

# **Interchurch Marriage Guidelines**

**For use in  
the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee,  
the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
and the Wisconsin Conference of the  
United Methodist Church**

Prepared by representatives of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and the Metro Districts of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church. We are grateful to the United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Milwaukee. Their work on the booklet, "When United Methodists and Catholics Marry" provided the foundation for this text.

Additional copies may be obtained through each denomination's judicatory or ecumenical offices.

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## INTRODUCTION

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These statements and guidelines are offered to assist those working with engaged couples from one of the participating Christian traditions, when both have indicated a desire to continue to practice within their own tradition.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help a pastor when approached by a couple who intend to marry. What possibilities are inherent in this situation? What are the prevailing norms? How can this occasion best be turned into an occasion of grace and mutual understanding, both between the two marrying and between their two churches? The following guidelines address these concerns.

These statements and guidelines have been prepared by representatives of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the ELCA, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Metro Districts of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church. They have been shared with pastors of these churches for feedback and have been approved for distribution and implementation.

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# STATEMENTS ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

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## ✚ What We Hold in Common: A Joint Statement

Christian marriage is a union in which a man and a woman unreservedly give themselves in love to each other. They are called to this institution by God, and it is God who joins them together. Our churches consider this bond to be established when the couple give their free consent before the people of God. What God joins together no one should separate, and so Christians are called to enter a marriage which is lifelong.

A Christian marriage manifests Christ's love and union with the Church, and the union between Christ and the couple. As a bride and groom pledge their love to each other, Christ pledges unfailing love to them in their life together. A couple open to God's grace will grow in union with Christ as they grow in union with one another.

The blessings of marriage include companionship in self-giving love, the expression of intimacy, the raising of children, and the proclaiming of God's love for all people. In marriage, the couple become a special gift to the people of God and are entitled to the encouragement and support of the whole church.

## ✚ An Episcopalian Statement on Christian Marriage

For Anglicans, Holy Matrimony is one of the sacraments of the Church. We believe it is not merely an occasion for celebrating a relationship between a man and a woman, but also for celebrating the relationship between God and humankind. The Episcopal Church, using Biblical language, speaks about the "covenant" entered into by the bride and the groom. There is a sacred relationship which signifies for us the bond between God and his people, between Christ and his church.

In the Celebration and Blessing of A Marriage in the Book of Common Prayer, 1979, this statement expresses our understanding of Holy Matrimony.

"The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.

"The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God."

We understand that marriage includes both emotional and physical love - that it is a union of heart, body and mind. We believe that the decision to marry is one of will. It must be a free, mutual decision, uncoerced by family or circumstances, and is best made with thought and discernment, as well as with the intensity of feelings of emotional and sexual attraction. Thus, premarriage counsel by the clergy is strongly encouraged. Marriage is understood to be a life-long commitment, and is to be entered into with this intention.

The canons of the Episcopal Church require a 30 day notice be given to the clergy person who will officiate. Canon law also requires that one person to be married be a baptized Christian. It does not require membership in the Episcopal Church, although many congregations and clergy do expect one person to be a member. It is expected that the marriage will be supported by a commitment to the Christian religion and by regular participation in the worship and social life of some congregation. Because of the "public" nature of marriage, and because the church is often functioning as a agent of the state, two witnesses must be present, in addition to the couple and the officiant, whenever a marriage takes place in the church.

The Episcopal church, in accord with ancient tradition, recognizes that the ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the bride and groom. The church, through the clergy who officiate, bestows or declares God's blessing on the marriage.

When the couple decides to have children, we believe that discernment, thought and willful decision-making must be practiced. Therefore, Anglican tradition supports family planning and the use of contraception until there is a clear and mutual decision by both people to begin having children.

