

Discussion On Interfaith Marriages

Interfaith marriage guidelines were issued April 3, 1975. The following is a reprint of this pastoral directive.

The Church is concerned that every man and woman entering marriage make the proper preparations and receive basic meaningful instructions for success in their life together. Because of circumstances and problems of interfaith marriages, there may be a greater need that the couple attain "perfect union of mind and a full communion of life in their Catholic marriage."

From a pastoral viewpoint, those who receive the couple should realize that each couple is unique and should be received with kindness and understanding. A thoughtful realistic dialogue should be entered into to discover the religious attitudes and convictions about marriage as well as the relationship each has with the Church (faith, prayer, and practice). Insights should be gained regarding each other's faith, about parenthood, and about the religion of the children of the marriage. The conversation should also include the expectations of the couple about the ceremony or celebration of marriage. Frank and mutual respectful dialogue will give insights into the convictions and values that each has for marriage — their marriage. If there are serious basic conflicts assuring in stability, it may be justifiable to advise against the marriage only after the couple consults with the Office of Family Life.

There are three areas of special concern:

1. The dispensation.
2. Canonical form.
3. Liturgical Celebration.

THE DISPENSATION

The Church wants the couple to know and respect

one another's beliefs and considers itself obliged by divine law to require the Catholic party to promise to do all in his power to rear his children in the Catholic faith. The priest should also reassure the non-Catholic that the purpose of the Catholic education of the children is true Christian formation.

The Catholic party requests a dispensation from the bishop to enter a mixed marriage. The Catholic is expected to declare that he or she is ready to remove all dangers of falling away from the faith and must also promise to do all in his or her power to have all children baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith. The promises are made by the Catholic and the non-Catholic, although no longer asked to make the promises, must be told of them before the marriage takes place. They are meant to give testimony to the Catholic's understanding of his responsibility before God to live his faith and do all that is possible to pass that faith on to the children.

CANONICAL FORM

A Roman Catholic must exchange his vows in the presence of a Roman Catholic priest and two witnesses. For ecumenical and pastoral reasons, a couple may obtain permission to be married in a non-Catholic church or synagogue by a non-Catholic clergyman or rabbi, and their marriage is valid. In some exceptional circumstances it may be necessary that the dispensation be granted so that a civil ceremony may be performed.

Three things are needed:

1. Proper preparation for marriage and dispensation from the bishop (dispensation from form).
2. Serious reason for requesting dispensation.

a. the non-Catholic's relationship with the minister.

b. strong family attachment of non-Catholic to his church.

c. likelihood of increasing family hostility if marriage took place in Catholic Church.

(This is not a comprehensive list; other pastoral reasons may call for pastoral adaptation).

3. Must be some public ceremony, preferably a religious ceremony.

When a marriage takes place in the church of the non-Catholic the official ceremony (rite) of that church is to be used and the non-Catholic clergyman (unless the priest has received permission to do so) is the principal witness to the couple's exchange of vows. The priest may also be present and offer prayers or some word of congratulations. Apart from the Eucharist celebration the priest may also read from the Scriptures and preach.

LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

The rite of marriage strongly encourages the couple to choose the scriptural readings, the specific prayers and blessings and the musical selections for the wedding. The couple also needs to decide whether their marriage will be in the context of a wedding Mass, taking into account the faith traditions of the non-Catholic and his family. Generally the choice is

the "Liturgy of the Word", with the choice of readings and prayers appropriate to the wedding. Because of our general discipline concerning intercommunion, it seems preferable to discourage celebrating interfaith marriages at Mass. Celebrating the Lord's Supper, but excluding half the congregation from communion only dramatizes the disunity of the Church at a celebration which should speak of unity and love.

All members of the wedding party need not be Catholic. An invitation may be extended to the clergyman of the non-Catholic to take part in the ceremony (this may be the desire of the non-Catholic and his or her family). In appropriate vestments, he may read the Scriptures, prayers, or blessings of the couple. He may offer congratulations and in this way both clergymen give public witness to a shared pastoral concern for the couple.

The marriage of a Catholic to a member of an Eastern Orthodox Church may be celebrated with a Mass. The Orthodox party, if he so wishes and his church does not object, may receive Holy Communion with the

Catholic party.

A second religious ceremony is not permitted, nor is it permitted for both the

Catholic priest and a non-Catholic minister to perform their respective marriage rites within the same ceremony.

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