



ECUMENICAL GUIDES

Guide for a Lutheran-Catholic Marriage

Preface

In November, 1990, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America entered into a formal covenant relationship. Since that time many parishes in the Synods and the Archdiocese have held prayer services for unity and have fostered conversation among clergy and laity on further implications of the Covenant. Among the more important and more common pastoral concerns of the ecumenical relations of our two communities is the marriage between Lutheran and Catholic spouses. This is such an important reality for the whole Christian community, as well as for the happiness of couples and families, that it has been studied by many in the international dialogue of unity between Lutherans and Catholics.

With a mutual concern for Church unity and the unity of marriage, two years ago we asked the members of the Lutheran-Catholic Covenant Commission to develop a guide for couples who are preparing for marriage in our two traditions. The Commission, constituted equally of members of the two synods and the archdiocese, has completed the guide; it has been reviewed by the proper ecumenical commissions and by other official bodies of each of our churches. Recommendations, suggestions and insights have come from many members and offices of our communities and the result is this document, which we hope will be a source of help to all those who assist in marriage preparation. But most especially we hope and pray that it will be a source of help to those who are to enter into Lutheran Catholic marriage. Those who are married in our traditions need the support of the members of the Church in living their marriages in the fullness of Christ's love and blessing. Finally, those in ecumenical marriages bring to the Church, by the testimony of their love and their vows, a call to all of us to continue to respond to the Holy Spirit's present gift of unity and to collaborate with the Spirit and one another in the journey to full unity of the Church.

As we mutually affirm and encourage the use of these guidelines, we pray to the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, to pour forth all gifts upon the Church and we pray for all those who enter into Lutheran-Catholic marriages.

The Feast of Pentecost - June 4, 1995

The Reverend Lowell O. Erdahl, Bishop, Saint Paul Area Synod, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Reverend David W. Olson, Bishop, Minneapolis Area Synod, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Most Reverend John R. Roach, Bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

<http://www.archspm.org/html/ecumem2.html>

An Official Document of
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Minneapolis and Saint Paul Synods and
The Roman Catholic Church Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
1995 - Permission to copy only the complete document is granted.

I. Lutheran-Catholic Marriage

Congratulations! You are planning to be married and begin your life together. Through the ages God continues to bless in marriage those who enter into this covenant with prayer and who live it out in faith. Therefore, to be married in the Church is to recognize God's intentions and blessings for your marriage.

Introduction

The following reflections on Christian Marriage are undertaken to assist Lutherans and Roman Catholics who are preparing for marriage. The Church wishes to deepen your understanding of how Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, blesses and calls you to share together in a new life.

As Lutherans and Catholics, you have both been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Your faith is a gift from God which joins you with God and calls you to a life of discipleship. Furthermore, as Catholic and Lutheran, you are not just individuals, but together you participate in churches with traditions of faith and doctrine; of hope and promise; of love and sacrifice. In Lutheran and Catholic communities you have both been taught to know the unique revelation of Jesus Christ who has proclaimed the Kingdom as a marriage feast. You are now preparing to commit yourselves to one another in love, and to do so before God and in the community of faith. This commitment is one which includes both the affection and fidelity you have for one another and the willingness to undertake a holy calling.

Because of the difficulties that married persons face in contemporary society, and because of the differences in the Lutheran and Catholic traditions, it is important to understand some of the agreements and differences of these traditions. Your common Christian faith will be a resource for the nourishing of your love, for strengthening the commitment of your vows and for providing happiness in your married life. Each of you has been shaped in part by the Church. It is true to say that some aspects of what you find lovable in each other flow from the tradition in which each of you has been nurtured. As Pope John Paul II remarked some years ago when addressing those who live interfaith marriages: "You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path of Christian unity." It is very helpful and important to know your own tradition, as well as that of your future spouse, so that you will be better able to understand one another and the importance of your love and commitment to each other.