### ✠ A Lutheran Statement on Christian Marriage

In the Lutheran tradition, human life is understood as "ordered" life: meaning, life-in-relationship. Marriage, therefore, is a technical (biblical) term that refers to a specific part of the natural ordering (i.e., interrelating) process of life that God established "in the beginning: and still establishes today. Specifically, marriage is the natural (God-given) institution (relationship) for living out human, sexual (male-female) existence. (BoC, 204-5)

As part of the natural ordering process of life, marriage is not specifically a "Christian" institution, but a "universally human" one related to the fact of humanity's sexual differentiation. Wherever males and females are drawn to one another in a "natural way," there marriage is found. Lutherans have not traditionally referred to marriage as a sacrament, but as a "holy estate" or "sacred ordinance," meaning, a part of God's good creation. The language of "sacrament" is reserved for the rites of the gospel: those rites and activities established by Jesus Christ and used by the Holy Spirit to effect the new creation.

As part of the natural ordering process of life, marriage is not simply a contract agreement or covenant between a man and a woman. Marriage is more than the sum of what a man and a woman bring to it, including their love for one another. It is an institution, an estate, a "post of responsibility" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), created by God, which the couple willingly and publicly enter into. The reality of marriage is grounded, not in the subjective state of the couple's resolve ("as long as we

can"), but in the objective reality of God's Word which creates it and declares it to be ("until death do we part").

As part of the natural ordering process of life, marriage exists independently from but in natural coordination with other parts of the natural ordering process of life, most immediately family and parenting, but also the wider social matrix of relationships. Therefore, Lutheranism resists talking about the "purpose of marriage as procreation (Gen. 1:8), mutual aid (Gen. 2:18), or even protection against sexual aberration (1 Cor. 7:2). Marriage has integrity as a relationship independently of these good "purposes." This especially obvious in the case of children. To be childless does not diminish the richness of marriage nor does the fact of divorce — the end of a marriage — negate the fact of the parent-child relation. In general, children, mutual aid, protection from sexual immorality are seen as "blessings" in marriage and not the "purpose" of marriage.

Lutherans regard marriage with high esteem — it is a "holy estate: — therefore, they are concerned about the character and quality of marriage, both among church members and in the society at large. When a couple does finally come to the church with their resolve to enter into marriage, they are ministered to in an intentional way through pastoral counseling and/or participation in marriage preparation workshops. Although the actual counseling process may vary from congregation to congregation and pastor to pastor, at this time of preparation the couple is encouraged to discuss their views on many aspects of their anticipated life together. If in the course of counseling the pastor finds reason to question a couple's decision to marry, this will be discussed openly and honestly with great care and sensitivity. If the pastor finds compelling reasons for a couple not to marry, he or she may decline to officiate at the desired marriage. For the most part, however, premarriage counseling is an exciting time for the couple because it gives them the opportunity to focus on themselves and the hopes and gifts they bring to marriage. If a couple desires, this "counseling" can be an ongoing part of their married life by participation in the various marriage enrichment retreats that are available through the church.

## ✠ A Roman Catholic Statement on Christian Marriage

In the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage between Christians is a sacrament, a covenant of love which helps them grow in holiness and community with each other within the church. Because the Roman Catholic Church considers marriage a sacrament, it must take place in an ecclesial context

By their joining together in marriage, the partners proclaim God's desire to reconcile all people to God and to each other. Married Christians "signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love which exist between Christ and the Church" (The Rite of Marriage). Because of the life and love shared with each other and any children they may have, they have a unique vocation and they are a special gift to the people of God.

Marriage arises from the consent that a woman and man freely give and receive. In the Rite of Marriage, the promises they make and the rings they may exchange express their sincere desire and commitment to live the sacrament of marriage. They promise to love each other faithfully in good times and difficult times all the days of their lives. By this covenant they enter into a partnership sharing all aspects of life. Christian couples nourish and strengthen the marriage bond by thoughtful, prayerful preparation and by continuing attention to their relationship. In doing this, they are entitled to the encouragement and support of the whole church.

As a community of life and love, Christian families reflect and participate in the oneness of Christ with God as Creator and the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit.

## ✠ A United Methodist Statement on Christian Marriage<sup>1</sup>

Christian marriage is a holy covenant between a man and a woman, pledged to love each other, trust each other, and face all of life together. They fulfill each other, and their love gives birth to new life in each other and through each other. As Christ's love and union with his church is exemplified in the imagery of the "bridegroom" and "bride" so should the bond between the couple be held sacred and as a life-long covenant relationship. "Covenant, in contrast to contract, involves giving of self unreservedly in love to each other."

