

Ecumenical Guidelines for the Dioceses of Texas

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PREFACE

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ in the Dioceses of Texas:

One of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration of unity among all Christians. As the above-mentioned documents issued since the Council indicate, great strides have been made in the past forty years to examine the various doctrines, disciplines and structures that seem to stand in the way of full ecclesial communion. Furthermore, in many areas, in this country and elsewhere, Christians have found ways to collaborate to promote the common good of all God's people, especially in the areas of charitable and humanitarian causes. However, ecumenical movement and collaborations should be concerned with more than ongoing, cooperative efforts in charitable and humanitarian causes. Truly, the ecumenical movement should be seen as a movement prompted by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity, and collaboration and participation in it at various levels as a Christian vocation. In other words, commitment to pray and work toward the unity of all Christians comes from the very center of one's Christian identity, and, thus, cannot solely be the task or mission of any one Christian church. (Cf. *UR.*, n. 5).

The *Decree on Ecumenism* affirmed that "***all who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they, therefore, have a right to be called Christian, and, with good reason, are accepted as sisters and brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church***" (*UR.*, n. 3). The highly commended and spirited tradition of setting the week of January 18-25, which includes the Feast of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, as a week of **Prayer for Christian Unity** is continued with ever greater fervor. Especially in his Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, the late Pope John Paul II invited theologians of all Christian churches to explore how the exercise of the Petrine Office itself may be modified, without compromising its essential elements, in order to promote Christian unity and to serve as a tool for it. (*UUS.*, nn. 95 & 96). Additionally, in his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Pope stated: "***The path taken by the Church in these first years of the third millennium is also a path of renewed ecumenical commitment. The final decades of the second millennium, culminating in the Great Jubilee, have spurred us along this path and called for all the baptized to respond in the prayer of Jesus 'ut unum sint' (Jn. 17: 11). This path itself is long and strewn with obstacles greater than our human resources alone can overcome, yet we have the Eucharist, and in its presence we can hear in the depths of our hearts, as if they were addressed to us, the same words heard by the Prophet Elijah: 'Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you' (1 Kg. 19:7). The treasure of the Eucharist, which the Lord places before us, impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all our brothers and sisters to whom we are joined by our common Baptism. But if this treasure is not to be squandered, we need to respect the demands which derive from its being the sacrament of communion in faith and in apostolic succession.***" (*EDE.*, n. 60). Pope Benedict XVI marked the formal beginning of his Petrine Ministry by appealing for Christian unity. In the homily at his Inauguration Mass, he said: "***Let us do all we can to pursue the path toward unity.***"

The ultimate goal and purpose of these *Revised Guidelines* is to assist all Christians, especially the pastoral agents, to pursue this path toward unity through common prayer and collaboration, while, at the same time, cultivating a spirit of openness, mutual respect and reverence for each other's traditions and views. These *Revised Guidelines* have been composed in light of before mentioned *Encyclical Letter of John Paul II*, the ecumenical dialogue, prayer services, and experience in the universal Church and the local Churches here in Texas since 1985 (the date of the earlier publication), and the changes in the episcopate and Texas Catholic Conference in these same years. As the Decree on Ecumenism states quite emphatically, only an endeavor undertaken in such a spirit of good will may rightly merit the name of true ecumenism: "***This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism'.***" (*UR.*, n. 8; Cf. Also *DAPNE.*, n. 61).

SOURCES

In addition to the documents issued by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), namely, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (1964), and *Dei Verbum* (1965), and the Apostolic Exhortation (Pope John Paul II) *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), and the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), all of which served as the basis for the existing *Guidelines*, these *Revised Guidelines* have taken into consideration the most relevant major documents issued subsequently: *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1988), the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* (1990), *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993), *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994), Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* (1995), Appendix to the *Order of Christian Burials: Cremation with Reflections on the Body, Cremation and Catholic Funeral Rites* (USCCB, Committee on the Liturgy (USCCB, 1997), *The Ecumenical Dimension of the Formation of Pastoral Workers* (Vatican, 1998). and Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003).

WORSHIP SERVICES

Ecumenical and *Interfaith Services* should be distinguished from one another. Through *Ecumenical Services*, Christians of various traditions take part in a form of worship not proper to any particular communion, but rather common and acceptable to all participants. An *Interfaith Service* is similar, but includes other non-Christian religious traditions.

