

## **MIXED MARRIAGE: A PASTORAL CHALLENGE TO THE FAMILY**

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### **Abstract**

This study is made in the light of the Preparatory Document of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization." The Document highlights the concern of the Church over certain widespread practices of the society today which have been corroding the fundamental Christian principles and the essential family values. Though many of the social practices identified by the Church are to be remedied for the sake of the preservation of faith and family life through proper pastoral care, there is no onetime definitive solution possible to this effect. This study focuses on pastoral care of the mixed marriage families in strict sense, which means, the marriages between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Mixed marriage is not a new development. In the modern society, because of the revolutionized social and religious consciousness, people are questioning age-old values, including marriage and family life. More and more young people challenge the very custom and relevance of getting married within one's own ethnic or religious community. The Catholic Church has been always cognizant in safeguarding certain values, namely, the faith of the members, the education of children, and the unity of faith and harmony within the family.

### **Introduction**

Family is the primary vital cell of any society. For this reason, much of the pastoral activities of the Catholic Church should be

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directed towards the support and care of families, especially to the pastoral care related to mixed marriage and the family.

This study is made in the light of the Preparatory Document, "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization." The Document highlights the concern of the Church over certain widespread practices of the society today which have been corroding the fundamental Christian principles and the essential family values. In this context the document states:

Concerns which were unheard of until a few years ago have arisen today as a result of different situations, from the widespread practice of cohabitation, which does not lead to marriage, and sometimes even excludes the idea of it, to same-sex unions between persons, who are, not infrequently, permitted to adopt children. The many new situations requiring the Church's attention and pastoral care include: mixed or inter-religious marriages; the single-parent family; polygamy; marriages with the consequent problem of a dowry, sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman; the caste system; a culture of non-commitment and a presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary; forms of feminism hostile to the Church; migration and the reformulation of the very concept of the family; relativist pluralism in the conception of marriage; the influence of the media on popular culture in its understanding of marriage and family life; underlying trends of thought in legislative proposals which devalue the idea of permanence and faithfulness in the marriage covenant; an increase in the practice of surrogate motherhood (*wombs for hire*); and new interpretations of what is considered a human right. Within the Church, faith in the sacramentality of marriage and the healing power of the Sacrament of Penance show signs of weakness or total abandonment.

Some of the social problems identified in the above statement are: cohabitation, same-sex unions, mixed or inter-religious marriages, the single-parent family, polygamy, dowry, caste system, presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary, unhealthy form of feminism, reformulation of the very concept of the family, relativist pluralism towards marriage, practice of surrogate motherhood, and new interpretations of human right.

Though many of these disreputable social practices identified by the Church are to be remedied for the sake of the preservation of faith and family life through proper pastoral care, there is no onetime definitive solution possible to this effect. This study will be focusing on pastoral care of the mixed marriage families in strict sense, which makes only a tiny fraction of the concerns raised by the Church in this context. Mixed marriages in strict sense mean the marriages between

a Catholic and a baptized person who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup>

From the recent past mixed marriage has become a universal phenomenon in the Catholic Church and, India is no exception to it. In the modern society, because of the revolutionized social and religious consciousness, people are questioning age-old values, including marriage and family life. More and more young people challenge the very custom and relevance of getting married within one's own ethnic or religious community. Numbers are on the increase of the celebration of marriages of the Catholics that take place either before civil registrars or ministers belonging to other religions or Churches or ecclesial communities. There are many instances in which Catholics have either given up practicing their faith or embraced the faith of their spouse.

The history establishes that the Catholic Church has been always cognizant in safeguarding certain values, namely, the faith of the members, the education of children, and the unity of faith and harmony within the family. Time to time, to this effect, the Church has brought out many documents and legislations.<sup>2</sup> We cannot deny the fact that there are people who ask serious questions about the relevance or value of such documents and legislations. As long as such legislation exists, those involved in pastoral ministry must try to make it as useful and meaningful as possible. Moreover, the pastors also have the obligation to catechize people about these values so that they are adequately helped in understanding and accepting, after a conscientious assessment, the values the Church proposes to them.