Marriage is not an arrangement of convenience, either physical or financial, to be entered into at will and dissolved at whim. It is to be entered into with careful thought, counsel, and respect for each other. Premarital conferences and instruction place accent upon the gospel and seek to correct the impression that weddings are theatrical performances. Though United Methodists do not refer to marriage as a sacrament, it is seen as instituted by God in creation and treated with the reverence and care given a sacrament.

Thus instituted, the purposes of marriage include: companionship in self-giving love; expression of intimacy in the realization that "sexuality is a gift of God to be accepted and enjoyed in the marriage relationship"; and raising children when this commitment is made in good conscience and marital trust under the influence of God's grace.

The church's care for the institutions of marriage and family is eminently pastoral. It includes preparation for marriage, help when there is difficulty, grace and comfort in times of loss through divorce or death. This care is an integral part of the church's encompassing care for families from birth to death.

Though the couple marry themselves to each other in the presence of God and a faith community, the pastor presides at the service and the Eucharist (when celebrated), announces the consent and pronounces the blessing. The pastoral concern is to celebrate both the church's faith and the faith and hope of the couple. Their families and the congregation, as the community of faith, affirm, give thanks and welcome the new family.

## ✚ Conclusion

When couples come from different Christian traditions, the pastor should advise them on ecumenical courtesies and possibilities. If, for example, a Roman Catholic priest will share in a United Methodist service, he should be invited to take part in the premarital discussions and plans. In the service itself, the pastors might share in the ritual. This kind of pastoral cooperation makes an important Christian witness to the families — for example, about our baptismal unity in Christ.

Marriage as a union of love is possible when Jesus Christ is the basis and bond of unity. Christ becomes that bond of unity when the couple is centered on him. The couple encounters the risen Lord daily in their love for each other.

Christian marriage is an act of serving God, proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the new family in the household of faith.

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# PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

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## Pastoral Considerations

### ✚ Choice of Tradition or Church in which to Marry

Couples from different Christian traditions often do not realize that they have an option in regard to the church in which their marriage may take place. The pastors<sup>2</sup> of both churches are asked to affirm the right of the couple to choose and to make it clear that each church recognizes the other church's marriage rite.

If a Roman Catholic decides to marry in another church he or she needs to obtain permission and a dispensation, which are readily granted and required for the ecclesial recognition of the marriage by the Roman Catholic Church. The pastor of the Roman Catholic party should be contacted to obtain this permission and dispensation.

### ✚ Ecumenical Courtesies and Communication with Pastors

The first pastor contacted by the couple is encouraged to advise them on the ecumenical courtesies and possibilities described in these guidelines. The pastor of the other church should be contacted. He or she may be invited to take part in premarital discussions and plans, and may be invited to take part in the ceremony. The couple is encouraged to meet at least once with each pastor to discuss appropriate premarital preparation and requirements. This may be a joint meeting with both pastors.

## ✚ Preparation of the Couple

Marriage is to be entered with prayerful consideration, careful thought, counsel and mutual respect. Each of our churches has different policies regarding marriage preparation. Pastors should be prepared to advise couples about these differences and to refer them to premarital resources. The Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation of the Roman Catholic dioceses in Wisconsin requires a preparation time of at least six months. The preparation period commonly includes an initial session with the Roman Catholic priest, deacon or pastoral minister; engaged enrichment program; premarital inventory; additional sessions to focus on interchurch concerns; and liturgy planning. Some of these requirements may be administered by either church or pastor and need not be repeated. To avoid duplication, pastors need to be in communication with the couple and each other as to how these requirements will be administered.

It is also common for pastors in the Episcopal, Lutheran and United Methodist churches to require several meetings with the couple. A premarital inventory is often used in the process. In all of our churches, the premarital process may raise questions about the couples readiness to marry at this time.