Biblical Foundations of Marriage

While it is impossible in this book to give a long history of how marriage has developed and been lived in both our traditions, we can turn to the Bible's teaching about love and marriage. Although Christian teachings concerning marriage have developed over time, there are major themes in the Scriptures that can be considered fundamental to Christians in every age. These can be summarized under three major headings.

God's Will and Blessing

Marriage is revealed in the Bible as willed and blessed by God. It is willed by God for human good and happiness through the physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman. This is set forth in Genesis 2:21-24, where God provides Eve as a companion for Adam; Adam expresses joy in having her as a companion and that joy is fulfilled in their union as one flesh. Marriage is also willed and blessed by God for the continuity of the human race. This theme is evident in the biblical injunction that man and woman are to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) and in those stories such as Genesis 24:1-67. Throughout the Bible marriage is the proper context for having and rearing children.

Marriage is blessed by God in stories about Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28, 5:2) and Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:15-16). In the New Testament Jesus' presence as a guest at the marriage of Cana (John 2:1-11) confirms God's own presence and blessing of marriage. Further, the use of the marriage banquet as a symbol of the final, heavenly gathering of Christ and his people is an expression of God's blessing as well (Matthew 22:2-12; 25: 1-13; Luke 12:35-40; Revelation 19:7-9).

Covenant/Fidelity and Commitment

Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14 present marriage between a man and a woman. A covenant is a bond which requires trust and obligations between the parties involved: it is also publicly known and honored. Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman that is to be held in honor by all. It ranks above other bonds and relationships, including those between a married person and his or her parents. That is implied in the statement of Genesis 2:24, and repeated in the Gospel of Matthew 19:5, that a man shall "Leave" his father and mother and "be joined" to his wife.

Unconditional and Mutual Love

In the ancient world people did not usually marry because of their love for one another. Generally marriage had more to do with economic necessity and the procreation of children. Indeed, love may have come to flourish but it was not a prerequisite for marriage, as we assume it to be today. Therefore a new emphasis was understood regarding marriage when Christian leaders spoke of love, even commanded love, on the part of husband and wife, as in Ephesians 5:25. The love referred to is agape, the quality of love that God has for us—compassionate and constant as is the love Christ has for his Church.

Ephesians 5:21-33 has had a particularly important place in the Church's teaching regarding marriage. Here the love of Christ for his Church is held up as the model of the love that a husband should have for his wife. As Christ gave himself up in sacrificial love and service for the Church, so a husband should love his wife with a love that goes beyond romantic love, a love that is caring and enduring, seeking her good (5:25, 28, 33). It exhorts both husband and wife to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). In a related passage (1 Cor. 11:11-12) the apostle Paul speaks of the mutual interdependence of man and woman in marriage adding that both are finally dependent on God for all that they are and have. That sense of mutuality between husband and wife, and their service to God as the one who has given and sustains all creation, can be a powerful witness to the intent of God for humanity.

In addition to sharing the common Scripture as God's Word for us, Lutherans and Catholics also hold in common other important experiences of faith, belief, religious knowledge and life. We share the common beliefs of the early Creeds which affirm the mystery of the Trinity, and of Christ as fully human and divine. We hold important the worship and praise of God in celebrating the Lord's Day, being faithful in prayer, and being people who witness to the gift of grace. It is also important to acknowledge our need for forgiveness from God and from one another. Because of this we believe that the Christian meaning of human love holds consequences for personal happiness and for life in and for the Church. We now turn our attention to what makes up our common tradition on the understanding of marriage, and differences in the two communities.

The Common Tradition

The similarities in Catholic and Lutheran teaching on marriage are well known. Some are rooted in the more "official" theology of the Lutheran and Catholic traditions and communities; others are based on pastoral practice. In either case, both traditions hold that marriage is a life-long covenant of faithfulness, blessed by God, and from that basis a number of other important things follow.

Catholic and Lutheran teachings affirm that within marriage, husband and wife are committed to love and honor one another, offering mutual support in difficult as well as happy times. Furthermore, the support of God's love is found through participation in the life of the Church and in raising children in the Christian faith.

