

Catholic church celebrates its long integrated history

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEMPHIS — There weren't many faces that looked like hers when Bettye Coe Donahue started going to mass at St. Therese-Little Flower.

Same for Helen Evans. But today these African-American women are part of a congregation that includes black and white, Hispanic, Asian, Irish and Italian mem-

bers. "Black men cooking Irish stew!" Donahue, 68, shakes her head and laughs when she talks about the food at her church. "That's the kind of stuff you get at Little Flower: Barbecue sandwiches, soul food, Italian. That's the kind of parish we are now, thanks to Monsignor Leppert."

Monsignor Joseph Leppert was the rector at Little Flower when St. Anthony's, a black Catholic church, closed its doors in 1968, and he'd started inviting members to his church prior to that.

"He went to St. Anthony's and invited the members of that church to join St. Therese parish," said Rev. Richard Coy, the church's cur-

rent pastor. So Little Flower became the first Catholic church in the city to integrate.

Leppert, who died in 1976, and the congregation's rich history are being remembered this month as the church observes its 75th anniversary, including the dedication of the Msgr. Joseph E. Leppert Hall. "Monsignor Leppert said

that racism and segregation of facilities was a moral issue, and that the Catholic church should not wait for the courts, that we should do the right thing first," Donahue recalled.

Still, integration took its toll on the church, upsetting some longtime members.

Donahue was one of the early St. Anthony's members to attend St. Therese.

"One or two (black) families was OK," she said. "Nobody got too upset about that. But when St. Anthony's closed, it was 50 families."

That was a different story. They raved and ranted, and Monsignor let them, and then he said, "This church will be desegregated, and whoever wants to come from St. Antho-

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California university is the first to host God blogging conference

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than gay marriage and abortion."

At one well-attended workshop—"When Non-Christians Read Your Blog"—Biola University professor Timothy Muehlhoff gave instructions on writing about faith without alienating nonbelievers.

He stressed that God blogging has the potential to be a "train wreck" because done wrong it can reinforce stereotypes of evangelical Christians as angry and close-minded "pit bulls of the culture wars."

"As Christians today we are embroiled in the argument

culture and we have forgotten this one thing: 'Blessed are the peacemakers,'" he said. "Wouldn't it be nice if we could say we brought a level of civility back to the conversation?"

Jackson, who blogs at smartchristian.com, said he wasn't as sure what long-

term influence blogging would have on evangelical Christians—but he knew it would be important.

"We are just at the begin-

ning of what is going on," he said. "We need to start thinking about how we can harness and focus the Christian blogosphere for greater

impact."

On the Net: GodBlogCon 2005: www.godblogcon.com Biola University:

Gay Episcopal bishop reaches out

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONCORD, NH — At New York's gay pride parade last spring, marchers and spectators crowded around Bishop V. Gene Robinson for more than three hours. They reached out to touch his hand, cheered, cried and thanked him.

When Robinson was elected the ninth Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire two years ago — the first openly gay man to hold such a position in the church — he knew that he and the diocese were making history. But he didn't know how completely it would change his life.

"It sounds soap-operais to say, but I'm the son of a tobacco sharecropper who didn't live in a house with running water until I was 10 years old. I can't believe I'm here, you know. So I find it very difficult to be anything but grateful," he said in a recent interview.

Robinson's new role leaves him juggling the needs of his diocese, which has 48 parishes and about 16,000 members, with hundreds of invitations to speak at national and international gatherings from people who see his election as a historic step for gays and lesbians.

He's spoken at colleges, churches and synagogues and received a national award from a gay rights group in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the demands on Robinson in New Hampshire are no lighter. For example, driving home from a

late church meeting in a snowstorm last winter, Robinson got a call telling him a priest was suicidal. He quickly went back into the storm on a mission that lasted into the wee hours of the next morning.

"The sheer pace of all this is the only really overwhelming thing," Robinson told The Associated Press.

At home, his responsibilities include diocesan finances, church meetings and priests with personal and spiritual problems. His desire is to be known as a good bishop, not the gay bishop — even if it means small sacrifices, like having no time to lose a few pounds as he promised himself.

Decisions often require delicate judgment calls. "What's the best thing for this congregation, for this priest? Those kind of decisions take a lot out of you," he said.

Last month, Robinson drove north to Plymouth to talk about finances with parish leaders from around the state. Parishes reported losing some long-term members over the issue of Robinson's homosexuality. But many also reported growth as young families have joined the church. Diocesan officials estimate they're at least even on membership if not slightly ahead.

"The spirit of the people is healthy. Our participation is good. Our attendance has slowly been building back up," said the Rev. Chip Robinson (no relation), rector of the

Church of Our Savior in Milford. Robinson listened carefully, sometimes tilting his head to one side, sometimes joking gently with the group.

In conversations afterward, few seemed to resent their bishop's role on the international stage. Much more evident was gratitude that Robinson held the meeting in a spot that shortened the trip for those from northern parishes.

"He's doing his job and he's doing it well," said Joe Fluet, senior warden at St. John's in Wakefield. "I'd never dream of telling another diocese how to pick their bishop, and I'm not much interested in what they think about how we chose our bishop."

Mark Andrew, a state health care administrator and Robinson's partner of 16 years, frequently accompanies Robinson on his visits to churches. "There he is, he's in a coat and tie, he looks like a decent enough person, he's not in a dress and high heels carrying a purse," Robinson jokes. "We look pretty normal. And people love him!"

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October, 2005 Newsletter - Part I
J.M. Little, Teacher

My Dear Friends:

We are glad to greet you again in the Name of our blessed Lord. The greatest thing in all this world is just to know Christ as your Lord and your Saviour. I marvel each day of my life over God saving me, the chief of sinners. How is it between you and the Lord? Do you know Him as a Living Reality to your heart? Or is it just church membership? Oh, may the God of all grace awaken you to the fact that you are a lost sinner. If the Holy Spirit has awakened you to the fact that you are a lost sinner, that is the greatest thing that has happened to you up to this point. Just this last week, I called a friend whom I had not talked to for several weeks. He said: "Jim, I thought you had died and gone to Heaven." I replied: "That would be the greatest thing that can happen to me now." When God awakened me back there to my lost condition, after I had lived in all that religion, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me up to that point. And when God saved me by His grace, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. Now the greatest thing that could happen to me is for the Lord to Come and take me Home to be with Him and my Heavenly Father. Do you ever think along those lines? I do daily. It means something to know the Lord, my friends. For more than three decades I've been telling you the same story. Christ is my salvation. My cousin said to me sometime back: "You are placing your name in the Word of God as if this is real to you!" Yes, Christ is real to me, and I'm praying He will be real to you! When we wrote to you in our September Newsletter, I had not talked to our Pastor Brother Pendarvis down in Louisiana. Later, I talked with him about the condition of our folks down there in the wake of the storm. I don't know about you folks here, but I am looking to the Lord. The Lord dealt with my heart about the storm before it went ashore. He settled my heart that the Word of His would be protected. Now, the Lord's people need our help as never before. I'll also say: the Lord dealt with my heart, back there some five years ago (2000) when He was healing my body from a serious operation about things that are going on today! And you can wait on the Lord. You can wait on the Lord five years, ten years, twenty years and thirty years! You can wait on the Lord!

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