It is important that the couple receive adequate preparation for marriage regardless of which church is chosen for the wedding. The preparation should address the following:

- **Understanding of Christian Marriage**
- **Life Style Expectations**
- **Friends and Interests**
- **Personality Match**
- **Personal Issues (e.g. alcohol abuse)**
- **Extended Family Issues**
- **Sexuality Issues**
- **Explanation of Both Faith Traditions**
- **Communication**

- **Problem Solving**
- **Religion and Values**
- **Parenting Issues**
- **Marriage Covenant**
- **Financial Issues**
- **Interchurch Issues**
- **Second Marriage**
- **Readiness to Marry**

*(see Appendix II for "Questions for Couples")*

## ✚ Religious Upbringing of Children

Both partners share responsibility for the religious upbringing of their children. They face a special challenge in being part of different Christian traditions. Marriage preparation, in any of our churches, should help them accept this challenge, provide them an opportunity to discuss their options, and encourage them to raise their children as active members of a church.

All of our churches understand that one of the blessings of marriage is the procreation of children and the corresponding expectation that they be nurtured in the knowledge and love of the Lord. While Episcopalians, Lutherans and United Methodists do not have a formal mechanism for expressing this expectation, the Roman Catholic partners in an interchurch marriage are asked to make promises regarding future church affiliation and the upbringing of children.

These promises are understood in light of the mutual respect which should be given to the faith and church affiliation of each partner. Both pastors should discuss these promises with the couple in light of their respective traditions. Both partners remain responsible for coming to a mutual decision regarding the religious upbringing of their children, while safeguarding the marriage covenant. (See Appendix I)

While the Episcopal Church does not require couples seeking marriage to make promises about the religious training of



children, we expect that children brought to the church to be baptized will (along with their parents) become active participants in the life of the Church.

## ✝ Remarriage

In some cases, one or both of the partners preparing for marriage has been previously married and is divorced. Our churches approach such situations differently.

### A Statement of the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church teaches that marriage should always be undertaken with the intention that it will be a life-long relationship, however, the Episcopal Church has come to recognize that not all marriages can be sustained for a lifetime. We understand that failure of a marriage to be a tragic and sinful occasion. We also understand that such failures can be resolved, repentance and forgiveness made present, and the possibility of a new relationship developed. Our church offers a process whereby divorced members of the church who wish to remarry (and who intend a life-long union, and who are continuing their care for the well-being of the former family) apply to their Bishop for permission to remarry. All divorced persons seeking to be married in the Episcopal Church must participate in the process with their local priest and the bishop of the diocese.

### A Statement of the Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Church recognizes the reality, sinfulness, and tragedy of divorce along with the possibility for legally, divorced people to remarry. (See "The Lutheran Statement on Marriage") For Lutherans, the practice of divorce and remarriage can be reconciled with integrity only in the gospel and, hence, is properly understood in the context of the Church's ministry of confession and forgiveness, of repentance and new life. In the gospel of Christ there is no contradiction between being an acknowledged (repentant) sinner who cannot undo the past (divorced) and going forward in life (remarriage) with a good (forgiven) conscience.

Reconciliation is had through faith in Christ crucified and raised. Therefore, the decision of a divorced person to remarry in the Church is never taken lightly, but repentantly. Before remarriage in the Church is offered, the pastor and/or other agents of the church will discuss in a spirit of repentance and forgiveness the issues that led to the divorce, the responsibilities that still exist to the former spouse and shared children, and the remaining characteristics that may be detrimental to the next marriage. Only after careful consideration of the facts and issues will the pastor decide whether or not the church will add its blessing to the remarriage.

### A Statement of the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize divorce, but will consider a person free to marry again if the former marriage has been officially declared invalid (also known as an annulment). A remarriage can be celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church only if the previous spouse has died or if an annulment of the previous marriage has been granted by the Roman Catholic Church.

The need for a previous marriage to be annulled applies to either partner, Roman Catholic or non-Roman Catholic. The requirement for an annulment also applies whether the couple is seeking marriage in the Roman Catholic Church or is requesting permission to marry in the church of the person who is not Roman Catholic.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee offers a premarital inventory and an Engaged Enrichment Day designed specifically for couples where it is a remarriage for one or both of the persons.

