremony, and the Church of Ireland relatives are free from any eucharistic restrictions. Discuss your plans with both clergy.

Relations with the Other Church

Interchurch couples often find that one or both are taking an active and meaningful part in the activities of the other church. With the arrival of your own family you may wish to attend both denominations as a family unit, so that your children will have a knowledge and awareness of both traditions.

Both churches are trying to provide joint pastoral care for interchurch couples, and

the Irish Inter-Church Meeting has produced a booklet *Ministering to Interchurch Couples* which you will find helpful.

In your marriage you as a couple can often find a unity in your primary church, the home, a unity which the churches themselves are still striving to achieve.

Sharing Communion

While the Church of Ireland welcomes at Holy Communion communicants of another denomination whose conscience allows them to receive, the Roman Catholic Church only permits "Eucharistic sharing" in exceptional circumstances (*Directory on Ecumenism 1999 para 209*).

Baptism

Baptism is into the Church of Christ and not into any one denomination. A baptism can take place in either church and be recognised by the other. There is a specially designed certificate for Christian Baptism which is recognised by all the churches.

The Religious Upbringing of the Children

As the *Roman Catholic Directory on Mixed Marriages (1983)* states: this is *the joint responsibility of both parents* and this will depend very much upon your own religious practice.

Each parent should be able to share something of their own tradition with their children.

Church of Ireland requirements

Ask your Rector about the section "**Arrangements and Clergy Guidelines**" page 3 of "**Towards Marriage**" Resource Pack (September 1999).

Roman Catholic Canon Law requirements

These are outlined - see Appendix One

(Although the *permission and Dispensation from Form* are not required for the legality of the marriage in a Church of Ireland church, they are necessary to enable the Roman Catholic partner to remain in good standing with his/her church.)

The Promise

The Promise that all Roman Catholics are required to give is stated (see Appendix One) and its context is then given:

In explaining this declaration, the *Irish Roman Catholic Bishops' Directory on Mixed Marriages (1983)* states how he or she succeeds in practice in the particular marriage depends not only on the Catholic's efforts, but also on the agreement and co-operation of the other partner (7.4) and the religious upbringing of the children

is the joint responsibility of both parents. The obligations of the Catholic party do not, and cannot, cancel out, or in any way call into question, the conscientious duty of the other party. (8.1)

At section 8.5 it adds: The actual circumstances of the marriage form the context in which this obligation must be carried out, and these circumstances are bound to vary considerably. The possibility exists that, despite his or her best efforts, the Catholic will be in a situation where some or all of the children are brought up in the denomination of the other party.

Thus there are three possible outcomes for the upbringing of the children: - that all are brought up as Roman Catholics; - that some are brought up as Roman Catholics; - that none are brought up as Roman Catholics. Any decision on this matter is the natural responsibility of the parents and should be made **jointly** from **within the marriage**. **However, as a couple you should discuss this fully before you marry, resisting undue pressure - from whatever quarter.**

Getting Married

(a) **In whichever church is chosen** - the Roman Catholic partner needs to apply for *Permission* to marry a member of another Church.

(b) In a Church of Ireland church - The Roman Catholic Church requires the Roman Catholic partner to apply also for a Dispensation from Canonical Form and the couple need to obtain a licence. (Speak to your rector about this).

In all cases attention must be paid to state laws regarding age, affinity, time etc.

In the Republic of Ireland all marriages require a minimum of three months notice. **Appendix Three**

The Methodist Church in Ireland: Conference Statement on Mixed Marriage (1987)

Conference recognises that a small but significant number of Methodists are entering into marriage with partners who are of the Roman Catholic tradition, and that in such unions many wish to maintain their active church membership while respecting the tradition of the faith of the other partner.

Such marriages, despite obvious difficulties, when they occur can offer to the couples and to the churches a challenge and an opportunity to reflect the values of

a truly Christian family, to grow into deep Christian union from differing traditions, and to be, in their own way, a symbol of Christian unity.

To this end, couples should be encouraged to attend joint pre-marriage courses where available. It should be recognised that there is positive gain in the clergy on both sides sharing in the marriage ceremony, in whatever church it is held. We accept that the tradition of this country is that the wedding is normally in the church of the bride.

In addition to joint pastoral care by the clergy, Methodists should inform themselves of the teaching on marriage of both churches, and be prepared to give a genuine welcome to the spouse who wishes to join the fellowship. Such should be placed on the list of Adherents, and together with the children of the marriage where appropriate, be welcomed to the Lord's Table.

