

Conferenza Episcopale Italiana
Chiesa Evangelica Valdese
(Unione delle chiese metodiste e valdesi)

**JOINT TEXT FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF INTERCHURCH FAMILIES OF ROMAN
CATHOLIC AND WALDENSIAN OR METHODIST CHURCHES IN ITALY**

THE APPLICATIVE TEXT

Preamble

The Italian Episcopal Conference and the Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist churches, recognizing the need to make the “Joint text for the pastoral care of Interchurch families of Roman Catholic and Waldensian or Methodist churches in Italy” effective, nominated their respective commissions with the purpose of reaching an agreement on the “Applicative Text”.

The commission of the Italian Episcopal Conference was composed as follows: Alberto Ablondi, Giuseppe Chiaretti, Francesco Coccopalmerio, Silvano Maggiani, Mario Polastro, Claudio Giuliadori (who, due to another appointment, attended only the first meetings; he was not replaced).

The Commission of the Waldensian-Methodist Synod was formed by: Maria Sbaffi Girardet, Maria Bonafede, Franco Giampiccoli, Giulio Maisano, Paolo Ricca, Alberto Taccia.

The two commissions co-opted Myriam and Gianni Marcheselli, an interchurch couple from Milan, for their first meeting.

The 15 joint working sessions took place between 29th October 1997(first meeting)and 10th January 2000 (last meeting), all in a true fraternal spirit, but with honesty and straightforwardness.

The following “Applicative Text”, made up of an introduction and 8 chapters, with a total of 52 paragraphs, is the result of this exacting task, which deeply involved the members of the two commissions.

INTRODUCTION

1.(*The Joint Text*) - “The Joint Text for the pastoral care of interchurch families of Roman Catholic and Waldensian or Methodist churches in Italy”, endorsed on 16th June 1997 by both faith communities, has become very significant for ecumenical interrelationships in this country. The document deals with the question of mixed marriages,¹ which, in the past, often caused conflicts between the two churches as well as bringing distress to the families involved.

The Joint Text underlines that “mixed marriages can be seen in a positive light for the contribution they give to Christian unity and the ecumenical movement, especially when both partners are faithful to their calling in their original church” (3.1; compare 1.9;2.5). This more positive and serene outlook has helped to overcome many prejudices and strained relationships, so that the Joint Text has been able to put together all the positive aspects of the two churches’ disciplines, without leaving out the different points of view.

Both the Roman Catholic church² and the Waldensian church (United Waldensian and Methodist churches)³ - hereafter referred to as Waldensian church-have definite regulations for the celebration of interchurch marriages.⁴

The object of the Joint Text is to tackle the different aspects of the problem, proffering an acceptable solution to both churches without infringing the spirit of the respective marriage regulations, which moreover, have undergone considerable changes favourable to ecumenical understanding, since 1970.

2. (*An applicative document*) - The Joint Text contemplates an applicative document which will enable the advice for pastoral care it contains, to be put into practice.(Conclusion. Joint Text).

The present document offers the necessary applicative counselling relative to problems which can occur from time to time in interchurch families, keeping in mind the theological and ecclesiastical aspects clarified in the Joint text, and expounding the liturgical, disciplinary and pastoral aspects. The phases preceding and following the marriage service itself are also considered.

The applicative counselling of this document is based on the acknowledgement of the mutual rights and duties of both spouses ,on the supportiveness of their churches, and, especially on the respect for the personal freedom of the future husband and wife. This freedom, which concerns the choice of the marriage

ceremony, the community in which the couple decide to baptize their children and the kind of spiritual upbringing they choose to give them, will be expressed in mutual decisions which both faith communities should accept without putting obstacles in their way.

3. (*Addressees*) - The document is addressed to the local churches, in particular, to the priests and ministers who are responsible for these communities, that they may accompany the decisions of the future spouses with respect and clarity. The text is also addressed to the couple themselves, to help them, as they prepare for the marriage and their future life together, to be conscious of their rights and their duties:

I - INTRODUCTION

4. (*Different norms*) - The differences and the divergences between the catholic and protestant concepts of marriage being not a few, it follows that the applicative regulations of the Joint Text must differ - second part.

5. (*Knowledge, understanding, applicaton*) - When an interchurch marriage ceremony is celebrated, whether in a Waldensian, Methodist or Roman Catholic church, the spouses must be informed of these regulations and of their true meaning; these must be applied correctly, according to the agreed forms, so as to be sure that both ecclesial communions are able to identify themselves in the marriage ceremony.