Mixed marriages have always been the object of special pastoral concern for the Catholic Church. This study is a humble attempt to assess the current teachings and legislations of the Catholic Church on mixed marriage in the context of continued pastoral care of the families. In other words, it is to bring to light the underlying values of

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. *The Code of Canon Law (CIC)*, can. 1124; *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)*, can. 813.

<sup>2</sup>For historical details on mixed marriages, see A. Connick, "Canonical Doctrine Concerning Mixed Marriages Before Trent and During the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *The Jurist*, 20 (1960) 294-326, 398-418; F.J. Schenk, *The Matrimonial Impediments of Mixed Religion and Disparity of Cult*, Canon Law Studies 51, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1929, 4-69; V.J. Doyle, *The Pre-Nuptial Promises in Mixed Marriages: An Historical and Canonical Analysis*, Canon Law Studies 461, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1968, 1-6; J. Dahyot-Doli, "Les mariages mixtes en droit byzantin," *Apollinaris*, 43 (1970) 571-582.

such teachings and legislations the Church wants to uphold or promote, and see how far the faithful reconcile with the Church's position on mixed marriage as against their freedom and personal dignity? There are different concrete or existential problems faced by those contracting mixed marriages which require effective pastoral approaches to promote the faith and stabilize a harmonious family life.

### **1. The Theological and Canonical Implications of Mixed Marriage**

The Catholic doctrine of marriage as a sacrament converges on the understanding of marriage as a covenant. The union of wife and husband in love both reflects and expresses the covenant love of God and His people. The theology of marriage in general explores how the response to God's love is experienced in the marriage relationship and family life. The unity of the two persons respects their differences and, through the practice of mutual caring, forgiveness, intimacy and nurturing of their offspring, they respond to the love of God.

The concept of mixed marriages first arose when a Jew or a Gentile was converted to Christianity. St Paul addresses the pastoral problem of when a Christian could not cohabit in peace with a non-Christian. Paul writes to the Church of Corinth:

To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For, the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife? (1 Cor 7:12-16).

The theology underlying the norms on mixed marriage is expressed in this scriptural passage. The key factor here is peace in the family and the salvation of the soul, i.e., the faith of the believer. According to St Paul a believer shall not divorce his/her non-believing husband/wife as long as the partner is willing to live with him/her. For he says: "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband" (1 Cor 7:14). However, if the desire of the unbelieving partner is to separate, he says, "let it be so; in such a case the brother

or sister is not bound.” The Church prohibited Christians from marrying non-Christians. The fundamental values the Church intended to safeguard from the beginning through its discipline of mixed marriages were the faith of the Catholic party and the upbringing of children born of such unions in the Catholic faith.

In general, the expression “mixed marriage” is a term that overarches two categories of marriage, namely a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person, which is prohibited by means of an invalidating impediment, and a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, which entails a prohibition of an impediment nature.<sup>3</sup> In a broad sense, or as frequently used in popular discourse, the term means any union between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, whether baptized or not. In the strict canonical sense, however, the term refers to a sacramental union between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic.

A mixed marriage, therefore, is one in which one party is either baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after baptism and the other is a baptized member of a Christian Church or ecclesial community, which is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> This category of non-Catholics would include members of Eastern Orthodox Churches as well as Protestants. The term “mixed marriage” is used in this study in the strict sense because the canonical implications of marriages between Catholics and baptized non-Catholics are quite different from those of marriages between Catholics and non-baptized persons. However, the examination of the patristic texts includes marriage between Christians and non-Christians, which is not in the strict canonical sense of mixed marriage.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Prohibitive Nature of Mixed Marriage

In the second half of the twentieth century, the legislation on mixed marriages was steadily simplified due to the mounting ecumenical concerns in the Catholic teachings. During the Second Vatican Council, the Church felt the need to relax its legislation on mixed marriages. Therefore, the Council and the subsequent follow-up became a real breakthrough in ecumenism. However, considering the

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<sup>3</sup>T.P. Doyle, Commentary on cc. 1124-1129, in *CLSA Comm 1*, 800.

<sup>4</sup>Beal, Commentary on cc. 1124-1129, in *CLSA Comm 2*, 1341.

