

SPIRITUALITY FOR INTERCHURCH FAMILIES

A mission statement about interchurch family spirituality prepared by the Association of Interchurch Families at the request of the Co-ordinating Group for Spirituality of Churches Together in England, February 1997

Spirituality for interchurch couples and families relates both to marital spirituality and to spiritual ecumenism. This is because, as Saint John Paul II said to them at York in 1982, when he spoke directly to partners in mixed marriages between baptised Christians in which one was a Roman Catholic: "You live in your marriages the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity."

It is the conviction of the Association of Interchurch Families that there is a close link between the two: indeed, that they are both concerned with differences held together in communion.

God made us different - starting with that first basic difference of gender which runs right through humanity. God made us for communion - and gave us that first basic insight that it is together that we are made in the image of God.

God made us for communion - and therefore willed marriage. God made us for communion - and therefore willed the Church. Both marriage and the Church exist to draw human beings into God's life of love, where alone differences are lived fully in communion: three distinct Persons, but one God in Trinity. Both marriage and the Church are signs of this life of love, signs of the great mystery of God's self-giving love revealed to us in Christ. No wonder that marital spirituality and spiritual ecumenism have so much in common; the one Spirit is at work in both, drawing diverse human persons into the communion of God's life and love.

For both it is an on-going pilgrimage. A family "is not holy because it is perfect, but because God's grace is at work in it, helping it to set out anew each day on the way of love" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). The Church is called by Christ "to continual reformation as she goes on her pilgrim way" (Vatican II *Decree on Ecumenism*). Interchurch families are called to live this dual pilgrimage in a unique way. "You live *in your marriage* the hopes and difficulties of *the path to Christian unity*."