6. (*The Roman Catholic Norm*) - According to the Catholic church, these regulations are contained in the Canon law and, as far as Italy is concerned, resumed in the general decree of the Italian Episcopal Conference (C.E.I.). The meaning of this norm must be explained and the terms of application of the commitments undertaken by the Catholic party must be clarified so that the freedom and the conscience of the protestant party will not be impaired.

7. (*The license*) -The Canon law establishes that “the marriage between two baptized persons (only one of whom is a Catholic)... cannot be celebrated without the special license issued by the competent authority”(see. can. 1124).

The necessity for this license does not come from the fact that the interchurch marriage itself is considered to be negative, but from the inherent difficulty of such marriages. The Catholic authorities therefore, feel the need to examine the situation so as to determine whether the prior conditions for a valid and fruitful marriage exist. The same authorities express their approval of the marriage with the concession of the license.

It is obvious that this concession only concerns the protestant partner indirectly, he or she not being subject to the jurisdiction of the Catholic church (can.11).Even less so does it concern the protestant minister, whose absolute authority in the execution of his duty when the marriage is celebrated in the protestant church, is acknowledged.

8. (*Declarations and promises*) - Canon 1125, n.1, establishes: “The Catholic spouse declares to be ready to avoid any danger of forsaking his/her faith, and sincerely promises to do all in his/her power to have his/her children baptized and spiritually educated in the Roman Catholic church”.

The following comments on this norm are advisable:

a) As far as the declaration of the Catholic spouse to avoid forsaking his/her faith are concerned, it must be pointed out that no danger can come from the faith of the Protestant partner, who, rather, can help to strengthen the faith of his/her Catholic spouse, and vice versa, but the danger could come from the risk of their own spiritual identity becoming weaker or, even of falling into indifference or religious relativism, thereby neglecting or forsaking attendance at their own church.

This risk is, of course, the same for the Protestant spouse. Both partners, therefore, should do all they can to help each other live out their faith genuinely and coherently.

b) With reference to the promise of the Catholic partner to do all in his/her power to baptize and bring up the children in the Catholic faith, it should be understood that this expresses the commitment of the Catholic partner to testify his/her faith to his/her children while, at the same time, keeping in mind that the Protestant partner has the same right and duty to testify and remain committed to his calling within his own church.

This situation, rather than being a source of conflict, should lead to a committed mutual love and deciding together that which is best for their own deeper unity and for the spiritual education of their children.

c) “If the children are not baptized in the Catholic church, despite all efforts in this respect, the Catholic

parent will not come up against the censure of the Canon law. Nevertheless, his/her duty to share his/her Catholic faith with his/her children, remains. It may be necessary for this partner to actively contribute to the Christian atmosphere of the family; and by word and example to do all in his power to help the other members of the family to get to know and appreciate the special values of the Catholic tradition; to know all the necessary regulations so as to be prepared to expound and discuss his/her personal faith with the others; to pray together with his family for Christian unity, according to the will of God".⁵

The same suggestions are likewise important for the Protestant partner whose children are baptized and receive their spiritual education in the Catholic church.

9. (*Information to Protestant partner*) - The Catholic priest is required to inform the Protestant spouse of the declarations and promises made by the Catholic spouse (see can. 1125, n. 2), explaining their contents and the meaning. The Protestant partner will take cognizance without any obligation to assent or sign anything. The priest must simply bear witness to this fact.

The Catholic spouse will, of course, be aware of the like commitment to his/her spiritual traditions and faith of the other partner.

10. (*Purpose and fundamental attributes of marriage*) - Can. 1125, n. 3 states: "both partners must be instructed as to the purpose and fundamental attributes of marriage, neither of the contracting parties being excluded". This is a question of principle concerning the unity of the couple, the indissolubility of the marriage and the acceptance by both partners of the natural law of procreation.

Having these aims in view, it is necessary and sufficient that both the Catholic and Protestant spouses accept the agreements of the Joint Text (part 1: concerning the common heritage of Christian marriages; part 2, paragraphs 2.1,2.2,2.3 concerning the differences and divergences on sacramentality, indissolubility and the procreation and spiritual upbringing of the children).

