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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INITIAL RESPONSE GIVEN
TO AUTHORITY STATEMENT

WASHINGTON--The Anglican/Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States (ARC-USA) has issued an "initial response" to the so-called Venice statement, terming it "a significant challenge to both our churches" which "merits prayerful study on the part of all Anglicans and Roman Catholics concerned about the unity of the Body of Christ."

The Venice statement, entitled Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church, was made public last week by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), a high level study group established by Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The international commission, while saying that it had not been able to resolve all of the difficulties of Anglicans concerning Roman Catholic belief relating to the office of the Bishop of Rome, reported that it had arrived at a basic "consensus" on the question of authority in the Church.

The ARCIC statement, like its Agreed Statement on the Eucharist, Windsor, 1971, and an Agreed Statement on Ministry, Canterbury, 1973, will be submitted to authorities of the two Churches for

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their ultimate appraisal.

ARC-USA is the United States counterpart of the International Commission. Its co-chairmen are Roman Catholic Bishop Raymond W. Lessard of Savannah and Rt. Rev. Arthur A. Vogel, Episcopal Bishop of West Missouri. The response was issued after an ARC-USA meeting held in New Orleans from January 19 to 22. It was released jointly by the ecumenical offices of the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches.

The full text of the statement follows:

The release of the Venice Statement on Authority in the Church proposed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) happened to coincide with a previously scheduled meeting of ARC-USA in New Orleans, Louisiana, January 19-22, 1977. This document has been received with gratitude by the members of ARC-USA but only an initial discussion was possible at this time. We propose to devote the next meeting of this group to a deeper study of the Agreed Statement on Authority and to the preparation of a reflective commentary to assist the members of our two churches in its understanding and use. Meanwhile we offer some initial observations.

1) There seems to be a significant difference between the nature of the Venice Statement and the two earlier Agreed Statements on the Eucharist and Ministry. The Windsor and Canterbury Statements expressed areas of substantial agreement in matters of faith and practice already present in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Communion. The Venice Statement is presented as "a consensus on authority in the church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy." The Windsor and Canterbury Statements seem to be verified in the life of our two churches. The principles in the Venice Statement, on the other hand, may not be fully reflected or even recognizable to all readers in the practice of either of our churches at the present time.

2) While the Venice Statement deals broadly with the doctrine of authority in the Church, it appears to treat the questions of episcopate (oversight) and primacy more fully than certain other expressions of authority more directly involving laity and clergy (e.g., in the Episcopal Church, vestries, standing committees, conventions; in the Roman Catholic Church, parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils, priests' senates, and national advisory bodies).

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Even now, as we offer these tentative observations on the Venice Statement, it is clear that it must be seen together with the two previous ARCIC statements, as a significant challenge to both our churches in the pursuit of ARC's stated goal of "full communion and organic unity." It merits prayerful study on the part of all Anglicans and Roman Catholics concerned about the unity of the Body of Christ.

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