

# A Review of Ecumenical Marriages

**Commission for Ecumenical And Interreligious Affairs  
Diocese of Rochester**

Marriage is viewed by the Church as a covenant, "by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life." (Canon 1055)

Between baptized Christians marriage is a Sacrament.

The religious and spiritual dimensions of marriage can not be overlooked either by the couple, or, for that matter, by the Church whose responsibility it is that sacraments be properly received in order that their richness may be a true aid to the gradual but real oneness of the two who enter into the

covenant of marriage in the Church.

This basic understanding of marriage between Christians is also the foundation for marriages contracted between baptized Christians who belong to two different communions. This is an ecumenical, or, mixed marriage, meaning a marriage between a Roman Catholic and a person of another Christian denomination.

The celebration of their covenant is witnessed by the Church under different circumstances called by the Church "The Form of the Celebration of Marriage" which are clearly stated and defined by Canon Law:

"Only those marriages are valid which

are contracted in the presence of the local ordinary (bishop) or parish priest or of the priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who, in the presence of two witnesses, assists, in accordance however with the rules set out in the following canon, and without prejudice to the exceptions mentioned in canons 144, 1112 #1, 116 and 1127, 2 and 3." (Canon 1108.)

"It is for the Episcopal Conference (The National Conference of Catholic Bishops) to prescribe the manner in which these declarations and promises, which are always required, are to be made, and to determine how they are to be established in the external forum, and how the non-Catholic party is to be informed of them." (Canon 1126)

"The provisions of Canon 1108 are to be observed in regard to the form to be used in a mixed marriage." (Canon 1127)

Two post-Vatican II innovations have also been included in the general law. These are dispensation from the canonical form and delegation of lay witness:

"In mixed marriages the bishop of the Catholic party may, for a good reason, dispense from the canonical form. This means that the Catholic may validly

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marry a non-Catholic in the presence of a non-Catholic minister or civil official in a non-Catholic religious or secular setting. In such cases a Catholic priest or deacon may be present and may even participate to some degree in the ceremony by giving a reading, a blessing, or a sermon. He may not, however, act as the official witness by receiving the vows of the couple. This must be done by the non-Catholic officiant." (A Catholic's Guide to the New Code of Canon Law, Thomas P. Doyle OP, Pueblo Publishing Co. Inc., July 7, 1983).

The theology and reality of this sacrament continues to evolve, i.e., Ecumenical couples no longer need to fear the effects of proselytization and are now free to share with each other the fruitfulness of their faith journey.

The following points are evidence of this gradual dev-

elopment into a fuller understanding of the sacramental marriage between persons of different communions:

1. Couples are encouraged to become acquainted with each other's beliefs and practices.
2. Live devoutly within the tradition and discipline of their respective churches.
3. Live and teach the apostolic faith within their marriage and their family.
4. Work for closer relations between their Churches.
5. Be living witnesses and active instruments of Christ's healing power within the community at large.

These attitudes enable the couple to view the question of the family and their responsibilities to it in a more meaningful and practical context of faith.

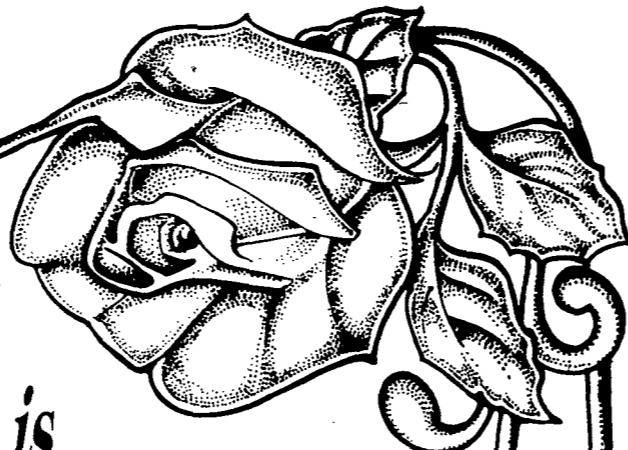
Another attitude which positively affirms the faith of the partners in an ecumenical marriage is stated, or reflected, in the Decree on Religious Liberty, which brings to the attention of those involved a clearer understanding of the religious responsibilities of a family.

In a Christian marriage both partners are equally responsible for the religious upbringing of their children and the maintenance of a life style in harmony with the Gospel principles of the Christian.

"Every family, in that it is a society with its own basic rights, has the right freely to organize its own religious life in the home under the control of the parents.

These have the right to decide in accordance with their own religious beliefs the form of religious upbringing which is to be given to their children" (Vatican II Document on Religious Liberty, Item 5).

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