<sup>5</sup>See Sebastian Payyappilly, *Mixed Marriage in the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 20014, 13.

possible danger to the faith of the Catholic party and the children, the Catholic Church has stipulated that marriage between two baptized persons, one of whom is Catholic and the other of whom is non-Catholic, is prohibited without the prior permission of the competent authority.<sup>6</sup> The fundamental reason for placing such prohibition is that it posed a serious threat to the continued practice of the faith by the Catholic party and to the baptism and Catholic upbringing of any children born of the union.

Until the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church considered both *mixed religion*, that is, a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian belonging to a Christian Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and *disparity of worship*, that is, a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person, as *impediments*. The former was regarded as an “impedient” impediment and the latter an “invalidating” impediment. Both needed a dispensation from legitimate ecclesiastical authority for a licit or valid celebration of marriage. The present legislation, however, adopts a different approach to mixed marriages as illustrated above. The “mixed religion” is no longer regarded as an “impediment” but only as a “prohibition,” and hence a marriage in a situation of “mixed religion” needs only the “permission” of the competent ecclesiastical authority, while a marriage with “disparity of worship” impediment requires a “dispensation” from the competent ecclesiastical authority.

### **3. Pastoral Concerns of Mixed Marriage in the Context of Ecumenism**

One of the chief concerns of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration of unity among all Christians.<sup>7</sup> The council declared that those who are baptized are reborn in Christ and are, therefore, incorporated into the Church of Christ. For this reason, there is a real (though incomplete) communion among Catholics and other Christians. The council upheld the religious freedom and supremacy of one's conscience in worshiping God. Therefore, no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience, especially in matters of religious beliefs. In view of these principles, the Catholic Church revised its approach to mixed marriages. In the ecumenical context the Church faces a pastoral challenge, one the one hand, to safeguard the rights and obligations of the Catholic party to keep

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<sup>6</sup>CCEO, can. 813; CIC, can. 1124.

<sup>7</sup>UR, 1.

his/her Catholic faith and to have the children born of the union baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith and on the other hand, to respect the freedom of conscience of the non-Catholic party. The Catholic Church does not claim exclusive competence in the case of mixed marriage (CCEO, cc. 780 §§ 1& 2 and 781). In spirit with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (*UR 16*), the Church also recognizes the competence of the Orthodox Church Law for their governance in a mixed marriage between a Catholic and an Orthodox (CCEO, c. 780 §2). In the case of other non-Christians, the same canon implicitly recognizes the civil law to which the party is subject. Here, the reason for recognizing Orthodox jurisdiction and “canonizing” civil laws is ecumenical.

In the pastoral context, the primary concerns of the Church in all marriages “is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it” (1993 *Ecumenical Directory*, n. 144). In this regard the Directory also makes a practical observation: “mixed marriages frequently present difficulties for the couples themselves and for the children born to them, in maintaining their Christian faith and commitment and for the harmony of family life” (n. 144). However, the Church is also well aware of the growing number of mixed marriages and the need for their pastoral care (see n. 145).

The Directory (nn. 146-149) makes a significant contribution to the preparation of prospective spouses for a mixed marriage and for the pastoral care of couples in mixed marriages. In preparing the couple, n. 148 of the Directory states that the pastor “should stress the positive aspects of what the couple share together as Christians in the life of grace, in faith, hope and love, along with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

The primary pastoral concern expressed here is the protection of the indissolubility of marriage and the family life that flows from it. In stressing this point, the Directory says: “When, for a just and reasonable cause, permission for a mixed marriage is requested, both parties are to be instructed on the essential ends and properties of marriage which are not to be excluded by either party” (n. 150).

