

## news

blow up to tear out  
the rest of our world

## Opening Doors

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20 minutes late with a choir of handbell ringers; it lasted for 3 hours. Parishes processed in from the Zamboni door with their banners and walked halfway around the arena before taking their seats in the sections above me. After various ecumenical and family guests, the bishops processed by, led by a fluttering, floating representation of a dove, with Gene Robinson in their midst. His presence was so unassuming that I wasn't sure it was him until the congregation behind me started cheering.

Dressed in a simple cream-colored robe with a hood, he turned and smiled at the parish folk before walking over to his chair facing Presiding Bishop and Episcopal Primate Frank Griswold and the half-dozen senior bishop co-consecrators (including the retired Barbara Harris, the first woman consecrated as bishop, resplendent in a turquoise blue cape and miter setting off her coffee-with-milk skin and white hair). Another 50 bishops, dressed in white albs under sleeveless dark orange cassocks, sat in ranks to the left and right.

At the center of the ceremony, Bishop Griswold asked for testimonials, an essentially pro-forma request. Letters and documents attesting to Gene's baptism, ordination, election as bishop by New Hampshire Episcopalians and confirmation by the national convention were produced and read.

Then Griswold asked another pro-forma question: "If any of you know any reason why we should not proceed, let it now be made known." He tempered that request with a cautionary discourse. "You seem to be a demonstrative congregation," he said with a smile before he went on to caution those present against responding in any way, yay or nay, to the statements of objectors.

There were three who spoke, some with clumps of supporters who stood behind them.

The first was a Father Earle Fox of Pennsylvania. He said, "It breaks my heart to be here," and went on, "We are not to judge persons,



Newly consecrated Bishop Co-adjutor Gene Robinson (left) offering a blessing.

but we are required to judge behavior." He then began detailing the sexual acts of gay men based on unidentified research (the third and last of his statements was "91 percent engage in rimming, which is touching of the anus..."). Bishop Griswold interrupted firmly: "Father Fox! I think you could spare us these details and get to the substance." "You know what I'm getting at," Fox returned. "Yes," Griswold answered drily, "I think we do."

The second objector was Meredith Harwood, from Ashland, New Hampshire, who said that if the consecration were completed, it would "break God's heart." She asked, "How dare this diocese carry out this cowardly act of capitulation to an elite culture?" The third was an assistant bishop from Albany, New York, bringing a letter from 36 dissenting bishops.

No other objectors spoke, and those who had – and their supporters – quickly left the arena.

The Presiding Bishop said the substance of the objections had already been aired,

and the consecration would continue.

Bishop Griswold asked us all to stand and said, "Is it your will to consecrate Gene as your bishop?" The assembled spoke loudly and in unison: "THAT IS OUR WILL!" "Will you uphold Gene as your bishop?" "WE WILL!"

The ceremony went on, with prayers and scriptures and a sermon from retiring New Hampshire Bishop Douglas Theuner that was relaxed, yet pointed. With ironic humor Theuner compared all the berobed ecclesiasts present to the scribes and Pharisees with whom the Biblical Jesus was so displeased, evoking gentle laughter.

He told Gene that he was a "symbol of unity as no one else among us can be." When he said, "Gene, your presence in the Episcopate will bring among us an entire group of Christians who have heretofore been unacknowledged," sustained applause rang out again.

There were questions asked of and answered by the bishop-elect. The bishops gathered round for the laying on of hands. Gene was named the ninth bishop of the Diocese of New

Hampshire.

When he was vested by his family – including his grown daughters and his partner Mark Andrew – with stole, chasuble (a cape-like outer robe, his made of gold-colored cloth lined in kelly green and patterned with green and red leaves), miter (pointed hat), shepherd's crook and all, the applause in the hall was sustained for a full five minutes.