The Roman Catholic Church perceives its relationship with Orthodox Christians as unique.

"With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the Orientals, we must recognize that they are admirably rooted in holy Scripture, fostered and given expression in liturgical life, and nourished by the living tradition of the Apostles and, by the writings of the Fathers and spiritual authors of the East; they are directed toward a right ordering of life; indeed, toward a full contemplation of Christian truth.

While thanking God that many Eastern sons of the Catholic Church, who are preserving this heritage and wish to express it more faithfully and completely in their lives, are readily living in full communion with their brethren who follow the tradition of the West, this sacred Synod declares that this entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, and their various traditions, belongs to the full Catholic and apostolic character of the Church." (UR., n.17; Cf. Also DAPNE., n.122).

Roman Catholics, therefore, have a special sensitivity toward the liturgical practices and tradition of the Orthodox Churches.

NORMS OF RECIPROCITY AND COLLABORATION

When Roman Catholics engage in any ecumenical or interfaith activity or service, the following norms of ecumenical courtesy should be observed:

- (a) As a general rule, we should neither extend nor accept an invitation to participate in an ecumenical or interfaith activity unless we may extend or accept a similar invitation in return. This is the *norm of reciprocity*. (Cf. DAPNE., n. 105).
- (b) In planning an ecumenical or interfaith activity or service, there should be consultation and collaboration with representatives of all the participating faiths or communions. This is the *norm of collaboration*. (Cf. DAPNE., n.106).
- (c) In the process of respecting and practicing reciprocity and collaboration, it is important to keep in mind the possible danger of **Proselytism**, though at times unintended. In other words, reciprocity and collaboration should not be seen as an opportunity for proselytizing one or another group.
- (d) Likewise, it is important to exercise caution and prudence in distinguishing between what may be called **Popular Religiosity** and other forms of pious customs and practices that have no sound theological basis or approval by competent ecclesiastical authority.

SHARING IN NON-SACRAMENTAL LITURGICAL WORSHIP

The first and fundamental sign of our faith and unity in Christ is the solemn assembly of the ecclesial community for public and official worship. Official worship refers to services conducted according to the approved liturgical books or the order of worship of a particular church or ecclesial community. (Cf. *DAPNE*, n.116).

Members of other churches, or ecclesial communities may be invited to attend and to take part in the prayers, responses, and hymns of a Roman Catholic service, taking care that such invitations do not offend against the regulations or sensitivities of others. Roman Catholics may also accept invitations to attend the official worship of others and take part in the prayers, responses, and hymns, though not the reception of Holy Communion, of that church or ecclesial community. (Cf. *DAPNE*, n. 121).

Because of the very close communion in matters of faith between the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches, there are ecclesiological and sacramental grounds for allowing and even encouraging some sharing in liturgical worship with these churches, given suitable circumstances and approval of respective church authorities. (Cf. *UR*, n.14; *CIC*, can. 844, *CCEO*, can. 671; *DAPNE*, n. 122).

ECUMENICAL SERVICES

“In certain special circumstances, such as the prescribed prayers ‘for unity,’ and during ecumenical gatherings, it is allowable and, indeed, desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with other Christians. Such prayers in common are certainly an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity, and they are a true expression of the ties that still bind Catholics to their separated fellow Christians: ‘for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’.” (*UR*, n. 8).

Ecumenical services are forms of worship not proper to any particular ecclesial communities, but acceptable to all participants in which Christians of various communities may take part. Ecumenical services may be conducted in Roman Catholic churches, Moreover; Roman Catholics are encouraged to take part in such services in the churches of other communities as well as in other suitable places. When ecumenical services are conducted in Roman Catholic churches, clergy and laity of other communities should be invited to act as reader, offer prayers, and give invocations and benedictions. Likewise, clergy of other communities may be invited to preach. Roman Catholic clergy and laity are free to act as readers, offer prayers, and give invocations and benedictions at all ecumenical services.

While ecumenical services are encouraged, they are also to be well planned, involving full consultation and collaboration of all participating groups. Those who are involved in planning an ecumenical service should decide in advance on such matters as the order, texts, and the appropriate liturgical attire of the clergy. The attire decided upon should be determined by the local custom of participants of other communions and the local custom of the Roman Catholic Church. Visiting clergy or laity who participate in an ecumenical service in a Roman Catholic church are to be offered places of honor.

