



2003: What a queer year!

In 2003 the LGBT community saw an overturn of sodomy laws nationwide, same-sex marriage in Canada and a gay bishop for the Episcopal Church

by David Moore
Q-Notes staff

It has been said that as time advances, the achievements of humanity do so exponentially. That point is an inarguable one when it comes to achievements for the LGBT community worldwide in 2003. Nowhere were those accomplishments felt stronger than in North America and the U.S. last year.

Although 2003 slipped in quietly, a loud noise north of the American border caught the attention of the globe on June 10 as the highest court in Ontario, Canada ruled that the province's legal definition of marriage — one man and one woman — violates gay and lesbian human rights as enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court of appeals in Ontario changed the common-law definition of marriage from its previous designation to "two persons."

A week later, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that the government would let the decision stand.

Literally thousands of same-sex couples flocked to Ontario to tie the knot there and in British Columbia, including many U.S. citi-



zens. As the year progressed, attempts to legalize gay marriage across Canada stymied as the country's Supreme Court announced it would not be able to hear arguments until 2004. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien stepped down in December to be replaced by Paul Martin, whose support for same-sex marriage remains unclear. At year's end same-sex marriages are performed in Ontario, British Columbia and recognized in Quebec.

While gays and lesbians in the U.S. celebrated for their brothers and sisters to the north, another decision in favor of LGBT civil rights exploded across the newspapers and

TV screens of middle America as the U.S. Supreme Court delivered the most powerful gay rights opinion in history on June 26.

The *Lawrence v. Texas* case began with the 1998 arrest of two Houston men who were having sex in their own bedroom when the police entered their home on a false emergency call. The two men, John Lawrence and Tyron Garner, were arrested and jailed for a night. That arrest would eventually lead to a 6-3 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, written by Justice Anthony Kennedy, which strikes down sodomy laws throughout the country and overturns the infamous 1986 opinion in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. In *Bowers*, a 5-4 majority upheld Georgia's sodomy law on the basis of traditional morality.

"Bowers was not correct when it was decided," wrote Kennedy, "and it is not correct today. It ought not to remain binding precedent. *Bowers v. Hardwick* should be, and is now, overruled."

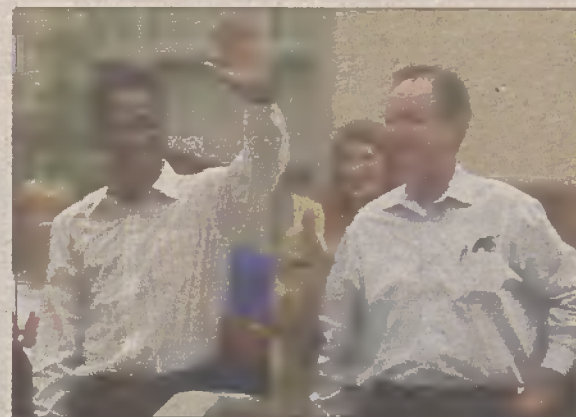
The decision was lauded by humanitarians and the LGBT community nationwide, though negative response was quickly forthcoming from conservatives and the orthodox religious community.

Less than a month later the issue of gay sexuality was again at the forefront of news reports as openly gay Episcopal Minister Gene Robinson was under consideration to become the United States' first Anglican bishop. After accusations of sexual misconduct suddenly sprang up and were cleared, Robinson is approved by 62 of the 107 voting bishops on Aug. 5.

Once again, the gay and lesbian community was enthralled with the decision — particularly LGBT Christians. While Robinson enjoyed a great deal of support from his New Hampshire parish, Episcopalians around the globe were torn over his appointment.

After months of bitter infighting, the Episcopal Church consecrated Robinson bishop of the New Hampshire Diocese — the first openly gay man to reach that level in the Church hierarchy and in the Anglican community worldwide.

"You cannot imagine what an honor it is for you to have called me," Robinson said afterward.



Tyron Garner, left, and John Lawrence

Despite his acceptance by a large percentage of American Episcopalians, churches in Africa and Asia decided to split from the Anglican Church in protest of his election. Nearly 40 parishes across the U.S. asked for new bishops in protest.

But gays and lesbians still weren't out of the limelight just yet. On Nov. 18, the highest court in Massachusetts ruled same-sex couples are legally entitled to wed under the state constitution, but stopped short of immediately allowing marriage licenses to be issued to the couples who challenged the law.

In a 4-3 ruling, the court ordered the Legislature to come up with a solution within 180 days.

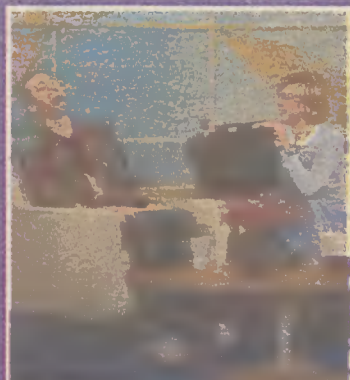
"Marriage is a vital social institution. The exclusive commitment of two individuals to each other nurtures love and mutual support. It brings stability to our society," Chief Justice Margaret Marshall wrote in the long-awaited ruling. "For those who choose to marry, and for their children, marriage provides an abundance of legal, financial and social benefits. In return, it imposes weighty legal, financial, and social obligations."

The Supreme Judicial Court's ruling closely matches the 1999 Vermont Supreme Court decision, which led there to the Legislature's approval in 2000 of civil unions that give couples many of the same benefits of marriage.

On Dec. 17, activists were concerned the state may be backtracking as the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court issued a call for briefs from "interested persons" who may want to have a say in the clarification of the court's Nov. 18 same-sex marriage decision in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*.



Rev. Gene Robinson



A year of Queer TV 21



Queer culture on the big screen 27

The Carolinas in 2003 04

In memorium 2003 16

2003 around the globe 06

Weird year 2003 15

North and South Carolina

News from the Tarheel State 08

News from the Palmetto State 09

ONLINE Q.POLL

www.q-notes.com

If the Federal Marriage Amendment is passed, would you consider leaving the U.S.?
. Yes . No

Q.POLL RESULTS: 03

From January to December all the events that shaped the year 2003!