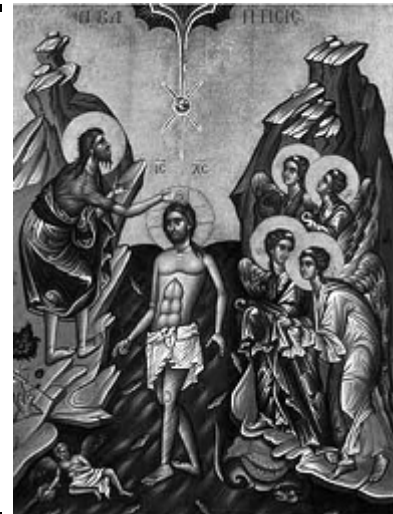

Ecumenical Endeavors: Interchurch Marriage



By: Rev. J. Michael Clark, J.C.L.
Ecumenical Officer, Diocese of Owensboro

Nestled in chapter four in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (DAPNE) - "Communion of Life and spiritual Activity Among the Baptized" - one finds a section addressing *Mixed Marriages*. Other more familiar terms, namely, "interchurch marriage" or "ecumenical marriage" are used in the United States with greater regularity and appear more inviting to us. [See page 18 in the *Ecumenical Handbook for the Dioceses of Kentucky*, rev. 2003]. However we choose to name them, these marriages between a baptized Catholic and another baptized Christian are commonplace in our society. Thus, most Catholic families in Kentucky have an experience of the opportunities and the challenges created from the unifying aspects of such marriages.

Questions, stresses and possibilities arise when we personally or a member of our family or inner circle of friends makes plans to wed. When the wedding involves two Christians, and one is a Catholic, additional questions are raised: How do we honor the faith tradition of both parties? What right does the Catholic Church have to regulate our marriage? Who can be involved in the ceremony? Where can the celebration be held? When we have children, which church will they attend and be baptized into? Such important questions during marriage preparation can be a source of conflict or can help to strengthen the marriage by strengthening the faith commitment of the couple.

To assist in guiding its members through the maze of logistical choices, the Catholic Church provides a set of "maps" illustrating the way. On the universal, that is, worldwide level, DAPNE functions to spell out the principles of marriage stating, "the primary concern of the [Catholic] Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it" [DAPNE, n.144]. An exhortation to each spouse to live Christian values, foster unity and harmony while acknowledging the real differences that exist in their respective faith backgrounds shines forth in this DAPNE. A caution to avoid relativism and religious indifference permeates the text. The sacramental nature of the marriage between two Christians receives important attention as well.

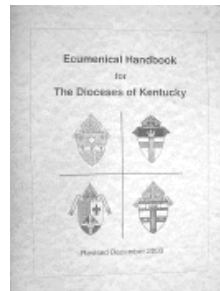
On the State level, the *Ecumenical Handbook* builds upon DAPNE by providing practical options for its implementation with a particular thrust for ecumenical collaboration. Answers to some of the standard queries about interchurch marriages can be found in this *Ecumenical Handbook*. Its emphasis on the positive elements of interchurch marriage constitutes a framework of congeniality and interconnectedness from which the couple can begin to grapple with the more sobering issues they must face. Furthermore, within the *Ecumenical Handbook* an acknowledgement of the role of the Holy Spirit in providing the necessary gifts for the couple to flourish in grace, love, faith and hope brings an awareness of the reliance upon God that all couples are to embrace. While the *Ecumenical Handbook* targets interchurch marriages

primarily, its import bears upon the larger institution of marriage.

On the local, that is, diocesan level, a *Policy for Marriage* fleshes out the details of preparation and celebration. When couples meet with a priest or pastoral minister to begin discussing their intention to wed, they should receive a copy of this *Policy*. With Church personnel and these “maps” to lead them, the couple sets out to answer the questions stated above and jointly make a myriad of decisions that will impact not just the wedding day, but their life-long living as a couple united in the bond established when they mutually exchange and receive consent to be husband and wife.

Although the ecumenical tools mentioned focus primarily on interchurch marriages, they have relevance for all who seek a better understanding of our Christian perspective on the

institution of marriage. The great lengths the Catholic Church, in consort with other Christians, goes to promote and sustain the notion of marriage illustrates the call of the Spirit to all of us to be witnesses to unity and cooperation in the manner marriages are celebrated and lived.



This article is the 5th of a series of six written by members of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky's Ecumenical Committee.

The 27-page *Ecumenical Handbook for the Dioceses of Kentucky* is available from your diocesan ecumenical office and can be downloaded from the

Catholic Conference of Kentucky website: www.ccky.org/publications.htm.

2,005,618 Christians in Kentucky

1. Southern Baptist Convention 979,994
2. **Roman Catholic 406,021**
3. United Methodist Church 208,720
4. Christian Churches (Independent) & Chs of Christ 106,638
5. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 67,611
6. Churches of Christ 58,602
7. Presbyterian Church, USA 36,940
8. Church of God (Cleveland) 33,572
9. Assemblies of God 30,103
10. Free Will Baptist 20,441
11. Church of the Nazarene 19,667
12. Episcopal Church 19,343
13. Latter-Day Saints 17,966

From: Religious Congregations & Membership in the United States 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 149 Religious Bodies. Published by Glenmary Research Center, Nashville, Tennessee, 2002.



1042 Burlington Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601
(502) 875-4345 For more info, click on www.ccky.org

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