

GROWING *Together*

ECUMENISM IN ACTION

What if ... Romeo is a twenty-five year old farmer working with his father on the family farm and dating his sweetheart Juliet. She's twenty-three and teaches Phys Ed at the local high school. They are deeply in love and decide to get married. But the O'Hara and Schmidt families don't approve. The O'Haras are Roman Catholic and the Schmidts are Lutheran. Their churches have been feuding for centuries. What are Romeo and Juliet to do?

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet ended their lives tragically, but our couple need not lose hope. With the support of their two pastors, they arrange for an ecumenical wedding service in which their Lutheran pastor marries them, and their Roman Catholic pastor offers a blessing. The marriage is registered in both churches. They attend either church on alternate weeks, and participate in Bible studies and other activities in each church as well. When their children are born they decide to baptize them in the Roman Catholic church, with the Lutheran pastor participating, and offering a blessing. Both sets of grandparents, having now accepted this marriage, happily attend the baptisms. The baptisms are registered in both churches.

Nowadays more than two-thirds of couples entering marriage cross denominational barriers. With the prayerful support of their families and churches they can find this experience to be a positive influence on their marriage and on their personal faith. At the Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism, pastoral support for mixed marriages has become a priority in the past few years. For four years, a group of inter-church couples have gathered monthly to share and reflect on their experiences.

Inter-Church Families is a term used to describe the mixed marriage couples and their children who worship regularly in both of their church traditions. These couples and the Centre for Ecumenism believe that their experience is a sign of the unity for which Jesus prayed when he asked "that they all may be one" (Jn 17:21a).

With the support of the Center for Ecumenism and their pastors, Romeo and Juliet can see their differences as treasures which they bring to their marriage. Inter-church couples, such as Romeo and Juliet, are a challenge to the whole church. They will not find solutions to all of their problems, but unlike Shakespeare's couple, they can live happily ever after.

THE SASKATOON CENTRE FOR ECUMENISM

The Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism is a dynamic and creative group of dedicated people working to promote understanding and respect among all faith communities. Working officially on behalf of Presbyterian, Lutheran, Ukrainian Catholic, United, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches, the Centre has been in operation since 1984. Inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation are the keystones of the Centre's ministry. The Centre offers its resources to all of the churches regardless of denomination or sponsorship.

A few of the projects which the Centre is currently working on include a regular gathering of the church leaders from Saskatoon; *Koinonia*, our newsletter; *Pilgrim*, an ecumenical calendar of events; the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; ongoing support for Multi-Faith Saskatoon and Inter-Church Families – Saskatoon; regular workshops and study days for clergy and congregations; publishing of information on the Internet and the World-Wide Web; *Growing Together* (this series of bulletin inserts); local and regional dialogue, particularly the re-established *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in Canada*; and ongoing support for local ministerial associations and other ecumenical initiatives.

If you would like further information about the ecumenical movement, or about the Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism, please contact us at the address below. For information about involvement in ecumenical activities in your community, talk to your pastor or local ecumenical organizations.

The Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism relies on the financial contributions of supporters across Western Canada. If you would like to support our ministry, please contact us. All donations are tax deductible.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.

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