

# Priest initiates black church, is suspended

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Father George A. Stallings inaugurated his breakaway black Catholic church July 2 with a three-hour-long liturgy punctuated by vibrant gospel music, African rattles and bells, and a passionate homily.

"Church, we got a struggle now, but that's OK (because) we serve a mighty God," Father Stallings told more than 1,000 people attending the first service of his Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation.

In a letter the next day, Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington suspended Father Stallings from his priestly duties.

"This suspension remains in effect until you have renounced this act of disobedience in accordance with the teaching and the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church," the cardinal's letter said.

Father William E. Lori, secretary to the cardinal, said July 2 that archdiocesan officials could not rule on the validity of Father Stallings' service because they had not seen a text of the liturgy.

However, Father Lori said, the liturgy was "illicit" because on June 22 Cardinal Hickey had revoked Father Stallings' permission to publicly celebrate Mass and because of "innovations" in the prayers and order of the Mass, which had not been approved for use in the United States.

After an hour's delay to erect an altar and accommodate all the people who came to the 500-seat chapel of Howard University Law School in Washington, Father Stallings welcomed the congregation to a celebration he said would make history.



Father George A. Stallings preaches during the July 2 Mass inaugurating his new church, the Imani Temple.

His formal announcement of the founding of Imani Temple was greeted with prolonged clapping and shouting.

"May we never forget that it is God who has brought us this far," Father Stallings said.

He also told the congregation that "we have to raise enough money to build a church" that will seat 6,000 to 8,000 people. Later Father Stallings told reporters that the initial collection was about \$16,000.

Ali Muhammed, leader of the Nation of Islam in Washington, came to the lectern to

greeting in the name of the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, national leader of the black Muslim group.

"God is doing a mighty work," Muhammed said. "To those who would say Imani Temple should not be: What do you have to do with it? This is the Lord's work."

"This is the beginning, only the beginning, of a movement that will sweep the world," Muhammed said.

In his homily, Father Stallings encouraged the congregation not to worry about breaking with the Roman Catholic Church.

"Don't get so sidetracked in a religion that you forget your redeemer," he said. "You've got to choose this day who you're going to serve."

"A lot of you have come here heavy burdened under a load of guilt and shame," he said. "We've got to stay on the right track and trust that God will give us the grace to keep on keepin' on."

Referring to a statement by Cardinal Hickey, Father Stallings said, "don't even worry about those in high places who will say you are part of an 'ill-advised' enterprise, because what does he have to do with it anyhow?"

For too long, he said, black Catholics have sat around complaining about racism in the church. "If you're not going to do anything about it, shut up."

"The Catholic Church has issued document after document after document on racism, but it hasn't done anything about it yet," he said.

"They tell us that the right way is to wait, wait, wait, wait," Father Stallings said. "Tell me why we must wait.... We've got to do for ourselves what no one else can do."

"The only one we're going to wait on is the Lord," he said.

Black Catholic leaders who did not attend Father Stallings services spoke to reporters later at the archdiocesan Pastoral Center.

Janice Burton, president of the archdiocesan Council of Black Catholics, said, "I am hurt and very disappointed."

"I am hurt because I feel as though we have been separated and the energy that has

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## High court bans displays 'endorsing' religious faith

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In a 5-4 vote the Supreme Court ruled July 3 that some government-sponsored religious displays are permissible if they do not have "the effect of promoting or endorsing religious beliefs," but said a nativity scene inside a courthouse violated that principle.

In the same case, the justices voted unanimously that a Hanukkah menorah placed outside a Pennsylvania city-county building did not appear to endorse Judaism because of its "particular physical setting."

The rulings came in the case of the *County of Allegheny vs. American Civil Liberties Union* which disputed whether Pittsburgh-area officials could place a Christmas nativity scene and a Jewish menorah at or in government buildings.

The lawsuit was brought against the city and the county by a local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Christmas nativity scene had been placed inside the Allegheny County Courthouse in Pittsburgh, whereas the Hanukkah menorah, was installed outside the nearby Pittsburgh-Allegheny city-county building.

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