### A Statement of the United Methodist Church

Within the United Methodist Church, where marriage partners, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, are estranged beyond reconciliation, we recognize divorce as regrettable but recognize the right of divorced persons to remarry. We express our deep concern for the care and nurture of the children of divorced and/or remarried persons.

We encourage that either or both of the divorced parents be considered for custody of the minor children of the marriage. We encourage an active, accepting, and enabling commitment of the church and our society to minister to the members of divorced and remarried families.

### **Conclusion**

These various approaches of our churches to remarriage are not presently reconcilable. The difference can lead to a situation in which an interchurch marriage is recognized in one church but not recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as a valid marriage (when, for example, a divorced partner cannot or will not obtain a church annulment). Such a situation demonstrates the lack of complete unity and mutuality which exists between our churches. Pastors need to be in communication with each other and sensitive to these varying policies as they assist couples in responding to them.

## **Liturgical Considerations**

### **✠ Basic Principles**

The bride and the groom marry each other in the presence of God and a faith community. The pastoral concern is to celebrate both the church's faith and the faith, hope and love of the couple. The families and congregation, as a community of faith, affirm, give thanks and welcome the new family.

It is important that the wedding ceremony be seen as an act of worship, in which the gathered community actively participates, praising and thanking God, reading God's Holy Scripture, and invoking God's blessing.

A Christian marriage ceremony is an expression and profession of faith. The reception also should be an extension of the faith celebrated in the wedding service. Though common in our society, extravagant display, overspending, overindulgence, and sexist customs cannot be reconciled with Gospel values.

### **✠ Choice of Rite**

The marriage rite should be that of the host Church, not a duplication or amalgamation of both rites.

Our rituals are quite similar:

#### **The Episcopal Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage**

- Procession - Entrance
- Introduction
- Declaration of Consent
- The Ministry of the Word, Collect, Lesson(s)  
Psalms/anthems, Gospel
- The Marriage Vows, Exchange of Rings
- Prayers, Blessing
- Holy Eucharist, optional
- Recession - Exit

#### **The Lutheran Marriage Service**

- Procession
- Apostolic Greeting and Prayer of the Day
- The Lessons and Sermon
- Declaration of intent, vows, exchange of rings, and blessing
- Prayers of the Church
- Holy Eucharist may be celebrated when appropriate
- Benediction and Recession.

#### **Roman Catholic Rite of Marriage**

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- Rite of Marriage  
Liturgy of the Eucharist optional but not recommended  
for a Catholic, non-Catholic wedding
- Concluding Rite

## United Methodist Service of Christian Marriage

- Gathering
- Ministry of the Word
- The Marriage
- Thanksgiving
- Dismissal with Blessing and the Peace

### ✚ Place and Atmosphere

Normally weddings are celebrated in the Church's regular worship space. Roman Catholics must have permission from the Chancery if the wedding is to be held outside the worship space. Episcopalians, Lutherans and United Methodists need the permission of the local pastor to have a wedding outside of the Church's regular worship space. The worship character of the ceremony also requires that photographers and video recorders be unobtrusive. Traditions related to photographers vary from church to church. Pastors are encouraged to share their traditions with one another. Photographers should be provided with clear guidelines before the service.

### ✚ Order of Worship

Since many in the gathered community will be unfamiliar with the particular ritual employed, it is recommended that an Order of Worship, Bulletin, or Program be provided to assist all present in active participation.

### ✚ Symbols and Rituals

Symbols, rituals and traditional customs can enhance the service, but our pastoral concern is to celebrate both the church's faith and the faith, love and hope of the couple. Symbols, rituals and customs should be chosen to this end. It is appropriate to provide an explanation of these symbols in the program or Order of Worship so that all present understand their meaning. Above all, the customs and symbols employed must not be contrary to the Gospel.

### ✚ Preparation of Participants

A thorough discussion of the roles of all those participating in the wedding (pastors, bride and groom, bridesmaids and groomsmen, readers, etc.) is critical especially in marriages where clergy and laity from different traditions are participating together.

### ✚ The Vows

Our churches provide specific wordings of the vows in their liturgies. In the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church the vows may not be altered. If an Episcopalian or Roman Catholic are married in the United Methodist Church or the Lutheran Church, and the couple suggests changes in the wording, care must be taken that the vows embody a promise of exclusive commitment and permanence; the wording should not introduce qualifications to this promise.