Regarding the children of a mixed marriage between a Catholic and a member of an Eastern non-Catholic Church, the Directory could be read to imply that the children be baptized and raised in either faith. It says that the children be “spiritually nourished by the sacramental mysteries of Christ,” and formed “in authentic Christian

doctrine and ways of Christian living” (see n. 152). We see the emphasis given here is on “Christian” rather than on “Catholic living.” In light of this nuance in terminology, J. Huels states that even if “the Catholic party is unwilling to make the promise to do all in his or her power to have the children baptized and raised in the Catholic faith, permission for a mixed marriage could still be granted provided the children will be baptized and raised in the Eastern Church.”<sup>8</sup>

Since Vatican II, there have been significant changes in our understanding and practice of pastoral care regarding mixed marriages and families. Walls of prejudice, ignorance, mistrust, and hatred have steadily come down. We are now recognizing the role of the Holy Spirit working in our Churches, and so are working together in solving social problems that cannot be resolved by one Church alone. The focus now is not on heresies and anathemas but on the essential message of Jesus Christ. One of the impressive ecumenical agreements is the one between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Yet, we have to admit the fact that there can be a challenging side to ecumenism. First of all, there exists a real danger of watering down all differences between our Churches and their fundamental beliefs. No one can deny that real differences exist between our Churches and they cannot and should not be played down to the extent that one might think they no longer exist. This is just not true. Differences do exist and truth must be upheld. Those who provide pastoral care to mixed marriage families must be aware of this fact, so as to fulfil their ministry truthfully and prudently.

There is a tendency to say that ‘one denomination is as good as another’. Again this is not true. God bestows His Spirit on His people in a visible way. His community is identifiable by its faith and practice. There is no way we can say that the Catholic Church, objectively speaking, is equal to any other believing community. By this we do not mean to say that the Catholic Church is superior to other Churches but is unique in its identity. Speaking of the ecumenical dimension of mixed marriage, Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio* (FC, 78), stated:

Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be

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<sup>8</sup>J.H. Huels, “The 1993 Ecumenical Directory: Theological Values and Juridical Norms,” *The Jurist*, 56 (1996) 420.

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.

For this purpose, and also in order to highlight the ecumenical importance of mixed marriages which are fully lived in the faith of the two Christian spouses, an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony, even though this does not always prove easy.

The Catholic Church is different and unique by Christ's will. This cannot be denied in principle though, in fact, the lives of Catholics may be no better or no worse than those belonging to other denominations. So, if we believe in the revelation of Jesus Christ, we cannot unpretentiously say that the Catholic Church is the same as other Churches.

Hence, what we should bear in mind while caring for mixed marriage families is that the ecumenical movement can prove to be positive as well as negative. To stress one aspect to the exclusion of the other could prove harmful to the faith of the people.

#### **4. Family as the "Domestic Church"**

In the light of the teachings of the Church, the Preparatory Document observes:

Even in the early Christian community the family appeared as the "domestic church" (cf. CCC, 1655): In the so-called "family canons" of the Apostolic letters of the New Testament, the great family of the ancient world is identified as the place of a profound solidarity between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between the wealthy and the poor (cf. Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pt 2:13-3:7; cf. also the Letter to Philemon). In particular, the Letter to the Ephesians recognized the nuptial love between man and woman as "the great mystery", making present in the world the love of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32).

Couples in a mixed marriage are bound together not only by their baptism into Christ but specifically by Christian marriage. "For Christians, marriage, which has its origin in God the Creator, also implies a real vocation to a particular state and a life of grace. In order to be brought to its maturation, this vocation requires adequate, particular preparation and a specific path of faith and love, all the

more so because this vocation is given to a couple for the good of the Church and society. This has all the meaning and strength of a public commitment made before God and society that goes beyond individual limits.”<sup>9</sup> The spouses are committed to each other in the name of Christ and are united in His love. Yet each one of them may have good reason(s) to remain faithful to Christ through their own Church. Many of the partners in mixed marriages find their life mutually enriching. Their experiences have much to offer their respective Churches as they seek to grow together. Yet they also may suffer more than others because of the continuing tensions within and between the Christian communities to which they are trying to remain faithful.

Those mixed marriage families in which the husband and wife are each fully committed to Churches of different traditions and where the parents and children, therefore, share to some extent in the life of two Christian communities are themselves the hallmark of modern ecumenical pilgrimage. Families as domestic churches (*ecclesia domestica*)<sup>10</sup> are the microcosm of the ecumenical relationship. Regarding the faith life of the spouses the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* stated:

Let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising up to life again (GS, 52).

