

# Catholic Charities hires priest to work on racial equality, diversity

WASHINGTON – Precious Blood Father Clarence Williams has been chosen as Catholic Charities USA’s new director of racial equality and diversity initiatives.

Father Williams, director of black Catholic ministries in the Archdiocese of Detroit for the last 12 years, starts the new job Sept. 1.

A consultant to Catholic Charities for about nine years, Father Williams told Catholic News Service July 25 he would “hit the ground running,” visiting local Catholic Charities agencies around the country to share his approach on race relations, which he calls “racial sobriety.”

Father Williams is the author of the new book, “Racial Sobriety: Becoming the Change You Want to See,” as well as “Racial Sobriety: A Journey From Hurts to Healing” and “Recovery From Everyday Racisms.”

A Cleveland native, he was the first African-American from that diocese to be ordained. He has served the past 30 years in the Archdiocese of Detroit, both as parish pastor and in the black Catholic ministry office.

Father Williams is co-convener of Building Bridges in Black and Brown, a national dialogue between the black and Hispanic communities, and produced three national teleconferences on racism, reaching an estimated 11,000 participants. He has given workshops and presentations on racism in the United States, Europe, South America and Africa.

He calls racial sobriety “an educational approach to see how we feel, think and act under the influence of our prejudices, and help leadership talk through where they think they are with race relations.”

Father Williams added, “We’re multigenerational – people who have integration perspectives and multicultural perspectives, racism as a language and anti-racism as a language. Many groups want to engage it (race relations), but because of the

different approaches, they can't seem to get together to set about doing the work. My part is to put a conceptual piece together to put everyone in the same paradigm."

He added that while he has worked principally with religious organizations, it can be applied in other settings as well.

"I've been to General Motors headquarters and worked with their employees and done a training with them," Father Williams told CNS.

Father Williams served as vice chair of Bread for the World, the Christian citizens' anti-hunger lobby. He has received the Dr. King Unity and Peace Award at St. Mary Cathedral in Miami, named for slain civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; the Archbishop James Lyke Award from the Pan African Roman Catholic Clergy Conference; and the Keep the Dream Alive Award in Detroit at St. Anthony Church, where he had once been pastor.

He also established the Black Catholic Televangelization Network, which supplied programming to broadcast and cable outlets.

Having been in Detroit more than half of his life, Father Williams said he would "miss the relationships" nurtured over that time, but planned to return to Detroit frequently. Catholic Charities USA is based in Alexandria, Va.

He pointed to Detroit as the birthplace of the black Catholic movement.

"Our local Catholic interracial council met and invited the national group to come here in 1968 to begin the healing (after Detroit's 1967 rioting)," he said. "We met right after the assassination of Dr. King. The 'Negro' clergy met at night and became the National Black (Catholic) Clergy Caucus."

From that, he added, sprang other ministries attending to the needs of other minority groups in the Catholic Church throughout the United States.