



# NEWS

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FROM: William Ryan

O 202-541-3200

H 202-686-1824

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **METHODISTS, CATHOLICS EXPLORE FRUITFUL DIALOGUE**

WASHINGTON--Nearly three decades of dialogue which has taken place between United Methodists and Roman Catholics, both in this country and throughout the world, were reviewed at a recent meeting of representatives of both Churches.

The meeting in New York February 23 was chaired by Catholic Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane and Methodist Bishop William Boyd Grove of the Albany area.

The meeting focused on the results of five international dialogues, sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Methodist Council, and four U.S. dialogues between the two Churches. The findings were summarized by Dr. Steven Russalesi, a United Methodist, and Father George Tavard. There was also a survey of the ecumenical programs of the Churches today and a discussion of how best to enhance the next stages of what participants call the pilgrimage toward visible unity.

Four general proposals were made to the sponsoring bodies: 1) that an ongoing, regular relationship between these two Churches be maintained, given their unique demography, commitments and the fruitfulness of previous dialogues; 2) that a focus on local parish relationships be maintained; 3) that historical and biblical bases be clear in any material produced; and 4) that continuing differences be explicitly acknowledged.

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Participants recommended that a bilateral dialogue be continued and that a mechanism be devised for regular communication between the two Churches. Participants also saw the need for a survey of the Churches' ecumenical leadership to assist in determining the content, audience and style of the next dialogue.

The Roman Catholic and United Methodist churches represent the largest and most evenly distributed U.S. Churches committed to the ecumenical movement. They both have a Church with bishops and structures of mutual accountability that make worldwide fidelity and interdependence central to their understanding of the Gospel.

Participants expressed the view that the United States provides a unique place where Catholic-Methodist relationships take on an enhanced significance. In local councils and ministerial associations around the country, Methodists and Catholics are almost always present, often with similar numbers and concerns.

Participants agreed that dialogues since the Second Vatican Council have shown a significant area of common faith, spirituality and pastoral practice. The dialogues in the United States have covered such areas as pastoral and ethical concerns touching the end of life; the Eucharist; holiness and spirituality of the ordained ministry; and education in society. The international dialogues have covered such topics as marriage and family life; the nature of the Church and authority; common witness in the world and mission; the Eucharist and sacraments; and the Apostolic Tradition.

The international dialogue is chaired by Bishops James Malone of Youngstown and Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright of Duke University.

Following the evaluation and planning meeting, the United Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogue issued a set of proposals which will be made to the General Commission on Christian and Interreligious Concerns and the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. This is the text of the proposals:

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-Given the unique character of the Roman Catholic and United Methodist Churches in the United States context and the fruits of earlier conversations, we propose an ongoing and direct relationship between our two Churches.

-This relationship will have a manifestation and fruitfulness at the local level in congregations and parishes.

-The United Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogues in the United States will adopt a deliberately and thoroughly biblical approach in future statements. Explicit reference will also be made to the historical traditions of each Church. Arguments for whatever position is taken will be supported by this biblical and historical material.

-Continuing differences not only between the traditions but also within the Churches themselves will be acknowledged and confronted. This will enable the appreciation of consensus where it is reached.

Specific proposals for implementation:

1) A bilateral dialogue will be taken up with a topic and focus to be determined after further consultation.

2) A system will be developed for the ongoing relationship for regular contact.

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