



Two Churches, One Marriage



Research

The **Two Churches, One Marriage** program is informed by recent research on interchurch couples conducted by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. An interdisciplinary team of professionals with backgrounds in theology, psychology, pastoral counseling, marriage and family therapy, counseling, and sociology conducted the research. Consultants from various denominations and religious organizations were also actively involved and provided valuable input into the research.

As part of the research, engaged and married couples were interviewed about the challenges and rewards of being in an interchurch relationship. These interviews were also helpful in identifying different strategies that interchurch couples used to deal with the various challenges. As much as possible, comments and quotes from these interviews are included throughout to bring alive the actual experiences of interchurch couples. (Their names have been changed to protect their identity.)

The Center for Marriage and Family also conducted a national survey to see how interchurch and same-church individuals were similar or different on a number of different dimensions. This study compared interchurch and same-church individuals on a wide range of religious and marital variables, and provided insight into what factors contribute to interchurch couples having a happier and more enduring marriage.

Since the research by the Center for Marriage and Family focused only on individuals who belonged to different Christian churches or denominations, is intended primarily for this type of couple. The term “interchurch” was adopted rather than “interfaith” as a means of distinguishing interchurch couples from those who belong to different religions (e.g., Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim couples, etc.). Although many of the program concepts will be applicable to couples of different religions, the research did not specifically examine these types of relationships. Further research in this area is clearly warranted. It is unclear, for example, if couples of different religions face unique challenges in comparison to interchurch couples who have different denominational affiliations, but share a common Christian faith.

The following publications summarize the research on interchurch couples conducted by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University.

Williams, L. M., & Lawler, M. G. (2003). Religious heterogamy and marital satisfaction: A comparison of interchurch and same-church individuals. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 1070-1092.



Two Churches, One Marriage

Williams, L. M. (2002). Premarital counseling with interchurch couples: Clinical implications from recent research. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 1 (1), 45-64.

Williams, L. M., & Lawler, M. G. (2001). Religious heterogamy and religiosity: A comparison of interchurch and same-church individuals. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, 465-478.

Williams, L. M., & Lawler, M. G. (2000). The challenges and rewards of being an interchurch couple. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 19, 205-217.

Lawler, M. G., Risch, G., & Riley, L. A. (1999). Church experience of interchurch and same-church couples. *Family Ministry*, 13, 36-46.

Center for Marriage and Family (1999). *Ministry to interchurch marriages: A national study*. Omaha, NE: Creighton University.*

Williams, L. M., & Lawler, M. G. (1998). Interchurch couples: The issue of acceptance. *Pastoral Psychology*, 47(1), 33-47.

* Copies of this report can be ordered through the website or by mail at:

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