INTERFAITH SERVICES

Interfaith Services are similar to *Ecumenical Services* except that the participants include Jews, Moslems, or others, in addition to Christians. The common observance of certain civic holidays as well as certain themes (for example, peace, social justice, freedom, etc.) are usually starting points for such interfaith services.

While we are encouraged to pray with others in matters of common concern, consideration should always be given to the religious sensibilities of all parties. Our prayers should find their inspiration in our common faith in God. For example, in services with Jews and Moslems, *Trinitarian Prayer Forms* should be avoided. Even apart from services with Jews, we should not use the name of the Lord in Hebrew: **YHWH**, out of respect for the tradition of never pronouncing the sacred Name.

Location, environment, participation, and attire should be decided upon in collaboration with all participating groups.

SHARING IN GOD'S WORD IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

The *Decree on Ecumenism* and the *Directory* point out very clearly how the bond that exists among all Christians is very much rooted in the Word of God in Sacred Scripture:

“Veneration of the Scriptures is a fundamental bond of unity between Christians, one that holds firm even when the Churches and Communities to which they belong are not in full communion with each other. Everything that can be done to make members of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities read the Word of God, and to do that together when possible (e.g., Bible Study Weeks), reinforces this bond of unity that already unites them, helps to be open the unifying action of God and strengthens the common witness to the saving Word of God which they give to the world.” (UR., n. 21, DAPNE., n. 183).

Thus, the Sacred Scripture being the common treasure and deposit of all Christians, it is laudable that they come together to study and gain a deeper familiarity with and insight into the sacred text through its prayerful reading. (Cf. DV., nn. 21 & 25; UR., nn. 17 & 21). In view of this, it is also commendable, and is even encouraged, that on such occasions Roman Catholics and other Christians, and/or their respective ministers, may proclaim the Scriptures and preach at one another's churches, within or outside of any liturgical setting, except within the context of the Eucharistic celebrations. (DAPNE., nn. 116-121, 133).

SACRAMENTAL CELEBRATIONS

“The Sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church. As actions of Christ and the Church, they are signs and means which express and strengthen the faith, render worship to God, and effect the sanctification of humanity and thus contribute in the greatest way to establish, strengthen and manifest ecclesiastical communion. Accordingly, in the celebration of the sacraments the sacred ministers and the other members of the Christian faithful must use the greatest veneration and necessary diligence.” (CIC., can. 840; CCEO., can. 667; CCC., nn. 1113-1116).

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

"In the sacraments of Christian initiation, we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection. ... [T]he three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring us, the faithful of Christ, to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world." (RCIA., n. 1).

BAPTISM

Through the sacrament of baptism we are incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ and are reborn to share in the very life of God. As St. Paul says, "***You have been buried with Him, when you were baptized; and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with Him through your belief in the power of God who raised Him from the dead.***" (Col., 2: 12; 6: 4).

"Baptism establishes a sacramental bond of unity existing among all who have been reborn by it. But of itself baptism is only a beginning, and inauguration wholly directed towards the acquisition of the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, is oriented toward the complete profession of faith, complete incorporation into the institution of salvation such as Christ willed to be, and finally the completeness of unity which Eucharistic communion gives." (UR., n. 22).

Roman Catholics presume the validity of baptism in other Christian churches. Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as "***re-baptism***" must be avoided. (DAPNE., nn. 95-97). If there is a doubt whether one has been baptized or whether baptism was validly conferred and the doubt remains after serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally. (CIC., can. 869.1. [**Note:** Non-Catholic ecclesial communities whose baptisms are recognized as valid by the Catholic Church include, besides all Eastern non-Catholics: African Methodist Episcopal, Amish, Anglican, Assembly of God, Baptists, Evangelical United Brethren, Church of the Brethren, Church of God, Congregational Church, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Evangelical Churches, Lutherans, Methodists, Liberal Catholic Church, Old Catholics, Old Roman Catholics, Church of the Nazarene, Polish National Church, Presbyterian Church, Reformed Churches, Seventh Day Adventists, and the United Church of Christ. Cf. John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, Editors, *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000, p. 1058; See also John M. Huels, *The Pastoral Companion: A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry*, Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1995, p. 342].

Because of the severe prohibition against re-baptism, a baptized member of a Christian church or community who desires full communion with the Roman Catholic Church is not to be baptized conditionally unless, after a serious investigation, there remains a prudent doubt about the fact or validity of the baptism. (CIC., can. 869.2).

