



AIF NEWS BULLETIN 4/19

Distributed August

Dear Member

This AIF News Bulletin contains several articles, including:

1. ***AIF Weekend 2019 – Booking Update*** [L][SEP]
2. ***AIF AGM and London Meeting 2020 – Save the Date!*** [L][SEP]
3. ***Report from the Brentwood Marriage Conference by Margaret and Peter Minoletti*** [L][SEP]
4. ***Eucharistic Sharing: the German Bishops' Guidelines/The Guidelines in Action by Ruth Reardon, [L][SEP]Herbert Heinecke and translated by Melanie Finch [L][SEP]***

If you have any news or articles to share with members, please continue to send them to me.

Please also continue to check the website

www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk and our Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Interchurchfamilies/> and Twitter

<https://twitter.com/interchurchfam> pages for information and articles

between the bulletins. I will be on annual leave from the 16th August until the 5th September, during this time please do leave a message or send an email and I will respond on my return.

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support for the Association and its work. If you have any questions about any of the information in the bulletin, please contact me.

With best wishes

Doral Hayes  **Executive Development Officer**

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope *John Paul II*,
York, 1982

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AIFWeekend2019-ConscienceandSpiritualConversations–

BOOKINGUPDATE!

Please find attached a booking form for the AIF Weekend which will

take place from 12 -13 October 2019 at The Hayes, Swanwick. Please do send completed booking forms either by post or email to the office as soon as you are able to help with planning the weekend.

Last year the Conference of German Bishops issued guidelines indicating that, under certain conditions, eucharistic hospitality might be extended to the non-Catholic spouse in an interchurch marriage. At the heart of their document the bishops say that any decisions to share communion should be made by the interchurch spouses themselves informed by their consciences after a “spiritual conversation” in which they should be guided by a priest or pastor. They envisage such spiritual conversations following the guidance given in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Discernment at this level is not something with which most lay people are likely to be familiar and so during the weekend we will therefore consider:

- **How such a process of discernment might “work”**
- **The steps that someone might take, both in planning and in holding, that conversation.**
- **What the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are – and how they might help in the process of discernment.**
- **How else a “spiritual conversation” might proceed.** The weekend will also include bible study and, as always, opportunities for joining in worship as well as time for fellowship, sharing experiences and learning together. During the weekend we will be joined by:
- **Fr Dominic Robinson SJ – who will lead our discussions on discernment**
- **Jenny Bond from Churches Together in England – who will lead our bible study**
- **Revd Dr Callan Slipper – National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of**

England **Would you like help with the cost? We hope that as many members as possible will join us (including you). If the cost would prevent you from coming, please remember that help is available from a dedicated fund that has given over £2,000 in grants and loans in recent years. One recipient of a grant said:**
"My heartfelt thanks for giving us the opportunity to attend the weekend. We got so much out of it – it was a big, greatly appreciated, spiritual refreshment." **If you think we might be able to help you too, please contact the fund administrators, Andrew & Helen Granger-Bevan (by 31 August) at andrew.granger-bevan@ntlworld.com or on 01273 779022. All requests will be treated in total confidence.** **Accommodation on the Friday night** **In previous years some members have arrived early and stayed at The Hayes on the Friday evening. We have been told there is no accommodation available on the Friday evening this year, there is however a Travelodge Hotel in Alfreton (details can be found at <https://www.travelodge.co.uk/hotels/2/Alfreton-hotel>) if people wish to book themselves.** **You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian Unity.' Pope John Paul II, York, 1982** **Association of Interchurch Families, 10 Aldersgate Street, EC1A 4HJ**
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AIF NEWS BULLETIN 4/19 2. AIF

AGM and London Meeting 2020 – Save the Date!

We are delighted to announce that the AIF AGM and Annual London Meeting will take place on the 8th February 2020 at St Andrews, Waterloo, London. Our special guest and speaker will be Bishop Paul Hendricks, Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Southwark. Bishop Paul is a member of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Department of Dialogue and Unity, A Trustee of Churches Together in England and long-standing friend to AIF.

Please do put the date in your diary and more details will be available nearer the time.

3. Report from Diocese of Brentwood Marriage Conference by Margaret and Peter Minoletti

Peter and I, as the Essex Contact Couple for AIF, were invited to represent our Association at what was the inaugural conference of a Diocesan "Marriage Conference". We were contacted by Father Matthew Bernard-Qureshi, the Director and Chaplain for the Diocese Marriage and Family Life department and as this was a relatively rare opportunity to raise the awareness within the Diocese about AIF we were glad of the opportunity to participate with a stall and a "five minute talk about our organisation".

