



What is life like if you and your family share your Christian faith within two different Church traditions? And what can your parish do to make a difference?

"You live in your marriages the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity." Blessed John Paul II, York 1982

What is Life Like?

"We sometimes feel we are always expected to be the token ecumenical representatives."

"It is hard work when we try to take part in the life of both our churches. We cannot be together in both all the time."

"Why are we accepted more as a family in our other Christian community than we are here in our Catholic parish?"

"Sometimes I seem to be treated as a second-class Christian in my partner's Catholic church."

"Our children want to be confirmed, but they are delaying because they do not want to choose one denomination over the other."

"I don't want to commit exclusively to one of my parents' churches."

"Sometimes we go to my church, sometimes we go to her church, but we do not feel either is our church."

"Both our clergy and communities could get together at our wedding, and for the baptisms of our children."

"Sharing communion on occasions has had a huge positive impact on our relationship."

"We feel enriched as a family by our experiences within both our churches."

"Being close creates difficulties but also opportunities - we picture ourselves walking from our different starting points up the mountain, becoming closer to each other the closer we draw to the summit, to God."

Challenges for the Parish

People in interchurch families have impressive amounts of loyalty - to their denominations, to their spouses, to their children and to their wider families and communities. They long for their parishes to welcome, encourage and affirm the shared experience and gifts of the whole family.

Language is important. Technical terms and acronyms are best avoided unless they are explained. Take care when using 'Catholic' - do you sometimes actually mean 'Christian'? **The term 'non-Catholic' usually offends.**

Inter-church family life is not only a challenge but an opportunity - for both denominations. It's important to work together to explore this.

What opportunities exist for joint marriage preparation, house groups, prayer groups? When and how can both spouses and children become more involved in the life and worship of both Christian communities?

Offer more information about Catholic teaching on Holy Communion, explain what it means and the range of experience eg full; partial. Talk about the times when a 'grave and pressing need' to share the Eucharist occur - see [One Bread One Body para 106](#).

Design pastoral care for the whole family and not just for the Catholic members.

"We want to be recognised for what we are rather than for what we are not."

Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

Occasions such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January), National Marriage Week (February), Women's World Day of Prayer (March), and National Parents' Week (October) are useful opportunities to organise inclusive services and celebrations.

Churches Together have local networks across the countries (CYTYN in Wales) that organise joint prayer or social action activities. Check their websites for contact details.

Try to get together annually with members of other local Christian churches at the local pub for a meal.

Encourage home-based prayer, reflection and social groups. Many family-centred organisations have an ecumenical dimension eg Marriage Encounter, Teams of Our Lady, Parish Family Groups.

God our Father
you achieve your purpose through love.
Look not on the sin
which divides us
but on the love you have given us
for one another;
may it be a reflection

of your love for us,
so that in love
we may be drawn nearer to you,
and be used for
the greater unity of your Kingdom.
We ask this
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one. As you, father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

Helpful Resources

Books:

[Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism.](#)
Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, 1993.

[One Bread One Body: A teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church.](#) Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1998.

[How to Survive being Married to a Catholic.](#) Michael Henesy & Rosemary Gallagher, Redemptorist Publications, 2004

Support groups:

[Association of Interchurch Families](#), Association of Interchurch Families
27 Tavistock Square, London WC1 9HH. Email:
info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk

Websites

www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk

www.cte.org.uk

www.cytûn.org.uk

<p>This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive. For further information contact: Marriage and Family Life Project Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX Email: Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk</p>
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