

APPENDIX F: **ECUMENICAL AND INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE**

OVERVIEW

“These days, many people marry across religious lines. The rate of ecumenical marriages (a Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic) and interfaith marriages (a Catholic marrying a non-baptized non-Christian) varies by region. In areas of the U.S. with proportionately fewer Catholics, as many as 40% of married Catholics may be in ecumenical or interfaith marriages.

Because of the challenges that arise when a Catholic marries someone of a different religion, the church doesn’t encourage the practice, but it does try to support ecumenical and interfaith couples and help them prepare to meet those challenges with a spirit of holiness. Theologian Robert Hater, author of the 2006 book, “When a Catholic Marries a Non-Catholic,” writes: “To regard mixed religion marriages negatively does them a disservice. They are holy covenants and must be treated as such.”

A marriage can be regarded at two levels – whether it is valid in the eyes of the Church and whether it is a sacrament. Both depend in part on whether the non-Catholic spouse is a baptized Christian or a non-baptized person, such as a Jew, Muslim or atheist.

If the non-Catholic is a baptized Christian (not necessarily Catholic), the marriage is valid as long as the Catholic party obtains official permission from the diocese to enter into the marriage and follows all the stipulations for a Catholic wedding.

A marriage between a Catholic and another Christian is also considered a sacrament. In fact, the church regards all marriages between baptized Christians as sacramental, as long as there are no impediments.

“Their marriage is rooted in the Christian faith through their baptism,” Hater explains. In cases where a Catholic is marrying someone who is not a baptized Christian – known as a marriage with disparity of cult – “the church exercises more caution,” Hater says. A “dispensation from disparity of cult,” which is a more rigorous form of permission given by the local bishop, is required for the marriage to be valid.

The union between a Catholic and a non-baptized spouse is not considered sacramental. However, Hater adds, “Though they do not participate in the grace of the sacrament of marriage, both partners benefit from God’s love and help [grace] through their good lives and beliefs.”

Following are the different terminology that describe Appendix C: Ecumenical and Inter-faith Marriages:

- ***“Ecumenical Marriage” refers to the union of a Catholic and a person baptized in another Christian faith. This union requires a Permission for a Mixed Marriage Form.***

- **“Mixed Marriage”** refers to any marriage between a baptized Catholic and a person baptized in another Christian faith
- **“Interreligious Marriage”** refers to the marriage of a Catholic and a person of a Non-Christian faith and requires a *Petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship*.
- **“Inter-ritual Service”** refers to the mixing of two different traditions in a single ceremony (such as a wedding), so that an observer cannot tell if it is a Catholic service or another faith tradition with adjustments.

Since the marriage preparation process will have a direct impact upon both the religious and marital future of the man and woman, the importance of a sensitive, open, and honest dialogue cannot be stated strongly enough.

The couple needs to share their different religious traditions and backgrounds, how these affect their relationship and how they plan to share these with each other and their children. Religious differences can easily give rise to emotions and tensions within a marriage and, therefore, call for special attention during marriage preparation. The large and growing number of interreligious couples is a reality in the Church that must be responded to in a positive way.

PASTORAL APPROACH

The priest or deacon is encouraged to use a pastoral approach and liturgical care, yet confronting realism. Negative attitudes are not helpful and can prove to be counterproductive. Therefore, he should discuss with the couple their different religious backgrounds and should determine whether any potential difficulties exist. He should encourage them to respect each other’s beliefs, especially when one or both parties fervently practice their faith. They should be encouraged to learn as much as possible about each other’s faith communities and convictions. They should also be invited to make the effort to pray together and, if possible, to participate in each other’s worship services. ***It is of utmost importance, as well, that the area of children’s religious upbringing be thoroughly discussed prior to marriage.*** A successful union will depend upon the couple’s willingness to commit themselves to honest dialogue on these issues throughout their marriage.

When the party, who is not Catholic, is active in his/her faith, consideration should be given to the possibility of inviting the participation of the minister of that faith tradition to be part of the marriage preparation, as well as the ceremony itself. In regard to the ceremony, when one party is not Catholic, normally, the wedding is celebrated without Mass.¹ Also, at the couple’s request and with solid pastoral reasons, a ***Dispensation from Canonical Form (See Appendix C)*** may be granted. This would authorize the wedding ceremony to take place before the minister or Rabbi of the non-Catholic party in the church, synagogue, or temple of that religious tradition.

When the non-Catholic is not active in his/her religion, and appears to be open to learning more about the Catholic Church, the minister should invite the non-Catholic party to consider the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process with his/her Catholic partner.