"Baptism by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling, together with the Trinitarian formula is of itself valid." (DAPNE., n. 95).

The word "***sprinkling***" can cause confusion. Some churches say they baptize by sprinkling as a way of distinguishing what they do from those who baptize by immersion. This type of "***sprinkling***" gives no ground for scruple.

When, because of a serious doubt, conditional baptism is conferred, the meaning of and the reason for the conditional baptism should be explained as well as the fact that it is not a re-baptism. Further, the baptism should be administered privately with a minimum of notice and in the simple form.

Members of those churches about whose baptism there is no prudent doubt are admitted to the Church after suitable catechesis according to the *Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion with the Catholic Church*. Since this is the celebration of the Church, the rite is generally celebrated within mass on a Sunday, unless for a special reason a smaller celebration seems opportune.

Since baptism is the celebration of all the baptized, the reception of baptized Christians into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church is a time for emphasizing Christian unity. Roman Catholics should be sensitive to the frequent presence of members of other Christian communities and the one who presides should make a special effort to welcome them and help them participate in songs, prayers, and symbols to the extent possible.

The rite consists of the welcoming of the candidate, the profession of faith by the candidate, and the confirmation of the candidate. The presiding priest has the faculty to confirm the candidate. With due regard for the individual case, the candidate should receive the sacrament of penance before the celebration. (*RCIA*, nn. 584-586).

When members of the Orthodox Church are admitted into full communion, they are received into a corresponding Roman Catholic rite. (Cf. *EO*, n. 4; *CIC*, can. 112; *CCEO*, can. 32. 1, 33 & 34).

When a person is received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church by means of a profession of faith, the person's name is to be entered into the parish baptismal register under the date of profession together with the date and place of the baptism.

A member of an Orthodox Church may be invited to act as a godparent at the baptism of a Roman Catholic. Similarly, a Roman Catholic may act as a godparent at the baptism of a member of the Orthodox Church. In both cases, the obligation to provide for the Christian education of the baptized person rests first with the godparent who belongs to the church of the person baptized. (Cf. *DAPNE*, n. 97).

Except in cases of the members of Orthodox Churches, it is not permissible for a member of another Christian community to act as godparent in the liturgical and canonical sense at a Roman Catholic baptism. A godparent is not merely undertaking a responsibility for the Christian education of the person baptized but represents the faith of the baptizing community.

Equally, a Roman Catholic cannot fulfill this function for a member of another Christian community. However, because of the ties of blood or friendship, a Christian of another communion can be admitted as a Christian witness of the baptism with a Roman Catholic godparent. In comparable circumstances a Roman Catholic may do the same for a member of another Christian community. Their names should be recorded in the baptismal book. (*CIC*, can. 877; *CCEO*, can. 689).

In these cases, the responsibility for the Christian education of the candidate belongs of itself to the godparent who is a member of the church in which the candidate is baptized. Pastors should carefully explain to the faithful the evangelical and ecumenical reasons for this regulation.

CONFIRMATION

As one of the three sacraments of initiation, confirmation is closely linked to baptism. By it the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the Church. (*CIC.*, can. 879; *CCEO.*, can. 692).

"By signing us with the gift of the Holy Spirit, confirmation makes us more completely the image of the Lord and fills us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may bear witness to him before all the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness as soon as possible." (*RCIA.*, n. 1; Cf. *CCC.*, nn. 1294-1296).

All baptized persons who have not been confirmed are capable of receiving confirmation. (*CIC.*, can. 889.1).

"There is no doubt about the validity of baptism as conferred in the various Eastern Churches. It is enough to establish the fact of the baptism. In these Churches, the sacrament of confirmation (chrismation) is properly administered by the priest at the same time as baptism. There is often happens that no mention is made of confirmation in the canonical testimony of baptism. This does not give grounds for doubting that this sacrament was also conferred." (*DAPNE.*, n. 99. 1; *CCEO.*, can. 692 & 695).

While the question of the recognition of confirmation administered in some other Christian communities is still in official dialogue, the current Roman Catholic practice is to confirm those seeking full communion in the Roman Catholic Church. For the same reasons as indicated in the sacrament of baptism, the sponsor at confirmation must belong to the Roman Catholic Church. (*CIC.*, can. 874; *CCEO.*, can. 685).

