

# Black, white Masons in South struggle with racial separation

Continued from page 5B  
 da, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. It even extends to Shriners, the men who wear funny red hats and operate a network of 22 charity hospitals for children. Shriners draw all their members from Masonry, and many of their policies are based on Masonic rules, he said.

Masonry began in the United States more than 200 years ago. Mainstream Masonry was controlled by whites, so blacks began meeting at lodges of their own in the 1770s, the organization that resulted was subsequently named for one of the founders, Prince Hall.

The all-black lodges flourished alongside their white counterparts, and Prince Hall organizations spread. White Masons in Washington briefly considered admitting Prince Hall Masons in 1890, Bessel said, but the

resulting uproar kept most such proposals on ice until 1989, when the Grand Lodge of Connecticut passed a resolution formally recognizing black Masons.

Since then, 37 other state organizations have granted mutual recognition. But the South remains a holdout.

In Alabama, where critics say Grand Lodge members refused a move to recognize black Masons in 1999, a handful of white Masons dissatisfied with the refusal to recognize black Masons has formed a group outside the old lodge system.

The issue also has become political, with Democratic opponents accusing Riley, the Republican governor, of racism for his membership in an all-white lodge. Riley said he didn't know there were two separate Masonic groups and hadn't heard of mutual recognition until questioned recently by an Associated Press reporter.

This fall, white Masons in North Carolina refused to grant mutual recognition to

Prince Hall Masons, meaning members still cannot attend each other's meetings and, more symbolically, aren't considered brothers in the fraternity.

The vote was 681 for recognition and 404 against, just short of the two-thirds majority required for passage, according to Ric Carter, assistant to the grand secretary of North Carolina and editor of the state's Masonic newspaper.

Black Masons in North Carolina granted recognition in their first vote after a study of the issue was completed in 2004, Carter said. While support is growing in the white group, he said, the lack of more progress is frustrating to leaders.

"It's not moving fast enough for me," said Carter. "I think it's just old men who can't change."

The leader of Prince Hall Masons in North Carolina, Milton G. "Toby" Fitch Jr., agrees.

"That raises the ugly head of racism, segregation, all

over again," said Fitch, a state court judge and former majority leader in the North Carolina House.

At the core, Fitch said, white Masons are saying they won't recognize blacks

as brothers in Masonry. "The best analogy I can give is Baptist churches. You have black Baptist churches, and you have white Baptist churches. But they both recognize each other as being Baptist," he said.

"We are talking about accepting the fact that, 'You practice Masonry and I practice Masonry.'"

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## Women's fall retreat Nov. 17

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nightly at 7 p.m. The church is located at 624 E. 15th St.

**November 17**  
 Pastor Valari Logan and Women of the Harvest present a Women's Fall Retreat, "Listening to GOD with our Total Mind, Body, and Soul." The event runs through Saturday and registration is \$85. The deadline September 15 to register. Send cash or money order to Kingdom Fellowship-Women of The Harvest,

PO Box 444334, Charlotte, NC 28215.

The retreat will be held at The White Oak Conference Center in Winnsboro, S.C. For more information (704) 531-2246.

**December 2**  
 Matthews United Methodist Church will host its annual Walk Through Bethlehem event after a one year hiatus. The event models Bethlehem as it appeared when Christ was born and offers visitors an interactive experience. The church is located at 801 S. Trade St., Matthews. The event runs from 9-9 p.m.

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