



# NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ROMAN CATHOLIC/ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES MAKE PLANS FOR CONSULTATION

NEW YORK--Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Armenian Churches in the U.S. has been expanded to include all branches of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in this country. Formation of the new dialogue group--the Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation (U.S.A.)-- was announced after a meeting at the headquarters of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.

The planning meeting was chaired jointly by the Right Reverend Bishop Papken Varjabedian, the Primate's Legate and Auxiliary Bishop J. Francis Stafford of Baltimore, representing the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB).

At the meeting dates were set for the first two discussion meetings in May and December of this year, and topics for the agenda were adopted. The May meeting will be devoted to a joint presentation on the purposes and methodology of the ecumenical consultation, and to a presentation on the history of the Oriental Orthodox Church communities given by representatives of those Churches.

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## 2/Consultation

The Roman Catholic and Armenian Churches have been planning a dialogue since 1976. But the meeting in New York was the first one at which the other Churches in the Oriental Orthodox communities were also present. The Oriental Orthodox Churches which will be members of the Consultation are the Armenian Apostolic, ~~Assyrian~~<sup>Syrian</sup>, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Indian Malabar Orthodox.

Participants in the meeting here were Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Archbishop Samuel of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Father Karekin Kasparian, pastor of the Armenian Church of Westchester, Crestwood, N.Y., Father Michael Buttero, Father K.M. Simon of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India in America, Ridgefield, N.J., Father Gabriel Duffy of Washington, Father John Hotchkin and Father J. Peter Sheehan of the NCCB Secretariat, Father Edward Kilmartin, S.J., Father Robert Taft, S.J., and Professor Thomas E. Bird of Queens College in New York. William Cardinal Baum of Washington also attended the meeting as the guest of Archbishop Manoogian.

In welcoming remarks at the meeting, Archbishop Manoogian emphasized that the deliberations which will take place in the Consultation should be seen as contributing to the larger, ongoing ecumenical dialogue in history and theology. Although needing confirmation by higher church authorities, he said, the work of the Consultation constitutes an initial response to concerns expressed by leaders of the Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

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### 3/Consultation

In recent years Pope Paul VI and Oriental Orthodox leaders including His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and His Holiness Pope Shenouda I, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, have held meetings at which they urged scholars to "open up new avenues which will overcome the differences that still exist and bring their Churches to a more perfect unity in the profession of their faith."

The Executive Secretaries of the Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation will be Father Arten Ashjian, Director of Ecumenical Affairs of the North American Diocese of the Armenian Church, and Professor Bird of Queens College.

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