Priests with faculties in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles may grant Permission for a Mixed

¹ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony/Ritual del Matrimonio* (2019). The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass, Liturgical Press, pg. 52 (*Spanish*)/53 (*English*).

Marriage, (that is for a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic). The promises regarding practice of the faith and religious education of the children are to be made by the Catholic party, acknowledged by the other party, and kept with the marriage records. For marriages between a Catholic and an unbaptized or doubtfully baptized person, a *Petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship* (See Appendix C), must be requested from the Office of Vicar for Canonical Services. In both cases, the issues of religious differences and the religious education of the children must be seriously discussed.

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES COMPLETE ECUMENICAL GUIDELINES ON MARRIAGE

The following is taken from the 1988 Los Angeles Archdiocesan Guidelines for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs. The Archdiocesan Tribunal or the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs should be consulted for more detailed information.

PASTORAL GUIDANCE

In addition to conducting the customary marriage preparation programs, the priest has responsibilities in the matters of a mixed marriage. He should especially see that each couple understands and accepts the Christian ends and essential elements of marriage. *In marriages between Catholics and other baptized Christians, he should stress the positive aspects of what they share together in the life of grace, in faith, hope and charity, along with other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each party should continue to follow and practice his/her faith, to search out those things that lead to unity and religious harmony, and to avoid indifference toward religious commitment so that the distinctive values of one or both are not lost.* The love, sharing and loyalty of such a marriage may reach out and have a healing effect that can cross the barriers of a divided Christianity and remind us of the mystery of Christ's abiding love for his Church, a love that continually seeks to reconcile. (Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages, P. 10.)

In the interest of greater understanding and unity, the priest should advise both parties to learn more of their partner's religious convictions and to occasionally attend their worship services. *He should remind the couple that common prayer is essential to their spiritual harmony and that reading and study of the Bible is especially important.* Provision should be made that couples in mixed marriages receive pastoral care not only in the preparation and celebration of their marriages, but also appropriate encouragement and support throughout their life together. Such programs should be prepared and supplied in cooperation with other clergy whenever possible.

I. EASTERN CHURCHES NOT IN COMMUNION WITH ROME

Marriage - For the Orthodox a Catholic may participate in an Orthodox wedding but may not act as the principal witness. For the Catholic Church an Orthodox may participate and act as principal witness in a Catholic wedding, although Orthodox discipline usually does not allow this.

The Orthodox consider that only a marriage performed by an Orthodox priest is valid for an

Orthodox. In this matter, Orthodox do not grant dispensations, while the Catholic Church does if there is question of the spiritual good of the parties. For pastoral reasons, therefore, it is often advisable to ask for a Dispensation from Canonical Form, thus allowing the marriage to take place before an Orthodox priest. In this way, both parties of an Orthodox and Roman Catholic marriage can remain in good faith. (C.f. Guidelines for Mixed Marriages). Without this dispensation, the marriage would be valid but illicit for the Catholic. The priest of the Catholic party should try to be present but generally will not be permitted any active participation beyond perhaps to give a blessing and a short exhortation.

Reference USCCB:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/index.cfm>
<https://catholiccurrent.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/catholics-and-orthodox-marriage.pdf>

II. CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES IN THE WEST

Introduction

In all marriages, the primary concern of the Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the marital union and the family that flows from it. The perfect union of mind and full communion of life, which constitutes the married state most readily occurs when both partners share the same faith. For this reason, the Church desires that Catholics marry Catholics, but in those cases that they do not, great pastoral care must be offered to the couple. (*Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, p. 1.*)

Recognizing, however, the overwhelming reality of mixed marriages in the United States, the full pastoral solicitude of the Church extends to couples preparing to enter, or having already entered, such marriages. It is the abiding responsibility of all, especially priests in a pastoral ministry to families, to provide special help and support for the couple in a mixed marriage. This support is based on the respect of the uniqueness of each couple's situation and the holiness of the state of marriage itself.