The aim of the conference was broad; "to gather as many people as possible who have an interest in supporting and promoting the vocation to marriage, including those who do so as members of national and local organisations". Thus, we were joined at the conference by a diverse range of organisations, namely Marriage Care, Explore, Teams of Our Lady,

Beginning Experience, Marriage Encounter and Retrouvaille. We were glad that Malcolm and Josie Green, another AIF couple, were able to attend and lend us their support.

Father Matthew opened the conference outlining his plans and hopes for a Diocesan strengthening of support for married couples and was hoping that lay organisations could work more closely both together and within the Diocesan structures to support marriage and family life. This then led to us all talking in groups about how best we can support marriages - from very practical suggestions of including prayers and recognition of wedding anniversaries in our Mass Centres and their newsletters, thus raising awareness amongst the congregation of those married couples, through to wider discussion about where marriage fits into the mindset of our children's generation in relation to church life. A very broad range of views emerged!

Brendan and Laura Thompson of Catholic Voices then gave a lively presentation entitled "Communicating the Good News of Marriage and Family" made even more graphic as Laura is expecting their first child very shortly! Their work is focussed on encouraging young Catholics to marry and see this choice as a vocation. Then each organisation had the opportunity to speak about their work. Beginning Experience spoke movingly about the work they undertake with grieving individuals be they separated, divorced or widowed individuals. Other groups talked about the work they do in supporting couples often through meals and sharing together.

For the AIF contribution we first focussed on the triptych, projected on the wall behind us, and on the reflections, Ruth Reardon had shared with us on its meaning. After the emphasis on words in most presentations, having a visual image may have come as some relief! I think it helped the participants understand some of the concepts we are used to talking about and why we take the issue of sharing the eucharist as an urgent and important sign of support within the domestic church. Peter spoke about the challenges and positives that have been in our relationship and the challenges faced by other AIF couples in those parts of England where support from the Catholic hierarchy has not always been forthcoming. Unlike the other groups, we present more of a challenge to the structures of the church, but hopefully also offer opportunities for fresh thinking into the future.

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During the lunch break many participants visited our stall, ate the sweets and picked up our pens. Some also picked up AIF prayer cards and leaflets and asked more about our work. It helped put us on the Diocesan map!

At 3pm we were joined by Bishop Alan Williams who celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving for Marriage in the Cathedral; Margaret received a blessing.

4. Eucharistic Sharing: the German Bishops' Guidelines

Introduction: The following article on 'The Guidelines in Action' carries forward the story of the German Bishops' guidelines on eucharistic sharing in interchurch families. It appeared in German in the Summer Newsletter of our German sister-association.

The author, Herbert Heinecke, wrote that Melanie Finch did a wonderful job of translating the article – thank you very much, Melanie. Herbert points out that the Newsletter article quotes only some of the German bishops, and as more dioceses publish their statements, he is updating the website (https://netzwerk-oekumene.de/de/eucharistie_regelungen).

So by the time of the Swanwick weekend we may well have more episcopal responses to report on, as well as German interchurch family responses to Herbert's 'Appeal' (see final paragraph).

And can I remind you that I am awaiting more responses to my request about 'Spiritual Conversations' too, please! (And thanks to those who have already responded).

Ruth Reardon (aifreardon@talk21.com)

The Guidelines in Action: Welcome news from many German dioceses

Things have gone quieter concerning the guidance leaflet 'Walking with Christ – Unity on Track. Interchurch families and sharing the Eucharist.' After the vociferous argument in the German Bishops' Conference and the tug-of-war with the Roman Curia, the standing committee of the Bishops' Conference published the guidelines 'Walking with Christ' on 26 June 2018, leaving the responsibility to individual diocesan bishops to put it into action. After that the guidelines disappeared quickly from headlines around the country – but not from our own focus. For this decision led to a great variety of diocesan rulings: one year later two-thirds of German diocesan bishops have expressed themselves positively concerning the guidelines, and have put them into action in various ways. It is beyond the scope of the newsletter to make an in-depth analysis of all the rulings. We will confine ourselves to an overview, citing comments from individual bishops.

