

Interfaith Marriages Reflect Ecumenical Spirit

By Susan Heybrock
NU School of Journalism

In a far more subtle way than talks of mergers and pulpit exchanges, the members of churches are showing their own ecumenical spirit by the increased numbers of interfaith and interdenominational marriages.

While the official position of most churches on mixed marriages remains a solid "no," leadership toward the "we can work it out" feeling found in such marriages is clearly traced to the ecumenism of the church.

Faced with statistics and other less documented measures, clergymen point to Catholic priests who are becoming more willing to officiate at interfaith marriages and to better understanding of the person-religion relationship as two results of the ecumenical movement which have led to more interfaith marriages.

Dr. Raleigh J. Peterson is one of the many clergymen who recognizes this trend.

As director of the Nebraska School of Religion, he has noticed more publications appearing on the subject and steady increases in the enrollment of the denominations class offered at the school.

Deeper Reasons

While Dr. Peterson agreed that this might indicate just increased interest, he thought there were deeper reasons. The figures presented by the Rev. Raymond Hain, director at St. Thomas Quinas, seem to bear out Dr. Peterson's suspicions.

Father Hain said that although the percentage was less in 1967, 70 percent of the marriages at St. Thomas during the previous year involved a non-Catholic. Comparatively, about ten years ago in Nebraska, the figure was about 50 percent.

Father Hain thought the "spirit of ecumenism" is the for the rise, but other answers were suggested by his fellow church leaders.

Both Rev. Alvin Peterson, Lutheran Student Center, and Dr. Alan Pickering, United Ministries in Higher Education, traced the increase to more mobility in society. Dr. Pickering said that one factor was the increased number of persons in college where they make a larger number of contacts.

Better understanding is responsible for more interfaith marriages according to the Rev. Ronald L. Wiley, Episcopalian minister at St. Marks on the Campus. He explained that young people have adopted "take them as they are" as their motto, rather than the "come along my way" of a few years ago.

In the Episcopal church, a marriage may take place as long as one of the persons is a baptized Episcopalian.

"An interdenominational marriage can be successful," Rev. Wiley emphasized. "It is the understanding of the other's faith, not emphasis on the differences between faiths that is important." He concluded that the rise in interdenominational marriages "proves that exclusive claims of a particular denomination

are not necessarily valid."

Many Factors

Most clergymen agreed with Rev. Wiley that interdenominational marriages have a greater chance to succeed than when the individuals are of completely different faiths. When two faiths are involved, Dr. Pickering said that the individuals are faced with psychological and sociological factors, not just those involving religion because the person is generally relating to someone with a different emotional background.

Problems in mixed marriages are often cultural problems. This seems to be true in Judaism, for example, where religion and culture are so close that they are hard to separate.

A young woman from a traditional Jewish home explained the factors that she is considering with her fiancé, who has a protestant background.

"Ours is a cultural problem," she explained. "My parents have always dreamed that I would have a synagogue wedding, so they disapprove of the marriage."

She didn't anticipate a religious conflict between herself and her future husband. They both attend the Unitarian church.

"We do not see a difference. We are both basically humanistic with a touch of agnostic," she said.

Concerning children, she said she expects a few questions when the children go to their Christian grandparents for Easter and to their Jewish grandparents for Passover.

"We plan to raise our children so we as parents will be happy," she said. "It might be confusing to them, but it can be explained. If we present both religions without emotional tension, then I think the children will be flexible enough to grow up accepting both."

Education

Father Hain indicated that one of the reasons for the Catholic agreement about the education of the children is to force young people to confront his problem before marriage. The agreement has recently been changed to place the responsibility upon the Catholic rather than the non-Catholic party.

Now the statement can be verbally acknowledged and requires that the non-Catholic party recognize that it is a matter of conscience that the Catholic party have his children raised in the Catholic church. Previously the non-Catholic had to sign a statement that the children would be educated in the Catholic church.

Birth control is another aspect which Rev. Hain continuously encountered.

"All I can do is clear the air and let them do what they want as they are guided by conscience," he said.

When asked about interfaith marriages, "It doesn't work," was the first reaction of Jan Hodges, one of 13 Ba'hais in Lincoln. She indicated that most Ba'hais are so active to their faith that mixed marriages usually end in divorce unless one of the individuals converts.

Statistically, divorce is more frequent in mixed marriages than when the couple shares the same religious beliefs. This is part of the reasoning for pre-marriage counseling programs offered by many churches.