Particular Lutheran and Catholic Emphases

It is important for you who are preparing for interfaith marriage to know that while many teachings are shared in common, there are some important differences which have implications for the celebration of your marriage in the Church and for your life together.

One of the differences in understanding marriage is deeply connected to those matters which still divide our communities. The Catholic tradition teaches that marriage is a covenant and also a sacrament, while the Lutheran Church holds marriage to be a covenant, but not a sacrament. While Catholic teaching realizes that marriage existed as an institution prior to Christ's founding of the Church, and accepts the validity of marriage in various traditions, it holds that the marriage of two baptized persons has a special role in the building up of the Church. This tradition also holds that marriage imparts a grace which strengthens love, enabling the married couple to imitate and reflect the love of Christ for the Church. Because of the understanding of marriage as a sacrament, the Catholic partner in a marriage promises to share his or her faith through baptism and proper instruction of children in the Catholic understanding of that faith. It is clearly understood that the Lutheran partner is also expected to share faith and instruction of children in the Lutheran tradition. The Catholic promise encourages discussion by both partners about their faith so that each one may strengthen their faith in Christ and the Church.

According to the Lutheran teaching, marriage is understood as a covenant but not a sacrament. The marriage service, called "the rite of marriage," is primarily an occasion in which the commitment to that mutual covenant is celebrated with the hearing of God's word, exchange of vows, the bestowing of God's blessing upon the couple, and prayers for the new husband and wife, and for all married couples. For Lutherans marriage is a gift of God through which human community is founded; husbands and wives are blessed by God so that they can embody God's loving purposes to create and enrich life.

The reason for this difference in our two traditions is because of our understandings of a "sacrament." Catholic teaching holds that a sacrament occurs through signs and rituals which effect a grace from God through the Church. In addition to the common agreement regarding the sacrament of baptism as a means of grace by which one becomes a Christian, the Catholic tradition speaks of the grace of sanctification (of God's assistance in the growth in holiness) which is found in the other sacraments. In Lutheran teaching a sacrament is defined as a rite that has been instituted by Christ, as taught explicitly in the New Testament "in which through earthly means we receive heavenly gifts of grace." These are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Since marriage was instituted by God prior to the time of Christ, and for all men and women, Christian or not, it is not regarded as a sacrament.

A second important difference between Catholic and Lutheran teaching and practice in regard to marriage concerns the remarriage of divorced persons. According to Catholic tradition and following on its understanding of marriage as a sacrament, marriage is a permanent union, and cannot be broken by a civil divorce. Thus a second marriage cannot be celebrated in the Catholic tradition without first having obtained an annulment of the prior marriage. Annulments are given through the marriage tribunals in dioceses. An annulment indicates that the prior marriage did not fulfill the requirements of a sacramental marriage in the Catholic tradition.

Lutheran teaching affirms the life-long intent of marriage; it also recognizes that the marriage covenant is sometimes broken, and that divorce may be justified in some cases. Whether a Lutheran pastor will

conduct a marriage in which one or both parties are divorced is a matter of the pastor's own judgment. In arriving at a judgment, the pastor will consider several matters, such as the following: the intent of marriage to be a life-long commitment of fidelity, how well those who have gone through a divorce have come to terms with their own responsibility for it, whether they have assumed all legal responsibilities incumbent upon them, particularly in regard to the former spouse and children, and the potential for the new marriage. These issues are similar to those addressed by Catholic marriage tribunals.

A third difference concerns the areas of conception, abortion and other responsibilities concerning sexuality. Both traditions teach the fundamental Christian belief that life comes from God, and that husbands and wives are cocreators with God. Both affirm that human sexuality is a gift for the intimate expression of love and for the birth of children. Differences exist regarding teaching about the relationship of love, sexuality and the birth of children. Perhaps the best known difference is the Catholic Church's teaching on the artificial means of birth control.

