

# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON INTERCHURCH SPIRITUALITY

*The thoughts of an English Anglican husband and a French Roman Catholic wife.*

Spirituality means for us the way we live out our faith – particularly the way it is incarnated in our daily life. We believe that everything we do should be impregnated by this faith in God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It seems important to remember that an interchurch couple or family is *first and foremost Christian*, and secondly ‘interchurch’. The following six areas we feel able to say something about, from our own experience which is that of a young married couple without children (for the time being!). There are obviously other areas we could have considered, but we leave those until the next conference.

## **Our home**

How we arrange our home is not unimportant to us: it is our ‘living space’ where we reside (‘dwell’) and where we can welcome others – family, friends, strangers. Thus, beauty and simplicity help us not to forget these essential things. Welcoming someone into our home also means welcoming them into our life. Offering hospitality at our dinner-table is part of this, and at our daily meals we like to remind ourselves from whom all good things come and give thanks by saying a simple grace before eating. Also, reserving a place in the house, in the living room for example, for times of prayer (placing a Bible open for scripture readings, a candle to light beside an icon....) has the effect of keeping our daily ‘material’ life in touch with our ‘spiritual’ life. The two exist, and we need signs and moments in the day to ensure that we do not forget their unity.

## **Prayer together**

Praying together also remains a vital aspect of our daily ‘faith-life’, even if we don’t always manage every day to pray together – often simply because of different time-tables or rhythms (morning or evening?). During our engagement we found praying together a rich and rewarding experience: an extra way of getting to know one another as well as the more usual ones! Since we are married our prayer-life is perhaps less ‘intense’, but we nevertheless desire and try to pray together regularly. Our prayer-time is centred round a short Bible reading, followed by a few minutes’ silence, a simple song or hymn, and prayers for others. We pray as we are able ... We also try, on a regular

basis, to have weekends (or longer) of ‘spiritual nourishment’: a retreat or privileged time to renew our dialogue with God, and to listen once more to Him ....

## **Someone more experienced**

To help us remember what is essential in our life as a Christian couple, we have discovered the richness of being able to speak with an older (and wiser!) Christian, more experienced than ourselves, who helps and accompanies us by listening and discerning. This is important both together and individually; and such a person is truly invaluable!

## **Gospel simplicity**

From the Gospels, we find it right to maintain a certain simplicity and even a sort of ‘poverty’ in our material dealings and in our relationships: remaining open, welcoming and marvelling at the situation in which we find ourselves, and giving thanks. Giving thanks even when things are difficult (not *for* the difficulties, but in spite of them!), in times of mutual misunderstanding, periods of unemployment, or simply for our differences and those of our two Christian communities. These things help to till the soil, and bear fruit. We also try to take any decisions concerning our work, moving home, and so on, in trust and prayer, being attentive to the place we allow God to have in our life, so that He can really be a part of all that we are and do.

## **Sexuality**

We have also found that our spirituality is very much linked to the way we live our sexuality as a couple. The choices of the rhythm and expression of our relationship enrich our capacity to trust and love one another. A tender and loving God is not so different from a tender and loving spouse. Gestures of acceptance and attentiveness enhance mutual forgiveness and lead to a new life in Christ. Growing together spiritually means growing together in love. Also, for a non-Catholic, it can be a pleasant surprise to discover the thought and attention given to marriage and family life by the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in marriage preparation and matters such as family planning.

## **An interchurch couple**

Finally, we want to consider potential areas of disagreement for an interchurch couple. For example, prayers for the dead, praying to the saints, or Mary. For us, Mary does not play a large part in our life ... she remains important and unique in the sense that she is the 'first believer' in God's plan concerning Jesus. As such she is a model for our faith. Now and again we have prayed the rosary together, but more as a 'technique' of prayer rather than anything else, a way of helping us turn towards Christ. This remains infrequent for us. Recently, we declined to take part publicly in a pilgrimage during the Marian year. We felt that such events are not always understood or well-received, nor do they necessarily further Christian unity — at least for us, as an interchurch couple, discretion is an important factor.

In conclusion we think that, for interchurch families, not appearing to be 'super-Christians' helps others to appreciate our situation. Otherwise, we can put people off by our zeal and commitment! We also feel that sometimes we have too much of religion: taking time to go for walks or to go swimming enables us to relax and be ourselves, and thus live out our faith. Every interchurch family needs to find its own spirituality just like other Christian families — with an added dimension, of course!