



The Family LifeLine

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Interreligious Marriages: Challenge and Celebration

By Ivy Lim & Sr. Theresa Seow FDCC



“an interreligious marriage is as much a challenge as it is also a celebration.”

Indeed, if accepting differences in personality and habits is already challenging for ‘normal’ couples intending to enter into marriage, what more for couples from different religious backgrounds. “Two of the more obvious challenges”, shares Sr Theresa, “are in the areas of family planning and the obligations assumed by the Catholic party concerning the baptism and education of the children in the Catholic Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1635)

Sr Theresa also observes that “very often, couples who are preparing to enter into marriage are not sufficiently helped to prepare for the eventual questions that may arise in later years.” She advises couples from different religious backgrounds to begin dialogue over these differences even before marriage. “Rather than avoid the topic of religious differences, ongoing dialogue between couples is necessary. This will enrich communication and has the potential to strengthen married life and family ties.” Even, if such differences are found to be insurmountable, it would still be better to call off the marriage than to enter into marriage and subsequently experiencing a breakup.

If they embrace their differences, then interreligious marriage can be a celebration. “Each partner entering into an interreligious marriage is likely to have a strong belief that their own spirituality would be an important pillar in supporting their relationship and that their commitment will help them overcome their differences. Indeed, the ongoing dialogue between the couple can even gradually foster a genuine acceptance and conversation between members of different religious communities. Moreover, both parties can recognise the spiritual values inherent in the other person’s belief system and find much common ground in their task of raising up a good family. For the Catholic spouse, such a dialogue can even lead to the conversion of his non Catholic partner.”

Note: Sr Theresa Seow FDCC will be speaking more about interreligious marriages at “Celebrate Marriage”, a conference organised by Worldwide Marriage Encounter Singapore. More details overleaf.

¹ This term is used to identify a marriage that involves a Catholic and a partner who is not Catholic otherwise known as a marriage with “disparity of cult”. An ecumenical marriage is a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian of another denomination.

Has a good marriage more to do with commitment than compatibility? When contemplating marriage, did you go forth because you thought you and your future life partner were very much alike? Or did you recognise both of you were different yet were willing to make your relationship work, at all costs? A couple entering an interreligious marriage¹ would probably be more aware of the need for the latter because it requires lots of perseverance and understanding to work out their own personal differences and getting their union consented by their family members and respective religious leaders.

Yet the obstacles facing such couples haven’t deterred too many Catholics from that path. In fact, such marriages seem part of a growing trend.

Sr Theresa Seow, FDCC, a member of the Interreligious organization (IRO) in Singapore and a former consultor with the Pontifical Council for interreligious dialogue, shares that

The Church on...

Mixed Marriages (when one partner is a baptized non-Catholic)

“Difference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they succeed in placing in common what they have received from their respective communities and learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ. But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated. They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1634)

Interreligious Marriages (when one partner is a non-Christian)

“...For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband” (1 Cor 7:14). It is a great joy for the Christian spouse and for the Church if this “consecration” should lead to the free conversion of the other spouse to the Christian faith. Sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1637)



Celebrate Marriage 2009

A good marriage and a secure family life are critical tenets of our society, and both the government and the Church recognise that these two institutions have to be upheld.

As such, since 2007, the Catholic Church here has its very own “Celebrate Marriage” day to simply rejoice and honour spouses in the institution of marriage. Organised by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter in Singapore (WWME), this year’s “Celebrate Marriage” also coincides with WWME’s 30th anniversary in Singapore.

Daniel & Shelley Ee, who are the National Coordinating Couple of WWME, shares that such an event makes perfect sense, “We have assigned days to acknowledge youth, nurses, teachers, and other vocations... why not a special event to honour the lifelong commitment of each pair of life partners?”

Indeed, such an event celebrates the good news that many spouses stay together inspite of the many modern day challenges. “It is human nature to lament on what we don’t have or have lost. However, we have so many couples who are enjoying a good marriage and we should affirm them, and help them keep going to make it better and better. Besides the Marriage Encounter programme, “Celebrate Marriage” is another way to share our vision of more happy marriages, particularly amongst young married couples,” added Fr Paul Goh, National Coordinating Priest of WWME.

This year, it will be held on Saturday, 23 May 2009 in the Church of the Holy Cross in Clementi and comprises a half-day programme made up of two parts.

In the first part, couples can pick up tips on communication and parenting from one of the four concurrent talks. Brother Adrian Danker, Brother Collin Wee, Msgr Eugene Vaz and Sister Theresa Seow have chosen to speak on topics very close to their hearts in relation to the 4 P’s of Family Life – Passion, Prayer, Parenting and Promise. The second part is the Mass (with a segment on milestone anniversaries) celebrated by His Grace, Archbishop Nicholas Chia.

To make it an event where all in the family can attend, a babysitting service and a children’s programme have been planned so that young parents can participate whilst their children are being taken care of. A drama workshop is also planned for the teens.

Being WWME’s 30th anniversary, the movement hopes to attract as many of the more than 4,000 “encountered” couples to meet and renew friendships during the luncheon reception.

Do register early online (www.marriage-encounter-sg.org) to secure your seats in “Celebrate Marriage”.

PROGRAMME

9.00am	Reception for participants
9.30am -	Concurrent Talks
11.30am	[Participants have to register online for the talk they are interested to attend.]
	1. Catholic Education in the Home: 4 P’s to Bring It to Life – by Bro Adrian Danker, SJ
	2. Family Life in the 21st Century – by Bro Collin Wee, FSC
	3. Interreligious Marriages – A Celebration of Diversity – by Sr Theresa Seow, FDCC
	4. Is the Marriage Vow Relevant Today? – by Msgr Eugene Vaz
	Youth Drama Workshop – by “Walk on Water Productions”
	Babysitting & Children’s Programme – by WWME couples
11.30am	Registration for Milestone Marriages
Noon	Mass
1.00pm -	WWME 30th Anniversary Celebration Lunch Reception
2.00pm	