There has been a rather complicated discussion between Lutherans and Catholics about the meaning of nature, or creation, in relationship to Christian life. Within that discussion the Catholic Church teaches the value and importance of family planning, but it does not accept artificial means for that purpose. Natural Family Planning is an acceptable form of regulating the birth of children because, in the Catholic view, it holds together the integrity of nature, free will and grace. The Catholic concern is to safeguard that integrity in teaching that motherhood and fatherhood are gifts from God which are to be mutually honored, and which call each partner to share these gifts of creation and conscience with full happiness.

According to Lutheran teaching, marriage is the appropriate and God intended place for the conceiving, bearing, and raising of children. However, while procreation is seen as one of God's gifts and intentions for sexual intimacy in marriage, it is also recognized and affirmed that sexual intimacy in marriage is a gift of love and pleasure that need not always have as its purpose the conception of a child. Therefore, Lutherans affirm the right and the responsibility of couples to use a variety of contraceptive methods, including natural family planning.

A final difference that affects marriage is related to eucharistic celebration. In the Lutheran Church the understanding and practice of the eucharist is summarized in "A Statement on Communion Practices."

Holy Communion is the sacramental meal of the new people of God who are called and incorporated into the body of Christ through baptism. Whenever the sacrament is celebrated it should be open to all such people who are present and ready for admission.... The decision regarding readiness should be informed by the following guidelines, which are consistent with our confessions: a) that there be a simple trust that the Crucified and Risen Lord is here truly present, giving himself to his people, as his words declare; b) that there be a basic understanding and appreciation of the gifts God gives through the sacrament; c) that there be an acceptance of one's place as a communicant in the fellowship of believers; and d) that there be self-examination in a manner appropriate to the level of maturity and recognition of the need of forgiveness.

In Catholic tradition "the celebration of a sacrament signifies unity in faith, worship and community life . . . sacraments are also sources of the unity of the Christian community and means for building it." The Catholic Church's teaching about the eucharist is also understood in the context of liturgical worship. Three meanings are considered central to this worship: a) the sacramental celebration is the making present of the sacrifice of the cross. It is not a replacement of that sacrifice and does not add anything to its saving reality. b) It is the memorial of death and resurrection of Christ. c) It is the banquet in which Christ's presence nourishes the Church as it awaits the promise of the Kingdom of God.

At present, the common dialogue continues to search for a way to overcome differences about the meaning of Christ's presence in this celebration and of the sacramental relation of eucharist to the cross as a means of God's redemption.

While it is recommended by some dioceses that marriages be celebrated outside the eucharistic liturgy, the most recent documents also indicate that under certain conditions, the local bishop may extend permission for eucharistic sharing to a non-catholic spouse.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor denominations have been engaged in national dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church for over thirty-five years. Though there is major agreement about the meaning of Holy Communion, there has not been an official joint declaration of eucharistic hospitality. For that reason sharing the eucharist is not yet accepted between our two communities. We pray for that reality to be changed in the future.

These four differences illustrate some of the complexities which exist between Lutheran and Catholic teachings and practice concerning marriage. They explain some of the responses which people of the two traditions have in discussing marriage. To be aware of them is important, even if such awareness does not resolve them. In the meantime, they pose significant and urgent challenges for the ecumenical dialogue of the churches.

II. Preparation for Marriage

What is expected of us as an engaged couple preparing for marriage?

Preparation for marriage provides an opportunity for you to meet with the pastor/priest/deacon to learn more about each other's faith tradition—practices, beliefs, expectations. Together you are encouraged to read, study and reflect on marriage, as well as to pray and to worship together.

Often a premarital written assessment such as "PREPARE" or the Premarital Inventory is available to assist engaged couples in coming to a deeper understanding of each other in many areas of the relationship, such as communication, financial management, family and friends, sexual intimacy, religious faith and realistic expectations. In such an assessment strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged and opened up to further understanding and growth.

Participating in an experience such as Engaged Encounter provides you with the opportunity to discuss important issues that may arise in married life. This is often a weekend experience that includes a number of couples from two faith traditions who are also anticipating marriage. The leaders will bring their own experiences to this setting to help participants address sensitive issues that may challenge a marriage.

