



Rev. Chester P. Smith, SVD



Fr. Smith was ordained in 1988 in Chicago along with his twin brother, Fr. Charles A. Smith, Jr. They made African American history by becoming the first African American twin priests to be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church in America.

Fr. Smith is one of three missionary priests that make up the Bowman-Francis Ministry Project. The Bowman-Francis Ministry Project was founded in 1993 by the Society of Divine Word to serve the Black Catholic Diaspora. The vision of the Bowman-Francis Ministry is to strive toward spiritual development while fostering the betterment of health and an elevated quality of life for all people of African decent. The Bowman-Francis Ministry travels the world implementing educational programs and materials that they have specially designed and produced to foster cross-cultural awareness from an afro-centric perspective while addressing the problems facing today's families of African decent and the communities in which we live. Fr. Smith is the co-author of *Boyhood to Manhood*, a Rite of Passage manual for African American boys (1993) and a manual for the African American family *Kwanzaa celebration: My Family Our Family* (1995).

Fr. Smith is the founder of Ambassadors of the Word (AOW), a peer group ministry program that addresses the issues of African American youth development and their transition into adulthood. The program is a response to the need for engagement of African American youth in spiritual education, conflict resolution, and leadership training. Fr. Smith lectures nationally and has made numerous conferences, media presentations on the use of the adolescent rites of participation with rites groups around the country. The youth in the seven chapters of Ambassadors of the Word have taken cultural exchange trips to West Africa, Caribbean Islands, Belize, Brazil and Trinidad.

Fr. Smith works with the other members of the Bowman-Francis Ministry to implement annual programs for the AOW Rites of Passage program for youth, Youth J.A.M. for Jesus, Sankofa Youth Summit, Harambee Bakijana Young Adult Retreat, Martin Luther King Celebration, Kwanzaa Fest, and AOW Cultural Exchange Retreat programs. In addition to these annual programs, as a member of the Bowman-Francis Ministry Project, Fr. Smith travels around the world conducting church leadership development workshops, revivals, and customized retreats for fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, strengthening the African family, and the study of Africans in the Bible.

Fr. Smith served as president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.