Counseling

The emphasis on counseling generally varies from congregation to congregation within denominations. The Rev. A. J. Norden of University Lutheran Chapel said that his goal in counseling a couple is that they achieve spiritual unity.

"It is difficult to agree, but if there is no spiritual union, the subject of religion is often not discussed and religion does not become an integral part of daily life."

Nearly every congregation has a doctrine class, but some also employ professional marriage counselors.

St. Thomas Aquinas has a pre-Cana series set up by the

Family Life Bureau of the Diocese in Lincoln. About 250 couples attend the sessions during the four times they are repeated each year. Four, two-hour programs are presented by medical doctors, businessmen, insurance personnel and married couples.

Besides professional counseling, the individual person in an interfaith or interdenominational marriage has some responsibilities.

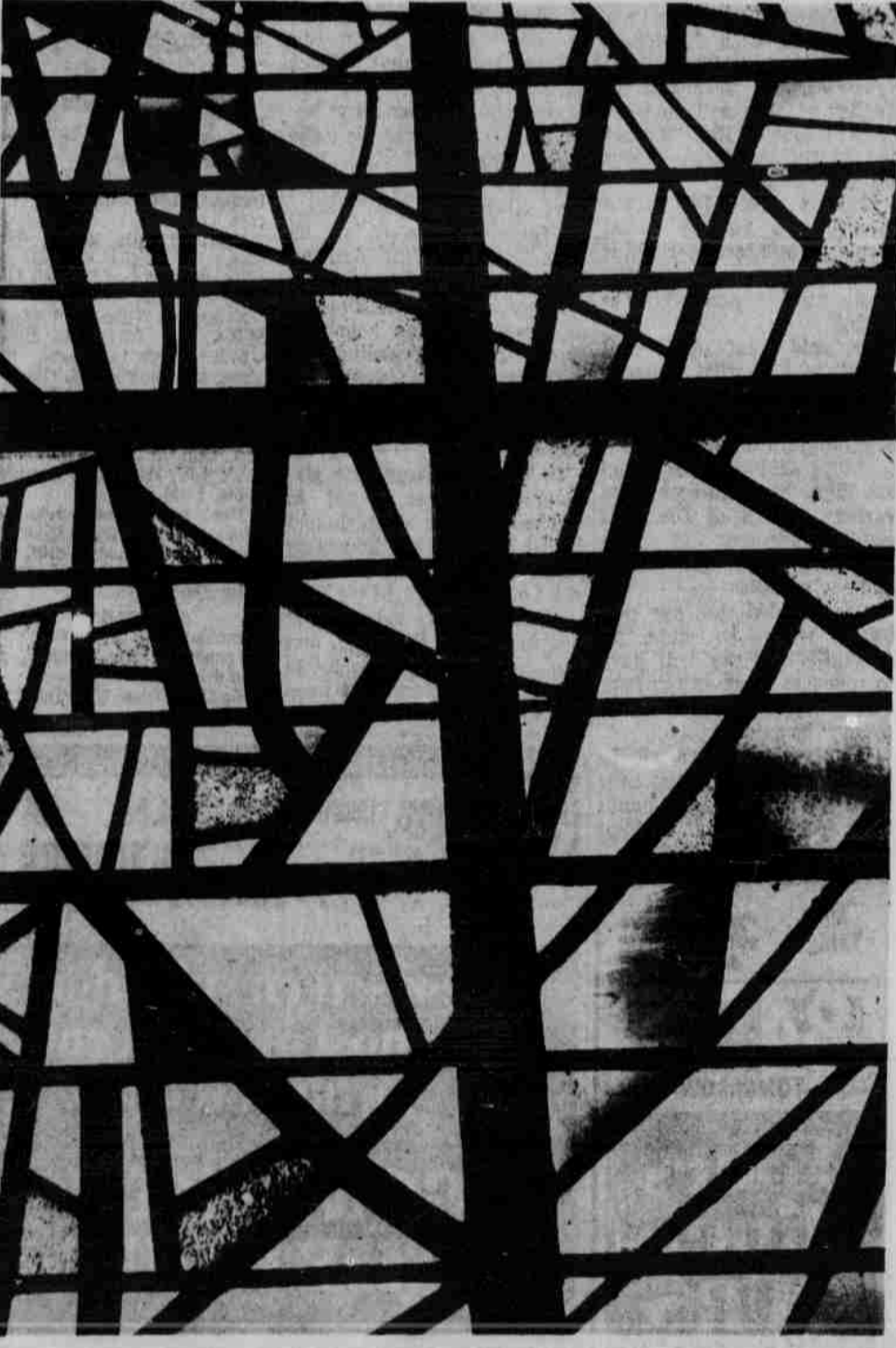
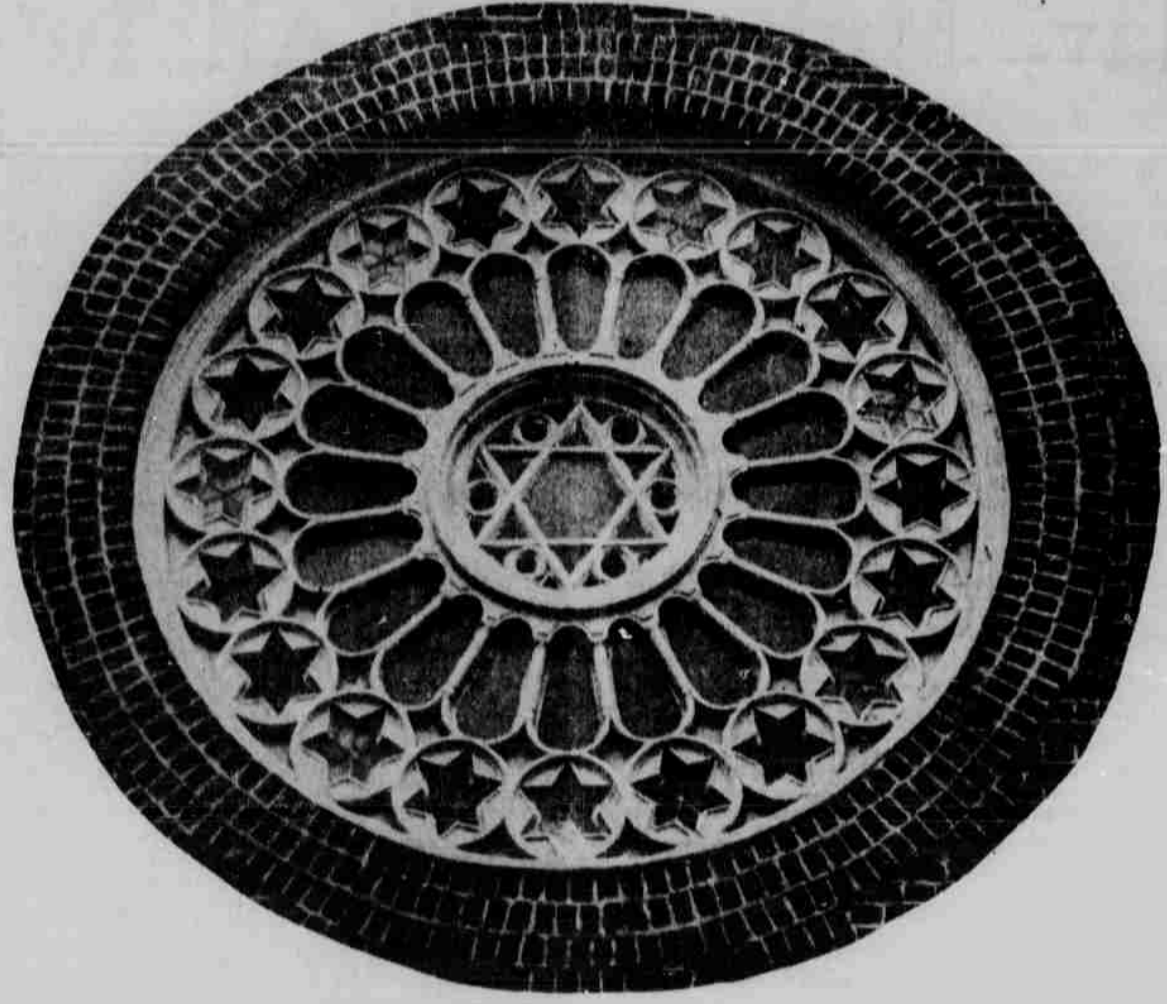
Rabbi Sanford Ragins of the South Street Temple Congregation, believes that "marriage is the function of the maturity of the people who enter into it." He compared the preparation for marriage to buying charts for navigating a boat. "It tells you where the reefs are and

background, heritage, training and personal convictions."

