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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNITED METHODIST-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE GROUP WORKS ON STUDY TO ASSIST LOCAL PARISHES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DIALOGUES

WASHINGTON--The third session of the fifth round of the United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue met at the College of Preachers here, October 3-5. The goal of the Dialogue is to produce a congregation-oriented study to assist Catholics and Methodists in local parishes participate in the thirty years of dialogues between these two churches. A further goal is to help them understand the theological implications of agreements which the two churches have reached on issues of faith, morals and the sacraments.

Under the leadership of the two co-chairs, Bishop William J. Skylstad of Spokane and United Methodist Bishop William Boyd Grove, the group reviewed papers on the Spirituality of Dialogue and on the Eucharist. These two papers were studied in the context of the five international and four U.S. Methodist-Catholic dialogues, the agreements reached in the World Council of Churches' *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the encyclical on ecumenism *Ut Unum Sint*. A presentation was given on the common ecumenical scholarship which has produced the United Methodist eucharistic prayers and those included in the *Missal* of Pope Paul VI. There was agreement that, although the prayers themselves are virtually the same, based on the liturgical scholarship of the twentieth century, people need a better understanding of the content of the eucharistic faith, the points on which the churches agree in faith, and those areas of disagreement which have begun to be resolved in the ecumenical movement.

There was also extended discussion of the common spiritual conversion necessary if Christians within the United Methodist and Roman Catholic churches are to become committed to more

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the goal of visible unity espoused by each of these churches, and to the process of dialogue, prayer and study which will be necessary to respond to agreements already achieved.

As has been the custom in the past, there were two Eucharists at the meeting, Methodists receiving at the Methodist Lord's Supper, Catholics receiving at the Catholic Mass, with those not taking the bread and wine receiving a blessing from the celebrant. There was extended discussion about the different practices of the two traditions. Methodists have what has been termed an open communion, seeing the Eucharist as a *converting* sacrament building up the sinner and healing the Body of Christ. Catholics, on the other hand, ordinarily recognize Eucharistic communion as a sign of unity achieved, and therefore generally not appropriate when churches are divided. After much discussion, it was decided that this practice of the Dialogue was too painful for some participants, and would not be continued at the next meeting. That meeting, which will take place in February, will feature a renewal of Baptism and a noneucharistic meal and prayer service.

Planning for the future included work on ecclesiology, the structures of authority, and the papacy. The invitation of Pope John Paul in the encyclical for advice on ways the office of the papacy can better serve unity has been responded to positively by the United Methodists. The purpose of this discussion will be to focus ways of assisting local congregations to enter this dialogue, to determine how the view of the papacy among United Methodists has changed, and what Roman Catholics can glean from the authority structure of the United Methodist Church.

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