

Recent canons on mixed marriages reflect ongoing ecumenical dialogue

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The term "mixed marriage" can be used to describe couples who combine one of several pairs of contrasting characteristics. Yet the revised Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983 by Pope John Paul II, gives precise meaning to the term. According to the code, "mixed marriage" means the marital union of two baptized persons, one person who was baptized or otherwise received into the Catholic Church and another who belongs to a church that is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Many of the norms applicable to marriages between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic are also applicable to marriages involving a Catholic and person who is not baptized.

Fortunately and providentially, the last few years since the Second Vatican Council have seen the Catholic Church take on a heightened sensitivity to its relations with other churches. Following the council, extensive research and dialogue were initiated to discuss the problem of "mixed marriages." This ongoing dialogue among the major churches has no doubt influenced some of the changes that have been made in the Church's legislation concerning these marriages.

Although one senses a mitigation in some of the norms in this area, the Church still expresses a pastoral concern for the Catholic party entering into a mixed marriage. The two post-conciliar decrees on mixed marriage, which were the basis for the revised code's legislation, invite the Catholic party to assess his or her own faith level and willingness to

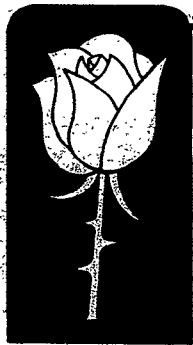
share that faith with any children born of the marriage.

Mixed-faith marriages require the permission of the local bishop, meaning the bishop of the diocese to which the Catholic party belongs or the bishop of the diocese in which the marriage will be celebrated. The local bishop can grant this permission for a mixed marriage if there is a good reason.

In the past, such reasons have included the possibility that the couple might choose to be married in a civil ceremony outside of the Church or that the Catholic party might abandon the faith altogether. There may also be more positive reasons, such as the couple's awareness of the responsibilities of a sacramental union or their commitment to their respective churches.

Most dioceses, including our own, provide forms for use in processing such applications. The Catholic party is asked to renew his or her faith in the Catholic Church and to do all in his or her power to have the children baptized and raised in the Catholic Church (Canon 1125.1). The partner who is not Catholic must be informed that these promises have been made. In addition, the couple is to be instructed about the properties and ends of marriage as understood by the Church.

Church ministers have the responsibility of reviewing with each couple the implications of entering marriage with two faiths or even with one faith represented. Decisions about the faith of the children who may be born of the marriage deserve careful discussion and reflection before the actual marriage ceremony takes place.



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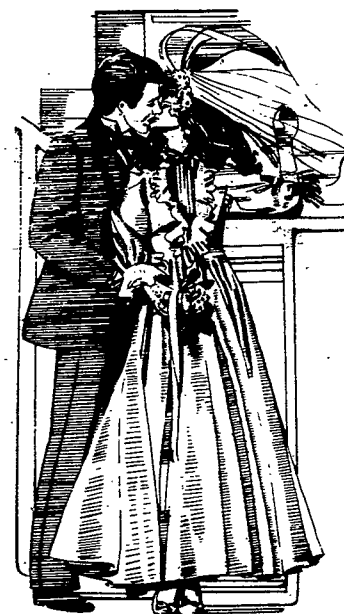
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