In addition the Committee producing the text of the Conference Statement made the following recommendations and remarks:

1. Our ministers, together with the Roman Catholic clergy, should in this matter make special efforts to establish and maintain good pastoral relationships. It would also help if each Methodist Synod would appoint two ministers equipped to offer advice and counselling in this whole area.

2. Many of the difficulties encountered by interchurch couples and their families arise from lack of knowledge and misinterpretation of the teaching and requirements of both churches. Ministers and Leaders have a special responsibility to be informed and so to promote understanding in their congregations.

3. We believe that the Methodist form of marriage should be recognised as being not only lawful but valid. While inter-communion is still unrealised, it is preferable that Holy Communion be not celebrated in the marriage service. The Roman Catholic "Dispensation from Canonical Form" should where appropriate be given without hesitation, accepting the long acknowledged tradition that the wedding takes place in the church of the bride.

4. While both Churches accept each other's baptism, the issues surrounding the baptism of the children of interchurch marriages are still unresolved, and should have the urgent and sustained attention of the appropriate church authorities. There does not seem to us to be any theological reason why registration cannot be made in both churches, with or without an explanatory note. The use of the Common Certificate, signed by both clergy, should be normal.

5. There remains a difference between our churches on the religious upbringing

and education of the children. We stress that this is the joint and equal responsibility of the couple, and that the decision belongs to the parents alone. The "declaration" required of the Roman Catholic partner can be given exaggerated importance, may be a source of serious irritation to both partners, and is objectionable to Methodists. In reality it adds nothing to the basic obligation to pass on one's faith to one's children. What is of primary importance is the marriage relationship itself.

6. We acknowledge the good work of the Association of Interchurch Families, and the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association, in the experience, advice, and assistance, which they offer, to families and to the churches in Ireland.

Appendix Four

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: Inter-Church Marriages - Presbyterian and Roman Catholic (1984)

This statement was made in the light of the issue of the DIRECTORY ON MIXED MARRIAGE by the Irish Roman Catholic Bishops and of their shorter guidelines, PREPARING FOR A MIXED MARRIAGE (1983).

1. In this whole area there is much confusion for a couple and for their pastoral advisers. Ministers and priests differ in their approach from their fellow-clergy of their own denomination, as well as from one another. Even with the new guidelines and *Directory* from the Roman Catholic Church it is too much to expect uniformity throughout that church, all over Ireland. At least we now may know what the official line is. Our ministers and members directly involved should examine the documents and not depend on the other party's priest being more fully aware of the official line to be followed or supplying all the information needed. To that extent these publications are to be welcomed.

2. We prefer to use the term "Interchurch" for couples, each of whom has some sense of inheriting and experiencing faith in God through Jesus Christ within their respective churches. Or it may be that they can be helped to develop or increase in such a living faith by the pastoral care they receive and their mutual commitment in love to one another and to Jesus Christ through their marriage.

3. We believe that at the centre of the scene are the two people wishing to marry. Ecclesiastical requirements and Church discipline cannot be set aside, but the foremost pastoral approach to the couple should be sensitive and concerned understanding, which will enable them to experience growing Christian awareness of what is involved in the marriage relationship and in Christian family life. Such a development will involve witness, prayer, fellowship and forms of counselling for

each couple and for their families. Prejudice and misrepresentation cluster round the thinking and attitudes of so many in this sphere that every effort must be made to distinguish political, social and cultural factors from those of faith, commitment to Jesus Christ, and Christian practice. The inevitable burdens of intolerance and ignorance in the wider society will be hard to assess totally by any couple in advance. However, they can be helped to prepare for that by being made aware of, and being able to face together as many issues as possible in their pastoral preparation for marriage. Priests preparing couples for marriage are obliged to have a long, detailed, seven-page questionnaire completed. Ministers, therefore, need not be dilatory about expecting couples to accept their extensive and careful briefing.