EUCCHARIST

Among the ways in which all Christians keep the memory of the Lord, participation in the Lord's Supper enjoys clear primacy. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christians affirm a special presence of the Lord in word and sacrament. Sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ expresses in the most profound way the union in faith of all those who participate. Thus, the mystery of the continuing union of the faithful in and with the Lord is at the heart of all ecumenical relations; the fullness of that union, expressed most perfectly in the Eucharist, remains their goal.

"... [C]oming to the table of the eucharist, we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that we may have eternal life and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering ourselves with Christ, we share in the universal sacrifice, that is, the entire community of the redeemed offered to God by their High Priest, and we pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family." (*RCIA.*, n. 1).

Some Christian faith communities admit all baptized persons to the Eucharistic table ("***open communion***"). Roman Catholics affirm the union which exists among all who share in the one baptism of the Lord; but with many other Christians we insist on a crucial significance of the community through which the baptized express their faith. Roman Catholics, therefore, ordinarily admit to the Eucharistic table only those with whom we enjoy full communion ("***closed communion***"). The principle of reciprocity is to be particularly observed when Roman Catholics gather with other Christians for celebration of the Eucharist.

As Roman Catholics and others gather to celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist, guests should be made to feel welcome and should be invited to participate in prayer and song. Since the Roman Catholic Church follows the practice of the "***closed communion***", care should be taken to avoid placing other Christians in an embarrassing or confusing situation. Where other Christians are present -- for example, at an interfaith or interreligious marriage -- it might be appropriate to conduct a liturgical service other than the Eucharist.

In the interest of family unity, courtesy, demands of public life or deeper appreciation of the work of others, a Roman Catholic may attend the official worship of others and take part in the prayers, responses, and hymns, though not in reception of Holy Communion. This practice is recommended, even though it does not fulfill a Roman Catholic's responsibility to worship in one's own faith community on Sundays and Holy Days.

John Paul II, on May 14, 1979, said, "***We must continue to work humbly and resolutely to remove the real divisions, to restore that full unity in faith which is the condition for sharing the Eucharist. Of great importance is the fact that in every Eucharistic celebration it is the whole faith of the Church that comes into play; it is ecclesial communion in all its dimensions that is manifested and realized.***" (Cf. Also *DAPNE.*, n. 122). Sharing in the Eucharist, therefore, presupposes unity in faith.

SHARING IN THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE: EUCHARIST, PENANCE, AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Celebration of the sacraments is an action of the celebrating community, carried out within the community, signifying the oneness in faith, worship, and life of the community. Where this unity of sacramental faith is deficient, the participation of other Christians with Roman Catholics, especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist, penance, and anointing of the sick, is forbidden. Nevertheless, since the sacraments are both signs of unity and sources of grace, the Church can, for adequate reasons, allow access to these sacraments to other Christians. The particulars of this are detailed as follows:

In general, Roman Catholic ministers may licitly administer the sacraments only to Roman Catholic members of the Christian faithful. Ordinarily, the Roman Catholic faithful may licitly receive the sacraments only from Roman Catholic ministers. (Cf. *DAPNE.*, nn. 122, 124, 129-131).

ROMAN CATHOLICS

Whenever necessity requires, or a genuine spiritual advantage suggests, and provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is lawful for the faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers in whose churches these sacraments are valid. (*CIC.*, can. 844.2; *CCEO.*, can. 671. 2). Sensitivity to the non-Catholic minister must always be given by the faithful requesting these sacraments.

MEMBERS OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Roman Catholic ministers may licitly administer the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick to members of the Orthodox Churches if they ask on their own for the sacraments and are properly disposed. This holds also for members of other churches who, in the judgment of the Apostolic See, are in the same condition as the Orthodox Churches as far as these sacraments are concerned. (*EO.*, n 27; *CIC.*, can. 844.3; *CCEO.*, can. 671. 3)

OTHER CHRISTIANS

If the danger of death is present or other grave necessity, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or the conference of bishops, Catholic ministers may licitly administer these sacraments to other Christians who do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and on their own ask for it, provided they manifest Catholic faith in these sacraments and are properly disposed. (*CIC.*, 844.4; *CCEO.*, 671. 4. See also the list provided on page 7 of this document.)

