



Department of Family and Marriage
Report to the 40th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress

Intermarriage Ministries Update
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA)

Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides, Ph.D., LMFT

Clergy Laity Congress Resolutions in 2008

WHEREAS the Committee reviewed the Resolutions adopted at the 38th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress in 2006 and the progress made in giving practical efficacy to each resolution;

AND being mindful of the attention given to these issues in the Keynote Address of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America during the official opening of this 39th Clergy Laity Congress;

AND in recognition of the magnitude of the undertaking and scope of the work ahead on this issue;

THEREFORE the Committee proposes the following resolutions:

1. That the Department of Marriage and Family create a permanent office for the development of resource materials, compiling of statistical data and for exploring and continuously updating materials upon the wider issue of interfaith marriage as it affects the Greek Orthodox Church in America;
2. That the Finance Committee of the Archdiocesan Council be requested to explore and make recommendations for financing a full time resource director and support staff for such office;
3. That the Eparchial Synod consider dedicating One (1) week every year as "Marriage Week" for the purpose of celebrating Christian Marriage from an Orthodox perspective, and expanding awareness at the parish level of the

challenges facing married couples in the Orthodox Church; and of the opportunities surrounding the issue of the Interfaith Marriage challenge, together with the resources available on the subject.”

Overview of This Ministry’s Work

Orthodox who Marry Non-Christians A new section on the Interfaith Marriage Web site entitled *When Orthodox Marry non-Christians* continues to be developed to address the challenges and issues that Greek Orthodox encounter who either consider marriage to a non-Christian or marry a non-Christian. This subsection of the Web site (a) outlines the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese’s position with regard to Orthodox who marry non-Christians, (b) includes a self-examination questionnaire for dating couples who are considering marriage, and (c) provides a pastoral approach to parents whose adult children are either considering marriage to a non-Christian or have entered into a marriage with a non-Christian.

Parents and Children Inter-Christian and intercultural couples encounter a host of unique parenting challenges related to their children’s religious and spiritual development that single church, single cultural couples do not encounter. As a result, another new section of the Interfaith Marriage Web site continues to be under construction in an effort to address the challenges that intermarried parents encounter across the family life cycle.

Continuing Education Seminar A workshop has been developed to assist clergy and lay leaders minister more effectively to intermarried couples and their families. This workshop seeks to help clergy and lay leaders discern the serious nature of the Interfaith Marriage Challenge. It also advocates for increased, effective outreach to this population of faithful. Twenty useful strategies that clergy and lay leaders can use at the local parish level to help them develop a more effective outreach program to intermarried couples and their families are also highlighted and discussed.

Premarital Education Program Thanks to a grant from Leadership 100 a premarital education program is under construction. This program is designed to enhance or replace existing programs and resources. It is decidedly Orthodox and evidenced based. This three stage initiative is currently being piloted in the Boston Metropolis. A couple workbook entitled, *The Journey of Marriage* is in press and will be available soon. Other deliverables will follow. The following is a succinct overview of this program. Session 1 defines marriage from an Orthodox, Christ-centered perspective. Session 2 introduces couples to a slippery slope that compromises “oneness” and leads couples toward marital meltdown and divorce. Session 3 focuses attention on participants’ family background and how our family of origin influences our understanding of marriage. Session 4 features a 90 item self-evaluation questionnaire that helps couples identify potential problems related to communication, problem solving, finances, parenting, in-

laws, sex, inter-Christian and intercultural challenges, friends, personal time and couple time. Session 5 focuses on the importance of good listening and communication skills from a decidedly Christ-centered perspective. And finally, Session 6 introduces participants to a number of Christ-centered, timeless strategies that can positively enhance, preserve and protect oneness.

