



# NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SOUTHERN BAPTISTS, CATHOLICS PRODUCE LEAFLETS FOR LOCAL USE**

WASHINGTON--Jointly produced biblical reflections designed to bring Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist parishes and congregations together to discuss issues of common concern in the community were released here. The themes treated in the four texts are: Poverty, Racism, Healing and Life. The reflections were written to allow local communities to talk about the meaning of the Gospel for their own Christian community, its relationship to the world, and how congregations of these two churches can work together for the common good.

The reflections were released by Bishop J. Kendrick Williams of Lexington, Kentucky, newly appointed cochair of the Southern Baptist/Roman Catholic Conversation. They constitute the latest set of documents produced by pastors and scholars in a five-year round of conversations.

Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists are the two largest Christian bodies in the United States.

The four texts are added to a previously published leaflet on the Environment. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Company will both produce and market the leaflets. The conversations are sponsored by the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The five-year conversation is the

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most recent round of twenty years of interchange. The meeting took place at the Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville in late February.

The previous three rounds were Scholars' Dialogues that produced texts on a variety of theological topics, providing a basis for mutual understanding and common witness. It is expected that a new round of interchange will begin soon.

An opening banquet at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board celebrated the twenty years of leadership given by Bishop James D. Niedergeses, retired Bishop of Nashville. The banquet was attended by the highest ranking Southern Baptist leadership ever to have attended an ecumenical event of this kind with the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to co-chairing the Scholars' Dialogue and the Conversation, Bishop Niedergeses has provided leadership, on behalf of the Bishops' Conference, in deepening the relationship of the Catholic Church with this largest Protestant body in the United States. The presence of significant Baptist leadership honoring Bishop Niedergeses provided strong indication of willingness at the highest levels to deepen this relationship.

The Southern Baptist Convention has been undergoing a change of leadership and orientation over the last decade and a half. The fact of this interchange and the publication of common texts indicates that the new leadership is willing to continue the policy of interchurch witness with Roman Catholics which has been difficult to build and maintain. Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists differ not only in doctrine and church structure, but also find their centers of population and culture in quite different places in this country. However, being the two largest Christian bodies in the United States, they bear an especially large responsibility for common witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world today. These texts should enable local parishes and congregations to carry on this common witness, even as church structures and leadership are undergoing change.

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Bishop Williams was appointed co-chair last fall by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, then chair of the BCEIA, and has been appointed to that committee by the present chair, Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile. Bishop Niedergeses will continue as a member of this dialogue when it begins its next round.

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