

Blessings: Interfaith prayers for a new baby

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 3, 2006](#) issue

One of the messages my church sent me when I was an adolescent was: Don't date Catholic girls; you never know where it might lead. When a cousin of mine not only dated but married a Roman Catholic, the aunts had apoplexy. Church practice in those days made "mixed marriage" extremely difficult. A wedding involving a Protestant minister and a Roman Catholic priest was unheard of. The first time I was invited to be part of a wedding in a Catholic church (by an uncomfortable priest who was under unrelenting pressure from the Presbyterian bride) I was told to sit in a pew for the ceremony. After it concluded, I was invited to stand up and offer a prayer.

Happily, much has changed on the ecumenical front. It is common for Protestant ministers and Catholic priests to preside at weddings together. It is not unusual for something like ecumenical baptisms to happen. I foresee a day when families with divided loyalties will find a way to belong comfortably to both faith communities.

An even more strenuous challenge recently presented itself. My congregation includes several Jewish-Christian families who participate in the life of both church and synagogue—which takes most of the weekend. One couple who had agreed that their children would be raised Jewish recently asked if we could do a "blessing" for their child. They knew that baptism was not possible. But couldn't we do something publicly and liturgically to acknowledge this newborn infant whose mother's relationship to our church was very precious to her?

I searched in the Book of Order for any help on what to do. I talked with my colleagues. My parishioner gently persisted. It would mean a lot to both of us, she said.

So during worship on a Sunday morning last summer, I met Marc and Regan in front of the sanctuary, which included several pews-full of baby Skyler's Jewish relatives. We had prepared a brief and simple liturgy. I began by saying that every child is a

reminder of God's goodness and mercy and that every birth is an occasion to give God thanks. I asked the parents to promise to raise their child in our shared tradition, our commitment to peace and our common intent to love God and our neighbor.

I asked those assembled if they would promise to include Marc, Regan and Skyler in their prayers for all the families of our congregation. In prayer, we thanked God for baby Skyler, asked God to keep her and to bless and strengthen her parents, and to keep and bless all of us.

I'm still not sure where that fits in anyone's ecclesiology, liturgy or Book of Order. But it was a good moment.