Brochure Series A new series of brochures is under construction which adds to the brochures that were released in 2008. The titles included in this new series are as follows:

- Avoid Arguments Related to Your Religious Differences: 10 Strategies
- Where Will our Children be Baptized and Raised: Part I
- Where Will our Children be Baptized and Raised: Part II
- Getting Past Couple Gridlock
- Three Powerful Words: I am Sorry
- Life's Circumstances can make you Bitter or Better
- Praying Together Helps Couples Stay Together
- A Self Evaluation Tool for Engaged Couples From Different Religious and Cultural Backgrounds
- Should we or Shouldn't we Live Together
- The Three Rs: Recognition, Remorse and Repair

Ongoing Work and Information Related to Interfaith Marriages

Interfaith Research Project (2000) Up until recently, evidence based information of the type that could help guide the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA) outreach minister to intermarried couples and their families did not exist. The *Interfaith Marriage Research Project* (IRP) filled this void. This study has provided the GOA with a much clearer picture of the challenges that inter-Christian, intercultural couples face¹. In addition to the information that emerged from this research initiative, I continue to conduct mini-research projects in an effort to update and expand the GOA's understanding of this population's lived experiences and challenges.

Interfaith Marriage Web Site (2001) An Interfaith Marriage Web site has been up and running for nearly a decade. It is one of the leading sites dealing with intermarriage issues on the World Wide Web. This site has proven to be an important source of information for thousands of interested individuals. On the basis of the regular feedback I receive, this Web site has facilitated positive change in the lives of countless intermarried spouses, couples, parents and their families both within the GOA and around the world. A retooled version of this site appeared in the spring of 2010. This site continues to grow and change to meet the increased needs of this population.

¹ For more information about the IRP, please consult Father Charles Joanides or log onto the Interfaith Marriage Web site: www.interfaith.goarch.org.

Confidential E-mail E-mail of a personal nature is received and answered on a regular basis by me. Most of this mail contains pastoral issues of a semi-therapeutic nature. Some of this mail is also concerned with the Orthodox Church's position regarding inter-Church and interfaith marriages. A sizable number of messages have recently concerned themselves with the subject of interreligious marriage. I utilize several consultants to assist me in drafting answers.

A Couples' Resource (2002) A resource for intermarried couples and their families is in its second printing. This work is entitled, *When You Intermarry: A Resource for Inter-Christian, Intercultural Couples, Parents and Families*². It offers intermarried couples the following:

- general information about intermarriage
- descriptions and observations from hundreds of intermarried spouses who participated in the Interfaith Research Project (IRP)
- useful information that will identify some of the unique challenges that intermarried couples face as spouses, couples, and parents
- useful coping strategies that have proven to facilitate marital satisfaction and family well-being in the individual, marital and family lives of hundreds of intermarried spouses
- premarital preparation materials written for couples intending to intermarry
- pastoral guidelines to clarify the Greek Orthodox Church's rules as they apply to intermarried couples

Resource for Clergy and Lay Leaders (2004) A companion manual for clergy and lay workers has been in print since November, 2004. The title of this book is, *Ministering to Intermarried Couples: A Resource for Clergy and Lay Workers*. This book is designed to encourage qualitatively different thinking concerning the intermarriage challenge facing the GOA. In an effort to accomplish this objective, the information in this manual will answer the following questions:

- Why is the Archdiocese concerned with intermarriages?
- On a local level, why should we be concerned with intermarriages?
- What unique challenges do intermarried couples experience over the marital life cycle?

² Joanides, C (2002). *When you intermarry: A resource for Inter-Christian, Intercultural couples, parents and families*. New York, NY: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

- What are the salient social and ecological challenges that intermarried couples face?
- What are some examples of programs and approaches that can be utilized to minister more effectively to intermarried couples and their families?
- What are some suggestions and guidelines that can help clergy during the premarital preparation process with perspective inter-Christian and intercultural couples?