"Acceptance of the other as a person is the big thing," Rev. Hain commented. "Marriages don't go wrong because of religious differences. It's because they haven't accepted each other as persons — including the person's particular

background, heritage, training and personal convictions."

"There is something that Catholics can learn from other religions and the same for them, if we would only share our insights," he said. "If we could only talk about religion like our favorite authors."



Play May Be Presented Immediately This Fall

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The system offers many advantages in many areas.

First, from an actor's standpoint: An actor may change a role three times in the course of a week.

"He will have a tremendous experience," Williams said. "He may have three comic roles, but each will be different. He will have different rhythm, timing and movement patterns. He is forced to change his speech and dialect patterns constantly within a week. A piano player can't learn his craft by

playing one piece of music all of the time; neither can an actor. The repertory allows an actor to do a lot of different things.

Second, from an audience's viewpoint: The audience can see three plays instead of just one, and then make some sort of judgment on the plays and the actors.

"Plus it will be much more culturally enriching for the playgoer to see three plays instead of just one," he added.

Third, from a standpoint of economics: If a play is done four or five times in a row, then finished, followed by another run of yet another play, the cost of building and maintaining sets is much higher. In repertory, many parts of a set, or of costumes and props can be utilized in many plays, thus reducing the cost.

Also, repertory allows more flexibility in scheduling so many more people can see all of the plays.

"But the greatest advantage of repertory is that a play is established," Williams said. "When a company of actors has given a play over a period of time, ten that play could be put in mothballs, so to speak, and brought back again at a later date."

That is precisely what the NU Theatre hopes to do with "Serjeant Musgrave's Dance," one of the three plays in the summer season, opening July 14.

Since most of the cast will be back in the fall, Williams said it is quite possible that the University Theatre will have a production ready for the opening week of school, and thus give better promotion for the upcoming season of drama.

And Williams has greater visions for the repertory in Nebraska.

He is predicting a traveling repertory company comprised of at least 20 drama students from college all over the state which could present productions in many of Nebraska's college towns and other cities. The company would consist

of graduate students, earning credit while performing on the road over a period of about two months.

"This could be an extremely popular and feasible endeavor," Williams said. "It is part of the future of theatre in the state of Nebraska."

He said that this program would be an outgrowth of a public awareness in the fine arts — of music, painting, theatre, the film.

"People are not going to be attracted to amateurism. If they want to appreciate culture they will want only the best that can be brought. They will soon begin to demand the best there is."

"I repeat, I think the hope of the American theatre, and of fine arts in general, rest with the academic community," Williams concluded.

Today's Nebraskan

Last Session

Today's issue of the Summer Nebraskan is the last issue of the first session of the University of Nebraska summer term.

Publication will resume July 23 with a six-page issue. Two more papers follow: July 30 and Aug. 13.

Students and faculty are reminded to submit articles for publication at 319 Nebraska Hall, or call 472-2590 for any information regarding possible publication.

Women's Swimming

Each afternoon from 2:30 women faculty may participate in recreational swimming in the Coliseum Pool. There is a 10c fee. Tofels and suits are provided but each swimmer is asked to bring her own swimming cap.

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Fine Arts

Schedule

The schedule for various forms of entertainment on campus during the next two weeks is:

"Midsummer Night's Dream" — 1935 film adaptation of the Shakespearean play by the noted German director Max Reinhardt. Tuesday, July 9, 7:30 p.m., Sheldon Auditorium.

"The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell," Union film, Thursday, July 11, 7:00 p.m., Union auditorium.

"Romeo and Juliet" — 1953 film production starring Lawrence Harvey and Susan Shental Tuesday, July 16, 7:30 p.m., Sheldon.

"Newport Jazz Festival All-Star Quintet" — Union Artist Series, Wednesday, July 17, west lawn of Sheldon.

On Being Jarred to Reality by a Train Whistle
 Why do you intrude, shrill whistle on the move?
 How dare you to impose upon this academic serenity
 And peace of life—removed; Removed from troubles
 And from cares—Gone to my small and peaceful world.
 By virtue of whose authority do you interrupt blind chastity;
 The chastity of lethargy—which is the chastity of men?

Stay away you worldly horn, with your anxieties;
 For I am contented here and now, without your ugly din.
 Poet; My voice does beckon you—call you to your arms.
 I command you now, take up your pen and let the world,
 The world of nothingness, know the stupor that it's in.
 Tell it this, and tell it now, before all time is past:
 The chalice of fear is empty and cold
 To live or to die, man must be bold.

—David A. Domina

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