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BLACK AND JEWISH SEMINARIANS COME TOGETHER TO EXPLORE COMMON BONDS

ATLANTA, Nov. 13....In an effort to enhance the understanding between Black and Jewish seminary students, and to encourage their future involvement in interreligious activities, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) are co-sponsoring the third Black - Jewish Seminarians Conference.

The conference, entitled "Blacks and Jews: The Heritage and the Hope," is taking place at ITC from November 17 through November 19. Christian seminary students from the six denominational seminaries which make up ITC and rabbinic students from seminaries in Cincinnati, New York and Philadelphia will come together as they have every three years for dialogue, study and worship. Participants will explore the heritage and hope of the Black and Jewish communities by discussing contemporary issues facing them and by asking questions of each other.

Conference co-chairs are Dr. James H. Costen, President of ITC, and Sherry Z. Frank, AJC's Southeast Area Director. The conference, the only one of its kind in the country, is made possible in part by grants from the Nathan Appleman Institute for the Advancement of Christian - Jewish Understanding.

Dr. Costen expressed his delight at providing opportunities for dialogue among these seminarians.

"How else can we prepare these future leaders to be receptive and open to each other and to the realities of their respective communities, if we do not begin at the level of theological education," he asked.

"Interdenominational Theological Center," Dr. Costen said, "devoted as we are to inter-church cooperation, is also committed to enhancing communication between African-American Christians and Jewish Americans, both of whom share a rich history as citizens of this great land and as adherents of the Judeo-Christian tradition." ITC ordains more Black ministers than any other seminary in the United States.

Ms. Frank noted that this conference comes "at a significant time for Black and Jewish seminarians to come together.

"We need to be reminded of the alliance that existed in the past between our two communities," she stressed, "and to explore new ways to enhance this alliance in the future. There is no better place to do this than in a setting rooted in religious and civil rights tradition."

Rabbi A. James Rudin, AJC national director of interreligious affairs and a member of the Conference Planning Committee, stated: "If we are ever to overcome anti-Semitism and racism in our society, we must begin with the men and women who will be our spiritual leaders of the next century. The AJC is pleased to bring rabbinical students together with African-American seminarians. Both our shared values and our differences will be fully explored. Nothing is more important than guaranteeing that our future rabbis and ministers will be free of dangerous stereotypes and caricatures."

The participating seminaries include: Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, New York and Cincinnati Campuses; Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City; Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia; Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary; Morehouse School of Religion; Turner Theological School; Phillips School of Theology; Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary; and Gammon Theological Seminary.

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