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TO EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS COVERING: **General religion**, the **Catholic Church**, **inclusive Catholic communities**, **lay involvement and leadership**, the **ordination of women and homosexuals**.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FORMATION OF THE OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH, PROVINCE OF THE UNITED STATES

The Merging of Several Inclusive Catholic Jurisdictions into One Church Patterned After the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht

NAPA, CA [date] – Church officials of The Old Catholic Church, Province of the United States (www.toccusa.org) announce the formation of a national Old Catholic Church. Patterned after the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, the formation of **The Old Catholic Church, Province of the United States (TOCCUSA)** is the culmination of more than four years of collaborative talks among the bishops and the three independent jurisdictions they represented. With the merging of those jurisdictions, TOCCUSA begins its new role with five dioceses whose collective territories span twenty states.

HISTORY OF THE FORMATION

TOCCUSA is the genesis of a May 2006 meeting hosted by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Episcopal Church, which convened at the request of the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht. The Episcopal Church is in full communion with the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, a communion of European Catholic churches that left the Roman Catholic Church in 1871 after the adoption of the doctrine of papal infallibility and the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. Although there are many self-identified Old Catholic jurisdictions in the United States, not one is a member of the Union of Utrecht. Observers from the Union of Utrecht were present at the May 2006 meeting. After meeting for two days, the bishops in attendance formed the **Conference of North American Old Catholic Bishops**, whose primary task was to work toward national unity among American Old Catholic jurisdictions.

PRIMARY TENETS OF TOCCUSA

Central to this unity is the ecclesiology of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht. These include the following tenets: 1) the fullness of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church resides in the local church (diocese) gathered around a bishop; 2) apostolic succession belongs to the church and is not the possession of a bishop; 3) bishops are servants of the church, and therefore must be elected by the church for ordained office in the church; 4) Old Catholic bishops are assisted in the governance of the diocese by a synodal council comprised of elected laypersons and clergy.

GOVERNANCE OF TOCCUSA

TOCCUSA is thus governed similarly. The Moderator of the Church is a bishop nominated by the House of Bishops and affirmed by the House of Delegates, which is comprised of lay and clergy representatives from all dioceses. **The Moderator of TOCCUSA is the Most Rev. Robert T. Fuentes, of the Old Catholic Diocese of Napa, CA.** As Moderator, Bishop Fuentes is also chairperson of the Executive Council, the synodal council of the Church, and chairperson of the National Assembly, the highest authority of the Church. The House of Delegates also elects its own chairperson, who must be a layperson. **The chairperson of the House of Delegates is Ms. Janet O'Day of the Old Catholic Diocese of New England.** As such, Ms. O'Day is also vice-chairperson of the Executive Council and of the National Assembly.

COMPARISON TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Although its liturgies and rituals are similar to those of the Roman Catholic Church, TOCCUSA's interpretation of Tradition and Scripture are markedly contemporary, which is reflected in the Church's motto:

“Ancient Faith. Welcoming and Inclusive Church. Serving the Modern World.”

TOCCUSA ordains women to all levels of ministry (one of TOCCUSA's bishops is the Most Rev. Rosemary Ananis of New England). Married and gay persons may also seek ordination in the Church. Same sex couples wishing to enter covenantal marriages may request the sacrament of marriage; the bishops of The Old Catholic Church, Province of the United States have spoken in favor of legal recognition for same sex marriages.

For more information on TOCCUSA, go to www.toccusa.org.

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