The preparation of the future husband and wife on these important matters can be carried out more effectually by the ministers of the two ecclesial communities in an atmosphere of brotherly and mutual cooperation, as suggested in the Joint Text. It will be their concern to verify the integrity of the spouses and that their mutual consent is given in absolute freedom. In any case, the Catholic minister will only prepare the Catholic spouse for marriage, while receiving the protestant partner's certificates of baptism and church membership, and registering his/her particulars. These will be taken from a contextual certificate (issued by the Registry office), and, if necessary, from a self-certification which is not limited to stating the spouse's legal status.

11. (*Forms of celebration for interchurch marriages*) - An interchurch marriage may take place in a Catholic or Protestant church, or before an official of the Registry office.

12. (*The "canonic form" and the dispensation from the "canonic form"*) - When the interchurch marriage is celebrated in the Catholic church, the validity of this celebration is conditioned by the observance to the "canonic form" which means that the marriage must take place in the presence of the Bishop or the local priest (or their delegate) and two witnesses.

When the mixed-marriage takes place in a Protestant church or before an official of the Registry office, the Catholic spouse, must obtain the dispensation from the "canonic form" as well as the license (see above, n.7). The purpose of this dispensation is to remove the obligation of the above mentioned rule for this particular circumstance.

The granting of the dispensation (see Joint Text, 2,5), has the valid motive of the free choice of the bride and bridegroom; the Catholic partner will communicate the same to the competent authority.

The dispensation from the "canonic form" is only significant for the relationship between the Catholic spouse and his/her church and in no way can be used to authorize the Protestant church to celebrate a marriage valid with the Catholic principles in view.

The Protestant spouse is under no obligation to contact the local Bishop for the above mentioned papers; they can be provided by the priest and the Catholic spouse.

13. (*The place where the interchurch marriage will be celebrated*) - When the bride and groom choose to celebrate their marriage in the Catholic church, the ceremony usually takes place in the parish church which the Catholic partner attends, canonic norm 1115.

When the Protestant church or Registry office is chosen, the Catholic partner will indicate the chosen

place when formulating the request for the dispensation from the “canonic form” so that the Bishop of the diocese will be able to consult the Bishop of the area where the marriage will take place (see can.1127, n. 2).

14. (*Notification to the churches of marriage which has taken place*) - The Joint text (2.5) establishes that both the Catholic and Protestant spouses will take care that their marriage, when celebrated and, at the same time, in a church different from their own, will afterwards be registered in their own church if this is requested by the discipline of the same.

15. (*Special cases*) - The general decree on marriage of the C.E.I., in chapters V (36-47), VI, VII, and VIII, deals with a series of exceptional situations, some of which could concern interchurch marriages. In these specific cases, the qualified Protestant minister should be consulted so that the best solution to the matter in question can be found—that which is the most desirable for the couple themselves and, in a future time, for their children. The regulations of both churches as well as the consciences of the couple will therefore be respected.

16. (*New wording*) - Number 1126 of the Canon law confers a certain freedom to the C.E.I. to formulate the wording of the declarations and promises of the Catholic spouse who requests the above mentioned license. Within the sphere of this concession, a positive wording of some expressions is suggested; thus, without altering the meaning, the expressions may be understood and received in a brotherly and ecumenical spirit.

e.g. With reference to and in substitution of the prescribed forms now used by the different dioceses for mixed marriages:

a) The wording of the declaration could be as follows: “I declare I will do all in my power to maintain and nourish my faith while, at the same time, acknowledging the Christian faith of my Protestant partner”; or: “I declare I will keep faith with the Roman Catholic beliefs, as my partner declares he/she will keep faith with the Protestant beliefs, each giving spiritual support to the other, avoiding any form of compromise or indifference.”

b) The wording of the promise could be as follows: “I promise (or undertake) to do all in my power to baptize and spiritually educate our children in the Catholic faith, while keeping in mind that my husband/wife has the same right and duty towards his/her faith as lived out in his/her ecclesial community. I agree, therefore, that we should seek together those decisions which will help us along our shared spiritual journey and be the best for our children’s religious upbringing”.

II - THE ASPECTS OF THE CIVIL LAW

17. (*The civil consequences*) - The Italian Republic acknowledges the civil consequences of marriages celebrated according to the Roman Catholic canonical law⁶ and of those celebrated according to Waldensian discipline⁷, on condition that the banns have been published and that the marriage act has been recorded in the Registry Office.