4. In reading the *Directory on Mixed Marriage and Preparing for a Mixed Marriage* one will notice two strains which determine the language and contents:

(a) There is the declared effort to be fair and sensitive to other Christians and their communions, and to recognise the great common threads of the faith fully shared by all churches. This is in keeping with changes after Vatican II. (b) There is a quite different note sounded, however, in both statements (reinforced by the recently revised *Code of Canon Law* of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church), which can imply that Presbyterians and others are treated as "second class Christians". For example we read: "...that Catholics believe that the Catholic Church, as distinct from other churches, has been endowed with the fullness of the means of salvation. This fullness implies more than simply a greater total of truths and means of grace. It means that Christ's presence to his followers and Christ's saving work in the world find their focal point and their most complete historical expression in the order, faith and worship of the Catholic Church" (*Directory* par. 6.8). Accordingly, it is urged that it is the Divine Law or Will of God that the Roman Catholic party should give, either orally or in writing, a twofold undertaking in order to receive the required permission to marry a non-Roman Catholic lawfully and with validity in the eyes of her/his church. This identification of God's law with the rules of the Roman Catholic Church appears to us an unjustifiable claim. It is not accepted as sufficient simply to promise a Christian upbringing.

5. Presbyterians are not now required to enter into such undertakings but are to be made aware by the Roman Catholic Church of the requirement and demand for the Roman Catholic partner to do so. This is the promise:

"7 declare that I am resolved, as God's law demands, to preserve my Catholic faith, and to avoid all dangers of falling away from it. Moreover, I sincerely undertake and I will, as God's law also requires, do everything possible, so far as in me lies, to have all the children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church".

[See, however, Appendix One, Annex 1, for the present position]

We have been informed that it is up to the Roman Catholic party to agree if this declaration is to be made orally or in writing.

6. The tension between the two strains of thought appears in par. 6, dealing with the obligations of the "Catholic Partner" where we are told that the second part of a twofold requirement is "to do everything one can do, *in the total context of the marriage*, to pass on that faith to one's children and to have them baptised *and educated* in the Catholic Church" (6.3); while in paragraph 6.4 we are told: "...the obligations, rights and responsibilities in regard to the upbringing of the children do not belong to the Catholic party alone but are *shared by both partners...* the Catholic parent can only be obliged to do everything possible - no more, but equally no less - to pass on his or her faith to the children".

7. Ministers should impress on their members our understanding of Christian marriage and family life as we find it expressed in the general usage of our Service

of Marriage:

"Marriage was ordained for the lifelong companionship, help and comfort which husband and wife ought to have of each other. It was ordained for the continuance of the holy ordinance of family life, that children, who are the heritage of the Lord, should be duly nurtured and trained up in godliness".

And according to the Service of Baptism of the Children of Believers: To parents: *"7n presenting this child for Baptism do you profess your faith in God as your Creator and Father, in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier and Guide?"*

Will you, by God's help, provide a Christian home, and bring up this child in the worship and teaching of the church, so that your child may come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?"

8. Ministers should keep the significance of that teaching and those undertakings before both partners in an interchurch marriage lest it be thought that the Presbyterian Church cares little about what happens to children of such a union, and also the agreed statement at the Ballymascanlon Conference, 1975:

"Full recognition should be given to the basic principle that in a mixed marriage husband and wife alike have a Christian duty to contribute spiritually to the marriage, to their children's upbringing and to the general life of the home. Their obligations in conscience towards God and in relation to Church membership are essentially of

the same nature, whether explicitly declared or not. Each party must respect the inviolability of the conscientious convictions of the other and seek to resolve conflicts with the, fullest regard for Christian truth and love".

It will be for the Presbyterian partner who has a real commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and head of the Church, to seek ways of fully sharing his/her convictions and attitudes with the Roman Catholic partner while endeavouring to understand the Christian ground and basis of the partner's faith and practice.

9. Many of our ministers will be ready to co-operate towards the establishing of a marriage in which each party remains a faithful member of the Church of his/her nurture and adherence prior to the wedding. Many others, however, will have conscientious reservations on this procedure. Some may think it their duty to bring pressure on the Roman Catholic partner to be instructed in and turn to, Presbyterianism before marriage. Our church is committed to repudiating pressures on any party to change membership, simply to fulfil marriage requirements, without real conviction. Mere surrender, because of such pressures, from whatever quarter, and not from genuine conviction and free choice, is unlikely to lead to strengthening of faith and to growth into Jesus Christ in the day-to-day sharing of Christian family life. It may even prove disastrous to the marriage relationship. It may turn both parties against church membership of any kind, which is more than nominal and formal.

10. As a church we emphatically maintain that a marriage according to the form and discipline of our church, is fully legal and religiously adequate without accepting any special permission or invidious conditions which may be set by the Roman Catholic Church, though we realise this is not so for that church or for a member who wishes to comply with its requirements and maintain their commencement standing.