MATRIMONY

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that a valid marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament. (CIC., 1055; CCEO 776; CCC 1602). As a sacrament, it is a sign to the Christian community of the special relationship between Christ and the Church as explained in the fifth chapter (vv. 21-32) of the *Letter to the Ephesians*. As such, marriage enables two Christians to grow in the love of Christ as they love one another and sacrifice themselves for one another.

The perfect union of mind and full communion of life to which married couples aspire can be more readily achieved when both partners share the same faith. There are many difficulties inherent in a marriage in which one party is a Roman Catholic and the other is of another faith, whether baptized or not since a certain division is introduced into the living cell of the Church, as the Christian family is rightly called, and in the family itself the fulfillment of the gospel teachings is more difficult because of diversities in matters of religion, especially with regard to those matters which concern Christian worship and the education of the children. For these reasons the Church greatly desires that Roman Catholics marry Roman Catholics.

MIXED MARRIAGES

In his Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II stated the spiritual and moral values that can be present in mixed marriage families, if appropriate catechesis, pastoral care and vigilance are provided:

“Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.” (FC., n. 78; Cf. Also CCC., nn.1633-1637).

[NOTE: This section does not intend to provide an extended treatment of all the pastoral and canonical questions relative to all aspects of mixed marriages. They are available in *DAPNE.*, nn. 143-160). The following are only some guidelines to deal with the most common pastoral situations].

When there is to be a marriage between a Roman Catholic and another Christian, both parties are to be instructed in the nature of marriage including its essential obligations and rights as well as its meaning for the spiritual life of the parties. In accordance with the norm of reciprocity, similar instructions may be received by the Roman Catholic party regarding the beliefs and practices of the other communion. Since these instructions are informational in substance, all proselytizing should be avoided.

In addition to the customary marriage preparation programs, it is the essential duty of all in pastoral ministry, according to their own responsibility, office, or assignment, to undertake:

- (a) The spiritual and catechetical preparation of couples who seek to enter a mixed marriage, especially in regard to the ends and essential properties of marriage;
- (b) Continued concern and assistance to the wife and husband in mixed marriages and to their children, so that married and family life may be supported in unity, respect for conscience, and common spiritual benefit. (Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Matrimonia Mixta*, March 31, 1970; CIC., can. 1063, 1124 & 1125; CCEO., can. 783, 813 & 814).

In the assistance which is given in the preparation for marriage between a Roman Catholic and one of another Christian faith and in continuing efforts to help all married couples and families, the priest or deacon should endeavor to be in contact and cooperate with the minister of the party who is not Roman Catholic. The declaration and promise by the Roman Catholic necessary for a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult, or for permission for a marriage of mixed religion, shall be made in the following or similar words:

"I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ, and with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics." (CIC., can. 1125; CCEO., can. 814).

This declaration and promise is to be made in the presence of the priest or deacon and the party who is not a Roman Catholic is to be informed of it. The priest or deacon who submits the request for dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult or permission for a marriage of mixed religion shall certify that the declaration and promise have been made by the Roman Catholic party and that the other party has been informed of this fact.

In a marriage between a Roman Catholic and another Christian, care should be taken to respect the values and faith tradition of all parties. For that reason, the regulations which appear in the rite of marriage outside of mass (arts. 39-54) should be observed. If suitable, and if the ordinary of the place gives permission, the rite for celebrating marriage within mass (arts, 19-38) may be used.

Mixed marriages are ordinarily to take place in a Roman Catholic Church. ***"With permission of the local ordinary or the pastor, it can be celebrated in another church or oratory which is not a parish church; the local ordinary can permit the marriage to be celebrated in some other suitable place."*** (CIC., can. 1118.1; CCEO., can. 838.1). When the party who is not a Roman Catholic expresses the wish to have his or her minister present, the Roman Catholic pastor (or his delegate) should issue an invitation, giving assurance of a cordial reception. When Issuing such an invitation, the Roman Catholic pastor (or his delegate) should advise the guest minister to wear whatever is deemed appropriate and that a place of honor will be reserved either in the sanctuary or in the body of the church as is desired; At a fitting point in the service, the one presiding should introduce the guest and extend a warm welcome.

The Roman Catholic pastor (or his delegate) should also invite the guest minister to give a blessing to the couple and address to them words of good wishes and exhortation at the end of the celebration. If there is no mass, the guest minister may take further part in the wedding service such as preaching, reading, or leading of the prayer of the faithful. To be a valid witness, the Roman Catholic priest or deacon must ask for and receive the consent of the contractants. (CIC., can. 1127.1; CCEO., can. 834 & 839).