18. (*Procedure for the celebration according to the CDC norm*) - For the Catholic part, after fulfilling the preliminary procedures for the marriage, the priest will apply to the registrar of the municipality where the contracting spouse resides, for the publication of the banns. The registrar will then send a certificate of the civil publication to the priest. The priest can then proceed with the marriage ceremony, read the articles 143, 144 and 147 of the civil law to the bride and bridegroom and forward a copy of the certificate to be registered.

19. (*Procedure for the celebration according to Waldensian discipline*) - For the Waldensian part, the spouses themselves apply for the publication of the banns, declaring that they desire to be married according to the Waldensian discipline. The registrar will read the articles 143, 144 and 147 of the civil law to the spouses. Following the publication of the banns, the registrar will leave the spouses a duplicate copy of the permit so that the marriage can then be celebrated. After the ceremony, the minister will forward an original copy of the marriage certificate and the permit to the registrar for the records.

20. (*The marriage certificate*) - The declaration of the separation of matrimonial property (c.c. art. 162, 2nd par.) and the acknowledgement of any natural children (c.c. art. 283) can be declared on the marriage certificate.

III - MARRIAGE PREPARATION

21. (*Importance of preparation*) - The Joint Text considers the preparation of an interchurch marriage to be particularly important. It does not lay down inflexible procedures for this, but leaves the two parties ample creative spaces in which to move, in a spirit of friendly understanding and the respect of the discipline of both ecclesial communities. (Joint Text 3.2.)

It would seem advisable, therefore, to offer a few suggestions to put this effect in a satisfactory way.

22. (*What the preparation should contain*) - The following suggestions are made for an adequate preparation:

a) a clear explanation of marriage according to the doctrines and the discipline of both ecclesial communities should be given, illustrating the shared beliefs and those which are discordant, having the Word of God as a fundamental reference point and the suggestions given in the Joint Text as a practical guide;

b) the spouses should get to know one another's church traditions and the way the other community puts its faith into practice;

c) as far as the ceremony itself is concerned, where there has been an agreement for a representative of the other church to take part, this should be arranged beforehand.

23. (*The places of preparation*) - As far as the place is concerned:

a) there must be an agreement made with the interchurch couple where this will take place on Catholic, Protestant or joint premises;

b) it is advisable that at least one or more of the conversations take place with the couple and both ministers being present;

c) it is also important for the betrothed to meet with groups of other interchurch married couples, where these exist, so as to benefit by the experience of others. Where no such group exists, the setting up of such a group locally, with the active participation of the two ministers, would be timely and another step towards Christian unity.

24. (*Freedom of choice of the spouses*) - The spouses must be free to choose the marriage ceremony which is in keeping with their sensitivities. For this reason, the three possibilities should be illustrated to them: the "canonic form", the form according to Waldensian discipline, in the registry office.

25. (*Information and basic preparation*) - The preparation for an interchurch marriage should not be limited to that which precedes an actual mixed marriage. It should take place, rather, in the normal courses of catechesis of the local churches, for both young people and adults, as suggested by the Joint Text (3.2b.). Both churches would then have opportunity to renew their courses of catechesis and training, and be able to include the theme of interchurch marriages.

IV - THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

26. (*Choice and adjustments of the ceremony according to the church where the marriage is celebrated*) - The betrothed freely choose the church where they intend to be married and the wedding ceremony will be celebrated according to the worship tradition of that church. Any adjustment to the usual liturgy will be agreed upon with the minister: choice of Bible texts, brief declarations, prayers, hymns etc., all of which, however, must fit in harmoniously with the usual worship pattern.

27. (*Representation and participation of the other church*) - If the couple so desire, the minister or a representative of the other community may take an active part during the interchurch marriage ceremony, with a message, a prayer of intercession, or by preaching the sermon etc. For this purpose, the ceremony should be prepared by the future bride and groom, together with both ministers. However, only the minister of the church where the marriage is celebrated will receive the promises and declarations of the spouses.

28. (*Advisability of ecumenical gestures of welcome*) - There is no set "ecumenical service" for interchurch marriages which has been agreed on by the two ecclesial communions.

However, the interchurch marriage ceremony should be of an ecumenical nature which is in harmony with the Joint Text. The fact that the couple and the congregation come from different church traditions must be kept in mind, so that all present will feel at ease and be able to understand and take part in the worship. For example, it is important that the members of the other partner's community are given a warm

welcome and for the representative to be greeted and shown to his or her reserved seat. Another shared and appreciated sign is the gift of the Bible in an interdenominational translation, signed by the ministers of both churches.

