

Q&A with Imani Temple founder George A. Stallings Jr.

Hamil R. Harris and Mike DeBonis

October 12, 2012

The Washington Post



George A. Stallings Jr., founder of the Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation stands in front of its building in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, which has been listed for sale (Hamil Harris/The Washington Post)

Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation was founded in the District 23 years ago after rebel priest George A. Stallings Jr. broke from the Roman Catholic Church to minister to African Americans with a doctrine and liturgy incorporating Catholic, African and evangelical elements. Now Imani is preparing to follow many of its 600 members out of the city, to Prince George's County, and its building, on the northeast corner of Stanton Park in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, has been listed for sale.

Stallings, 64, was the subject of newspaper headlines in the 1980s and 1990s as he battled the Archdiocese of Washington over allegations that he had sexually abused two altar boys. Stallings has strongly denied the allegations. A lawsuit claiming that he played a role in the abuse of a seminarian in 1984 was settled by the archdiocese in 2009. He broke from the church in 1989 and was excommunicated in 1990.

Stallings has occasionally been a figure in city politics, and he ran unsuccessfully for the Ward 6 D.C. Council seat in a 1997 special election.

Although never a member, he collaborated with the Unification Church. The founder, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, picked Stallings's wife, Sayomi Kamimoto, with whom he has two sons.

This week, Stallings talked to Washington Post reporters Hamil R. Harris and Mike DeBonis about the move, his break with the Catholic Church and more. Below is a condensed version of the conversation.

When and why did you come to the decision to sell your building on Capitol Hill?

In our 23-year history, we were never able to anchor our ministry in a predominantly African American community. It was just a coincidence that led to [being at our current] location. The congregation that had occupied that space had to move out because the bank had foreclosed on them, and we were in need of a physical location to have a full-fledged ministry. We knew when we purchased the property back in July of 1994 that it wasn't the ideal property. We are selling that building because that is not the ideal location for an Afrocentric expression of the Catholic faith. Jesus said cast your net upon the waters, and we are saying that the fish have moved.

Why did you leave the Catholic Church?

I left the Roman Catholic Church because that institution was not willing to embrace the unique spiritual and cultural gifts of African Americans in such a way that we felt that we had ownership and control over our own destiny within Roman Catholicism. I still believe to this day that Roman Catholicism only offers token expression to black people.

Some pretty heavy charges were levied against you [at the time Stallings's ministry broke away from the Catholic Church], charges of you having an inappropriate relationships with boys.

One has to understand the politics of the Roman Catholic Church. When someone such as I would step out and do something that had never been done in the history of Roman Catholicism in regards to black Catholics. What really concerns me about those charges is that not one of them surfaced while I was a Roman Catholic priest. [The Post published a front-page story about the allegations three months after Stallings broke with the church in 1989, but sources in that story said allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior by Stallings had surfaced within the archdiocese years earlier.]

At what point did you become involved with [Unification Church founder Sun Myung] Moon?

I didn't become involved with the Unification movement until January 2001, and the involvement was not with Rev. Moon or the Unification Church but with the American clergy leadership conference, which is an interreligious and interracial coalition of ministers who were focused on rebuilding the family, restoring the community and renewing the nation and the world. That organization was founded as a result of the inspiration of Father Moon.

People in general didn't understand the relationship that Rev. Sun Young Moon had with the African American church and African American ministers. It was . . . the result of a commonality that existed between Rev. Moon and the black church when it came to the whole concept of suffering, being denied access and being accepted for who one is.

One new chapter in your life was when Rev. Moon arranged for you to meet a young lady who would become your friend, then your wife.

My wife and I were married May 7, 2001. Our first child [Shin Young] was born April 15, 2002, and our second son, Young Pal, was born exactly 23 months to the day later on March 15, 2004.

Why did you make the decision to get married and what has that relationship meant to you?

My life, besides my parents, has been my wife and my children. I look at marriage as being a powerful expression of healing and God's love. What convinced me was when Rev. Moon and I had a discussion about lineage and the importance of the DNA and blood line. Rev. Moon would ... say: "Which is most important? Life, love or lineage?" People say love, and he would say, "No, lineage."

If there is no lineage, there is no love. I began to realize the number of Catholic priests who are not married and can't acknowledge the Catholic children who they have fathered themselves because they have not been faithful to their vows. Pope John Paul II has no lineage. No matter how great is, there is no one after him. His life line is dead.