

# Priest plans to form black church

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Father George A. Stallings, director of evangelization for the Archdiocese of Washington and a former president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, announced plans June 21 to form a black Catholic church over the objections of his archbishop.

The Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation, as Father Stallings is calling his church, "will address the cultural needs and aspirations of African-American people."

He said the liturgy of Imani Temple will be based on a Mass being used on an experimental basis in Zaire.

Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington said June 20 that "Father Stallings' action is a serious step toward separating himself from the Roman Catholic Church."

Father Stallings said he is not trying to create a split within the church in the United States. Like U.S. society, the U.S.

church is already split because of racism, he said.

Imani Temple will give black Catholics total control over their faith lives without domination by the "Euro-American white male hierarchy," Father Stallings said at a June 21 press conference at Howard University in Washington.

The first liturgy of Imani Temple is scheduled for July 2 at the university law school's chapel.

Just as the Roman Catholic Church has distinct rites for Latin and Eastern churches, he said, it should be possible for African Americans to have a specific rite that reflects their history, culture and needs.

In a statement, Cardinal Hickey said he had strongly urged Father Stallings "not to separate himself from the church, but rather to continue our dialogue and to take some time for prayer, assessment and reflection on his priesthood, his personal situation and his relationship with the church."

"It remains my hope and prayer that Father Stallings will serve the people of God within the church and not attempt to exercise his priestly ministry through some enterprise of his own making," the cardinal said.

Archbishop Eugene A. Marino of Atlanta and Auxiliary Bishop John H. Ricard of Baltimore, two of the nation's 13 African-American bishops, joined Cardinal Hickey in expressing disappointment that Father Stallings' announcement came just days after the U.S. bishops spent two hours discussing the needs and gifts of African Americans.

During its June 16-19 meeting, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops voted to issue a pastoral statement on black Catholic evangelization.

"Our opportunities as African Americans in the church, while not perfect, have never been more promising," Archbishop Marino's statement said.

"I join Cardinal Hickey and the church

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**Father George A. Stallings of Washington makes a point during a June 21 press conference in which he announced plans to form a black Catholic church.**



AP/Wide World Photos  
**During the June 17 presentation on black Catholic evangelization, Sister Thea Bowman leads the singing of "We Shall Overcome" with (left to right) Archbishop Eugene Marino, Professor Albert Raboteau and Bishop John Ricard of Baltimore.**

## Statement on blacks cites need to challenge, nurture

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. — The vitality and enthusiasm of the black Catholic community must be "challenged and nurtured," said a draft statement on black Catholic evangelization presented June 17 during the U.S. bishops' meeting.

"We believe that the Holy Father has laid a challenge before us to share the gift of our blackness with the church in the United States," said Archbishop Eugene A. Marino of Atlanta, one of the speakers at the two-hour presentation.

After the presentation, the bishops, meeting at Seton Hall University in South Orange, voted to use the draft statement as the basis for a pastoral statement on the

evangelization of African-American Catholics. The bishops plan to approve the pastoral statement after further work on the draft.

Auxiliary Bishop John H. Ricard of Baltimore, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, presented the draft of the statement, "Here I Am, Send Me." It parallels the 1987 National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan, written and adopted by African-American Catholics from 107 dioceses.

Although black Catholics have found increasing acceptance in the U.S. church and have benefited from church ministries, especially education, they still suffer from racism in the church and society, the draft statement said.

"There is a serious concern on the part of many observers of the attrition of black Catholics from the church," the document said.

"A failure of black Catholics to find the church culturally relevant and the place where they can feel at home results in enumerable instances of black Catholics leaving the church for Protestant denominations," it said.

The statement also said that black Catholics are ready to assume full responsibility for evangelizing others and "to take the lead in involving the church on the diocesan level in issues of peace and justice."

The continuing work of the National Office for Black Catholics, the growing number of diocesan offices for black Catholics and the National Black Catholic Congress — which adopted the pastoral plan — all point to advances in the church for African Americans, Archbishop Marino told his fellow bishops.

The increasing use of black music and art in liturgy "has resulted in a spontaneity and expressiveness of the soulfulness and fellowship characteristic of the daughters and sons of African descent — a 'oneness in Christ Jesus' which other ethnic groups desire to emulate," the archbishop said.

Black Catholics are aware of the need to combat black-on-black crime, pregnancy out of marriage, the school drop-out rate and the use of illegal drugs, he said. "The church as a historical caring institution can assist in eradicating these evils."

Black Catholics long have been thought of as "an anomaly," said Albert Raboteau, chairman of the religion department at Princeton University in New Jersey. Even Catholic historians and African-American historians "assumed that being black meant being Protestant," Raboteau said. But the history of Catholicism in Africa predates the beginning of the slave trade

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