Orthodox Observer Regular submissions on the subject of inter-Christian and intercultural marriage appear in the *Orthodox Observer*. The following articles have appeared in the observer in 2010:

- Avoid Arguments Related to Your Religious Differences: 10 Strategies
- Getting Past Couple Gridlock
- Life's Circumstances can make you Bitter or Better
- The Three Rs: Recognition, Remorse and Repair
- Should We or Shouldn't We Live Together
- Three Powerful Words: I Am Sorry

Articles, Videos, Radio Programs and Interviews Fr. Charles continues to write articles for magazines like *Praxis*. His latest article to appear in *Praxis* was entitled: *Where Will our Children be Baptized and Raised*. He has also been a guest speaker on *Come Receive the Light*; the latest topic he addressed was entitled: *Our Divorce Culture: Challenges and Answers From an Orthodox Perspective*.

Peer Review Journal Articles Fr. Charles has written and published several articles for academic publications and peer review journals related to the subject of intermarried couples and their families. The references appear below.

Joanides, C., Joanning, H., & Keoughan, P. (2000). Toward an understanding of religious people's perceptions and lived experiences of religion and spirituality: Implications for marriage and family therapists. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 3, 79-97.

Patsavos, L., & Joanides, C. (2000). Interchurch marriages: An Orthodox perspective. *International Academy for Marital Spirituality Review*. 2, 215-223.

Patsavos, L., & Joanides, C. (2000). Interchurch marriages: An Orthodox perspective. *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*. 45, 433-442..

Joanides, C., Mayhew, M. & Mamalakis, P. (2002). Investigating inter-Christian and intercultural couples associated with the Greek Orthodox

Archdiocese of America: A qualitative research project. American Journal of Family Therapy, 30, 373-383..

Joanides, C. (2003). A Systematic Conceptualization of Intermarriages In the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. In A. Vrame. *Parish in America: Faithfulness to the Past and Responsibility for the Future.*(pp. 199-208). Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press.

Joanides, C. (2004) Mapping the challenges that intermarried couples encounter. *International Academy for Marital Spirituality Review*. 10, 221-230.

Workshops Fr. Charles conducts daylong workshops. Some of the subjects he addresses are as follows: (a) why marriages succeed or fail, (b) effective communication techniques, (c) what's your arguing style, (d) myths about divorce, (e) attributes of a Christ-centered marriage, (f) how our faith helps our marriage, (g) balancing strategies that work, and (h) intermarried couple and family challenges. He has recently conducted workshops or been a guest speaker in the following locations:

- Metropolis of Boston Metropolis Clergy Laity Conference
- Holy Cross School of Theology
- Atlanta Metropolis

Attending to Your Marriage (2006) Father Charles' third book is entitled, *Attending to Your Marriage: A Resource for Christian Couples*. This self-help book is written for engaged, newlyweds, married and divorced persons and couples. Chapters devoted to the following issues are included in this resource: (1) conflict resolution, (2) communication (3) problem-solving strategies, (4) underlying issues, (5) myths related to divorce, (7) remarriage, (8) finding a professional couples' therapist, (9) spousal abuse and (10) marriage from a Christian and Orthodox perspective.

Goals Over the Next Two Years

Premarital Education Program Time and attention will be devoted toward the completion and dissemination of the premarital education program. Training workshops offered by the co-developer of this program, Philip Mamalakis, Ph.D., LMFT, have already begun and are scheduled to continue over the next two years.

Interfaith Marriage Web site³ The Interfaith Marriage Web site has proven to be a very effective outreach tool. For this reason, the continued improvement of this Web site will remain a priority. For example, a Question and Answer section will soon be added featuring my responses to common questions.

³ The address of the Interfaith Marriage Web site is www.interfaith.goarch.org.

Presentations, Lectures and Workshops Fr. Charles will continue to develop and conduct interfaith marriage workshops and marital enhancement workshops for engaged couples, spouses, parents and clergy across the GOA.

Collaboration with Other Archdiocesan Departments. Fr. Charles plans to continue to work together with other departments and institutions in the Archdiocese. In particular, more collaboration will be cultivated between the Departments of Family Care, Religious Education, Out Reach and Evangelism and Youth and Young Adult Ministries.