Planning the ceremony is also an opportunity for the pastor/priest/deacon or wedding coordinator to meet with you.

Will a previous marriage affect preparation for this marriage?

The pastor/priest/deacon who will officiate at your wedding will want to know about any previous marriage. From a pastoral concern, clergy will want both of you to be certain that the healing process and resolution of a previous marriage has been fully addressed. As has been mentioned before, in the Catholic tradition there is a process of annulment that must be initiated and completed by the individual having a previous marriage, whether that person be Catholic or Lutheran. In some cases, this annulment process may take twelve to fifteen months, so it is important to discuss a previous marriage as soon as possible with the priest or deacon who is helping you prepare for marriage. (cf. p. 7-8)

How will we share our faith with our children?

Remembering that "children learn best by example," both Lutheran and Catholic Churches share the understanding that you, as parents and as baptized Christians, will be the primary religious educators of your children. As the primary educators, it is understood that through the many stages of life, you are responsible for their intellectual, moral and religious life. While this may seem at times to be an overwhelming task to undertake as parents, there are many resources available through the Christian community for growth and support. It will be important for both of you to discuss with your pastor, priest or deacon, "the declaration and promise of the Catholic party" which was explained in Part I, regarding the baptism and education of children.

How do we approach family planning?

As you approach marriage it is important to understand the meaning of human sexuality in your life as husband and wife. The Church can be a support to you in providing the resources, love and help you need in raising a family and in growing toward a fuller expression of a Christian way of life.

We refer you to Part I where the teaching of the two Churches on this question is presented.

III. The Wedding Service

Happy Indeed, Are Those Who Are Invited to the Wedding Feast (Rev. 19.9). The wedding service is an act of worship, and those present are encouraged to participate as fully as possible. It is an opportunity to join together in hearing the Word of God, in offering prayer, praise and thanksgiving, invoking God's blessing. Therefore, as you plan your wedding service, consider how your family and friends may be able to participate in worship that will give glory to God and be an occasion of joy for you.

It is important to remember that the service of worship should be consistent with the respective rites of the Lutheran and Catholic traditions. The ceremony should express your unity as a couple, and should emphasize the Christian faith which you both hold in common! The following guidelines can help you plan a wedding:

- You are encouraged to have at least one joint pastoral session with both clergy or their representatives to review and discuss the Churches' expectations and pastoral responsibilities.
- Anticipate potential difficulties. Demonstrate a respect and concern for parents and others through a willingness to invite them into a discussion about the issues. Create a climate for understanding. The Lutheran-Catholic Study Guides may serve as a resource for you; these are available from your pastor or priest.
- Encourage the participation of clergy from both traditions in your wedding service. This is a powerful ecumenical symbol. The priest or pastor whose church is the location of the ceremony is usually the host and the presider who witnesses the vows. If the ceremony is to be held in a Lutheran Church, the Catholic person is required to obtain a dispensation which should be discussed with his or her priest or deacon. The support of the priest and pastor affords a unique pastoral presence that reinforces positive ecumenical values at a personal and parish level.
- Respect your covenantal and sacramental beliefs as Lutheran and Catholic Christians. From this perspective you will want to consider how your beliefs will be strengthened and enriched in the ceremony. The marriage ceremony can occur within the context of the Liturgy of the Word only, or within the context of the Word and the Eucharist. Both of these ceremonies are appropriate

ways for you to celebrate your unity with God and with each other within the broader Church community.