Overview

Many of the bishops have adopted the guidelines personally, and commend them to their various pastors and advisors. The variety of expressions goes from 'I am asking you to ...' to 'I entrust to you ...' to 'I recommend to you ...'.

The bishops of Dresden-Meißen, Freiburg, Hildesheim and Magdeburg have gone further, as they have published the guidelines in their diocesan news/church bulletin/directory, so that they are brought into more prominence.

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Some bishops have sent the guidelines – accompanied by a letter – to all their diocesan pastoral advisors, and in these letters individual points are explained more fully.

In the dioceses of Hildesheim and Rottenburg-Stuttgart, additional flyers have appeared, directed specifically to interchurch couples, and the key elements of the guidelines are summed up. Both these flyers also contain an encouraging message for interchurch couples who have already decided to share the Eucharist: 'Perhaps you made a decision about this a long time ago. We respect this decision.'

Examples of some of the bishops' comments

'The guidelines give the necessary clarity to believers, and full advice to pastoral advisors who accompany them. Therefore he (the bishop)

***greet this text and he voted for its publication at the Bishops' meeting. Pastors and believers may now understand what the bishop commends in these individual specific situations.'* (Limburg diocesan website: Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing.)**

***'I am asking you to consider these guidelines as official advice to pastoral companions to interchurch spouses in the Speyer diocese.'* (Bishop Dr Karl-Heinz Wieseemann, Speyer.)**

***'As pastors we don't have a right to give OR to forbid anyone admittance to the Eucharist. At the same time it is not possible to categorically refuse to give holy communion, particularly at the point of giving or receiving communion, which is no place for a theological or personal discussion.'* (Bishop Dr Felix Genn, Münster.)**

***'I would like to underline the point that a Protestant Christian in an interchurch marriage, who has knowingly and deliberately entered into such a marriage according to Catholic understanding, and therefore has not only received but also contributed to a Catholic sacrament, is living in fellowship with the Catholic Church in a partially fulfilled way.'* (Bishop Ulrich Neymayr, Erfurt.)**

***'I ask you to note that the current guidelines, recognised as a helping hand in the Magdeburg diocese are to be followed in the accompaniment of interchurch marriages.'* (Bishop Dr Gerhard Feige, Magdeburg.)**

***'In the discussions, it is sometimes pointed out to me that that, there may occur a serious problem, which might be called "competing consciences". It may be that a non-Catholic spouse during a conversation about the guidelines believes he or she has the right to request the Eucharist on the grounds of conscience, whereas the priest feels uncomfortable about this decision, which pricks his own conscience. (...) But in no way may we, when administering the sacraments, disregard the conscience of the believer, and make our own judgement. If in any doubt, this must ('where there are competing consciences') come second.'* (Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch, Berlin.)**

The Bishop of Würzburg plans first to discuss the guidelines with the diocesan committees. Nevertheless shortly after their publication he made

a clear (and significantly public) statement: 'Bishop Dr Franz Jung expressly invited interchurch spouses to the Eucharist in Würzburg Cathedral on the two days of the Marriage Festival, 5th and 6th July (2018). 'The German bishops want to acknowledge once more this lived faithfulness within the domestic church of marriage, including in an interchurch marriage', he said on Thursday 5 July, in his homily during the first of four masses for the 2018 Marriage Festival. (...) But for today, on a day when we celebrate wedding anniversaries in the year 2018, I would like to offer an invitation to the Eucharist to interchurch couples, in which both spouses have kept their promises for so long,' he said in the cathedral.' (Würzburg diocesan website.)

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'At last married couples may know that when a Protestant partner in an interchurch marriage, after careful consideration, and believing in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, comes forward to communion, this is not merely tolerated with gritted teeth by the Catholic Church,

but is accompanied by the Church's blessing, (nr.19), indeed, is a 'cause for joy'(nr.58)'. (Bishop Stephan Askermann, Trier.)

Postscript

A third of the bishops have not yet explicitly commented, insofar as the guidelines are being used in their diocese. This may be in some cases of long-term illness, or one only having been appointed a short time ago, which we may excuse. We may assume that we will not be expecting a positive vote from the seven bishops who sent the protesting letter to Rome in Spring 2018.

Appeal

What experiences have you had of the discussion and the outcomes in your diocese? Are there already examples of the envisaged spiritual conversations? Write to us – your local experiences are important!

Written by Herbert Heinecke and translated by Melanie Finch

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