29. (*Worship based on the Word*) - The interchurch marriage ceremony, both in the Catholic and Protestant church, is centered around the Word of God (Liturgy of the Word). The Eucharist or the Lord's Supper is usually excluded so that there is no element of division in what should be an occasion of true communion for the bride and groom; on the other hand, it is a reminder that true spiritual unity between the two churches has still not been reached.

30. (*Wording of the vows*) - The exchange of the marriage vows during the ceremony takes place in conformity with the regulations of the churches.

For the Catholic church, according to the liturgy currently adapted by the Italian Episcopal Conference, there is no special wording for the vows made during an interchurch marriage.

The Waldensian marriage ceremony offers three possibilities for the exchange of the marriage vows, with the aim of respecting any different personal situations, one of which concerns interchurch marriages.⁸

V. - CIVIL MARRIAGE CONDUCTED IN THE REGISTRY OFFICE

31. (*The marriage ceremony by civil rite or in a civil office*) - The ceremony conducted in the registry office or by civil rite, consists of exchanging the vows before the registrar rather than before a minister of the Gospel.

32. (*Marriage by civil rite according to the Catholic church*) - For the Catholic church, the above mentioned ceremony is not excluded from the extensive wording of can.1127,n.2;it is implicit in the expression "except.....possible agreements" of the general decree on canonical marriage n.50 and was already established for the Pinerolo diocese from 1970.

The possibility of an interchurch marriage between a Catholic and a Waldensian or Methodist by civil rite, is now admitted in all Italian dioceses (see Joint Text 3.3c).

The Catholic partner must obtain the authorization of the Bishop of the diocese for the civil rite, so that, being a baptized Catholic, the rite is valid and therefore considered sacrament.

The Catholic partner will be asked to go to confession and receive Holy Communion.

33. (*Clarifications*) - It is necessary to explain, especially to practicing Catholics, that the civil rite celebrated before the registrar is not the "civil marriage" in the sense that is usually understood by Catholics, but it is a "non-religious" marriage ceremony.

When Catholics talk of a "civil marriage" in the general sense, they usually mean that the couple who cannot or do not wish to marry in a church, get married "in the registry office", and therefore the marriage takes place in disagreement with their church and is not considered to be valid by the same.

When, however, the "civil marriage rite" takes place with the consent of the Catholic church, this is valid and therefore sacrament.

34. (*Marriage by civil rite for the Waldensian church*) - A marriage by civil rite (i.e. in the registry office)for the Waldensian church represents no problem for the reason that the church gives no particular significance to the form of the celebration:"...every believer knows, by faith, that their marriage is covenanted before God, whatever form they decide to follow to announce this publicly" (Waldensian Synod, Document on marriage, n.15).

35. (*Importance of the marriage conducted in the registry office*) - In any case, the churches should underline the importance of an interchurch civil marriage, being an act of social, civil and moral responsibility.

36. (*Following up the civil marriage*) - The Joint Text (3.3 c) suggests that, after the interchurch marriage ceremony in the registry office, without renewing the marriage vows, a shared time of prayer and testimony could be held, as a visible sign of the faith of the bride and bridegroom and of their desire to live their marriage as a means to grow towards Christian unity. No definite indications are given regarding this; the choice is left to the spouses, supported by their respective ministers or other representatives of their communities.

By way of example this meeting could be called: ecumenical get-together, with readings from the Word of God, Bible message and blessing of the bride and groom; family worship with Bible readings and prayer.

In the Waldensian and Methodist churches, the civil marriage is usually followed by a service during which the community asks God's blessing on the newly married couple and gives them a copy of the Bible, promises are exchanged, and a prayer of intercession is offered. The repetition of the vows is excluded.

37. (*Notification of marriage to respective churches*) - The newly married couple should notify their respective churches of their new status by means of a marriage certificate, so that their marriage can be written up in the official church register.

VI – THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN

38. (*Mutual recognition of baptism*) - There is a mutual recognition between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches (with the exception of the Baptist) of the validity of the baptism administered in either of the communities, and this has been so for some time. For this reason, baptism is cannot be repeated in these churches.⁹

39. (*Ecumenical collaboration regarding baptism of the children of interchurch families*) - The interchurch couple who desire to have their children baptized, must be free to choose the church for this rite.

The baptism will take place according to the ceremony which is effective in the chosen church, with any adaptation considered appropriate. The minister or a qualified member of the other community could be invited for the occasion; he/she could take an active part in the service with a message or the preaching or a prayer.

