

## Pastor's Column

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### A Slice of Family; A Slice of Life

Over Labor Day weekend, I had the opportunity to go to Michigan for the wedding of Jessica who is the daughter of my nephew, David, and his wife, Sue.

I did not preside at the ceremony; rather I was a family member in attendance.

Jessica, recently graduated from College, is Lutheran and Kyle, her husband, is also Lutheran. Therefore, I was not able to preside at the wedding because I can do so only when I am acting on behalf of the Catholic Church. Either the bride or the groom or both would need to be Catholic if I were to preside.

Almost 30 years ago, David and Sue, Jessica's parents, were married in a ceremony at Sue's Lutheran Church. I had the privilege to co-celebrate that service with the Lutheran Pastor. The marriage was and is recognized in both the Catholic and the Lutheran Churches. *(At the time, my mother, David's grandmother, was very upset that her grandson was getting married in a Lutheran Church. She even considered not attending. I had a heart to heart conversation with her before the wedding, and said, "Mom, what is wrong? Why are you upset? It is a Catholic wedding as well. Your son, the priest, will be on the altar. Isn't that good enough for you?" Finally, she broke down and said, "When I was young, my best friend was getting married. She was Lutheran and was getting married in her Church. My priest said that if I attended her wedding, I would go to Hell! I did not attend the wedding." My poor mother carried that with her all her life. Now her son, a priest, was co-celebrating a wedding in a Lutheran Church. She did not know how to process all of that. In the end, my mother attended the wedding and began to broaden her vision of things that was so blinded by that priest of many years ago.)*

At the time of their marriage, David, my nephew and the Catholic, was not as active in our Church as Sue, the Lutheran, was in her Church. After the marriage, as they began to have children, the question, regarding in what Church the children would be baptized, surfaced. Since Sue was much more active in her Church than David in his, it made sense to baptize them in the Lutheran Church. So Jessica and her sister, Chrystie, were baptized and raised in the Lutheran Church. Over the years, David became more and more active in the Church with his family, and David, eventually, became Lutheran. The family was now united "denominationally." They are a wonderfully active Christian family, and I am proud of them. *(Isn't it interesting how we are so happy when someone from a different Christian*

*denomination becomes Catholic, but we seem to be not so happy when it goes in the other direction, even when we see that the person is practicing his/her Christianity in a way he/she never did when they were Catholic? If we are happy when one becomes Catholic and has deepened their commitment to Christ, should we not be happy when they deepen their relationship with Christ in another denomination?)*

Jessica and Kyle were married on the beach, on the shores of Lake Michigan, near Grand Haven. It was an outdoor wedding, the weather was perfect. Everyone was barefoot because of all the beach sand. The non-denominational minister chosen for the occasion was in pink shirt, beige khaki pants, and barefoot, in keeping with all the groomsmen.

Needless to say, running through my mind, was, "Oh man, new age...new age...new age. I hope that God and Jesus will be mentioned, at least once. Please don't let it be a glorification of the bride and groom and how wonderful they are, etc. blah, blah, blah..."

Much to my surprise, all of my prejudice was gratefully destroyed. All through the ceremony, this non-denominational Christian minister spoke of God, of Jesus, of marriage as sacred, of marriage as life-time commitment, and of marriage being the foundation of society and Church. He gave an excellent "Teaching" on marriage that was challenging not only for the bride and groom, but all in attendance.

Everything this Pastor said was Christ-centered and, from our perspective, was very Catholic. I was so happy that I chose to attend the wedding. What that moment helped me to remember is that Catholics and other Christians have very much in common. And if we do not communicate with each other, if we do not rub shoulders together, if we do not treat each other with common respect and dignity, we will never begin to know what we have in common, and we will not know what our differences are. If we do not do this, how can we dialogue about our commonalities and our differences? *(I could have easily chosen not to attend the wedding, especially as a Catholic Priest, citing reasons of denominational differences, etc. So often parishioners will ask me—"Father, my son or my daughter, my grandson or my granddaughter, my cousin, is getting married in a Church that is not Catholic... Am I allowed to attend? Should I attend? Am I setting a bad example for the Catholic Church?)*

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Over the years, I have always advised Parishioners who are invited to weddings in Churches that are other than Catholic to accept the invitation. Make every effort to go! Do not use religion and denominational differences as a reason not to attend. This advice is given especially for parents and grandparents. You need to be there. You need to keep the lines of communication open. You need to work to keep the family together, despite the differences, whatever they may be. ***(Years ago, I had a nephew who was getting married. He is Catholic and the woman he was marrying was Catholic. They chose to be married in a Church other than Catholic. I chose not to attend. I have regretted that decision ever since. In my mind, it has created a wedge between us that still exists to this day. As I have reflected upon this over the years, I often think that what partially motivated that decision was my hurt that I was not asked to celebrate the wedding. For whatever reason, they didn't ask their uncle. My reasons were not so theologically pure. They were very clouded with pride, hurt, and selfishness. Since then, they have had children, baptized them in the Catholic Church and have had their marriage convalidated in the Catholic Church.)***

In December of this year, Jessica's sister, Chrystie, is getting married. She is Lutheran and her fiancé is Catholic. They will be married in the Lutheran Church, in the same Church as her parents, some 30 years ago. I too will be there, and I will co-celebrate with the Lutheran Pastor. Jessica and her husband, Kyle, will be there. And all of our family, Catholics and Lutherans will be there. All Disciples of the Lord Jesus, struggling to be faithful to the Gospel, carrying with us all the burdens that history has placed on our shoulders, will be there. And my mother will be there, from her seat in heaven, smiling and saying, "How good it is for family to be together and to stay as one."

***I share all of this with you, because I know that my family is no different than your family. It is the world in which we live.***

***I hope that this sharing helps you to formulate the decisions you need to make when similar situations arise.***

***My challenge and encouragement to you is:***

***"Always keep the lines of communication open. Be present. Be open. Be vulnerable. Trust God. Don't make religion a wall that keeps people apart, let it be a bridge that brings people together!"***

***Do not allow religion to be a wall that keeps family apart.  
Let it be a bridge that brings family together."***

*F. Mike*