

Black church

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of Washington in lamenting this ill-advised and unfortunate decision which will no doubt cause great sadness and confusion to many of our black sisters and brothers, both within and outside the Catholic Church," Archbishop Marino said.

Archbishop Marino has known Father Stallings since 1974, when Father Stallings was ordained to the priesthood and Archbishop Marino became an auxiliary bishop in Washington.

Bishop Ricard, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, issued a statement June 20 saying he acknowledges that "we as African-American Catholics still find it necessary to struggle for full inclusion in the Catholic Church."

However, he said, the founding of Imani Temple "represents a regressive step which only obscures the authentic aspirations of African-American Catholics as they seek not to sever ties with our church, but to enrich it with the unique gifts which the African-American experience can bring."

The church has been talking about incul-

turation, integration and the sin of racism for years, Father Stallings said. But, he added, "there is never a translation from paper to action."

"Catholic Church: we love you, we respect you, but we can no longer wait," he said. It's time to stop "talking that talk and start walking that walk."

Father Stallings told reporters that Cardinal Hickey and others have and will continue trying to make him the issue.

The problem is not about personal difficulties, Father Stallings said, but instead concerns "issues that affect the integrity and credibility of our church when it makes pronouncements about the development of peoples and fails to understand that development implies self-direction toward fulfillment of a God-given call."

Cardinal Hickey's statement said, "I do not believe that Father Stallings' personal difficulty should lead to sweeping judgments on the ministry of the church in the black community."

"My own conviction is that this situation has more to do with the needs and expectations of Father Stallings, than with broader questions about the adequacy of Catholic ministry within the black community," he said.

Father Stallings said his decision to go ahead with plans for Imani Temple, after four meetings with Cardinal Hickey in the past several months, came in early June when the cardinal suggested he go to New Mexico for a weeklong psychological examination.

The cardinal's reaction, he said, was an indication that he didn't understand the urgency of the issues Father Stallings raised.

Father Stallings told reporters that Cardinal Hickey had termed him "excessively ambitious."

"That told me right away he was culturally blind," the priest said. "He cannot understand the whole concept of blackness

and particularly being a black male and knowing for centuries my male counterparts have been emasculated. That we as black people are striving to develop self-esteem and self-worth."

Father Stallings said that at least at the time of the press conference, he was still a priest in good standing in the archdiocese.

"In my own eyes I cannot be defrocked," he said, asserting that if the cardinal takes action against him it would mean "the church will leave me. How can you leave what you have never been in?"

"I cannot be excommunicated from Christ, I cannot be excommunicated from my faith," he said.

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that brought Africans to the United States.

In the early 1400s, Portuguese explorers brought Catholicism to Africa and "by 1500 the feudal lord of the Congo, Nzinga Mbemba, had converted to Catholicism." One of his sons was consecrated a bishop in 1518 by Pope Leo X, Raboteau said.

"The recovery of the history is crucial to a sense of being truly black and authentica-

lly Catholic," Raboteau told the bishops.

But especially in the United States, he said, "that history is inextricably bound up with the brutality and cruelty of oppression and enslavement and discrimination."

The U.S. church not only would not accept black priests and religious until well into the 19th century, some religious orders held slaves, Raboteau said.

With that history, "the church needs to be especially sensitive to ongoing issues of domination, discrimination, racism in herself, in society, among her members and most especially in its institutions."

Sister Thea Bowman, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, answered the question "What does it mean to be black and Catholic" by singing a spiritual: "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.... Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air."

Africans brought to the United States in the slave trade "clung to African ways of thinking, of teaching, of understanding values, of celebrating life and walking and talking and healing and nurturing, of singing and praying," she said.

"African people of the diaspora, we are here in this land and this is our land," said Sister Bowman, whose grandfather was a slave. "Our people helped build this nation."

"Our people developed a culture that was African and American," but "we are still trying to find home in the homeland and home in the church, still struggling," she said.

"For many of us," she said, being black and Catholic "means having been evangelized, having been educated, having been given a chance through the work of the Catholic Church."

"Now our black American bishops, in the name of the church universal, have publicly declared that we as a people of faith, as a Catholic people of God, have come of age. It's time for us to be evangelizers of ourselves."

Being black and Catholic "means that I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become," Sister Bowman said.

To be black and Catholic also means at times "being a second- or third-class citizen of the Holy City," she said.

The leadership, scholarship and skills of black Catholics must be used in all levels of church life, she told the bishops. "Sometimes decisions are made that affect the black community for generations and they are made in rooms by white people behind closed doors."

"Some of us are poor, some of us have not had the advantages of education, but how can people still have a voice and a role in the work of the church?" she asked.

Black Catholics "need to celebrate who we are and whose we are," she said. Without their full participation, Sister Bowman said, the Catholic Church would not be Catholic or universal. All ethnic groups must be able to take a place in the church, she added. "The family has to stay together."

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