

1. The primary reason that motivates these types of couples to marry is their mutual love for each other.
2. Interfaith couples like Bill and Maria also respect their spouse's need to remain connected to his/her religious, ethnic, and family backgrounds. These types of couples would never impose conversion on their partner.
3. Couples like this are also not particularly threatened by their religious and ethnic differences. They tend to believe that they will be able to resolve these differences in much the same way that they will resolve other types of differences.
4. Non-Greek Orthodox spouses like Bill who regularly attend Greek Orthodox churches are torn between their loyalty to their family of origin and its religious traditions, and the needs of their new nuclear family. This internal struggle appears to be one primary reason why these types of spouses either choose to convert or choose to remain non-Orthodox.
5. In time, if the non-Orthodox partner chooses to attend his spouses' Greek Orthodox church, some of these non-Orthodox may be receptive to embracing Greek Orthodoxy as their comfort level and knowledge of the Greek Orthodox faith increases and the needs of their nuclear family change.
6. And finally, by respecting interfaith couples' decision to remain in an interfaith marriage, and by trying to make them feel welcome, this pastoral approach can potentially be more profitable than if we seek to force or manipulate these types of couples into becoming a single-faith Orthodox couple/family.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE

www.Interfaith.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE

www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS

When You Intermarry

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

Ministering to Intermarried Couples

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

Attending to Your Marriage

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM:

Some Practical Steps

Department of Outreach & Evangelism



Why many
**INTERFAITH
 COUPLES**
 do not become
**SINGLE-FAITH
 COUPLES**



Icon by the hand of Athanasios Clark

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

The following interview has been constructed from numerous couples' observations and descriptions, and therefore is not only one couple's opinions. While the two spouses in this short interview are a fictional couple, the contents of this interview are based on actual information.

This short interview will introduce the reader to some of the common challenges faced by interfaith couples when considering whether to remain an interfaith couple or become a single faith couple. It is hoped that this short interview will provide a better understanding of the internal and external tension that many interfaith spouses and couples experience when trying to decide if they will remain an interfaith couple or become a single-faith couple.

Meet Bill and Maria:

Bill (29) and Maria (30) met in 1992 while attending a large university. They dated for one year, and married just after graduation in 1993. Bill is a Lutheran with a German background. Maria, a Greek Orthodox, was born in Greece, and immigrated to this country at an early age with her family. This couple lives in a large Midwestern urban area, and has a four-year-old daughter named Stacey.

According to Bill, the primary and secondary reasons why they determined to get married were, "because we both loved each other, and saw the world in much the same way."

"It was important to me," Maria also points out, "that I marry someone with similar values...." She continues, "...since Bill was raised with Christian family values like my own, I decided that it was okay to begin dating him on a serious basis."

Bill also chimes in and states, "...and I also liked the fact that Maria was from a good, honest, hard working family."

Both spouses also state that during the dating process when they found themselves getting serious about one another, "some minimal conversation took place around their religious and

ethnic differences." They also indicate that they did not perceive these differences in "terribly threatening terms," and felt reasonably confident that they could deal with whatever religious and cultural challenges they might confront just as they would deal with other types of challenges such as money problems or parenting differences, etc.

Looking back on these short premarital conversations, both Maria and Bill state that they agreed to attend Maria's Greek Orthodox Church because they both value "family worship," and because Maria "had a stronger connection to her Greek Orthodox background."

They also indicate that their brief premarital conversations generally underestimated some of the challenges that they would face as a result of their religious and cultural differences. In hindsight, both now feel that "some premarital preparation might have helped." Bill is careful to add the following: "I wouldn't have minded some information from either the priest or one of his assistants, so long as it was given in a respectful manner. Any efforts to convince us that we were making a mistake to marry someone from another religious and ethnic background would have definitely backfired."

Maria also concurs and states, "Conversion has to be heartfelt and can't be forced." She then refers to her priest's approach, Fr. John. "He put us at ease almost immediately. His kind and understanding manner served to help us feel like he was going to be an advocate for us and not someone whom we had to tolerate if we hoped to get married at St. George."

"That's right," stated Bill. "And besides that, Fr. John had a way of respecting our decision, and also letting us know what the rules were without intimidating us."

Bill also talks about the importance that this couple places on "family worship." And then begins to briefly describe his struggle with the idea of conversion. He states that he does not believe that

"Maria would ever consider conversion," and that he has not converted, "out of a respect for my parent's feelings and my own sense of loyalty to my religious tradition." He then continues, "But it has been harder for me over the past few years to remain Lutheran as our daughter continues to grow and ask questions." He wonders if he will remain Lutheran indefinitely as a result of his nuclear family's needs, and from time to time has prayerfully "toyed with the idea of conversion."

Maria has been listening intently, and now discerns that it is her chance to speak. She states, "even though Bill has not converted, I believe that we both belong to the same religion -- Christian." She then pauses to consider her words carefully and continues on a slightly different tangent. "Even though we consider St. George Greek Orthodox Church our primary place of worship, sometimes I feel a profound sadness because we really don't share the Divine Liturgy on the same level. The Liturgy definitely doesn't have the same appeal for Bill that it does for me."

"That's true," Bill states. "What can I say, maybe I'm just a Lutheran at heart... but it is getting easier to follow the services, and I do have a greater attraction to them than I did when we first got married."

Maria offers the last few thoughts on this subject, and states, "but I wouldn't want anyone to get the wrong impression. Yes, it's true that we have our challenges, but we are also generally comfortable with our current interfaith status, and time will tell if we remain this way."

Some Observations

Inter-Christian couples like Bill and Maria look for mates with whom they have as much as possible in common with one another. These types of couples are not apt to marry someone who is from a radically different religious and ethnic background.