For the preparation of this kind of gathering, the ministers should meet the interchurch couple beforehand, as before the marriage ceremony.

This shared celebration can be, both for the couple as for the two ecclesial communions, another step on the journey towards true unity.

The minister of the church where the baptism is held should enter the details of the baptism in the official register and notify the minister responsible for the other church of the baptism. This procedure corresponds to that of the declaration of the marriage.

40. (*Godfathers and Godmothers*) - In the Waldensian and Methodist churches, the Godfather's and Godmother's role is not considered to be essential. If a practising catholic asks to be Godfather or Godmother of a child baptized in these churches, the request is accepted if he/she is fully aware of the meaning of baptism and of the promises he/she accepts to share with the parents.

In the Catholic church, although not considered to be vital, (see can. 872), this role must be accepted by practising catholics who live according to their faith. A protestant may be a witness of the baptismal service.

VII - THE RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING OF THE CHILDREN

41. (*Equal rights and duties of both parents*) - The religious or spiritual upbringing of the children of interchurch families is the right and duty of both parents. This means that, in a mixed marriage, one parent cannot leave this duty entirely to the other, thus avoiding his/her own direct responsibility.

The Joint Text (2.4), suggests though, that the parents decide which of them shall have a special commitment to this task. This is meant to give the children a precise denominational identity.

The spiritual support and testimony of the other parent is, however, irremissible.

42. (*Suggestions for the religious upbringing of the children*) - The spiritual education of interchurch family children has been approached in different ways, always with the aim of giving them a biblical foundation and, at the same time, of bringing them up to know and "feel at home" in both ecclesial realities. Their total freedom to choose confirmation or adult baptism must at all times be safeguarded.

As the Joint Text states (2.4.), agnostic, neutral or confused attitudes should be avoided, which, in the name of an equidistance, fail to provide any formation, putting off the choice until the children are "older".

On the other hand, while it is obvious that an "ecumenical church" does not exist and that the children will tend to experience the regular life and worship of one ecclesial community rather than another, this must not exclude the sharing of both church traditions so that the ecumenical commitment will be a reality.

43. (*Joint ecumenical undertaking in the field of catechesis*) - As far as the religious education of young people is concerned, the communities having interchurch families as members, have felt the need to share resources in the field of catechesis. This consists of putting together common riches and experience, and, not withholding the differences and divergencies, presenting the other church to the young people (history, theology, spirituality) impartially and without prejudice.

44. (*Sharing interchurch resources in the field of catechesis*) - In the ecclesial communities where there are children of interchurch marriages, a sharing of resources in the field of catechesis should be organized by carrying out a joint programme of catechesis based on biblical teaching, prepared by the two local churches. This programme could include time for dialogue concerning the differences and divergences of the two communities, a help for those young people who have yet to make a decision concerning their future commitment. The interchurch family itself is obviously the first “domestic church” for this catechesis.

45. (*A promise made in an ecumenical perspective*) - Those who are baptized or accept confirmation in one or other of the churches, promise to testify to Christ and their faith. This promise should include witnessing to the shared spiritual values of the two communities, thus furthering the ecumenical pilgrimage of the two churches, building bridges of understanding and trust in place of the former walls.

VIII - THE PARTICIPATIVE SUPPORT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

46. (*Interest, support and welcome of the local community*) - The Joint text (3.1 and 3.4) underlines the necessity of the local churches becoming involved in the event of an interchurch marriage, so that it is not merely a private matter concerning the two families of the spouses, who often tend to feel surrounded by distrust misunderstanding.

The growing ecumenical spirit of the local community is essential if the newly married interchurch couple is to feel welcome. It is no easy matter for a couple to decide on an interchurch marriage; for this reason, it is essential that they are surrounded by a supportive and understanding spiritual community, both before and after the marriage celebration, and especially at the crucial moment of introduction to the “other’s” church. A warm word of welcome, given publicly to the partner from a different church can be useful and appropriate.

47. (*Active presence of the interchurch couple*) - While respecting their specific partnership, the interchurch couple should take an active part in the community, building up that fellowship which is so important for mutual understanding and getting to know each other. The couple could help to introduce ecumenical activities, such as Bible study, prayer and other meetings, to the community.