## 5. The Social Outlook of Mixed Marriage

The family is the micro-unit of the human society. A person, as a social being, is basically formed and shaped in one’s own family. Marriages are naturally influenced and shaped by the personalities and life experiences of the individual spouses. They are also impacted by the changes in social values. Especially during the past few decades the changes in society’s values have been rapid and rampant, and those changes have had significant effect on marriage and family.

These changes include: (1) attitudes toward faith life and sexual relationships, (2) acceptance of abnormal sexual orientation, (3)

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<sup>9</sup>Pontifical Council for Family, “Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage,” *Origins* 26 (1996-1997) 97, 99-109.

<sup>10</sup>LG, 11; FC, 21; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1656.

increase in divorce rate, (4) fertility control and abortion, (5) overemphasis on equality at the expense of mutual responsibility as a parent.

In spite of these problems, it is possible to prepare couples well for marriage and to equip them with the skills and resources to build strong family relationships. As already seen, the Church is actively involved in preparing couples for marriage, and through marriage and family life education programs, it strives to raise people's awareness of the dire need to cultivate personal and interpersonal skills necessary to develop and sustain happy and enriching marital and family relationship.

## **6. The Ecclesial Outlook of Mixed Marriage**

For better pastoral care, it is important to know the attitude of Christians in general and Catholics in particular, towards mixed marriages. In marriage the obvious Catholic ideal is that the two be of one flesh, one mind, one soul, one faith. This complementary unity in marriage few will deny. Yet, in many Catholic eparchies, mixed marriages are increasing in number. In some cases, the actual faith commitment of the partners may be minimal; nevertheless they come to the priest or the minister requesting a religious or liturgical celebration of their marriage in order to receive the Lord's help and blessing in their union of love.

We must be honest about mixed marriages. They are not the means to resolve the differences existing among various Churches or ecclesial communities. Ecumenism is the mutual sharing of gifts in truth. For a Catholic, the truth is that his/her faith is a gift from God, which must be shared with others. Yet this gift cannot be imposed on anyone. Therefore, the greatest gift in his/her possession can only be shared at the good will of the other. The Catholic Church does not encourage any false ecumenism in relation to mixed marriage norms and the pastoral care rendered to the mixed marriage families.

The faith of the partner can nonetheless be a source of strength, growth, and inspiration to the other partner. Even a minimal faith can be fanned in a mixed marriage. This would undoubtedly require great pastoral nurturing from those who provide spiritual support to married couples and families. Expressing the beauty of pastoral care, the Church teaches:

Pastoral activity is always the dynamic expression of the reality of the Church, committed to her mission of salvation. Family pastoral care too — which is a particular and specific form of pastoral activity — has as its

operative principle and responsible agent the Church herself, through her structures and workers (FC, 69).

The Catholic Church does have grave concerns about preserving and handing on the gift of faith in mixed marriages. So do many other religions. Nevertheless, the modern world has created a highly pluralistic society due to migration, mobility, and changing political and social structures. It is important to the Church's mission that its laws are applied to concrete cases with compassion and mercy.

## **7. The Pastoral Care of Mixed Marriage Families**

Having discussed some of the social as well as religious aspects of modern family life, we shall now look into the continued pastoral care of mixed marriage families.

It is in the family that faith, morals and ethical values are shared. Hence the Church, especially at the parish level, has to claim its role in the family. This is so because any work toward the building up of the universal Church or a better parish unit needs to start from the family. The Church, committed to working for the realization of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1a), considers family as the domestic church (*ecclesia domestica*) and the place where its primary focus is derived by promoting the integrity and welfare of the family.

Through the pastoral care of mixed marriage families the Church reiterates the ecclesial character of a Christian family, which has a special role to play in bringing forth the Kingdom of God in the world. The mind of the Church is that "in the first five years of married life, it would be desirable to follow up with the young couples through post-marriage courses, to be carried out in parishes or deaneries."<sup>11</sup>

The parish priest must pay special attention to couples in mixed marriages by helping them to live married love responsibly in accord with the demands of ecclesial communion and the practice of their faith life.

