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FROM: Don Clemmer

O: 202-541-3206

M: 260-580-1137

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MID-ATLANTIC CATHOLIC-MUSLIM DIALOGUE NEARS COMPLETION OF INTERRELIGIOUS EDUCATION GUIDES

*Muslim participants seek greater portrayal of Islam's core values in document
Catholics advise greater sensitivity to accurate presentations of each tradition
Both agree to present a dual interpretive perspective in each document*

WASHINGTON— Representatives of the Mid-Atlantic Catholic and Muslim Dialogue have brought to near completion their multi-year project of two guides entitled *Understanding Islam: A Guide for Catholic Educators* and *Understanding Catholicism: A Guide for Muslim Educators*. While final edits will be performed by individual drafting committees, the dialogue participants anticipate that this project will be complete before the group reconvenes in 2013.

The meeting, which is co-chaired by Dr. Talat Sultan of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and Bishop Barry Knestout, auxiliary bishop of Washington, D.C., was held April 11th and 12th at St. Paul's North American College in Washington.

The draft version of *Understanding Islam: A Guide for Catholic Educators* was presented at the plenary session by main contributor Sandra Keating, Ph.D., of Providence College. The document, which is intended to serve as an introduction to Islam for Catholic educators, provides an interpretation of Islam that is faithful to how individual Muslim educators understand and teach their religion. Overall, the document provides a brief historical survey of Islam, as well as a description of the holy Qur'an, the rise of the Ummah and Shar'ia law, including its five pillars, and a brief consideration of contemporary issues.

This document was well-received by the Muslim participants who offered the following suggestions to help bring the paper to completion. First, historical inaccuracies need to be corrected and terminological alternatives that are more faithful to the meaning of the Qur'an

need to be included. Second, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Jabbar and Dr. Zahid Bukhari urged that the final document will need to de-emphasize its historical tone and incorporate more core Islamic values that communicate an accurate vision of Islam as a dynamic and living tradition for the world.

The draft version of *Understanding Catholicism: A Guide for Muslim Educators* was presented via teleconference at the plenary session by Shaykh Aboor Rahman Khan, the main contributor to the document. This document describes some of the central tenets of the Catholic faith, as well as the basic differences between Catholics and other Christians. It also provides an historical retrieval of the origins of the faith, the beginnings and growth of the church, and the basic beliefs, ethics, and worship life of Catholics.

While this document was received positively by the Catholic participants, they encouraged their Muslim colleagues to strive to convey better to their Muslim audience a more faithful rendering of the central doctrinal notions of Incarnation and the Trinity as Catholics understand these. Catholic participants noted that the document provides a reading of Catholicism that is more faithful to the Qur'anic interpretation of Christianity. Such a method of interpretation, it was stressed by the Catholic participants, seriously compromises a truly Catholic understanding of Catholicism.

By the end of the session, both drafting committees produced their final comments on each other's project and have agreed to work together in the coming months to bring the respective documents to conclusion.

Bishop Knestout summed up the overall agenda for this work saying: "It is my hope that the guides on inter-religious education will be of practical help to educators and the lay faithful of each community in speaking to their own students about the teachings and practices of the other faith community. These materials should ensure a respectful and accurate presentation of the beliefs and practices of both Catholicism and Islam."

In addition to the co-chairs, the Muslim representatives at the meeting included ICNA president Zahid Bukhari, Ph.D.; Shaykh Abdur Rahman Khan, resident scholar, Islamic Foundation Villa Park, Chicago; Naeem Baig, Ph.D., executive director, ICNA Council for Social Justice; Muhammad Abdul Jabbar, Ph., of Bayshore, New York; Muhammad T. Rahman, secretary general of ICNA; Khursid Khan, Ph.D., principal of MDQ Academy, Bayshore, New York; and Ishtiaq Gondal, Ph.D., professor of Islamic studies, Punjab, Pakistan.

Additional Catholic representatives included Al Grindon, Immaculate Heart High School, Altadena, California; Rev. Dr. Sidney Griffith, chairman of the Institute of Christian Oriental Research, The Catholic University of America (CUA); Pim Valkenberg, Ph.D., professor of religion, CUA; Sandra Keating, Professor of Religion, Providence College; Paulist Father Tom Ryan, , ecumenical and interreligious officer, North American Paulist Center, Washington; Kirsten Evans, program specialist, Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (SEIA), U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); and Anthony Cirelli, Ph.D., associate director, USCCB SEIA.

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