- Involve your families as:
greeters and ushers
members of the wedding party
Scripture readers
eucharistic
ministers
musicians
- Provide a printed order of worship for your family and guests that will help to create a warm, joyful and prayerful atmosphere. Included in the program could be an expression of gratitude for their friendship and presence, as well as an invitation to enter into the ceremony as fully as possible.
- Your wedding ceremony, because it is an act of worship, acknowledges the presence and blessing of the Triune God. Since music plays a significant role, selections should be musically and textually appropriate so that they will be a contribution in setting the tone for a Christian marriage. Choose readings from Scripture, preferably one from either the Old Testament or the New Testament and a Gospel.
- Secular music, readings and poems are more appropriate at pre-wedding and post-wedding celebrations.
- Familiarity with the facilities and the customs of the local church such as the sound system, the use of video equipment, the use of flash bulbs and the use of rice, seed or petals will serve to avoid unpleasant situations. For most weddings a rehearsal is necessary to insure that all is in order and that each person understands his/her role so that the ceremony can be prayerful and dignified.
- Members of the wedding party must comply with church rules and refrain from the consumption of all alcoholic beverages prior to the rehearsal and the wedding ceremony.

A well planned wedding ceremony can be a powerful catalyst in drawing interfaith families together. It is a public affirmation of the common faith we all hold in Christ. In some cases it can break down the barriers of intolerance and prejudice, and evoke trust, understanding and a growing appreciation of the other faith tradition.

Through careful planning your wedding ceremony can be a gift that will strengthen and celebrate the faith of all present, and be a memory to cherish throughout your married life.

IV. The Reality of Married Life

Several things are vital within a marriage: mutual support, respect and understanding together with shared worship and prayer. These qualities also contribute to a positive relationship with extended family members.

The Reality of Preparing for Marriage

An important question to be considered as you plan for your wedding is: "Are we preparing for the ceremony and celebration only, or are we preparing for our married life together?"

As you envision future years together, more specific questions emerge, such as:

- How will our families understand our need to live life harmoniously within our diverse Christian upbringing?
- How can we become living examples of Christian unity for our families and others?
- How can we as a couple overcome the unknowns involved in Lutheran-Catholic marriages?
- How will we contribute to and seek support from our Churches, families, friends?

Sources of enrichment can be found through conversations with other couples who are already living an interfaith marriage. Occasional retreats may be a means of strengthening faith and love within a marriage. It will be important to take the initiative to seek, or to create, communities which encourage open and respectful conversation about differences in beliefs.

Issues which may generate discussions include:

- Family prayer—Praying together strengthens the family's relationship to God, and is a wonderful opportunity for growth.
- Participating in the two Churches—if both spouses are equally committed to their faith and their tradition, certain challenges may arise, such as:
 - Knowledge of and growth within each tradition.
 - Awareness and further understanding of the other spouse's tradition.
 - Social involvement with each faith community.
 - Respect for both traditions regardless of degree of involvement.

Joint participation in ecumenical services is a good way for sharing Christian life. Many regional services are available. Among them are the annual "Lutheran-Catholic Prayer Service" in the Twin Cities, Thanksgiving Worship Services in various communities, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25) celebrated formally at many churches, as well as Lenten and Holy Week Services.

While you grow in love together through the years, marriage can be both complex and enriching. Patience, communication, acceptance, and respectful humor are essential. Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, and Via de Christo are some programs which are designed to enhance communication and are resources to support interfaith marriages. Pastors and lay ministers will be able to supply further information about these programs.

Other moments of importance in a marriage:

- The birth of children requires important decisions regarding baptism and faith. The common understanding and agreement of the significance and importance of baptism is paramount. By Baptism we are joined to Christ and become members of the Church.
- Growth in religious life will deepen when each one encourages and enriches faith through prayer and weekly worship, education, faith and community involvement.
- Illness, death and other times of loss are occasions when the Churches can provide strength and support for all those involved.

Periodically, it is important to recall both the joy and commitment of your wedding day. As difficulties arise it is important to seek competent advice and encouragement. Likewise it is paramount to search for ways to grow in and sustain a fulfilling married life, and to be aware that sacrifice is needed in every marriage.

As you plan for this important moment in your life, keep in mind that the Church—both Lutheran and Catholic communities — invites God's blessing on your deliberation, your commitments and your hopes.

Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

226 Summit Avenue Saint Paul, MN 55102 (651) 291-4400

communications@archspm.org

<http://www.archspm.org/html/ecumem2.html>