11 There are two distinct forms of permission or "dispensation" which may be sought in the case of a marriage between a Presbyterian and a Roman Catholic, if that marriage is to be recognised by the Roman Catholic Church.

(i) The first and basic dispensation is from the so-called impediment of mixed religion (*Directory* par. 9.1). This is required even if the marriage is to take place in the Roman Catholic Church building and be conducted by a Roman Catholic priest.

(ii) The second dispensation, sometimes granted, is from "canonical form". This permits the marriage to take place in the Presbyterian Church, and be conducted by a Presbyterian minister according to "the form and discipline" of our church, with or without the participation of a Roman Catholic priest. This second dispensation

can only be granted if the first dispensation has been approved and only "if serious difficulties stand in the way of observing the canonical form" (*Directory* par. 12.2). The difficulties envisaged are not precisely defined, but have sometimes been interpreted as marriages involving the family of a minister, elder or other person holding office in the Church, etc. With this dispensation the service in a Presbyterian Church is accepted as constituting a "sacramental marriage" in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church. We normally expect the wedding of any couple to follow the custom of long standing, that the wedding will take place in the church selected by the bride. Though the same custom may be followed in the Roman Catholic Church, of itself this is not accepted as sufficient reason for granting dispensation to get married in the Presbyterian Church.

12. "If he is invited, and in accordance with the wishes of the minister of the other church, a Catholic priest will attend and take part in the ceremony" so long as there is no celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is clear that the priest may not conduct the marriage ceremony according to the rites or forms of another church. The priest is encouraged to invite the minister to participate in the ceremony where it takes place in the Roman Catholic Church, "by words of greeting or exhortation and by additional prayers and blessings at the close of the actual marriage ceremony itself". (*Directory* par. 14.1).

13. It must be made clear that any suggestion of a double marriage service is to be avoided (*Code* par. 85 (5)). This is sometimes requested by couples who want to be "married in both churches". Our doctrine of marriage insists that the couple are already married by their first public exchange of promises the one with the other. If an extra service of prayer for the newly married couple should be arranged, the foregoing principle and rule should be made explicitly clear. The principle is the same on the Roman Catholic side (*Directory* par. 14.3); but this can be complicated by the assertion that if both the required dispensations have not been obtained then no marriage has taken place in the eyes of their church so that they are free to go ahead with another service. However logical this is to that church, it obviously appears invidious and offensive to us, and must remain one of several points of friction between our churches in this field.

14. In each individual case the relationship between the minister and the priest will have a substantial bearing on the extent to which each can be involved. We should hope that ministers will seek, for their part, to do their utmost to co-operate in preparing each couple for their "marriage in the Lord" and should do so in celebrating such a wedding by co-operating, so far as possible, in leading the families and friends and the couple themselves in worship, even though two diverse churches be involved.

15. The pastoral follow-up of such couples calls for further co-operation by

minister and priest, if acceptable to the couple in each case. Those ministers who find themselves (on grounds of principle or of local situation) unable to share at any of the points we have outlined have a particular obligation not to abandon their pastoral concern and support for the church member involved. Similarly those who are able to co-operate have a particular obligation to underline the contribution to a marriage expected of a faithful Presbyterian.

16. Such co-operation should not be regarded as a denial of Presbyterian principles, or a failure to maintain Presbyterian witness. It is expressive of a desire to give full support to, and blessing for a marriage whereby both Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches hold that vows are made not to a minister or priest, but are rather pledges mutually given before God. Those present and taking part are there as witnesses to this central act of the couple themselves, and as celebrating the action of God in Jesus Christ drawing them together by the Holy Spirit, according to the Divine Word, and entering into sacred covenant with them for their continuing guidance and renewal for the responsibility of family life.

17. Where mutual trust and co-operation prove possible the risk of losing either or both partners in the marriage to the church and the Christian faith can be greatly reduced, and the surrounding social, cultural and political forces less harmfully felt. The paramount reason for pastoral concern for and support of an interchurch marriage is the spiritual growth of the couple involved, and the maintenance of Christian faith. Ecclesiastical order must be seen to be secondary to but also serving this central interest.

18. We welcome the endeavors of ministers and priests of several denominations to provide joint courses of preparation for engaged couples with interchurch allegiance as a supplement to the preparation afforded by each minister and priest for their couple. We commend the valuable contribution of the Association of Interchurch Families and the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association and urge ministers to relate as fully as possible to the functioning of those bodies. Details of addresses may be had through the Christian Marriage Committee of our church.

