

*FAX to Charles M. et al
Plough, SPV,
Greetings, Art*

Pro-Life Sect

First Catholic-Bruderhof dialogue takes place in Ulster County

New ecumenical dialogue has begun to bring Catholics into conversation with the Bruderhof (Society of Brothers), a small pacifist group of German origin that shares the pro-life position of Catholics.

The first dialogue session took place Oct. 8 at the Bruderhof community in Ulster Park with an archdiocese representing the Catholic Church.

There has never been an official Roman Catholic-Bruderhof conversation before in ecumenical affairs—there have been meetings between the leaders of the Bruderhof and prominent Roman Catholics, but that's all it's been until now," said Father James F. Loughlin, S.A., ecumenical officer of the archdiocese. Cardinal O'Connor visited the Bruderhof in Ulster County in October 1996 and received an enthusiastic welcome from the community. The cardinal's visit came one year after Hann Christoph Arnold, leader of the Rifflon Bruderhof and grandson of the founder, joined a group of ecumenical leaders who met with Pope John Paul II when he visited New York in 1995.

The Oct. 8 meeting was the first of three dialogue sessions to be held before the end of the year on the initial topic: Purity and Marriage. Father Loughlin told CNY the participants expect to release a paper on their talks in January or February. The paper has the working title: "A Common Plea for Purity."

Father Loughlin added, "Then we'll start a new topic." The long-term goal of the dialogue is to "bring

about a common witness to the Gospel between our two communities," he said.

Besides Father Loughlin, the Catholic representatives were Father John S. Bonnici, director of the archdiocesan Family Life/Respect Life Office, Sister Paul Therese Hennessey, S.A., associate director of the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute in Garrison, and Thomas Conway, a parishioner of St. Joseph's in Kingston.

Preceding the dialogue, a Vatican official, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, met in Manhattan Oct. 6 with five members of the Bruderhof, which has six of its eight communities in the northeastern United States and the other two in England. Cardinal Cassidy is president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Also present were Msgr. John A. Radano, an official of the council, and Father Loughlin.

The Bruderhof movement originated in the 1920s with the desire of Eberhard Arnold, a minister of the German Lutheran Church, to build a community that would live according to the Sermon on the Mount and the model of sharing goods found in the Acts of the Apostles. They currently support themselves through such activities as making furniture.

Eberhard Arnold came into conflict with the Nazis, and after his death in 1935, the Bruderhof members were driven out of Germany. They went first to England and then to Paraguay, but began transferring to the United States in 1961. Arnold succeeded his father, who was leader from 1963 until his death in 1982.

Arnold said his grandfather found his principles had been taught by Anabaptists of the 16th century, and for a time he became connected to the Hutterites, one of the groups continuing that tradition. But the reluctance of the Hutterites to make their witness in the outside world and open themselves to change led to a separation, he said.

He described the Bruderhof as strongly pro-life, expressing this not only in pacifism but also in opposition to abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

In a statement prepared for his meeting with Cardinal Cassidy, he said, "We appreciate what Pope John Paul II stands for, and we thank God for his courageous call to the sanctity of life versus the culture of death."

Arnold said the Bruderhof has grown to about 3,000 members. Besides the three communities in New York, it has two in the Pittsburgh area and one in Connecticut, he said.

The Bruderhof is open to dialogue with other churches, but so far has established only the one with Catholics, he said.

—Catholic News Service contributed to this Report.