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STRENGTHENING OF CATHOLIC-JEWISH TIES
CALLED FOR BY NEW VATICAN COMMISSION

BISHOPS' SPOKESMAN SAYS DOCUMENT
'SOLIDIFIES' BASIS FOR DIALOGUE

WASHINGTON--A newly established Vatican commission has published a document which calls for a deepening of relations between Catholics and Jews, through such means as prayer in common, "real" dialogue that respects each other's religious convictions, and collaboration in the struggle for peace and justice at local, national and international levels.

The document states that Christians must acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism and "strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience."

It says the relationship between the Church and Judaism is so inherently strong as to "render obligatory a better mutual understanding and renewed mutual esteem."

Unlike a working document on Jewish-Christian relations

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which became public some years ago, the document issued today does not mention the existence of the state of Israel.

The document, dated December 1, 1974 and made public at the Vatican on January 3, was issued by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Pope Paul VI created the Commission on October 22, 1974, to encourage and foster religious relations between Jews and Catholics, and to do so eventually in collaboration with other Christians. Johannes Cardinal Willebrands is president of the commission, and also of the Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of which it is a branch.

Father Edward Flannery, executive secretary of the U.S. Bishops' Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, commented here that the "long-delayed document was worth waiting for."

"Intended as an implementation of the Vatican II Statement on the Jewish People (Nostra Aetate, 4), it goes well beyond that statement," Father Flannery said. "In many ways it may be seen as the fruit of the dialogue between Christians and Jews that has taken place since the Council.

"In clear and firm terms it repudiates not only anti-Semitism but also that anti-Judaism which characterized so much of traditional Christian thinking about Jews and Judaism," Father Flannery stated. "It recognizes the richness and ongoing vitality of Judaism. In this way it solidifies the basis for genuine dialogue between the Church and the Synagogue," he continued.

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"It is well known in this country that a previous draft of the present document existed from which certain excisions were made," Father Flannery remarked. "As regrettable as some of them may be, they should not prevent a just evaluation of this final version on its own merits," he said. "The important thing now is that this implementation of the conciliar document be fully implemented itself. It gives us much to do in the years to come and should, hopefully, give a new and strong impetus to the promotion of Catholic-Jewish understanding and cooperation in our dioceses."

The document is entitled Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate"-- Vatican II's declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

Nostra Aetate was promulgated by the Second Vatican Council on October 28, 1965. It declared that the spiritual bonds and historical links binding the Church to Judaism serve to condemn, "as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity," all forms of anti-semitism and discrimination. It also recommended "that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues."

The Declaration Nostra Aetate "marks an important milestone in the history of Jewish-Christian relations," the Commission said in the document issued today.

"Moreover," the Commission noted, "the step taken by

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the Council finds its historical setting in circumstances deeply affected by the memory of the persecution and massacre of Jews which took place in Europe just before and during the Second World War.

"Although Christianity sprang from Judaism, taking from it certain essential elements of its faith and divine cult, the gap dividing them was deepened more and more, to such an extent that Christian and Jew hardly knew each other," it said.

However, in the nine years since the appearance of Nostra Aetate, steps in the direction of mutual understanding have been taken in various countries, the Commission reported. "This seems the right moment to propose...some concrete suggestions born of experience, hoping that they will help to bring into actual existence in the life of the Church the intentions expressed in the conciliar document."

The suggestions in the document issued today by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews are in the areas of dialogue; liturgy; teaching and education; and joint social action. Also included is the suggestion that episcopal conferences which have not already done so create commissions or secretariats on a national or regional level, or appoint competent persons to promote the implementation of the conciliar directives and the guidelines given in the new document.

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The document's section on dialogue encourages meetings of Christians and Jews "in the presence of God, in prayer and silent meditation, a highly efficacious way of finding that humility, that openness of heart and mind, necessary prerequisites for a deep knowledge of oneself and of others."

"In virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world," the document states. Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offense to Jews, however, "they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty...They will likewise strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul--rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence--when faced with the mystery of the incarnate Word.

"While it is true that a widespread air of suspicion, inspired by an unfortunate past, is still dominant in this particular area," the document continues, "Christians, for their part, will be able to see to what extent the responsibility is theirs and deduce practical conclusions for the future."

The document's section on liturgy states that "The idea of a living community in the service of God, and in the service of men for the love of God...is just as characteristic of the Jewish liturgy as it is of the Christian one." To improve Jewish-Christian relations, the document

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suggests that cognizance be taken of those common elements of the liturgical life (formulas, feasts, rites, etc.) in which the Bible holds an essential place.

"With respect to liturgical readings, care will be taken to see that homilies based on them will not distort their meaning, especially when it is a question of passages which seem to show the Jewish people as such in an unfavorable light," it states.

The section on teaching and education places on Christians the obligation to see that catechisms, religious texts and history books, and the mass media do not distort the significance of Judaism and its continuing relationship to the Christian faith.

Among the facts which deserve to be recalled in this connection, the document says, are that "It is the same God, 'inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments,' who speaks both in the old and new Covenants;" that "the history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition;" and that "The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor."

The document encourages scholarly research into problems bearing on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations by specialists,

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particularly in the fields of exegesis, theology, history and sociology. It says that wherever possible chairs of Jewish studies will be created and collaboration with Jewish scholars encouraged, and calls for the thorough formation of instructors and educators in training schools, seminaries and universities.

"Love of the same God must show itself in effective action for the good of mankind," the document states.

"In the spirit of the prophets, Jews and Christians will work willingly together, seeking social justice and peace at every level--local, national and international."

The concluding section of the document states that the problem of Jewish-Christian relations "concerns the Church as such" and remains an important one even in areas where no Jewish communities exist. For Christians there is also "an ecumenical aspect to the question: the very return of Christians to the sources and origins of their faith, grafted on to the earlier Covenant, helps the search for unity in Christ, the cornerstone," the document states.

While acknowledging that "there is still a long road ahead" in promoting deep fellowship between Jews and Christians, the Commission said in the document that it would, within the limits of its competence, provide assistance and information to all organizations interested in pursuing that road.

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