News



Danielle Brown speaks during a May 2022 lecture at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, where she serves on the board of directors. (Courtesy of Benedictine College)

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Danielle Brown is out as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' director for the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, the latest change in a new-look social justice department for the nation's episcopate.

Brown, a Michigan-born attorney and former judge who resigned from the USCCB role in January, had served at the conference since 2018.

"I left in part because I had given all that I could and felt called to contribute, discerning ultimately that it was time for a new adventure," she told BCM in a statement.

"I am confident that the bishops will remain committed to justice as Jesus envisions it, reconciling the past with the present, ultimately preaching the gospel and calling all to Jesus through this important work."

Brown's role at the conference in Washington included collaboration with various committees and departments to combat racism, a work that began with the creation of the Ad Hoc group following the deadly 2017 Charlottesville car attack. The committee has been led by Black bishops since its creation and issued the pastoral letter "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love" in 2018.

The group's work was perhaps most visible early on during the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide racial reckoning after the 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota. The Ad Hoc Committee's then-leader, Archbishop Shelton Fabre, was noted for his pointed call for justice and a recognition of the anti-Christian nature of racial prejudice.

Brown, who has played an integral role on the committee during nearly the entirety of its existence, noted that it encouraged bishops in their own reckoning with racism, including pilgrimages to "cultural sites of historical significance" and an exploration of the "theological aspects of reparations."

"I'm grateful for the great work of the bishops of the Ad Hoc Committee and supporting bishops," said Brown. "Such efforts can and will deepen insight and inform prayer and ultimately decision making."

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Following the election of Archbishop Timothy Broglio as USCCB president in 2022, Fabre was succeeded as Ad Hoc Committee chairman by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Perry of Chicago. Perry is best known for supporting the Traditional Latin Mass and for his work on the sainthood cause of Venerable Augustus Tolton.

Perry retired as a bishop in September 2023, but was granted special permission by the conference to continue as the Ad Hoc Committee chairman for two years. He is joined on the committee by bishops from various ideological perspectives, including Cardinal Seán O'Malley, OFM Cap., Archbishop Emeritus of Boston; Archbishop Fabre of Louisville; Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco; Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, and several others.

Last summer, the USCCB's Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development — in which the Ad Hoc Committee is housed — announced major staff layoffs following the resignation of longtime Catholic Campaign for Human Development director Ralph McCloud, the highest-ranking African-American layperson in the U.S. church.

The sudden restructuring — which reportedly resulted from financial challenges and was widely condemned by Catholic advocates — included a rebrand as the Secretariat of Justice and Peace.

Brown did not mention the department changes in her statement shared with BCM this month, and the USCCB did not respond to a request for comment on her departure.

As of Monday evening, the conference had not publicly acknowledged Brown's resignation, though they have posted an associate director position on their hiring website.

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