



DIOCESE OF LONDON

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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To: The Priests, Permanent Deacons, and Lay Ecclesial Ministers of the Diocese of London

Dear Co-workers in the Church of London:

Last May, when I met with the priests of the diocese, a question was submitted specifically about the liturgical celebration of a mixed marriage, that is, a marriage where one of the parties is a Catholic and the other a member of another Christian Church or ecclesial community. It seems that some variation in practice with reference to the celebration of the Eucharist at such weddings has arisen recently, leading to confusion among the faithful and creating difficulties for those preparing couples of mixed Christian religion, especially for those pastors who have adhered to the long-stated liturgical recommendation that the Eucharist not be celebrated at a mixed marriage. According to the information I have received, the Eucharist is sometimes celebrated at mixed marriages where the Catholic party practices his/her faith regularly but not at mixed marriages where the Catholic is irregular in his/her practice of faith. Clearly this is not a balanced or objective criteria for what is to be done in the liturgical celebration of such weddings.

While the law of the Church does not explicitly forbid the celebration of the Eucharist at the wedding of a couple of mixed Christian religion, the liturgical norms have consistently recommended that the Eucharist not be celebrated at such weddings. The "Pastoral Notes" in the *Rite of Marriage*, quoting several Canadian sources, state: "Because of the differences in doctrine and sacramental life that exist between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches and [ecclesial] communities of the West, it is generally more opportune that a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic be celebrated without Mass"; and again: "Subsequent to these norms, the Joint Working Group of the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops made a further recommendation that the Eucharist should not be celebrated during a mixed marriage: 'An inter-Church wedding does not include Mass' [...] (see further *Rite of Marriage*, no. 32, page 33).

The reasons for this recommendation are self-evident, namely, that on an occasion when the assembled community gathers to celebrate unity in the marriage of the couple, a sign of disunity will inevitably result if the Eucharist is celebrated and half of the assembly is free to approach the table of the Eucharist and the other is not. Therefore, it is a mark of ecumenical sensitivity and respect if such a moment of division is not deliberately created.

As a general rule, mixed marriages should be celebrated without the Eucharist. Sometimes a celebration of the Eucharist for the couple and the Catholic family prior to the wedding can both express and strengthen the desire for full communion of faith. Yet, a full sharing in the Liturgy of the Word at the wedding itself well expresses the common faith celebrated in the marriage (*Guidelines for Ecumenical and Interfaith Action in Ontario*, 1985, no.97).

Since all the ecumenical guidelines are constant in recommending that the Eucharist not be celebrated at a mixed marriage, *I am directing that in all the parishes and Catholic Communities in the Diocese of London that we adhere to this sound ecumenical and liturgical principle and that the Eucharist not be celebrated at the marriage of a couple of mixed Christian religion.* It goes without saying that the reasons for not celebrating the Eucharist at the marriage of a Catholic with a non-baptized person are even more obvious. There should be no variation in this practice even if the Catholic or the Catholic family insists on the celebration of the Eucharist at the wedding. A careful explanation as to the reasons for this practice should be provided, along with the possible option, noted above, of celebrating the Eucharist for the couple and the Catholic family prior to the wedding.

It is my hope that this directive will not only foster harmony in our pastoral practice in this regard but also serve the cause of promoting a greater understanding and respect among the Christian Churches.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B." with a cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

RPF/bk