In a marriage celebrated before a Roman Catholic priest or deacon and a minister of another Christian church, it is not permitted for their respective rites to be performed together or successively.

The canonical form, i.e., marriage before the Roman Catholic pastor of the place (or his delegate) and two witnesses, is required for the valid marriage of a Roman Catholic. An exception occurs when there is a marriage between a Roman Catholic and a member of an Orthodox Church performed in the presence of a minister of the Orthodox Church and carried out according to the requirements of the law of the Orthodox Church. In the latter case, canonical form is required for liceity, but lack of it does not invalidate the marriage. (CIC. 1127.1; CCEO., can. 834 & 839).

When serious difficulties pose an obstacle to the observance of the canonical form for marriage, the bishop or local ordinary of the Roman Catholic party for a just pastoral cause has the right to dispense from the canonical form in individual cases, but only after consulting the ordinary of the place where the marriage is to be celebrated and with due regard, for validity, for some public form of celebration. The following are types of reasons in which a dispensation from form may be granted: to achieve family harmony or to avoid family alienation; to obtain parental agreement to the marriage; to recognize the significant claims of relationship or special friendship with a minister of another communion; to permit the marriage in a church that has particular importance to the other party.

In a mixed marriage for which there has been granted a dispensation from the canonical form, an ecclesiastical record of the marriage shall be kept in the curia of the diocese which granted the dispensation from canonical form and at the parish of the Roman Catholic party whose pastor made the investigation concerning their free state. The priest or deacon arranging the marriage is responsible for notifying the church of baptism of the Roman Catholic party that such a marriage has taken place.

In the case where there has been a dispensation from the canonical form and the priest or deacon has been invited to participate in the marriage service, his participation should be the same as outlined for the minister of another faith or communion at a Roman Catholic ceremony. If the marriage service is not part of the Lord's Supper or the principal liturgical Service of the Word, the priest or deacon may also accept the invitation to read a lesson and/or preach.

Members of other faiths or communities may act as official witnesses at a Roman Catholic marriage and Roman Catholics at marriages in other communions which are properly celebrated. (*CIC.*, can. 1108; *CCEO.*, can. 828).

The banns for an ecumenical marriage may be announced. However, the publication of banns should be omitted if it violates the norms of the other religious community involved.

INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

An interfaith marriage is a marriage between a Roman Catholic and a person of a religious faith who is not a baptized Christian.

In the pastoral assistance which is given in the preparation of an interfaith marriage, the priest or deacon should follow the norms concerning mixed marriages mentioned earlier. The pastoral preparation in these marriages should be sensitive to the unity of married and family life and the need of mutual respect for one's conscience.

In interfaith marriages a dispensation from the local ordinary for disparity of cult is required for the valid celebration of marriage. The declaration and promise of the Roman Catholic party mentioned earlier is required, and the priest or deacon shall see that the party who is not Roman Catholic is informed of the declaration and promise.

Interfaith marriages should not be celebrated within the Mass. Rather, the norms which appear in Nos. 55-66 of the *Rite of Marriage* are to be followed.

An interfaith marriage can take place in a Roman Catholic Church or any other suitable place. (*CIC.*, can. 1118.3; *CCEO.*, can. 838.1). The policy of the local ordinary should be followed in determining a place for an interfaith marriage outside a Catholic church.

For a just pastoral cause, a dispensation from the canonical form may be granted in an interfaith marriage. Some public form of celebration, however, is to be kept in these instances for the valid celebration of marriage. In those marriages where a dispensation from canonical form has been granted, the norms on notification of marriage to proper Church authorities listed earlier are to be followed.

HOLY ORDERS

Those of other communions may be invited to be present at the conferral of Holy Orders. If they are clergy, they should be accorded a special place of honor in the church. However, only Roman Catholic priests may participate with the bishops in the imposition of hands.

Catholics may accept invitations to be present at the ordination services of other faiths or communions. Moreover, the Roman Catholic clergy may, if invited, accept a place of honor within the church and, with due regard for local custom, wear a cassock and surplice or alb and stole, but Roman Catholic clergy may not join in the imposition of hands.

CHRISTIAN BURIALS

Church funerals conducted for baptized members of other faiths should always be in accordance with their wishes and those of the diocesan bishop.

