

## *United by love*

***Gayle and Marcel DeGagné accompany couples preparing for marriage, for the Archdiocese of St. Boniface. Their expertise? How to enrich married life when the spouses are of a different Christian denomination.***



*By Daniel Bahaud, Communications Coordinator at the Archdiocese of St. Boniface*

**For Gayle and Marcel DeGagné, it all started when both were archivists for the Sisters of Our Lady of Missions...**

**Gayle DeGagné:** The nuns served as matchmakers! It was evident we were kindred spirits. In a short time, it was also obvious that we came from two different Christian

traditions. My family is Anglican, and for four generations we have been parishioners at Old St. Andrew's Church, in St. Andrews, Manitoba.

**Marcel DeGagné:** I was born and raised in St. Boniface. I was baptized at Precious Blood church. Before I met Gayle, I didn't know anything about the Anglican church. Her tradition wasn't a part of my little Catholic world. Gayle opened my eyes. When we were dating, I visited her parish several times. I wanted to better understand.

The more I learned, the more I understood that our churches have many similarities. High Anglicanism is very sacramental. Its Eucharistic liturgies are very similar to the Roman Catholic Mass.

**G. D:** Of course, there is a more "evangelical" Anglicanism, which is less liturgical and has a more Protestant aspect. The Methodist churches and the Salvation Army sprang from evangelical Anglicanism. Old St. Andrew's is a more traditional church. During our services, we read the same biblical texts on the same days as Catholics.

**M. D:** I love it. Gayle and I can pray and meditate on the same texts together all year long, following our common liturgical calendar. It's something that helps us be united in our prayer life.

**G. D:** The big difference is communion. Anglicans have an "open table." Anglicans believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in a mysterious way that is perceived through faith. So, any baptized person can partake, regardless of their Christian tradition. For the Catholic, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is considered an objective reality. Christ is present in the Eucharist – body, blood, soul and divinity. That presence doesn't depend on the faith of the communicant, but on the priest who performs a priestly sacramental function.

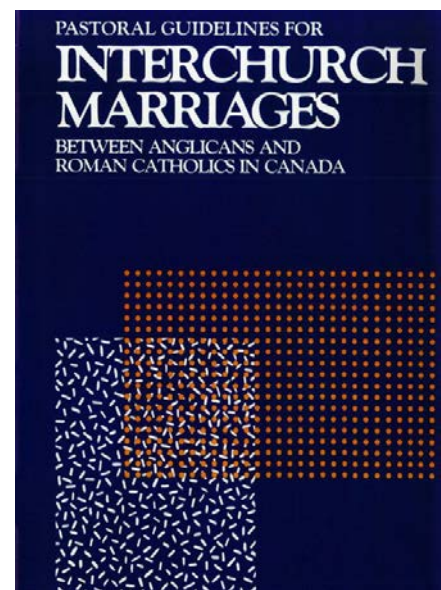
**M. D.** And that is why the Catholic Church does not recognize Anglican communion. This does not prevent me from attending Anglican services, or Gayle from attending a Catholic Mass. Though some aspects of our worship are different, we always remind each other that despite the very real differences, we are Christians. Our Lord is Jesus Christ. And Jesus himself said, “*Where two or three are assembled in my name, I am in the midst of them.*” (Matthew 18:20). That’s not just a beautiful thought, but a truth that can sustain an inter-church couple when things get challenging.

**On October 9, 2010, Gayle and Marcel DeGagné were married at Old St. Andrew's Church...**

**Gayle DeGagné:** Two Anglican priests, Stephen Sharman and Kenn Garrity were in attendance. Father Marcel Damphousse, who at the time was pastor of St. Boniface Cathedral Parish, was also there and to convalidate our marriage in the Catholic Church. The celebration was the result of a long preparation, punctuated by prayer and discernment.

**Marcel DeGagné:** Reverend Sharman gave us a book on inter-church marriage prepared by the Anglican Church. We found it to be an excellent resource. We also took the wedding preparation course offered by the Archdiocese of St. Boniface.

That was useful, but there was no mention of inter-church or even interreligious marriage. This lack of resources gave rise to our desire to offer new material specifically addressing the question of inter-church marriage to engaged couples, such as *For Better for Worse for Inter-church families*, which is a great manual. The Catholic



Church also has pastoral guideline for inter-church marriages, and even specific ones for Anglican/Catholic couples. And, of course, we also wanted to meet and discuss with couples in order to offer them the benefit of our experience.

So, we got the necessary training from the Marriage, Family and Life ministry at the Archdiocese of St. Boniface... and here we are!

**G. D:** Our message is simple. Inter-church marriages can be some of the most successful and solid ones. Sometimes, that kind of marriage can be a challenge. But any spouse who lives his or her faith in a sincere and committed way will be able to benefit from it.

**M. D:** The key is maturity. In 2010, I was 43, and Gayle 36. We already knew the ups and downs of life. And we knew our own personalities.

**G. D:** Father Marcel Damphousse was more concerned that we would have to overcome the habits we had created for ourselves as singles!

**M. D.:** Maturity requires a couple to ask difficult questions. What are your common religious values? How do they differ? You are a Baptist and your spouse is Catholic. What are you going to do when you have children? Here's another scenario: what if you want your child baptized while your wife is an atheist? Love is beautiful, but feelings are not the answer to everything. It is essential to discuss as soon you're engaged. Hopefully even before. You have to discuss and discuss some more, and you have to pray and keep praying.

**G. D.** Maturity means realizing that people change. Obviously, our material and our life experience can help couples who already take their faith seriously. But they can also help couples where one or both are not too seriously committed to their faith. What can happen

in those cases is that as one or both mature, faith takes on a more important dimension. That often happens when children enter the picture. So, a couple has to prepare for that eventuality, so as not to be caught by surprise.

**M. D.** Relationships are always in flux. So, we can also be of service to couples who have been married for quite some time. Gayle and I often had to muddle our way through because we had no one to talk to. No one was there. And that can be tough. Because it's not just you and your spouse. Others can cause difficulties. There is a lot of judgment out there. Family members, pastors and priests can take a hard line. That can take a toll on a couple.

**G. D.** Maturity also means that not everything will be resolved quickly. Answers and solutions take time. I had discussions with Father Marcel for a year and a half before I even had answers to some of my questions. I'm grateful to him. That is why I hope that all engaged couples can have the kind of accompaniment we can offer while they prepare for marriage. Before Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church pretty much advocated for the conversion of the non-Catholic spouse. We do not want to see people abandon their tradition or make so many compromises that they feel they are living out a mushy relationship with God and that they've lost something. We want them to obtain the tools necessary to make their marriage a sign of mutual elevation and a testimony of faith for all Christians.

*For more information, contact the ministry of Marriage, Family and Life at the Archdiocese of St. Boniface at 204-237-9851.*