Minority concerns trump gay ordination for church

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The issue of gay ordination
has been the focus of intense
scrutiny in the Anglican
church, of which the Episopals are a part, since 2003.
That's when American Episcopal leaders elected the first
openly gay bishop, V. Gene
Robinson, of New Hampshire.

church.

Early this week, the Anglichurch.

Early this week, the Anglichurch anneuncement of an exclusive overseer for several conservative U.S. dioceses.

Among black Episcopalians, however, the issue takes a backseat to more standard minority concerns improving the economy, health care and education, treasurer John Harris said. Episcopal leaders meet to discuss church issues at the General Convention every three years.

"The issues that the General Convention have been obsessed with have not been as important to black Episcopalians sitting in pews," Harris said. "We're still behind the eight ball."

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Top among black Episcopalians' concerns is forming a singular voice that can share thoughts on racism and poverty with the larger church, Wilson said.

But their experiences haven't gone unnoticed, said Robert Williams, a spokesman for the Episcopal Church.

"The Union of Black Episcopalians is absolutely correct in identifying that life and death issues such as the eradication of hunger and poverfunst have the church's full attention," he said. "The Episcopal church's record for civil rights achievement has been strong."

wilson linked the debate over gay ordination to the decades-old ordination of women—a pill she said con-servative leaders never fully

swallowed. With women now incorporated into many churches, she said gays have become a new scapegoat. She joined other leaders who said the church enlisted the support of right-leaning African bishops while overlooking issues facing their continent, including the HIV crisis.

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crisis.

On Tuesday, she asked black Episcopalians to remember the civil rights era as she held up a copy of the Windsor Report, a 2004 document that urged U.S. Episcopal leaders to apologize for dividing the faith.

"As I looked at the Windsor Report, there were echoes of all the oppression that I've experienced throughout my life as a black woman," she said. "We who have been oppressed and rejected ... do not need to be a part of rejecting and oppressing others."

On the Net:
Union of Black Episcopalians, www.ube.org/
Episcopal Church: http://www.episcopalchurch.org

Judge skeptical of councilman's position in Va. prayer lawsuit

RICHMOND, Va.—A federal judge strongly hinted Thursday that he will rule against a Fredericksburg City Council member who is challenging the council's nonsectarian prayer

Chaintinging are controlled the policy last year after one of its members, the Rev. Hashmel Turner, insisted on invoking the name of Jesus Christ whenever he gave the invocation. Turner claims in a lawsuit that the policy violates his free-speech rights.

"All the case law is against you," U.S. District Judge James R. Spencer told Turner's lawyer, R. Johan Conrod, at a hearing. "I'm not saying it's impossible. I'm saying you have a steep hill to climb."

Terence J. Rasmussen, an attorney for the

to climb."

Therence J. Rasmussen, an attorney for the council, said legislative prayers "are quintessential government speech" subject to the U.S. Constitution's establishment clause, which prohibits government promotion of one religion

over others.

Rasmussen cited a 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling striking down a South Carolina town's practice of opening council meetings with prayers that mention Jesus. The court's 2004 decision cited Supreme Court rulings that allow only generic prayers by government bodies.

Conrod argued that Fredericksburg's prayers are a "hybrid" of government and personal speech. Such conflicts historically have been resolved in the individual's favor because government cannot dictate the content of a prayer, he said.

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he said.

"If Tm hearing you right, you're saying a little bit of Jesus Christ is all right," Spencer said.
"It doesn't make sense. The right can't be exclusive just to him."

The judge said that if Turner has an individual right to pray in the name of Jesus, every
other member has the same right and "then
you have establishment of religion."

Turner and the council both asked Spencer to
rule in their favor without a trial. Spencer said
a trial would not be necessary and that he
would rule on the motions for summary judgment soon.

ment soon.

Turner, a minister at the First Baptist Church of Love, was re-elected to a second four-year term in May. The council removed him from the prayer rotation after he refused to alter his prayer.

"If I'm allowed to go back, there will be no compromising." Turner said in an interview after the hearing.

Asked about Spencer's questions and comments from the bench, Turner said: "He, too, will have to give an account to the real, true judge."

Popular pastor packs rural Georgia church and town

MILNER, Ga.—When the Rev. Benny Tate arrived in town 17 years ago, the congregation at Rock Springs Church numbered just 25. Now, he regularly draws up to 2,500 people to the church each Sunday—about five times the number of folks who live in this town during the rest of the week.

