

News from Saskatoon

In Saskatoon, one of the interchurch couples (Colleen & Mark Stoeklein) have been very busy for the past two years serving on an RC diocesan task force to examine the marriage preparation process. In Saskatoon there are a variety of ways that couples take marriage prep:

1. Engaged Encounter, offered at the retreat house by married couples. This is a single weekend.
2. A Marriage Preparation weekend offered by the Catholic Family Services. Once again it is only a weekend. There are married couples as well as others leading this process.
3. A parish-based process of 11 weeks, one evening per week. This process is also led by married couples, although the parish priest also is involved at certain stages.

Marriage preparation is an absolute requirement in order to be married in a Canadian parish. In a few circumstances the parish priest may allow a couple to take some other form of marriage prep, but may not exempt them. The couple also has to visit the priest for a pre-marriage interview. According to Catholic Family Services, their weekends have had 52% mixed marriage couples over the past 10 years. There are no statistics from Engaged Encounter or the parish programmes.

According to Colleen & Mark, the task force will be introducing a standardized curriculum for the parish-based marriage prep. The 11 weeks will now include a component on interchurch couples, led by interchurch couples. This section is not only for those couples who are entering mixed marriages. All couples will participate in this section. We are very excited about this, however it is also a big commitment to make. Currently 3 interchurch couples in our diocese assist with marriage preparation. They cannot be expected to support all of the parishes. Thus, we will be looking at developing a training process for interchurch couples in the respective parishes.

Colleen & Mark have done a great amount of work on the diocesan task force and as chair couple of our local interchurch families group. All while they each work full-time and raise two daughters. Some of you will remember their younger daughter Heidi from the Edmonton conference. Heidi will be confirmed on April 19 at their RC parish. The RC bishop and their Lutheran pastor will have a special blessing for Heidi after the service. Their other daughter Monica has already been confirmed in the RC parish and is in a multi-year program preparing for "affirmation" in the Lutheran congregation.

In other news, the new director of the [Prairie Centre for Ecumenism](#) (Dr. Jan Bigland-Pritchard) began her ministry in January. She came to her first interchurch families meeting on Feb 26. She fits right in since she is an Anglican married to a Mennonite. The summer gathering for Prairie interchurch families will be July 15 to 17 at Camp Kannawin,

Sylvan Lake, Alberta. The weekend is being organized by the Calgary interchurch group with help from Maureen and Darrell Chastkiewicz in Regina. All are welcome.

On January 31 the RC bishop of Saskatoon issued a new diocesan policy on sacramental sharing. A pamphlet entitled "**Pastoral Directives for Sacramental Sharing in particular circumstances between Catholics and Baptized Christians of other Denominations**" has been distributed to the parishes. It will appear on the diocesan website soon. The policy is a diocesan application of the Ecumenical Directory norms on sacramental hospitality. I particularly appreciate the language of the document. It also includes a clear statement of two important principles:

1. the directives are to be interpreted broadly to favour sacramental reception by those eligible;
2. the Church does not demand more of fellow Christians than it does of Catholic people.

The introduction of this policy has been a long process. The bishop initiated the project almost two years ago. It has been shepherded by him and the ecumenical commission through many rounds of discussion with the priests' council, the diocesan study days, the liturgy commission, and others. As well, the bishop has shared the document in draft form with the other Christian leaders in Saskatoon and with the other RC bishops in Saskatchewan. The policy consists of a decree, the pastoral directives pamphlet, and pastoral notes provided to the parishes to assist in their interpretation of the document. I have asked for permission to share these pastoral notes with you. I will need to wait for a response.

The pastoral directives have been sent to all the parishes with instructions that they are to be given to every family in the parish. As well, copies of the pamphlet will be at the back of each church for visitors. The document will eventually appear on the diocesan website. And finally, the ecumenical commission is holding four workshops in various parts of the diocese to introduce the policy to lay people, parish ministers, and priests.

I am very impressed by the willingness of the bishop and the ecumenical commission to promulgate this policy widely. The few other dioceses in Canada that has developed local policies have done so quite quietly. Last Saturday at the Saskatoon workshop there was an supportive group of lay people. They were interested and had many questions. Although I already had copies of the documents, I attended the workshop to see how it was received and to hear the tone of the presentation. I was very impressed by the willingness of the ecumenical commission to treat this as a work-in-progress. At one point a presenter referred to the "next draft." While there is no immediate plan to revise the document, it was pointed out that the policy and its interpretation cannot remain static. If we are to work towards the day that we can all receive at the same table, then we must be prepared to see this policy as a preliminary response from one church.

One other matter that I greatly appreciate about the document is that it leaves the decision to "request the sacrament" to the individual. When asked what the document means by "request" the commission was very clear that this refers to the decision of the individual to come forward for communion during Mass. In other words, the policy does not require or envision a formal request to the priest or bishop for permission. In response to the

observation that this leaves the matter within the pastoral context rather than a juridical one, the commission members were clear that this was their intent.

In many respects the policy is not much different from the ecumenical directory, other than the positive tone. However, the inclusion of a section on interchurch marriages is a great strength of the pastoral directives. The section discusses the particular needs of interchurch marriages with respect to the sacraments, and lists a number of occasions when a marriage partner from another Christian church might request the Eucharist. This includes the standard list that we have discussed many times before. The strength of this document is its willingness to provide the list.

As well, the pastoral directives includes the catch-all "special circumstances" at the end of the list. In discussion with the ecumenical commission, it was clear that it is up to the couple to determine for themselves when the special occasions in their life occur. When people around the room began to list various occasions that might be more special than Christmas or Easter, I commented in a stage whisper "or any Sunday". This drew a round of chuckles from the group, but was responded to from the presenter with the observation that it was certainly possible that a couple would determine that every Sunday is a special occasion. This does not present a problem to the commission.

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