### ✚ Music

Recalling the principle that a wedding is a worship service, it follows that: music appropriate to worship and consistent with a Christian theology of marriage should be selected.

It is appropriate to consider congregational music as well as solo and instrumental music and to consider using music from the traditions of both bride and groom.

### ✚ Celebration of the Eucharist

Eucharistic sharing among Christians of different denominations may be appropriate when there is basic agreement in Eucharistic faith. However, at present, we cannot affirm that this is the case between all of our churches. We must continue to work and to pray for the day when members of each of our churches will gather together around the Lord's Table. Following are sketches of the Eucharistic policies of our churches.

### **Eucharistic Policy of the Episcopal Church**

Sometimes, couples wish to celebrate the Holy Eucharist at their wedding ceremony. Such a celebration is appropriate in some circumstances, but not appropriate when it would cause scandal, embarrassment or confusion to the congregation present for the wedding. In general, a wedding involving two Episcopalians, or one Episcopalian and a members of a church in communion with the Episcopal Church would be an appropriate setting for a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. When couples are from churches who do not recognize one another's sacramental ministries, the eucharist is usually inappropriate.

### **Eucharistic Policy of the ELCA**

In general, for Lutherans, the Eucharist is an optional setting for the celebration of marriage. Its use as a setting for marriage is decided in consultation between the pastor and the couple. In the context of an "ecumenical marriage" (one that is jointly witnessed by a Lutheran and a representative from another denomination) the Eucharist would normally not be celebrated unless that other denomination is in formal eucharistic fellowship. "Ecumenical restraint" is the general rule. However, because for Lutherans the Eucharist is the Lord's Supper and not any particular denomination's Supper, whenever local circumstances have with integrity made eucharistic sharing a part of local practice (ecumenical breakthroughs may happen from below or above) the local practice of eucharistic sharing may be followed.

### **Eucharistic Policy of the Roman Catholic Church**

As Roman Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Roman Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844.4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844.3).

We encourage the use of the Rite for Celebrating Marriage outside of Mass when the union of a Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic occurs.

### **Eucharistic Policy of the United Methodist Church**

Holy Communion may or may not be celebrated in the United Methodist service. If it is, it is most important that its significance be made clear. Specifically: (1) The marriage rite is included in a Service of Word and Table. (2) Not only the husband and wife but the whole congregation are to be invited to receive communion. It is our tradition to invite all Christians to the Lord's table. (3) There should be no pressure that would embarrass those who for whatever reason do not choose to receive communion.

### **Conclusion**

In all of our churches, it is inappropriate for the bride and groom or the wedding party to receive Holy Communion while the congregation does not partake.

It is also the case that in all of our churches the celebration of marriage does not require the subsequent celebration of Eucharist. Each church provides a service of marriage apart from the Eucharist. Couples may need to be informed of this. Roman Catholics, in particular, may need to be reassured that

a "Catholic wedding" does not require celebration of the Eucharist (Mass).

### ✚ Cooperation Between Pastors

The presence and participation of both pastors at an ecumenical wedding may help the families and congregation feel more comfortable with the celebration, and it may be an important expression of the support and blessing of both churches.

When clergy from both traditions are invited to participate the following information and guidelines are suggested:

- Both clergy should discuss the service in advance.
- Both clergy should be invited to the wedding rehearsal.
- The pastor of the host Church should preside, while the other pastor performs an assisting role, e.g. Scripture readings, prayers or blessings. The pastor of the host church should instruct the visiting pastor regarding local liturgical customs and movements; i.e., where clergy sit, stand, kneel; how clergy enter, exit and move in the liturgical space; appropriate participation in communion (if it is a part of the ceremony); and other practical liturgical considerations.
- Clergy should be identified either verbally or in the wedding bulletin or Order of Worship.
- If the wedding is held in the Roman Catholic Church, a service outside of Mass allows for a greater role for the other pastor.
- Only one of the pastors may ask for and receive the vows of the couple. This role belongs to the presiding pastor and should not be performed by the visiting pastor.
- An honorarium appropriate to each pastor's role in the wedding and marriage preparation should be given to all participating clergy.