"You cannot imagine," said newly consecrated Bishop Co-adjutor V. Gene Robinson as his voice cracked with emotion, "what an honor you have conferred upon me. I want to remind you of what you already know: that there are wonderful, faithful Christian people for whom this is a moment of great pain and confusion." Any who felt the need to leave the church over his ordination, he said, were "always welcome back." And he urged those assembled to use the worldwide attention his consecration had generated – "The eyes of the world are upon us, we couldn't buy this kind of attention" – for God.

His first job as Bishop Co-adjutor (the bishop who works with a soon-to- retire bishop whom he will replace) was to celebrate communion, serving the bishops bread and wine as teams of co-celebrants spread out into the stands.

The new bishop was applauded and cheered again during the recessional, as the bishops in their many-colored robes disappeared through the Zamboni door.

Outside the arena, the dozen or so Phelps-folk and their allies were still there in the evening darkness, shouting about hell and Sodom and Gomorrah. But now they were nearly drowned out from across the sidewalk by ten times their number of students from the university, some guys wearing shirts that said "gay? fine by me," cheering as loudly as they could and applauding everyone who left the consecration, thanking us, wishing us peace, holding signs that said "God is Love" and "Remember Matthew Shepard – Say No to Hate for UNH." They didn't have to do that, they had no formal structure writing the script, they just did it, and they kept it up for a very long time. ▼

*Euan Bear identifies as a skeptic regarding organized religion, following a traditional New England Protestant childhood.*

## Gay Marriage

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two attorneys who litigated Vermont's *Baker v. State* case said in a statement, "Massachusetts has built on the precedent set by Vermont. Now it's up to the Massachusetts legislature to take the next step, and confirm that the only way to provide true equality for its gay and lesbian citizens is to simply open up the marriage laws to gay couples."

Echoing the groan of other Vermont pro-civil union political activists, Murray cautioned, "It's likely that Massachusetts is in for a battle just like the one that we fought in 2000, both in the legislature and in the subsequent campaign season. Gays and

lesbians here in Vermont must to do everything we can to support Massachusetts' fight for full equality."

"This is a historic day for lesbian and gay couples in Massachusetts who until today have only dreamed of being able to get married," said David Buckel, Lambda Legal's Marriage Project Director. "The court has said explicitly that civil marriage can't be limited to different-sex couples. The state legislature will now look at how – not whether – Massachusetts couples will have equal marriage rights.

"This isn't a chess game – today's ruling is about real people's lives, hopes and dreams," Buckel said. Lambda Legal is litigating for marriage rights on behalf of seven New

Jersey couples.

Presidential candidate Senator John Kerry (D-Mass) wasted no time in issuing a statement in support of the ruling and encouraging the legislature to uphold equal rights for lesbian and gay couples. "While I continue to oppose gay marriage," he wrote, "I believe that today's decision calls on the Massachusetts state legislature to take action to ensure equal protection for gay couples. These protections are long overdue."

"Our community and the people of Massachusetts now face a bruising political struggle. We have to make sure that the 'appropriate action' taken by the state legislature is to ensure the freedom to marry for all its citizens, not some attempt to create

some kind of separate and fundamentally unequal system," wrote National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Director Matthew Foreman. "We've learned from painful experience that court victories are incomplete – and sometimes hollow – until they are translated into statute and fairly implemented."

Foreman likewise cautioned pro-gay marriage activists in Massachusetts and nationwide to brace for a "vicious, demonizing, and dehumanizing assault that is likely to be undertaken by anti-gay extremists."

"Today, the Massachusetts Supreme Court made history," said Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign. "This ruling will never interfere with the right of religious institutions – church-

es, synagogues and mosques – to determine who will be married within the context of their respective religious faiths. This is about whether gay and lesbian couples in long-term, committed relationships will be afforded the benefits, rights and protections afforded other citizens to best care for their partners and children. This is good for gay couples and it is good for America."

The Human Rights Campaign signed onto a "friend of the court" brief in *Goodridge*. A variety of other civil rights organizations, religious groups, child welfare experts, family and legal historians and others also either signed or filed briefs of their own in favor of extending civil marriage laws to same-sex couples. ▼