

Godly Gay

continued from p. 1

faced intense media scrutiny as delegates to the triennial Episcopal convention met in Minnesota. The hottest item on the agenda was Robinson's confirmation, although nine other bishops-elect also faced confirmation and delegates deliberated on dozens of other questions and issues.

His candidacy was opposed by conservative bishops, two of whom brought forward an eleventh-hour allegation that Robinson was involved in a youth organization from whose web page one could find links to a porn site.

Robinson had already faced and passed two votes when the allegation of a connection to the Outright (New Hampshire) web page surfaced. Robinson had helped to found the LGBT youth organization several years ago, but had not been associated with it recently. The web page had been built only within the last year.

An editorial in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* characterized the pornography challenge as a "phony accusation ... a deliberate, calculated lie, apparently held in reserve until the last minute."

The *Star Tribune* did its own investigation of the Outright web site porn link and discovered that it would take seven clicks and a credit card to actually view content that might be considered

pornographic. The Outright.org website has links to ten Outright groups in northern New England that, said Outright Vermont executive director B.J. Rogers, share only "similar names, goals, and missions," but no formal affiliation.

There are six Outright

able people and honorable work."

Rogers said that any links on the Outright Vermont web site "have been visited individually by members of Outright Vermont's staff and have been deemed appropriate for youth viewing." He continued, "Despite the risk of our site



**"I want to be known as a good bishop, not as the gay bishop."
Bishop V. Gene Robinson**

organizations in Maine, three in New Hampshire, and one in Vermont. The New Hampshire site had a link to bisexual.org, which contained a link to a site called "3 Pillows," a bi "erotica" site, with two warning screens and a registration with credit card screen. The Concord, NH, Outright website has since removed the link to bi.org.

Outright Vermont Responds
Outright Vermont's director B.J. Rogers said in a prepared statement, "The allegations made against [Gene Robinson] are sadly predictable and familiar. ... Such allegations, made at the eleventh hour and in the spirit of homophobia and heterosexism, most often contain little or no truth and are simply attempts at smearing honor-

being used or interpreted inappropriately, we believe strongly that the information contained on the site, and accessible from our site, is vital to the health and safety of young queer Vermonters."

Outright Vermont's web coordinator, Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak, wrote in an email that the media attention "caused a huge surge in visits to our OutrightVT.org website," to the tune of "11,000 extra visits during the three days of media blitz." A typical three-day hit rate is about 120 visits. "Due to our youth focus, we always have many pictures of queer youth here in Vermont," Mulvaney-Stanak wrote. "With the increase in visits from folks that might not have been visiting us for supportive reasons, we decided to

temporarily remove pictures of the youth."

The Homosexual Harassment Challenge

The other challenge came from the Zion Episcopal Church of Manchester, Vermont, from lay leader David Lewis. He had emailed an allegation of "homosexual harassment" against Gene Robinson to the bishops at the convention. He implied that Robinson's conduct was comparable to that of a "womanizer." When the charge was investigated, the "inappropriate touch" was found to have been an arm around the back and a hand on the forearm during a conversation in the presence of others. The Bishops investigating the allegation decided the touch did not rise to the level of harassment and would not have been considered inappropriate by most people. Lewis declined to make a formal charge, and the matter was officially dropped.

But according to a *Rutland Herald* report, "hate mail poured in" to the parish following the dismissal of the harassment allegation, accusing it of being a "hotbed of homophobia." Lewis's priest, Rev. John Mitchell, urged Zion parish members to support Lewis and his wife and not to shun them.

The *Rutland Herald* article cited a report in the *Boston Globe* that Lewis had twice attempted to become a priest in the Diocese of Los Angeles. He had also tried to become a priest in Vermont but was not ordained.

The bishop of the Diocese of Vermont, Thomas Ely, met with

Zion Episcopal parishioners on the Sunday following the convention to discuss church teachings on sexuality.

Burlington Episcopal Embrace Election

Robinson's election, St. Paul's Dean Ken Poppe said, "is not the beginning of our work on these issues. We've been doing this work for years. In this diocese we have many gay and lesbian members in our church and in our leadership, including many gay and lesbian priests."

The Episcopal General Convention of 1997 had passed a resolution apologizing to gay and lesbian Episcopalians and non-church members "for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church."

The Episcopal General Convention also approved a measure assuring local dioceses that they are "within the bounds" of the church in blessing same-sex unions. The measure was considered a compromise to appease the conservatives, who objected to a proposed measure to authorize a denomination-wide liturgy for such unions.

Poppe said the Burlington cathedral staff has already been performing same-sex union ceremonies or "blessings," including that of Stan Baker and Peter Harrigan, lead plaintiffs in the lawsuit that resulted in the legal recognition of civil unions. ▼

Margaret C. Porter hangs out and writes in rural Chittenden County.

Glad Publishes VT Rights Guide

Boston-based Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders recently released *Vermont: Overview of Legal Issues for Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgender People*. The publication aims to be a comprehensive outline of legal protections for LGBT Vermonters.

"We wrote this publication to ensure that gay men, lesbians and transgender people are aware of their legal protections under the law," said Karen Loewy, Staff Attorney for GLAD. Vermont is not a gay Eden, GLAD staff indicated. "LGBT people continue to face discrimination in the work place, the housing market, at local businesses, and even in terms of their ability to form families," Loewy added, although she did not cite specific cases.

Despite the awareness raised by the debate over civil unions, most LGBT Vermonters don't have access to information regarding basic legal issues, according to GLAD. GLAD served as co-counsel in *Baker v. State*, the 1999 landmark case that led to civil unions.

The publication's four sections mirror the concerns of Vermonters who have called the GLAD information hotline. The first section discusses what recourse gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people can pursue when they've been discriminated against. While Vermont's non-discrimination law covers sexual orientation, it does not explicitly cover discrimination based on gender identity and expression. However, transgender people can often seek protection based on

other factors, such as sex, disability, or sexual orientation, according to GLAD.

The second section describes legal issues related to relationships, parenting, and families, including civil unions, domestic partnership, adoption, custody, and domestic violence.

The third section focuses on the ways the criminal justice system should protect and might otherwise have an impact on gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. It explains how to seek protection from anti-LGBT violence and harassment, discusses sexual misconduct laws, and describes the responsibilities of the police to treat all people respectfully, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity.

The final section provides information

to LGBT youth: students should know they have a right to attend school in safety, free from violence or harassment. It also describes protections for student groups, including Gay/Straight Alliances.

Rep. Bill Lippert offered an endorsement of the publication: "This handy, user-friendly tool from GLAD breaks down the most important legal protections available to LGBT Vermonters and helps people understand their rights. It is a tremendously valuable resource for the community." ▼

Vermont: Overview of Legal Issues for Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgender People is available online for download as a pdf file from www.glad.org/publications/civilrightproject/LGBT_Overview_VT.pdf or by calling GLAD's hotline at 1-800-455-GLAD.