

Clerical couple

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are more common. Today, clergy from both denominations participate more often and more fully in joint ceremonies than they did in the past. Couples are also more aware of their options, although the increasing numbers of such marriages have prompted more specific guidelines.

"The amount of support any ecumenical couple would get now is much broader," Lynne said. "We have gotten a tremendous amount of support from both of our parishes."

That applies to both their marriage and their shared ministry as deacons. "Having been locally called and working in the same parishes we attended for 14 years has helped," Brian said. "There have also been a lot of marriages between these two parishes."

The McNulty's didn't have to stand outside the altar rail at their wedding. Nor was Lynne required to sign a "contract" that she would raise their children as Catholics. But plenty of obstacles remain. Diocesan sacramental guidelines for marriage still require that Catholic spouses promise to do everything in their power to give their children the Catholic faith.

"Now I see it as more a promise that you are going to pass on to your children the traditions your parents taught you, that you will allow your children to be part of your faith experience, but not to the exclusion of the faith experience of the other partner," Brian said.

Beyond written requirements, there are the practical dilemmas. Many couples feel pressure from their families. Pastors are not universally cooperative when an interfaith

marriage is being planned. After surviving the wedding, couples need to decide where and how the family will worship — together or separately? What kind of religious education will they undertake? Where and when will they receive the sacraments?

The McNulty's solved the religious education quandary by teaching their children at home. Once, St. Augustine's and St. Stephen's did offer a joint religious education program, but it folded. "I think that there is a growing need for ecumenical religious education," Lynne said.

Brian and Lynne's oldest son, Joe, eventually made his First Communion three times — once at each parish and once at school. Their second son, Sean, made his only twice.

They note that parents of an interfaith family each need to be well-versed in their own traditions. "You can't see to it that someone else does it for you," Brian said. "It's up to you to see that when your kid asks an honest question you give him an honest answer."

Among the toughest questions their children have asked to date have been why the churches separated in the first place and why they had First Communion in mommy's church two years earlier than they were able to receive it in daddy's church.

Now confirmation looms just ahead for Joe, and with it, another painful dilemma. "If he is confirmed in one church, what does that do to his relationship with the other parent and the other community?" Lynne wondered.

To promote understanding among clergy so they can minister better in such situations, Brian and Lynne are developing what they hope will be a model project between their two parishes to support ecumenical marriages.

"The bottom line is that as a parent, you

want your child to grow up in the love of God, with good moral standards and a good faith tradition," Brian said. "If he sees both parents active in their communities, then hopefully he (the child) can carry out the life of a Christian in a community."

Anyone involved or interested in ecumenical marriages, from pastoral staff to married couples, is invited to attend the conference

October 22 at Sacred Heart Cathedral. In addition to the McNulty's, Father Thomas F. Stransky, CSP, a founding member of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, will be featured.

Reservations are due by October 10. For more information, contact Margery Nurnberg, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y., or call (716)328-3210.

Education

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the work of the various task forces.

"I don't see us making any decisions, but making recommendations to the bishop," Dillon said. "I see our job as making them informed recommendations."

If the commitment does not exist among Catholics and school parents to maintain Monroe County's parochial schools as they are now, Dillon said, the committee will try to determine what is possible. "We will have to look at what we can marshal or direct to preserve some form of Catholic education relative to what is there, not just in terms of finances, but also in terms of time, effort and support," he said.

"Our historical mindset is parochial,

which means limited or bounded, rather than Catholic, which means universal. If we want our schools to truly be Catholic, then we have to balance our own needs with our commitment as our brother's keeper. If any portion of our community is in crisis, we all are."

Correction

The page-one story on sacraments (C-J, Sept. 18: "Sacraments minus faith 'superficial'") incorrectly stated that age has replaced readiness as the overriding consideration in administering sacraments. The sentence was inadvertently transposed and should have read, "readiness has replaced age . . ."

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