

The Episcopal House of Bishops confirmed the Rev. V. Gene Robinson as the denomination's first openly gay bishop during their 74th General Convention on Aug. 5 in Minneapolis. He will lead the diocese of New Hampshire, which elected him in June.

Diocesan bishops only were permitted to cast ballots; 62 voted in favor, 43 were opposed, and two abstained. Robinson needed only a simple majority to win consent.

Earlier that day he was cleared of 11th-hour allegations of sexual misconduct. The investigation explored a claim that Robinson was involved in a Web site that ultimately linked to an adult-content site. It also looked into an e-mail allegation from a Vermont man claiming inappropriate touching by the bishop-elect. Both claims surfaced after the House of Deputies approved the election of Robinson on Aug. 3.

After Robinson and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of New Hampshire requested an inquiry, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold appointed Bishop Gordon P. Scruton of Western Massachusetts to investigate the charges. He later concluded that "there is no necessity to pursue further investigation and no reason on these grounds to prevent the bishops with jurisdiction from going forward with their voting about whether or not to consent to Canon Robinson's consecration."

The confirmation process, reported widely as having the potential to prompt a schism in the Anglican community, underscored Robinson's support in the national Episcopal community and an outspoken desire for unity in the church.

"I am excited and thrilled at the action of the House of Bishops," says the Rev. Susan Russell, executive director of Claiming the Blessing, a

HALLELUJAH!

Episcopal Church confirms first openly gay bishop

by Jim Radosta

partnership of leading Episcopal queer organizations. "As difficult as these last couple of days have been, I am gratified to be part of a church that is willing to work together through hard times. This is a prophetic step forward taken by the Episcopal Church on behalf of GLBT people and the Gospel."

Russell adds, "I believed all along that Gene was an extraordinarily good choice to be the next bishop of New Hampshire and feel that the General Convention has now said 'amen' to what the Holy Spirit said to the people of New Hampshire."

Frank Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, says his church has a "diverse center," a vast body of clergy and laity who hold differing opinions but want to stay together. "I have deep confidence in the power of the Spirit to do amazing things and hold us with all our diversities in union with one another."

The Rev. Steven Baines, People for the American Way religious organizer, agrees. He notes that, as with the debate concerning the participation of women in the church 27 years ago, reports of schism and disharmony are being overreported.

"These are turning points for the church that open doors for social justice," Baines says. "The pillars and foundations of the church have not crumbled with these votes, nor will they with this historic vote."

Timothy Rusch, Gay and Lesbian Alliance

Against Defamation central regional media manager, followed news coverage of Robinson's election, most of it focusing on division within the church rather than its commitment to unity and respectful debate. "Although there has been some sensationalized reporting of a potential schism and unrest in the church, we are seeing the denomination come to resolution despite differences of opinion," he said.

On the other hand, Portlander Bruce Mason sees little cause for celebration amid the church's ongoing animosity. He was at the Minneapolis convention serving in his role as Western regional vice president for Integrity, a nonprofit organization that has been pushing for the full inclusion of queers in the Episcopal Church since 1974.

"The church decided that gays were fully included in the people of God—it took them a



The Rev. V. Gene Robinson was cleared of 11th-hour allegations of sexual misconduct prior to the vote Aug. 5

hell of a long time to do that," he says. "The problem is not going away."

However, Mason doesn't predict this controversy will lead to schism. He remembers identical threats were made after women were given more powers in the denomination.

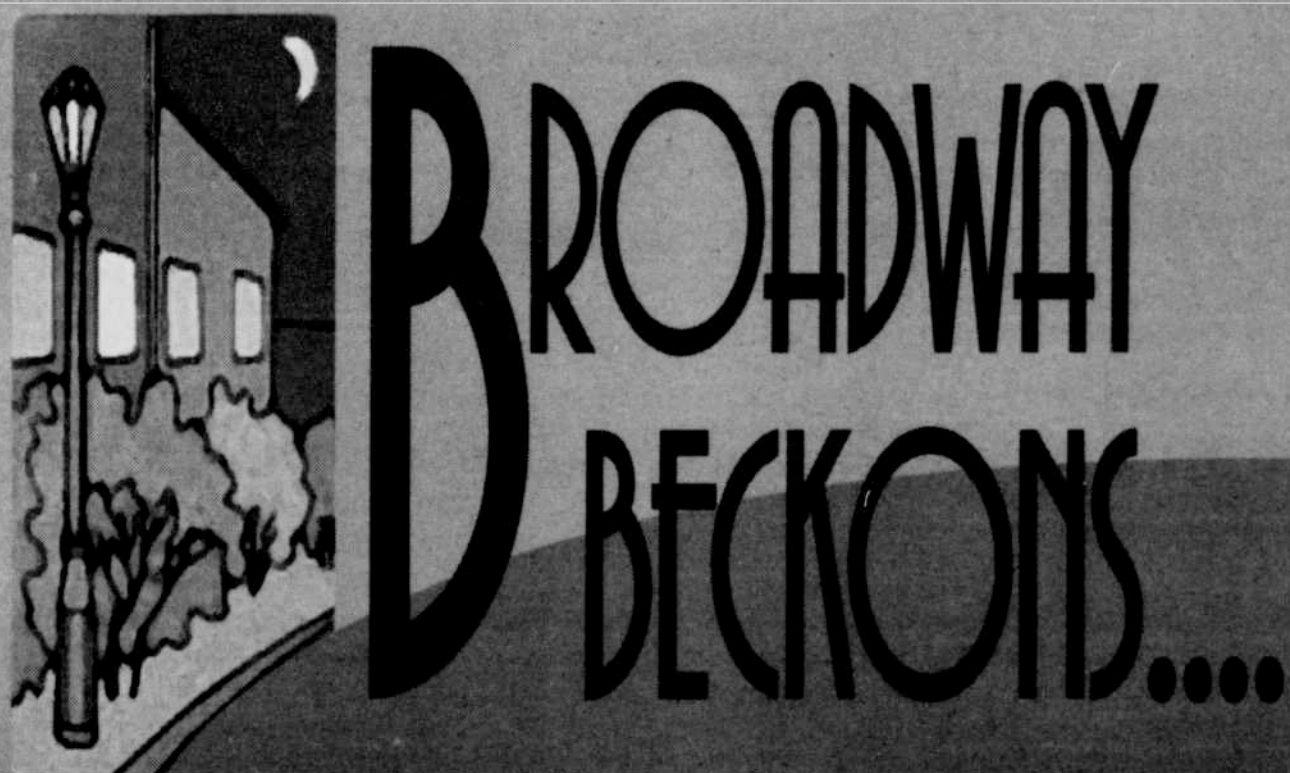
"There was the same 'Oh, you've ruined my church' kind of thing," says Mason, a social worker at Arleta Elementary School. "It turns out that after that—all the protesters—only one-third of 1 percent actually left the church because of that resolution."

Mason says he has met Robinson, who he calls "a great guy." He notes that Robinson served as a priest in New Hampshire for 28 years without incident.

"There's just some glow around this guy when you're in his company," he said. "He's such a gentle, loving man."

Although frustrated about the situation, Mason says the vote at least gave gay Episcopalians a moment of relief. "We're not trying to take over their churches. We just want to be acknowledged for who we are in our own churches. It's ridiculous because everybody knows who's gay in a parish, and it's not usually a big deal. But we just want to be legitimized." ■

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