Members of other faiths may be buried in a Roman Catholic *cemetery* and with the clergy of another faith conducting cemetery rites, although celebration of the Eucharist is not permitted. A Roman Catholic priest or deacon may lead services at the funeral home, family residence, or cemetery if requested.

Members of other faiths may be invited to preach or read from the scriptures during a funeral service outside the celebration of the Eucharist.

Roman Catholics are ordinarily to be buried in Roman Catholic cemeteries as a sign of sharing life, death, and resurrection with the faith community. Burial in other than a Catholic cemetery is permitted, especially where this is for the convenience of the family.

CREMATION – FUNERAL LITURGY – DISPOSAL OF THE ASHES (CREMATED REMAINS)

Since the desire for cremation seems to be increasing among Catholics, it is incumbent upon the pastoral agents to provide appropriate instructions to the families regarding the Catholic Church's concerns and guidelines on this matter: Funeral Liturgies in the presence and/or in the absence of the Ashes (cremated remains) and the proper and respectful disposal of the Ashes. For this purpose, the pastoral agents must familiarize themselves with the: *Appendix. Cremation with Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites by the Committee on the Liturgy* (USCCB, 1997) and carefully follow the instructions and directions contained therein.

ECUMENICAL COOPERATION, DIALOGUE, AND COMMON WITNESS

HEALTH FACILITIES

Each Catholic health facility, recognizing the special needs of staff, patients and their families, and employees, respects their relationship with God as practiced according to each individual conscience. As a result, cooperation is encouraged through the following:

- (a) Consultation and communication with the various churches and members of the clergy in the area, especially where members of their congregation are patients in these facilities;
- (b) Extending invitations to members of the clergy to educational forums of concern to them such as abused children, rape crisis, etc.
- (c) The sharing of facilities in case of

need. **SCHOOLS**

Teachers in Catholic schools who do not share the Roman Catholic faith should be given the opportunity of an orientation program to assist them in their role. This would include an opportunity to understand and be comfortable with the value system of the Catholic Church. Such teachers should not feel compelled to adopt the teachings of the Catholic Church but rather should feel free to recognize the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition and exercise them through the context of a Roman Catholic ministry.

Students of other faiths should be encouraged to attend services in our Catholic schools. However, all situations should be avoided that would place moral coercion on a student not of the Catholic faith, especially the active participation in religious services. It should be noted, though, that the absention of such students from attendance at religious class and observances can be disruptive and, for that reason, guidelines should be established by the school and discussed with the parents prior to entrance.

For thorough consideration of these matters in detail, responsible persons should consult the current *Guide to Quality and Effectiveness: An Accreditation Manual for Catholic Schools of Texas* issued by the Texas Catholic Conference.

CIVIC OBSERVANCES

The clergy are encouraged to take part in the civic observances of the community. Since the participants in such affairs often include Jews, Moslems, and others in addition to Christians, the prayers should consider the religious sensibilities of all parties. In services with Jews and Moslems, for instance, the Trinitarian form of prayer should be avoided as well as the use of the name of the Lord in Hebrew. Our prayers can find their inspiration in the common faith in one God.

What has been said elsewhere in regard to location, participation, and vesture for ecumenical and interfaith services also applies here in civic observances.

CONCLUSION

On April 25, 2005 Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the “Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and Other Religious Traditions” said *“The path to the full communion desired by Jesus for his disciples entails, with true docility to what the Spirit says to the Churches, courage, gentleness, firmness and hope, in order to reach our goal. Above all, it requires persistent prayer and with one heart, in order to obtain from the Good Shepherd the gift of unity for his flock.”*

It is our hope that these revised guidelines reflect not only the experience of the ecumenical movement since 1985, but also the above words of Pope Benedict XVI, and assist the faithful of Christ in our local Churches here in Texas, in union with the Universal Church, to travel this path to full communion in daily life.

A very special thanks to all who assisted in revising these guidelines: Bishop Michael Pfeifer OMI, Bishop Placido Rodriguez CMF, Bishop Kevin Vann, Sister Maria Elena Gonzalez RSM, Father Ken Hannon OMI, Father John Makrothakat, and all the Texas bishops who offered their suggestions during the process of review, especially Archbishop José Gomez and Daniel Cardinal DiNardo.

Most Rev. Kevin Vann
Bishop, Diocese of Fort Worth

August 6, 2008
Feast of the Transfiguration