Reference USCCB:

<http://uploads.weconnect.com/mce/9d94ce174298e08402d1271df4e20f4cb50f7340/Marriage/when%20a%20catholic%20marries%20a%20protestant%20-%20myUSCCB.pdf>

A. Permission for Mixed Marriage and Dispensation from Disparity of Worship

After the instruction, the Catholic will be asked to explicitly declare and reaffirm his/her continuous, active faith; to promise to respect the conscience of the other party in marriage and to promise to do everything possible to see that the children of the marriage be baptized and educated in the Catholic faith. The non-Catholic must be informed of the promises and responsibility of the Catholic although there is no absolute requirement of a formal statement on the part of the non-Catholic. *This is the point where the couple should seriously weigh the results of their differing religious convictions and the influence of those convictions on each other's new life. The couple's effort to understand their individual religious traditions and serious discussions of the differences that exist can lead to a greater honesty, charity and understanding of the basis of unity.*

B. Dispensation from Canonical Form

Where there are serious difficulties in observing the Catholic Canonical Form in a mixed marriage, the Ordinary of the Catholic party having consulted with the Religious Leader of the place where the marriage is to occur may dispense the Catholic from the observance of the form for a just pastoral cause. A non-exhaustive list of typical reasons: to achieve family harmony or to avoid family alienation; to obtain parental agreement to the marriage; and to recognize the significant claims of relationship or friendship with a non-Catholic minister. Such marriages should take place before the non-Catholic party's minister in a church or before a rabbi in a setting normal for a Jewish ceremony.

A Catholic priest is encouraged to attend and participate in the marriage of a Catholic party if invited to do so when Dispensation from the Canonical Form has been granted with the following stipulations: a) he may not perform a combined inter-ritual service with the minister, or a separate liturgical service. b) he may, with the agreement of the other minister, recite appropriate prayers, give his personal congratulations and blessings to the married couple, but not the nuptial blessing, and c) if the marriage is celebrated during a Scripture service, which is not the principal Sunday Service, he may read passages from the Sacred Scripture and give a homily.

Rites for Mixed Marriages

The rite of the wedding should be the official rite of the religion in which the wedding is celebrated. It is not permitted to have two religious services separately, or one service which would celebrate two rituals jointly or successively.

With the agreement of the couple, the priest is encouraged to invite the minister of the non-Catholic party to participate in the Catholic service. The participating minister may give additional prayers, blessings, and words of greeting and exhortation. He/She may, if Mass is not celebrated, read a lesson and/or preach. He/She is also encouraged to wear his/her liturgical vestments.

Since Eucharistic sharing is not permitted by the general discipline of the Church, the couple should celebrate the rite of matrimony outside of Mass. Rite II if the non-Catholic party is Christian or Rite III if the other party is not Christian.

Two members of other traditions may be the principal witnesses at a Catholic marriage. Likewise, Catholics may serve as witnesses at marriages, which are legitimately celebrated in churches of other Communions. Priests are encouraged to attend such marriage ceremonies when invited to do so.

For special regulations concerning Eastern Orthodox Christians and those professing Judaism, please refer elsewhere in these guidelines.

III. CATHOLIC-JEWISH MARRIAGES

When a Catholic and a Jew decide to enter into marriage, the priest who is helping them prepare a marriage ceremony should be sensitive to the religious conviction and customs of both parties. Neither party to the marriage should be asked to violate the integrity of his or her faith.

Priests of the Archdiocese should be aware that the Jewish community is officially in opposition to

mixed marriages; they are a prime area of concern and sensitivity within the Jewish community.

The official statement of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, made in response to an inquiry from the Archdiocesan Commission of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, highlights this concern:

Our Board of Rabbis has issued a statement, as of February 28, 1974,* in which we called upon members to refrain from officiating at mixed marriages. This is in accordance with the decision and guidelines established by each of our three rabbinical associations and is in keeping with our on-going Jewish tradition.

Similarly, all of our rabbinical bodies have reaffirmed the historic view of Judaism that Rabbis should not participate with clergy of other faiths in the performance of marriage ceremonies.

Hence, Rabbis who do participate with ministers of other faiths in such ceremonies are violating Jewish doctrine and practice and are doing so without the sanction of tradition or the approval of their rabbinic bodies.

*The Board of Rabbis indicated on April 6, 1988 that this same policy on inter-faith remains in effect.

Our committee, of course, recognizes that the Catholic religious community established regulations for the guidance of its own constituency, but in the matter referred to us it also seems to touch upon concepts and rites treasured by the Jewish community. The official religious leadership of the Jewish faith would therefore welcome Catholic cooperation in helping to keep intact our accepted standards and views concerning rabbinical participation in Jewish-Catholic marriages.

As of 2020, the official policies of the Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical associations do not allow member rabbis to officiate at interfaith marriages, while other rabbis (Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Humanist, etc.) may do so at their own discretion.

These regulations should be shared with a Jewish-Catholic couple seeking pastoral advice concerning marriage. The priest should also advise the couple that the Catholic Church does not encourage such marriages; indeed, the Church greatly desires that Catholics marry Catholics. This position stems from a concern for the marital union and the good of the family.

