

Interchurch Families International Network

December 2005 Newsletter

Dear friends

Now we have established an informal but strong network of interchurch families around the world, we have given this network the name 'Interchurch Families International Network', and so I am using this name on this newsletter for the first time. Interchurch families have been involved in many activities over the past few months, and here is a summary of some of them.

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Worldwide

Our network was confirmed when a **group of interchurch family representatives** visited the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) at the Vatican in October, following continuing contacts with the Council since our visit there during our Rome conference in 2003. We had sent them a report of the conference, and the Rome Document which came out of it, and they welcomed us to informal conversations. You can read reports of the visit in **Interchurch Families Visit to Rome** and Ray's **Rome Report**.

It was particularly interesting that the group was there during the Catholic Bishops' Synod on the Eucharist, to which interchurch families in several parts of the world had contributed by sending in responses to the preliminary document for the Synod, the Lineamenta. Reports from the Synod showed that other countries with whom we have not yet any contacts through interchurch families also consider the question of eucharistic sharing among interchurch couples as an important and urgent issue. Several bishops spoke on this question even though it was not explicitly mentioned prior to the Synod.

After the group visited the Council, responsibilities for carrying on the work of the IFIN were divided up as follows:

- Fr GEORGE KILCOURSE (USA) will continue to liaise with the **PCPCU** on interchurch family concerns.
- JULIEN AND BRIGITTE VIELLE (France) will relate on our behalf to the **World Council of Churches** (WCC). Beverley Hollins will be our Delegated Representative at the **Ninth Assembly of the WCC**; Melanie Finch will run a workshop.

- JEAN-BAPTISTE LIPP (Switzerland) will continue the work at European level, relating to the **Council for Episcopal Conferences in Europe (CCEE)** and the **Conference of European Churches (CEC)** and keeping us all informed about plans for the next European Ecumenical Assembly they plan to organize together at Sibiu, Romania, 4-7 September 2007.
- THOMAS KNIEPS-PORT LE ROI (Belgium) will co-ordinate study on the theology and spirituality of interchurch families, following up the Theological Preparatory Group of the PREPROMA Committee which produced the Rome paper.
- MELANIE FINCH (UK) will do the administrative and co-ordinating support for all these areas of work.
- Since the visit, Thomas has started to look at how we might follow up our Rome Document and the conversation with the PCPCU with more theological reflection based on our experience as interchurch families.

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Shortly after the visit to Rome, where they were members of the group, Julien and Brigitte Vielle from France and Jean-Baptiste Lipp from Switzerland represented interchurch families in Geneva at the celebrations of the **40th Anniversary of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church**. There were three keynote speeches given: by **Pastor Samuel Kobia**, General Secretary of the WCC, **Cardinal Kasper** of the PCPCU, and **Aram I** of the Orthodox Church. The Vielles and Jean-Baptiste were able to speak to Cardinal Kasper and Mgr Farrell about their visit to Rome, and met with much warmth from them both. They were seated with Bishop Farrell at the evening worship. They were interested to hear Aram I emphasizing the urgent necessity for a better reception of ecumenical documents and theological agreements by churches and Christians, which had been one of the concerns of Mgr Farrell and Mgr Fortino during the visit to the PCPCU.

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Rev. Beverley Hollins (Anglican curate at Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes, an ecumenical church, and a long-standing member of AIF UK) and Melanie Finch will be representing interchurch families at the World Council of Churches General Assembly to be held from 14 - 23 February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Bev will be our delegated representative and together we will organise an exhibition on the work of interchurch families worldwide, and run a workshop entitled 'Interchurch Families - Catalysts for Unity?'

We are inviting interchurch family groups and associations in all countries to send us a high-quality eye-catching **poster** representing work among interchurch families in their own country, which we can display on the exhibition stand at the **WCC Assembly in Brazil** to show the **activities of interchurch families** around the world. The maximum size should be A1 (594x840mm, 23.4x33.1inches).

Send us your poster by e-mail icf-wcc@interchurchfamilies.org .

We welcome all contributions: it's a big stand!

We will not be able to carry large quantities of printed material on the flight, but we will try to encourage any enquirers to contact groups and associations in their own country if we know of one.

