

GETTING MARRIED?



*“We want to get married
in church,
but we come from
different Christian Churches”*

read on.....

Challenge or opportunity?

Attitudes towards marriage between Christians of different churches have changed enormously over the years. Such marriages are now seen not only as presenting challenges, but as offering opportunities for closer understanding between the churches.

Do we have to meet any conditions?

All the churches have requirements that couples wishing to marry must meet. Some are conditions laid down by state law and some by a particular church. It is important that you allow yourselves plenty of time for the necessary arrangements to be made.

What is going to be asked of us?

Marriage is a public statement of a deep personal relationship of shared love and mutual commitment, not only in the present, but one that anticipates a future of life-long faithfulness to each other. This commitment is expressed in the vows you make together. All Christians believe that God is alive, real and active in the love of husband and wife, both when the marriage ceremony takes place and throughout their lives together.

What if one of us is an Anglican and the other from a Free Church?

If you are an Anglican and want to marry a member of the Free Churches, or vice versa, decide which church you want to be married in and then discuss your marriage plans and the service with your minister and/or parish priest.

What if one of us is a Roman Catholic?

If one of you is a Roman Catholic and you want the Roman Catholic Church to recognise your marriage, you will need to ask for permission to marry someone who is not a Roman Catholic. There is usually no difficulty about this, so long as the Roman Catholic partner is willing to give the required undertaking.

What is this undertaking?

The Roman Catholic Church requires the Roman Catholic partner to give an undertaking to be prepared to avoid the dangers of abandoning the faith and to do all he or she can within the unity of the (marriage) partnership to have all the children of the marriage baptised and brought up in the Roman Catholic Church. The other partner must know of this, but no undertaking is required from him or her, nor indeed any response. The Roman Catholic partner can give the undertakings either by signing a form or verbally in the presence of a priest.

The Roman Catholic Church accepts the centrality of the marriage relationship and that this undertaking should not threaten the unity of the marriage. Rather it emphasises the supporting role of a living faith in a couple's life together.

The official text of the revised Roman Catholic *Ecumenical Directory* (1993) respects the views of the other partner, adding: “At the same time, it should be recognised that the non-Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his or her own Christian commitment.”

[See *Directory for the Application of Principles & Norms on Ecumenism*, norms 150, 151.]

Many couples from different denominations have found that, far from excluding one denomination from their children's upbringing, their family life is enriched by praying, reading Scripture, sharing the spiritual riches of their different traditions and by becoming involved in the life of both Churches.

If one of us is a Roman Catholic, do we have to get married in a Roman Catholic church?

No, the marriage can take place in another Christian church, but in this case you will also need a "dispensation from canonical form" from the Roman Catholic Church.

Can both our Churches play a part in our wedding?

Many couples are keen to have the ministers of both their churches take part in the wedding and to have a service that reflects the dual nature of their Christian commitment. This is something for you to discuss with your chosen priest or minister. Usually the person who conducts the main part of the wedding will be the minister of the church to which the building belongs.

If one of us is divorced, can we marry in church?

If one of you has been divorced and your former partner is still alive, it may not be possible to get married in the church of your choice. If this is your case you should speak to the priest or minister there as soon as you can and explain your situation.

Isn't this all a bit complicated?

You are unique, creating your own relationship. You each bring to it your own experiences in many areas of life. It is extremely important that you talk together about your feelings and expectations as well as your personal faith. You do not need to agree about everything, but to know that you can communicate openly, honestly and sincerely about things that matter to you, both before your wedding and as you grow together throughout married life.

Are we alone in making this kind of marriage?

More people than we realise marry across denominational boundaries. For instance, 70% of Roman Catholics in Britain marry people who are not Catholics. If, before making any decisions, you want to find out more or talk to people in a similar situation the *Association of Interchurch Families* can help you. The Association started in 1968 and since then members have faced the challenges of getting married, dealing with parents and in-laws, bringing children into the world, questions of baptism, schooling, church membership and the possibility of sharing communion together. Their solutions will not all be the same, but all would agree that they have gained immensely from the deeper spiritual understanding that a "two-church" marriage brings and that they want to offer their children something of both traditions as expressed in the unity of their marriage.

The experience of the *Association of Interchurch Families* is mainly of marriages between Roman Catholics and Christians of other churches.

Useful publications

Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families (Churches Together in England & CYTUN, 1994). (Includes a short section on marriages in the Greek Orthodox Church.) ISBN 1 874295 06 9

Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain: *An Order of Marriage for Christians from Different Churches* (Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1999). ISBN 1 85311 309 3

Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (CTS Publications, 1993). ISBN 0 85183 890 1

Michael Henesy & Rosemary Gallagher, *How to Survive being Married to a Catholic* (Redemptorist Publications, n.e. 2001). ISBN 0 85231 089 7

Resource Pack: *Getting Married* (Association of Interchurch Families; see address below)

Further information is available from:

Churches Together for Families
www.churchesandfamilies.org

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1 Blythe Mews, Blythe Road, London, W14 0NW
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