All these pastoral efforts should support and help the couple to grow in love for their family and to live after the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always. Loving the family means identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them.

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<sup>11</sup>"Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage," n. 73.

Loving the family means endeavoring to create for it an environment favorable for its development (FC, 86).

To live the family after the Holy Family of Nazareth, one must understand that through God's mysterious design, it was in the Holy Family of Nazareth that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It was, unique in the world, the prototype and example for all Christian families. Its life was passed in anonymity and silence in a little town in Palestine, where it underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. Such an ideal will not fail to help Christian families indeed, all the families in the world to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfil with joy the plan of God in their regard (See FC, 86). The Holy Family should be held up as the finest example for all Christian families to emulate. The canonical legislation of the Church has given due importance to this understanding.

The norm states that Church's pastoral action must be progressive, also in the sense that it must follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development. If this wider support is neglected in the mistaken hope that the couple will be able to sort out for themselves any practical problem that might arise, it will not achieve the goal of true pastoral care of families. It is the duty of each eparchial bishop and the parish priests to take care that the families get adequate pastoral care in order that the couple "love the family and live the family after the Holy Family of Nazareth."

The Church legislation is very clear about the duty of the bishops and priests regarding their pastoral roles. The primary duty of a bishop is the pastoral care of the people of his eparchy. The pastors have the obligation to assist their respective bishop in discharging his pastoral duties. Hence, while respecting the norms given by the *sui iuris* Church, every eparchy should have norms governing their pastoral ministry.

According to both Codes of Canon Law, the person principally responsible in the eparchy for the pastoral care of the family is the eparchial bishop. As father and pastor, he must exercise particular solicitude in this aspect of his pastoral ministry. He must devote personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources for the well-being of families and for all those who, in the various eparchial

structures, assist him in the pastoral care of the family. The bishops and the priests who constitute an essential part of the Church's ministry should avail themselves for the care of marriage and the family.

Continued pastoral care must take into account different stages of family life, which starts from the day of wedding and continue through childbirth, caring of infants, schooling of the children, instruction of the adolescent children, the marriage of the children, becoming grandparents, coping with old age, loss of one's partner and finally, facing one's own death. Continued pastoral care can be effective only if those involved in the ministry realize that their ministry encompasses all these stages of life. For the efficacy of continued pastoral care, all those in the field of pastoral ministry should have proper training and ongoing refresher programmes.

Unlike other Catholic families, pastoral care for mixed marriage families should be more generous, modelled on the Good Shepherd. They require extra attention, since they are more in need not only of assistance "but also of more insightful action upon public opinion and especially upon cultural, economic and juridical structures, in order that the profound causes of their needs may be eliminated as far as possible" (FC, 72). In continued pastoral care of mixed marriage families, attention should be focused on the support of the faith of the Catholic spouse and the Catholic education of their children.

## **Conclusion**

Mixed marriages, although discouraged by the Church in the past, have not been that infrequent. Recently, however, given the rapidity of changes in society in general as well as in the Church, no doubt stimulated by the increased mobility and intermingling of people, it should surprise no one to witness an upward trend in the number of mixed marriages. Problems arising from such mixed unions are not peculiar to the Catholic Church; non-Catholic Churches face similar problems. As a result, important issues related to pastoral care are being raised which the Catholic Church has address in the Preparatory Document, "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization."

The Church obliges her members to preserve their Catholic faith and family tradition, yet it offers positive pastoral support to those choosing to enter mixed marriages. Recognizing the reality of mixed marriages and reflecting the principles of ecumenism declared by the

Second Vatican Council, the Church has envisaged and implemented balanced guidelines for the pastoral care of the faithful. The Church also attempts to foster closer ties between Catholics and non-Catholics, especially the Eastern Orthodox Christians.

While recognizing the competence of the civil authorities concerning the civil effects of marriage (CCEO, c. 780 §1; CIC, c. 1059), the Church, through appropriate teachings, shows its responsibility of protecting the natural and divine institution of marriage from possible dangers to the faith of the Catholic spouse and the children. The present position of the Church on mixed marriage is pre-eminently pastoral and ecumenical in its approach.