If the priest is still asked to assist after sharing this with the Catholic-Jewish couple, the following avenues may be pursued:

- a) A priest may officiate at the wedding of a Jew and a Catholic, with a Dispensation from Disparity of Worship, in the sanctuary or other part of the Catholic Church, or in any suitable place.
- b) A dispensation from the Catholic form of marriage may be sought so that the Catholic party may marry in a religious ceremony before a rabbi in a setting normal for a Jewish marriage ceremony.

- c) If neither of these options is possible, then the Ordinary is prepared to dispense the Catholic party from the Catholic form of marriage so that a public ceremony that is civilly valid will be accepted by the Catholic Church as both licit and valid.

Jews may be admitted as witnesses and attendants at a marriage ceremony in a Catholic Church. Catholics may act as witnesses and attendants at the wedding of friends who are Jews.

When a priest or deacon is invited to participate in the marriage ceremony of two Jews conducted by a rabbi, he may offer prayers for the couple and invoke God's blessing on them.

When a rabbi is invited to participate in the marriage ceremony of two Catholics conducted by a priest, the Rabbi should be offered a place of honor in the sanctuary and may offer prayers for the couple and invoke God's blessing on them.

All mixed marriages between Catholics and those who are not Jews and who are not baptized, fall under the general provisions of existing Church law.

Reference USCCB:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/national-council-of-synagogues.cfm>

IV. MARRIAGES IN ISLAM AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Introduction

Married life and family life are held in high esteem both in Islam and Roman Catholicism. The family, which grows from married life, serves as the building block of society and is the unit in which values are taught, love of God is encouraged and respect for human beings is learned. As Muslims, and Roman Catholics we affirm the dignity of the married state and the centrality and importance of the family within our religions and within contemporary society.

This is not a thorough presentation of the beliefs, theology, or discipline concerning married life in Islam and Roman Catholicism. Rather its purpose is an educational one, to allow the reader to gain an insight into married life and the dignity it holds within our religious communities. For those who find themselves in that small number of Islamic Roman Catholic marriages, this statement indicates the similarities and dissimilarities, the value upon which the marital bond can be strengthened and those areas in which there might be tension.

Our religions do not encourage interfaith marriages. However, if a couple is contemplating such a marriage, they are advised to consult with a Catholic priest and a Muslim Iman while planning for such a marriage.

Synopsis of Marriage in Islam

Marriage in Islam is considered a blessing bestowed by God and a sign of his mercy to be honored and enjoyed. The Quran says, "and one of his signs, that He created you, from yourselves, spouses,

to dwell with them in tranquility, and between you He set love and compassion” (Sura 30 verse 21). It is clear from the previous verse that the relationship is based upon love and compassion, to offer the environment of tranquility, for a family to be formed under God.

General Principles:

1. Marriage is an important decision that should be exercised through the free will of both spouses and should only be taken after due thinking and consideration.
2. There are certain rules and regulations that control the selection of the spouse. In Islam there are certain categories of relationships that are considered incompatible with marriage, e.g., brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, stepdaughters and mothers/fathers-in-law, as detailed in the laws of Islam.
3. An engagement period is recommended where the spouses will know each other and the families will become acquainted.
4. Declaration is essential, no marriage is a secret. The society is a considered factor, and the marriage should be witnessed by at least two persons and should be declared.
5. Marriage is a permanent covenant. The intention is for a permanent everlasting relationship, one that outlives life itself to extend through eternity. Divorce is considered as a last resort to correct a wrong decision and should only be entertained if the alternative is harm or intolerable misery.
6. A dowry is a symbolic gift offered by the husband to the wife. It is a requirement of the contract and the absolute right of the wife.
7. The marriage relationship is formalized in a contract between the two spouses witnessed and sanctified by God. In the contract each spouse can spell out the conditions that he or she will feel necessary to guarantee a happy marriage and secure parties.
8. The responsibility to sustain the family falls basically on the man, who hence assumes the leadership role for the family, especially in these particular situations when a consensus of opinion could not be reached through cooperation and mutual understanding.
9. The marriage contract is based on acceptance and declaration. Because there is no clergy in Islam, “formal” religious rituals are not needed, and a Muslim in good standing can perform the ceremony anywhere.
10. The religion of the two spouses is fundamental. A Muslim man should restrict this relationship to a Muslim woman or to a woman who belongs to the “people of the book” namely a Jew or a Christian, in which case he recognizes her religion and guarantees her right to practice her acts or worship according to her creed. A Muslim woman should not get married to anyone who does not recognize her religion, she can only marry a Muslim. A Muslim is obligated to pass Islam to the offspring out of faith and love.

Reference USCCB:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/index.cfm>