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## APPENDIX I

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### Religious Upbringing of Children – A Roman Catholic Perspective

When applying for permission to marry, the Catholic partner is asked to offer assurance that he or she will remain faithful to the Catholic Church's teachings and share his or her faith with their children. For permission to enter marriage with someone who is not Catholic, a Catholic is required to verbally express or sign the following declaration:

I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared Catholic.

The partner who is not Catholic is informed of these promises. (Prior to 1971, both partners were required to make the promises in writing, and the promises were worded differently.) The declaration and promise should be completed early in the preparation to allow time for the couples to resolve any difficulties that may arise from the requirement.

The statement "to do all in my power" is key to this promise. It means "as far as one's strength goes" or "as far as one is able to do it." This capacity, however, should not be measured by the internal disposition of the Catholic party only but by the intensity of the religious conviction of both.

The law mandates the Catholic to do no more and no less for the Catholic baptism and education of the children than what is feasible and fitting without doing violence to the right hierarchy of values which together make up the fabric of a happy union. The correct judgment can be made, and must be made, by the two spouses together. The Catholic spouse must not bring into peril the peace and harmony of the marriage in trying to fulfill the promise nor must the freedom of

conscience of the other party be violated nor the practice of that party's faith be hampered. To reach a satisfactory solution the spouses and those who are advising them should keep in mind the distinction between the abstract approach of the law and the concrete demands of life.

It is only fair that the other party be informed about the promises and the obligation of the Catholic. It is equally fair that the Catholic should be made aware of the state of conscience and religious obligations of the other party as well. Through such mutual information the parties should be in a position to come to a mutually acceptable solution. The parties need to take cognizance of the complex issues they must address if they want to live together peacefully. If they do not confront these issues before marriage, the problems are likely to return and haunt them later.

Thus, when couples of differing faith traditions prepare for marriage it is important to stress the need for mutual respect as each person lives out their own faith tradition. The lived practice of each one's faith will serve to strengthen the couple's relationship as the two individuals affirm the presence of God in their loving commitment. By their example of respect, care and concern for one another, couples of different religions can witness God's love in the broader community.

(Much of the information presented here was adapted from the book *Marriage in Canon Law* by Ladislav Orsy, SJ and the *Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation* by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference.)

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## APPENDIX II

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### Questions for Couples Preparing for an Ecumenical Marriage

1. What are some of the positive qualities and strengths, in the area of faith and religion that each of you will bring to your marriage?
2. Do you worship together now? What effect do you feel worshipping together or separately will have on you marriage?
3. How do you plan to handle church involvement once you are married, in such areas as participation in worship, financial support and belonging to church organizations? Are you both comfortable with these decisions?
4. How well do you each understand your own religious beliefs, values, and specific practices, and how familiar are you with each other's religious beliefs, values and practices? How do you feel about these beliefs, values and practices?
5. Can you honestly be supportive of each other's religious beliefs and practices? In what ways? Has there been any difficulty in this regard?
6. What has been the reaction of your parents, relatives and friends to your relationship? Are your religious differences a matter of concern to them?
7. (If one of the persons is Catholic.) Have you discussed the promise required by the Catholic partner concerning the baptism and faith formation of your children? What are your reactions to this promise?
8. How do you plan to handle religious holiday celebrations, sacramental celebrations and religious

upbringing of children? Do these areas present any difficulties for either of you or your families?

9. How do you plan to share your religion and customs with your children? How do you think you will help them to understand that you belong to different churches?
10. How do you feel about praying together? What place do you think prayer will have in your home life?

## Notes

1. Sources for statement include: *A Service of Christian Marriage* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 4-20; Evangelical United Brethren Church, *The Book of Ritual* (Dayton: Otterbein Press, 1959), pp. 34-35; The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Worship* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1965), pp. 28-29.
2. In this document, "pastors" refers to Episcopalian priests, ELCA pastors, Roman Catholic priests or deacons, United Methodist pastors or deacons, or other ministers of these churches who exercise a comparable ministry in relation to marriage.