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Europe-wide

Jean-Baptiste Lipp in Switzerland is responsible for contacts with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of Episcopal Conferences in Europe (CCEE), who are planning the **Third Ecumenical Assembly** in Sibiu, Roumania, in 2007. CEC recently welcomed a new General Secretary, the Venerable Colin Williams, Archdeacon Emeritus of Lancaster in the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn, England.

There is another ecumenical gathering planned for 2007, this time in Stuttgart, Germany, to follow the gathering Christian Churches and Communities Together, which was attended by 10,000 members of Christian churches and communities in Europe, held in May 2004 and attended by several interchurch family representatives. Interchurch families from Germany are keeping us informed about this meeting, known as 'Stuttgart 2007'. They are participating in its preparation, and we hope to send representatives from several countries, as we did for previous Ecumenical Assemblies. You can read a **report of one of the preparatory meetings**, by Cardinal Kasper's sister, Hildegard Kasper, a prominent German theologian.

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Australia

Kevin and Bev Hincks represented Australian interchurch families in the group visiting the PCPCU. The **11th English-speaking International Conference of Interchurch Families** held in Newcastle NSW in August was a great success. You can read the **final report**. The Australian and New Zealand interchurch families, who in many cases met each other for the first time at the conference, have committed themselves to meeting again in a year's time.

Austria

The Austrian group held its annual conference in Vienna in October, on the theme 'Why Marriage? Where Marriage?' There were about 70 participants from all over Austria including 3 new couples, and John and Vita Jenkins attended from England. Three excellent speakers from the Roumanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church considered the theme from a historical perspective. Other ecumenical questions were also included in a panel discussion. There was also a plenary session with the Catholic Bishop Krätzl and the Lutheran Bishop Sturm, discussing further possible ecumenical steps which interchurch families might take in their lives together. A moving ecumenical service was led by the two bishops at the end of the conference.

Next year's conference will be held in Brixen (Bressanone) in the South Tyrol from 23 – 26 October 2006. All friends will be welcome.

Belgium

Dr Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, a German working in Belgium, has been for more than 10 years a research staff member and editor of the review of the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (**INTAMS**) at the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven. He and his wife Annette and their little son Marcus attended the Rome 2003 gathering of interchurch families, and Thomas and Annette were members of the group visiting the PCPCU. INTAMS has recently created a new Chair for the Study of Marriage and Spirituality at the University, and we are delighted to congratulate Thomas, who has become the first chair-holder and will be responsible for continued academic research and teaching.

Canada

In Winnipeg, Ray and Fenella Temmerman are most encouraged in the encouragement by their parish priest to place interchurch families on the 'Stewardship Committee' agenda. They are being invited to conduct a session for interested interchurch couples, with a view to forming some kind of support group or network. Consideration is also being given to interchurch couple involvement in marriage preparation, planting seeds for when the couples begin to face the concrete consequences of the division of the churches.

While the Bedards and Temmermans, from Quebec and Manitoba, were at the international conference in Australia, families from Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia gathered at Sylvan Lake in Alberta for a wonderful weekend of prayer, reflection, sharing, and fun.

France

Julien and Brigitte Vielle and Bruno and Françoise Martin represented French interchurch families as members of the group visiting the PCPCU. The **Association Française des Foyers Mixtes Interconfessionnels Chrétiens** (AFFMIC) sent a response to the Lineamenta of the Bishops' Synod on the Eucharist through Archbishop Macary, responsible for ecumenical affairs in France, who responded with an encouraging **message from Cardinal Kasper, President of the PCPCU**. The next meeting of AFFMIC will be held in Lyon from 13-14 May 2006. All friends will be welcome.

Germany

Rudolf Lauber represented German interchurch families in the group visiting the PCPCU. The German **Netzwerk Ökumene** has been very busy running stands and workshops at various ecumenical meetings in different parts of the country, and now has an extensive database of contacts. Members attended the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Mannheim in June, there have been several meetings of local groups of interchurch families, some members participated in a conference held in the Catholic Academy of Berlin on the subject of 'Strengthening Families', and at other gatherings. Next year's annual conference of the Netzwerk will be held from 17-19 February 2006 at Braunfels bei Wetzlar, on the subject of

'The Relationship between Word and Sacrament in Theology and in the Community.' All friends will be welcome. During 2006 the Netzwerk will again be involved in the national Katholikentag in Saarbrücken from 24-28 May, and in further local meetings of interchurch families.

