

# 'Old Catholic' prelate ordains Bishop Stallings

By Mark Pattison  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Father George Stallings, excommunicated from the Catholic Church for founding the African-American Catholic Congregation, was ordained a bishop of his breakaway denomination May 12.

After his ordination, Bishop Stallings thanked the congregation for their belief. "Because of that belief and that trust we have in each other, we have come to this hour," he said.

He said his ordination is "God once more receiving the praise of his people."

Ordaining Bishop Stallings was Archbishop Richard Bridges of the Independent Old Catholic Church of Southern California. Six other bishops, all from denominations styled under Old Catholic principles of independence from the Roman Catholic Church, were present at the ceremony.

Old Catholic churches broke with Rome in the 19th century, mainly over nationalist concerns and the definition of papal infallibility. The Roman Catholic Church still recognizes the bishops of Old Catholic churches as having been validly ordained in apostolic succession, but maintains that their ordinations are illicit, meaning that the ordinations did not follow the proper procedures or were performed without the approval of the Vatican.

Bishop Stallings' ordination would appear to have solidified his break from the Roman Catholic Church. But "the door to reconciliation is always open," said Wilbur Pinder, a spokesman for the Washington archdiocese, where Bishop Stallings had been a priest.

"If you go astray, no matter how far you go, reconciliation is always there," Pinder said in a telephone interview May 14. "You have to want to change your life... That is the principle that is open to Father Stallings as it is to anyone else."

After the ordination liturgy began, Bishop Stallings told the congregation, "Our saints and our ancestors are pleased with us today."

During the homily, Father Charles Stephney, one of Bishop Stallings' associates, hailed the event.

"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be glad, let us be glad, let us be glad and rejoice in it. For he has brought us all a mighty, mighty long way. He did not have

to do it, but he did it anyway because he loves us," Father Stephney said.

Father Stephney was dismissed from the Precious Blood order in March on charges of disobedience beginning prior to his involvement with Bishop Stallings' breakaway church.

An apostolic mandate from the Synod of Old Catholic Bishops of America was read at the ordination, declaring that Bishop Stallings was "a suitable candidate for bishop in the church of God." The mandate was dated Feb. 12, 1990 — one week after Bishop Stallings incurred automatic excommunication for announcing that the African-American Catholic Congregation

would be "independent from Rome."

George X. Cure, representing the controversial Nation of Islam leader, Louis Farrakhan, spoke from the pulpit during the ordination liturgy.

Pointing to Bishop Stallings, Cure said, "Look at the way they're treating our brother," adding that leaders in the black community have historically come under attack.

Since he announced his break from the church, Bishop Stallings has been the subject of newspaper stories charging him with homosexual activity and financial irregularities.

The ceremony included the laying on of

hands over the bishop, which is necessary for a valid ordination. It also featured — alongside African drumming, Ghanaian dances and black spirituals — two chanted hymns in Latin.

Bishop Stallings' motto is also in Latin: *Essere Quam Videri*. Translated, it means, "Better to be than to seem" to be.

The ordination took place at the Miracle Faith Center in northeast Washington. The site was renamed "Pro-Cathedral of Our Lady of Africa" for the ordination.

About 1,200 attended the liturgy, but about half of the congregation began filing out once the ordination ceremony was over.



**WATER TRAIL** — Paul Cooper moves himself and some horses to higher ground Wednesday, May 9, through the small community of Wamba, which is under water due to overflow from the Red River. Residents of Wamba, five miles northwest of Texarkana, Texas, and surrounding areas have suffered from flooding since Monday.

AP/Wide World Photos

## Ladies of Charity celebrate 50 years of caring for young and old

ELMIRA — The Ladies of Charity of Elmira and Chemung County will receive new members and celebrate the 50th anniversary of their founding with a Mass and dinner on June 7. The Mass will take place at St. Patrick's Church, 604 Park Place, at 5:15 p.m., followed by dinner at the Downtown Holiday Inn at 6:30 p.m.

The celebrants for the Mass will be Father Daniel F. Holland, the former spiritual director for the Ladies of Charity in Elmira and present pastor of St. Patrick's Church, and Father Paul J. Cuddy. Father Cuddy, a columnist for the *Catholic Courier*, will be the featured speaker at the

dinner. Both celebrations are open to the public.

The Ladies of Charity of Elmira and Chemung County was founded in 1940 through the efforts of Mary E. Fitzgerald. In 1953, the chapter was admitted into the Confraternity of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul as "The Ladies of Charity of the Catholic Family Service."

In 1976, the group obtained a charter from the Association of Ladies of Charity (United States) under its present title.

During their years of association with Catholic Family Service, the women were known for serving as "big sisters" to adolescent girls in need of direction and companionship, as well as visiting new mothers in hospitals, according to Mary Smith, vice


president. In addition, they have also provided scholarships for incoming freshmen at Notre Dame High School, and aided Catholic Family Service with adoption procedures and CYO dances.

The group has focused recent efforts on caring for the elderly and the needy. Among those endeavors are a monthly birthday party and summer picnic for elderly patients at St. Joseph's Hospital.

According to Smith, the group currently boasts 137 members and is actively seeking new members. The current officers are: Ann Lennon, president; Smith, vice president; Dorothea Watts, secretary; Louise Aiello, treasurer; and Sister Mary Christopher, chaplain.

Registration for the dinner is required by May 24. The cost is \$15. For information or to register, write Theodora Bragg, 611 Jay St., Elmira, N.Y., 14901, or call 607/734-8671 or 733-7293.

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