Note: Additional background information on the issues raised in this paper may be found in the Report to the General Assembly, 1976, on INTERCHURCH MARRIAGES, printed separately and available from the General Secretary's Office, Church House, Belfast, BT1 6DW.

Appendix Five

Report of the Inter-Church Meeting Working Party on Social and Community Problems - Statement on Mixed Marriage (1975)

1. As long as our churches remain divided mixed marriages will bring tensions, both for the marriage partners and their children. The acuteness of those tensions and of the problems they create is likely to be in proportion to the depths of the divisions between the respective churches and the degree of commitment felt towards their teachings and disciplines by the parties concerned.

2. In some mixed marriages the members have indeed found an enriched sense of mutual respect and responsibility which has strengthened rather than weakened personal faith and the church allegiance of each party. In other cases such marriages have led to a weakening or even loss of personal faith and church allegiance, bringing with it grave harm to the spiritual welfare of the children. Out of their experience, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in Ireland continue to advise their members about the difficulties inherent in a mixed marriage.

3. In Ireland where social and political division is often associated with ecclesiastical affiliation, the pressures on mixed marriages can be intensified by non-theological factors. This can have an injurious effect not only upon the partners but also upon their families, relatives and friends. We recognise that the churches have a duty to help mitigate such situations by a more effective education of their clergy and laity in respect for the rights both of those who belong to their own church and of those whose traditions and convictions are different. The responsibility for this falls upon the different Christian communities in proportion to the influence they exercise in any particular area.

4. Because of the deeply personal nature of the marriage relationship and of the way in which it impinges upon church members in their daily lives it must be recognised that church teaching and attitudes in this field have a special importance for community relations. Should the tensions and problems of mixed marriages be compounded by any failure to act in a spirit of sympathetic understanding and pastoral care, those responsible for such failure would be neglecting a fundamental Christian duty.

5. Pastorally it is important that those who intend to enter a mixed marriage should do so with genuine understanding for the conscientious religious beliefs of the other party. Pressures upon either partner to change church membership simply to fulfil marriage requirements and without real conviction must be repudiated.

6. Full recognition should be given to the basic principle that in a mixed marriage husband and wife alike has a Christian duty to contribute spiritually to the marriage, to

their children's upbringing and to the general life of the home. Their obligations in conscience towards God and in relation to church membership are essentially of the same nature, whether explicitly declared or not. Each party must respect the inviolability of the conscientious convictions of the other and seek to resolve conflicts with the fullest regard for Christian truth and love.

7. The tensions arising from mixed marriages must be seen in the context of the obligation on all Christians to be faithful to the will of Christ for his Church. To see the problems only in terms of obstacles to personal and community harmony, and not also as a challenge to each Christian to remain true, above all else, to his calling as a member of Christ's Church, is to miss the full range and seriousness of the issues with which it confronts the Christian conscience. A truly Christian approach to the problem also demands that in the delicate decisions which have to be taken in this field considerations relating to Christian faith and love and the Christian understanding of marriage and parenthood should take priority over social and economic factors.

8. We see no easy way in which to resolve the basic problems of mixed marriages, such as those arising from the churches different ways of understanding the nature and identity of the church, the principles for interpreting scripture, obligations arising from the demands of the moral law and the relationship between church authority and the freedom of the individual. Inevitably the impact of these differences on mixed marriages is affected, also, by the approach of the clergy involved. Pastoral instruction and care should be undertaken by them in a spirit of mutual respect and trust. Where such a spirit exists it cannot but have a beneficial effect on the relationship of the married partners to each other.

9. We recommend that the churches establish a small Joint Standing Committee to report annually to them on such general trends in church practice concerning mixed marriages as appear to involve difficulties or misunderstandings calling for resolution or clarification. [Subsequently set up as the Interchurch Standing Committee on Mixed Marriage in 1976.]

10. While differences between our churches in marriage teaching and discipline, as indicated in last year's interim report, remain unresolved, much even now depends upon the spirit and the degree of sensitivity in which traditions and directives are interpreted and applied. We believe therefore that each church should review its own practice in this light and frame directives and give guidance, both for their ministers or priests and for their people, so as to demonstrate concern for the Christian conscience not only of their own members but of those of the other churches. It is our opinion that this, supported by developing evidence of mutual good-will and a cessation of recrimination, would make an important contribution to the Christian life of our country.