Great Britain

Interchurch families from Great Britain were represented by Melanie Finch, Bev Hollins and Ruth Reardon in the group visiting the PCPCU. The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) held its annual conference in August. You can read a report in "[Swanwick 2005](#)".

The next AIF annual conference will be held at the Swanwick Conference Centre in Derbyshire from 26-28 August 2006 on the theme of 'View From the Other Side'. All friends will be welcome.

The AIF Advisory Council has agreed to hold an **International English-speaking conference at Swanwick from Friday 22nd - Monday 25th August 2008**. Please put this date in your diaries (well, at the back of your diaries, perhaps...)

Italy

Italian interchurch families were represented in the group visiting the PCPCU by don Mario Polastro and Myriam Marcheselli. The group sent a response to the Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist. Myriam's husband Gianni has been very unwell and needs our prayers. Myriam has sent a prayer he has written about the difficult question of eucharistic sharing, which you can read in "[Gianni's Prayer](#)".

Kenya

David and Joyce Makumi continue their work among interchurch families in Nairobi. Several people around the world have contributed generously to the costs of enabling them to attend the next Association of Interchurch Families conference in August 2006, so we can learn from each other. Please pray that their application for a visa will be successful.

Northern Ireland

William and Anne Odling-Smee represented interchurch families from Northern Ireland in the group visiting the PCPCU. You can read a report on the conference of the [Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association](#) (NIMMA), which was attended by the Hollins family from England, in "[NIMMA Conference May 05](#)".

Switzerland

Swiss interchurch families were represented by Jean-Baptiste Lipp and Gisèle Francey in the group visiting the PCPCU. The Association des Foyers Interconfessionnels de Suisse (AFI-CH) held their annual conference in September. Rachel Jones, whose family were

members of AIF when it was first founded, now lives in Geneva with her husband and daughter, and was able to attend. You can read a report in "[AFI-CH Conference](#)".

You can read the letter which the Swiss interchurch families sent to Cardinal Kasper as a result of their conference in "[Swiss Letter to Cardinal Kasper](#)".

Jean-Baptiste sends encouraging ecumenical news: 'I was able to participate in the celebrations organized for the 75th anniversary of "Echo Magazine" in Geneva on June 24th: this is a Catholic weekly published in French-speaking Switzerland ("Suisse Romande"), which has decided to open its "Commentary on the Gospel" columns to me, a Protestant pastor, and to Noël Ruffieux, an Orthodox friend who is also a member of AFI-CH and of the Committee of the Revue Foyers Mixtes. Father Longchamp, a Jesuit priest who is in charge of the province in Switzerland, told me that he feels as if we have always been working with them when he reads our articles....'

The Swiss Association have a prayer which is used at their meetings, which you can read in "[AFI-CH Prayer](#)".

United States

Fr George Kilcourse represented interchurch families from the USA in the group visiting the PCPCU. He chaired the meetings and continues to liaise on our behalf with the Council.

We congratulate Michael Slater on his ordination as Deacon in July. The Slaters report that they are on the local Interfaith Council and were part of the committee which put together an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service for the Thanksgiving celebrations in November.

The American Association of Interchurch Families ([AAIF](#)) [2006 Conference](#) will be held from 19-23 July 2006 at Virginia Wesleyan University. All friends will be welcome.

You can read a '[Reflection on Ecumenism](#)' sent from the US.

Conclusion

Thank you very much indeed to all of you who have sent reports and information for this newsletter. Please continue to keep the news coming for the next bulletin. If you would like to see the original version of the pieces in translation, or you would like any further details of national or international conferences and meetings, please contact me. It is especially good when people can travel to conferences in other countries, as it strengthens our links and means that we can work more effectively together. Please continue to pray for our priests and pastors and leaders of churches worldwide, and for interchurch families around the world, in their work for Christian and church unity.

With many warm greetings to you all, and to your families, for the coming Christmas and New Year celebrations! I hope you all have a blessed time.

Melanie Finch

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Secretary/Administrator, Interchurch Families International Network

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