48. (*The problem of the mutual sharing of Holy Communion*) - Among the “new problems” and “new responsibilities” that the interchurch couples will have to face, with the support and fellowship of the Christian community, (Joint Text 3.4), there is the delicate question of the sharing of the Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper with the partner who is a member of the other church.

49. (*Sharing the Lord’s Supper for the Waldensian church*) - The Waldensian church, following the Leuenberg Agreement, believes that “during the Lord’s Supper, the risen Jesus Christ offers himself in his body and blood shed for all, through his promises and in the symbols of bread and wine. Thus, He gives himself, unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine. Their faith receives them for salvation, their unbelief for judgement”¹⁰. The Waldensian church welcomes all who freely and in faith, “examining themselves” (I Corinthians 11.28), approach the Lord’s Table, which is His and belongs to no special church.

50. (*Sharing Holy Communion -the Eucharist-for the Roman Catholic church*) - On the one hand, the Catholic church believes that total ecclesial communion and its visible sign are essential for the mutual sharing of Holy Communion. On the other hand, it is baptism which “establishes the holy bond of unity...and reaches out to the fulness of life in Christ”; for this reason, the Catholic church “recognizes that in some exceptional circumstances, and in precise conditions, Christians of other ecclesial communities can be admitted to, or even recommended to partake in this sacrament (the eucharist)”¹¹

Members of the Catholic church may not share in the Lord’s Supper in a Protestant church, there being no mutual recognition of the ordained ministry.

51. (*Holy Communion and communion with the Universal Church*) - Roman Catholics, Waldensians,

Methodists, in different ways, believe in the strong bond between Eucharistic communion and the communion of the Universal church, as the apostle Paul affirms: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (I Corinthians 10.17). Nevertheless, there are differences in the interpretation of this bond and in the consequences which follow on a theological and pastoral plane.

52. (*The interchurch couples*) - In this context of consonance and differences, the interchurch couples(families)seek to live, with the aid of the Holy Spirit and the strength of the Word, as an undivided “household church”.

Torre Pellice, 25th August 2000

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¹ This definition includes both the Catholic wording (mixed marriages) and the Protestant (interchurch marriages). Both wordings denote marriage between believers of different Christian traditions.

² ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE,(C.E.I.)General canon on Marriage (1990), n.48-53.

³ Waldensian Synod, Synodal document on marriage (art. 46/SI/1971), n.19-54.

⁴ The most important documents of both churches concerning mixed marriages, in chronological order, are as follows: Motu proprio Matrimonio mixta by Paolo VI (1970); Waldensian Synodal document on marriage (1971); Waldensian Synodal document on ecumenism (1982); Canon law (1983); General canon on marriage of the C.E.I. (1990); Ordo celebrandi matrimonium. Editio typica altera (1990); Counsel for pastoral care of interchurch spouses in the Pinerolo diocese (1992); Directory of Pontifical Council for the application of regulations for the advancement of Christian unity(1993); Counsel for the celebration of an inter-church marriage in the IVth circuit of the Waldensian church; Joint text for the pastoral care of interchurch families of Roman Catholics and Waldensians or Methodists (General assembly of the C.E.I., May 1996; Waldensian and Methodist synod, August 1996; joint approval and signatures, June 1997); Guide to the celebration of interchurch marriages according Waldensian discipline (Waldensian Board,1997); Waldensian Synodal document on ecumenism and interfaith dialogue(1998).

⁵ Directory, cit. n. 151

⁶ Agreement of amendment of Concordato lateranense of 18th February 1984,art.8 – additional protocol,n.4.

⁷ Agreement between Italian Government and Waldensian Executive Board, putting into effect art.8, third paragraph, of Constitution and law, application of Agreement, 11 August 1984, n.449, art. 11.

⁸ “A...B...Do you promise to love him/her and give yourself entirely to him/her in every circumstance of life, in joy as in sorrow, to seek together the unity to be found in belief in the Gospel, and to be faithful to him/her according to the teaching of God’s Word?” (handbook, p.24)

⁹ The recognition of baptism, administered even by a church not in total harmony with the Catholic church, was clearly stated by the 2nd Vatican Council: “Baptism establishes the sacred tie of unity which exists between those who have been regenerated”. Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*,n.22(see Directory,cit.n.95).The Waldensian discipline states: “Baptism which has been administered by other Christian communities is recognized. In no situation it can be renewed”.(Organic Regulations 2,”People in the church”,art.18.

¹⁰ Leuenberg agreement,1973,art.18.

¹¹ Directory,cit.,nbs129-132,160.