ATLANTA, Nov. 9...Future religious leaders of the Black and Jewish communities have joined in a "Covenant of Commitment" that recognizes both the commonalities and the differences between the two communities; sharply criticizes political, media, and other attempts to exploit and heighten intergroup tensions, and proposes specific educational and other programs to promote the two groups' knowledge and understanding of each other.

The "Covenant" was issued earlier this week at a Black-Jewish Seminarians' Conference held at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta and sponsored by the ITC, the American Jewish Committee, and the National Interreligious Task Force on Black-Jewish Relations.

Participants in the conference were Jewish students from three of the country's major rabbinical schools and Black students from six leading Christian seminaries, along with educators from those and other colleges and officials of ITC, AJC, and the Task Force. All the students who attended expect to become rabbis or ministers, and are thus, as two of the conference speakers said, "the religious leaders of the 21st century."

Major points of the "Covenant of Commitment" included these:

* "We recognize that as African Americans and Jews, we have certain things in common, among them: a life in the diaspora; a history of oppression; a love of the Bible, and of our peoples and cultures; a commitment to interpreting our sacred texts in our particular socio-historical contexts; a commitment to fighting bigotry, racism, and anti-Semitism";

* "We recognize that there are many differences between African Americans and Jews, and that, consequently, there are bound to be differences in our perceptions, political and economic priorities, and leadership needs";

* "We deplore all attempts -- by the media, government officials, and leaders of any religious or ethnic groups -- to feed intergroup tensions through distortion and inaccuracy, and through emphasis on points of conflict, potential or actual";

* "As seminarians, we propose and encourage: ongoing and serious exchange programs between the congregations of our traditions, including but not limited to pulpit exchanges and involvement in youth and adult education; mutual and self-education about each other's cultural and religious histories, development, and current ideology and practice, including exchange of seminary faculty and students and long-term internship programs; development of library and curriculum resources about each other's traditions at our respective institutions."

In the closing statement of the conference, which was held November 5-7, Dr. James Costen, President of ITC, and Rabbi A. James Rudin, National Interreligious Affairs Director of AJC, looked to a future of increased understanding and decreased bigotry:

"The Jewish and African American communities have a vital role to play in developing positive intergroup relations in this country," they said. "This Covenant of Commitment is an important step forward in overcoming misunderstandings and tensions between our two groups. The covenant was written and passed unanimously by seminarians, the religious leaders of the 21st century, and represents their collective
commitment to overcoming bigotry and stereotypes. We hope their statement will serve as a model for others to follow, and the ITC, the AJC, and the National Interreligious Task Force on Black-Jewish Relations intend to implement the Covenant's specific recommendations.

The director of the conference was Benita Gayle-Almeleh, Executive Director of the Task Force and Program Associate in AJC's Department of Interreligious Affairs. The conference planning committee included Dr. David Blumenthal, Emory University; Sherry Frank, Southeast Area Director, AJC; Dr. David Shannon, Academic Dean, ITC; Rabbi Zvi Shapiro, ITC, and Sunny Stern, Assistant Southeast Area Director, AJC.

The seminarians attending the conference came from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Reconstructionist Rabbinical College; Gammon Theological Seminary; Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary; Morehouse School of Religion; Phillips School of Theology; Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary, and Turner Theological Seminary.

The conference was made possible in part by a grant from the Nathan Appleman Institute for the Advancement of Christian-Jewish Understanding.

The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; defends democratic values and seeks their realization in American public policy; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the U.S.
COVENANT OF COMMITMENT

We recognize that as African Americans and Jews, we have certain things in common, among them:
- a life in the diaspora;
- a history of oppression;
- a love of the Bible, and of our respective peoples and culture;
- a commitment to interpreting our sacred texts in our particular socio-historical contexts;
- a commitment to fighting bigotry, racism and anti-Semitism.

We recognize there are many differences between African Americans and Jews, and that consequently, there are bound to be differences in our respective perceptions, political and economic priorities and leadership needs.

We deplore all attempts - by the media, government officials and leaders of any religious or ethnic groups - to feed intergroup tensions through distortion and inaccuracy, and through emphasis on points of conflict, potential or actual.

As seminarians, we propose and encourage the following:
- ongoing and serious exchange programs between the congregations of our respective traditions, including but not limited to pulpit exchanges and involvement in youth and adult education.
- self and mutual education about each other's cultural and religious histories, development, and current ideology and practice. This would include interseminary exchange of faculty and students and long-term internship programs.
- development of library and curriculum resources at our respective institutions about our various traditions, based in part on our recommendations to each other.

We commit ourselves to bringing whatever insights and knowledge we have gained about each other to our respective communities.

Finally we urge that the American Jewish Committee and the Interdenominational Theology Center make such inter-seminary conferences an annual program, coupled with an ongoing evaluation process.