

Priest celebrates first anniversary of temple

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Bishop George A. Stallings, the excommunicated Washington archdiocesan priest, celebrated the first anniversary of his breakaway African-American Catholic Congregation on July 1.

Washington Mayor Marion Barry, who is on trial on drug use and perjury charges, attended the ceremony in a Southeast Washington educational center — dubbed the Imani Temple — along with his wife, Effi.

At the celebration, Bishop Stallings said, "We love you, Mayor Barry. You're the greatest mayor the city has ever had. You're more popular now than ever before."

Bishop Stallings said the mayor was in trouble because "he is too smart, too intelligent and too black."

Of the mayor's wife, he said, "When I get married I'm going to find me a woman just like Effi Barry."

Archbishop Richard Bridges of the Independent Old Catholic Church of Southern California ordained Father Stallings a bishop in Washington May 12 in a ceremony that was considered valid but il-

licit.

He was suspended from his priestly duties July 3, 1989, in a letter from Washington Cardinal James A. Hickey and was automatically excommunicated Feb. 5 when he announced his congregation would be "independent from Rome."

U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson said July 6 that Bishop Stallings and Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan could be admitted as spectators to Barry's trial.

The judge, who is presiding over the trial, reversed a decision he made June 29 barring Bishop Stallings from attending Barry's trial because his presence might disrupt the courtroom.

A day earlier the judge, for the same reason, had barred Farrakhan, who like Bishop Stallings has espoused black separatist views.

Jackson said the two could attend the trial as long as they "observe the proprieties of the court."

He reversed himself after a court of appeals said spectators cannot be barred merely because they advocate a particular political or religious viewpoint.

Activist predicts that soldiers will not go to trial over Jesuit killings

SAN SALVADOR (CNS) — The director of the San Salvador archdiocesan human rights agency predicted that the military officers believed to have ordered the killing of six Jesuit priests in November will never be brought to trial.

Maria Julia Hernandez, director of the Tutela Legal human rights office, said the investigation into the Nov. 16 murders of the Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter is "practically closed, and the military (officers) who ordered the abominable crime have not been touched."

"The military is blocking the investigation because they are the ones who wield the real power in El Salvador," Hernandez said.

"The church is totally convinced that the military (officers) who came up with the idea and ordered the killing of the Jesuit fathers have not been touched" by the government investigation, she said.

Col. Alfredo Benavides, the highest military official charged with involvement in the murders, was scheduled to testify July 2. However, the Salvadoran Supreme Court postponed his testimony for a week after he presented a medical certificate that he could not testify.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas of San Salvador said that on three consecutive days, Salvadoran navy troops searched an archdiocesan home for the elderly in the town of Apopa, near the capital. The center, located next to a seminary, was previously used as a shelter for war

refugees.

The archbishop protested the searches, which he said occurred at different hours of the day and night from June 25-27.

"The sick and the elderly must be the object of our most diligent attention," the archbishop said in his homily.

"Naturally, these incidents have a certain explanation in the situation of war, which affects the entire Salvadoran family ... but in no way are they justifiable," he said.

Archbishop Rivera Damas spoke during a July 1 Mass, concelebrated with Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, marking the archdiocese's third annual day honoring the disabled. An estimated 2,000 sick and elderly people received Communion in front of the downtown cathedral during the Mass.

The archbishop also said that possibilities of a peaceful settlement to the country's 10-year-old civil war have increased as a result of the second round of government-guerrilla talks in Oaxtepec, Mexico.

Archbishop Rivera Damas cited "well-informed" sources who told him that as a result of the Oaxtepec talks, "the first fruits could begin to be produced in upcoming meetings" between the two sides.

He said that in the next round of talks, scheduled for later this month in Costa Rica, "it is expected that ... we might have some political accords" aimed at ending the war.



AP/Wide World Photos
Actor Martin Sheen, left, is seen here with homeless activist Mitch Snyder in Washington, D.C., prior to the premier of a 1986 television movie in which Sheen portrayed Snyder.

Snyder's apparent suicide stuns homeless advocates

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The apparent suicide of Mitch Snyder, the nationally known and sometimes controversial advocate for the homeless, left many people who knew the 46-year-old activist stunned.

Snyder was found hanging July 5 in his bedroom at a 1,400-bed shelter developed from a dilapidated building that he had convinced the federal government to give the poor after a 51-day hunger strike in 1984.

Police estimated he died July 3 or July 4 at the shelter run by the Community for Creative Non-Violence, a radical Christian community of which Snyder was a member.

A funeral was set for July 10 outside the shelter with the Rev. Jesse Jackson scheduled to preach at the service.

Jesuit Father Daniel Berrigan, whom Snyder had cited as an influence in his life, said he was "shocked" by the death.

"I really don't want to talk about it. It's too close," Father Berrigan told Catholic News Service July 6.

Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington said he was "deeply saddened." "Homeless people have lost a true friend and an effective advocate," he said in a statement.

He called for "decent, affordable housing" for all people and said that Washington's Catholic community "remains committed to offering our homeless sisters and brothers both dignity and opportunity. We would all honor the memory of Mitch Snyder by recommitting ourselves to this ongoing struggle."

A maverick who abandoned his wife and two sons as he launched into activism, Mitchell Darryl Snyder was born in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. His father, Robert, left the family when his son was only 9 years old. During his teen years, Mitch Snyder spent time in reform school and as an adult in prison for car theft. It

was in prison that he met Father Berrigan and became interested in social activism. At the time Father Berrigan was serving time for civil disobedience related to anti-war activities.

Snyder attracted media attention through sit-ins and hunger strikes which he used to influence government and church officials in his efforts to create awareness over the issue of homelessness.

In 1982 he began to lose his eyesight during a hunger strike in which he and two other strikers, including his girlfriend Carol Fennelly, demanded the Navy change the name of a nuclear submarine christened "Corpus Christi," Latin for body of Christ.

Snyder ended the strike on its 64th day after President Ronald Reagan ordered the nuclear attack sub renamed "City of Corpus Christi."

Snyder also led Hollywood celebrities to work for the homeless and became friends with movie actor Martin Sheen, who played the title role in the 1986 CBS presentation, "Samaritan: The Mitch Snyder Story." Sheen even joined Snyder in sleeping on a Washington grate to show solidarity with the capital's homeless.

At the shelter where Snyder died, residents were "in shock," said Mercy Sister Carol Ann Votruba, clinic director of medical services for the homeless there. "He was always there for them; he lived here in the building and was around."

She was "stunned" by what looked to her as a "sudden need to give up, to make one last point for the homeless." It was as if he were asking "What else do I do?" she said.

The nun, who met Snyder three years ago after Snyder asked women religious to work with the homeless in Washington, questioned reports that his death was primarily related to a floundering relationship with Fennelly. A suicide note had been found in which Snyder reportedly lamented a failed relationship.

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