



New Stories to Tell: Living Ecumenism Today

A project of the
Anglican-Roman Catholic
Dialogue of Canada



*Kevin and Catherinanne George /
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CHAPTER II

A continual prayer: interchurch families

Kevin and Catherinanne met in the early 1990s at a talk about interchurch marriage held at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Seminary in London, Ontario. Kevin is an Anglican parish priest serving a busy, vibrant congregation. Catherinanne is the Director of Campus Ministry at a Roman Catholic College, and a member of the Canadian Armed Forces Navy Reserve. Their courtship and eventual marriage raised concern and opposition from church leaders at the time, including

the fear that Kevin would ‘ruin his career’ by marrying Catherinanne, and that she would need to be careful not to ‘lose her faith.’ Now married for over twenty years, Kevin and Catherinanne share their experience of the unique ecumenical vocation that is interchurch marriage:

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*Praying together over the phone, sending notes encouraging one another in faith, and attending our respective churches together, became critical to finding the strength to persist in the face of others’ fears. Our marriage was young, and it hurt to know that people in leadership in our churches could not always see past what divides us, to support that which brought us together. Kevin is fond of remembering that he fell in love with Catherinanne because of her faith and not in spite of it!*

*In those early days we prayed for God’s help and for strength to get through it all. We also prayed that we might bear witness to what we could achieve as Anglicans and Roman Catholics, if we look towards the things that are most critical to Christians on the journey of faith. When we focus on love, devotion, prayer, giving, witnessing, and serving, we can accomplish so much together. We believe that we have made strides, and we believe that we have much left to accomplish. Each time a hurdle is placed before us, God has used that as an opportunity to let the Spirit display what the possibilities are.*

*We often return to meditating and praying upon the readings we chose for our wedding. We chose Ephesians 4 to highlight the gifts and unity to which God was calling us, Psalm 148 to give glory to God in all things and for calling us together, Revelation 21 to remind us that there will be a new heaven and a new earth and that God will wipe away every tear, and John 17. Knowing that*

*Jesus prayed “that they may all be one” has sustained us through many things. We designed our own wedding invitation, long before this was popular. Art on the cover was an altar with scenes from the wedding feast at Cana, and we had written: “We bring our love to this altar, that united we might be a sign of God’s love for the world.” One of Catherinanne’s classmates at the Seminary sent us a note telling us that our marriage would be a continual prayer at the gates of heaven for unity in the Church.*

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The joys and challenges of living the Christian life are met in some profound ways in marriage. In the ARCIC II document *Life in Christ* (LC), spouses are called to live the vocation of marriage as a “vocation to holiness” (LC, 60). “When God calls women and men to the married estate, and supports them in it, God’s love for them is creative, redemptive and sanctifying” (LC, 60).

Anglicans and Roman Catholics share much agreement about the nature of marriage and its sacramentality. This vocation is one that is shared frequently between Anglican and Roman Catholic partners. Their life together witnesses to the very real but imperfect communion our traditions share even as they live, in daily life, our agreements and differences. In ARCIC II’s *The Church as Communion* (CC) we read: “Those who are in communion participate in one another’s joys and sorrows (Heb. 10:33; 2 Cor. 1:6–7); they serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13) and share together to meet the needs of one another and of the community as a whole. There is a mutual giving and receiving of spiritual and material gifts, not only between individuals but also between communities, on the basis of a fellowship that already exists in Christ (Rom. 15:26–27; 2 Cor. 8:1–15)” (CC, 15).



*The Association of Interchurch Families UK Annual Conference, 2018 / Association of Interchurch Families*

In the face of opposition to their marriage, Kevin and Catherinanne demonstrate self-emptying love by being committed to prayer, mutual encouragement in faith and commitment to worship in each other's traditions as appropriate. They return to Scripture together to find strength through meditation and prayer, focusing on the unity they already have and on their deep respect for one another. They embody the essence of interchurch dialogue in the recognition and 'exchange of gifts' each has to offer from their tradition within the bonds of marriage.

Some couples find sustaining full commitment to both traditions is too difficult and either shift to one community or the other, or sometimes slip into not commitment at all. This seems particularly common when children are added to the family. In order to continue in both traditions, support is strongly beneficial and should be expressed by the whole community, from bishops to clergy to parishioners. Our churches in Canada already have established *Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada* (1987), created jointly by the bishops of both traditions in dialogue.

Yet, there is still resistance to encouraging and honouring the potential witness to unity as evidenced by the initial responses Kevin and Catherinanne received. Our church leaders and parishes need to be proactive in supporting this vocation and seeing in it a sign of growing towards the unity we seek.

*Are there interchurch families in your Christian community? Is their vocation lifted up as a positive example, or seen as a problem?*

*In what ways do we as church leaders, colleagues or peers show support or disapproval to interchurch couples?*

*Rather than see interchurch marriages as a threat to the religious identity of each spouse, how can we encourage mutual support?*