As some churches struggle to hold onto dwindling flocks, this Congregational Methodist church has tripled its congregation in the last two years alone. This feat is even more remarkable given the church's location in a rural part of Georgia, about 55 miles south of Atlanta.

Tate quickly dismisses speculation that so many people come just to see him. He credits God, his congregation and the church's inclusive message for the rapid growth.

"I don't believe great preachers build great churches," he said. "I believe great churches build great preachers."

But his congregation and staff say Tate is the reason some drive as much as an hour each way from cities like Macon and the Atlanta suburb of Stockbridge every Sunday to hear him preach. Many come from Jackson, a city of roughly 4,000 about 20 miles up U.S. Highway 41 across Interstate 75.

Milner itself has little more than a grocery store, post office, bank, cafe and one stoplight. "He's not only my preacher," said Judy Sutton, a 60-year-old retired nurse from nearby Orchard Hill. "He's my pastor, he's my friend, and I feel like he's my son."

With a youthful face, close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair and broad smile, 41-year-old Tate oozes enthusiasm in the pulpit and out.

The average person on the street, Tate said, believes in Hell. But too many people forget about good things and lose hope. He tries to put a positive spin on his message and emphasize the fact that God is forgiving.

The church's slogan is "The perfect place for people who aren't."

people who aren't."

Standing at the front of the packed 1,200-

ing, Tate wore a sharp black suit, crisp white shirt and bright red tie as he preached about achieving success in daily life—delivering each line louder than the last and with growing

urgency.

Punctuating his message, he used slides projected on the wall behind him that recapped the themes he touched on. He paced the stage and used dramatic arm gestures. His booming voice prompted shouts of "Amen!" from the crowd, leading to a standing ovation.

He said he wants church to be fun and favors "blended worship" that relies heavily on the choir. "Even when I go to Heaven, I believe I'm going to come home on the weekends for the music," he told the congregation.

He also incorporates humor to keep the congregation's attention.

In his sermon about success, he urged people to develop their strengths rather than obsessing over weaknesses.

ing over weaknesses.
"I don't even try to sing," he said, drawing laughter and applause. "I sound like a dying duck in a hail storm"
"Some of you shouldn't be laughing," he quipped with mock seriousness. "I've heard

quipped with mock seriousness. Tve heard you."

On that Sunday, Tate welcomed about 15 new members to the church. The congregation has grown dramatically in the last two years—from 700 to about 2,000—following a move in August 2004 from an old 250-seat building to a sprawling new brick and stucco structure that seats nearly five times as many.

The church was founded in 1852 in the old building next door that was rebuilt in 1979 after a fire.

Even though the new church building holds more people, ushers still scramble on busy days to place extra chairs at the ends of rows and along the back wall to accommodate overflow crowds. They don't turn anyone away, but sometimes people are discouraged by the lack of space and leave on their own.

Church mother to be celebrated



Hester M. Ford, who will be 98 on August 15, will be celebrated during Macedonia Baptist Church's 7:45 a.m. worship service next Sunday Ford is the oldest member of the church.

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The Charlotte – Mecklenburg NAACP will again host the annual Ashanti Awards and Scholarship Celebration on September 15 and 16. The weekend will start with the Ashanti Golf Challenge at Highland Creek Golf Club on Friday, September 15 and culminate with the award celebration on Saturday starting at 6pm at the beautiful Westin Hotel in downtown Charlotte. NC.

This year, Mel Watt, U.S. Congressman will receive the Meritorious Public Service Award. Public Service Awards will also be bestowed upon NC State Representatives Becky Carney and Beverly Earle The Hall of Fonne Award recipent will be Mecklenburg School Board member George Dunlap. Our corporate sponsor this year, Bank of America will receive the Corporation of the Year Award. The 2006 scholarship recipient will be G.K. Moss, Jr of Sun Valley Hish school

No. In White, President of the Charlotte Branch said this is the premier annual event of the year for the branch. A Silent Auction attracts many attendees to bid on a vast array of art work, crafts, fine jewelry, hats and other

onderful items.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half million members the properties of the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting other mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in public and private sectors.

Golf green fees are \$10,000 per person with several sponsorship levels available that include green fees. Please send off checks to NAACP, PO Box 480540 Charlotte, NC 28269, att: Kenneth White. Call 704-517-1877 for additional disconsisting and the properties of th

Ashanti Awards celebration tickets are \$75.00 each. Please make checks payable to NAACP, P.O. Box 25774, Charlotte, NC 28229, Att: Yvonne Pettis, Ashanti Charperson.

