

whether all opportunities such as church leadership or legal marriage are available to them, too.

Robinson's opinions and his election spotlight not only major changes within the constantly changing cultural fabric of America, but major changes within the U.S. Episcopal Church.

Before the 1960s, Episcopalianism was considered conservative and close to Catholicism in its views on personal liberties. Since then, it's often referred to as "trendier than thou" as it continually provides greater personal freedoms in keeping with popular society. Over time, the church has eliminated restrictions against divorce, birth control, the ordaining of women and now openly gay church leaders, but not without struggle. It manages large decisions by balancing a "three legged stool" of tradition, reason and scripture, and then votes on those decisions through a national democratic process. The church's mission: Make God relevant in an evolving modern society.

To Rev. Bill Swan and Rev. Ralph Haynes, two recently retired local Episcopal priests with nearly 100 years of experience between them, the national church seems out of control. They struggled with the ordaining of women priests in the 1970s, but to them the Robinson decision is proof that the church is now too liberal. Swan likes to quote C.S. Lewis: "He who marries the current of the age will soon be a widower."

Swan, 76, with a white moustache,

strong handshake and mouth that turns down at the corners, recently came up with a way to address his grievances: He formed his own church.

Swan incorporated the new Fellowship of the Living Word in the summer and then signed Haynes on as the assistant preacher. Swan advertised the church in the *Register-Guard* with an upside-down Episcopal shield — the national symbol for Episcopalians — on Aug. 8, two days after Robinson's election.

The Fellowship of the Living Word's "parish" is the gymnasium at Agate Hall, part of the UO. The gym, with plaster peeling from coved ceilings, exposed fir timber boards and an oak piano tipped on its side, is the congregation's temporary home until it gets a building of its own.

The church is attracting people like Mark McCool, a former member of St. Matthews. McCool, in his 30s with a round face and salt-and-pepper goatee, shakes his head at the topic of Robinson. He doesn't understand how a gay bishop can counsel him in marriage, among other areas.

On a recent spring Sunday, Swan greets 11 parishioners as they gather for a class after the service. Swan looks down at everyone, grasps the lapel of his black jacket with his right hand and starts to pace.

"The U.S. Episcopal Church's appointment of a homosexual bishop shows that it's no longer a Christian body. American religion is now more about protecting personal

freedoms than following the will of God," he says in a subtle, native Tennessee drawl.

The group of mostly 50- to 60-year-old white men is silent. Eventually, one by one, heads start to nod. An older man with dyed black hair and a thinly shaved moustache sitting in the middle of the group leans forward.

"It's up to the youth of America to change things," he says quietly. They're the ones that will lead them — he implies the church, and the country — back toward God.

Swan nods. Standing against Robinson and for a pure interpretation of scripture is the congregation's mission.

Robinson says that churches like the Fellowship of the Living Word will appear, and he can't stop that. He believes, however, that broad acceptance of gay men and lesbians is an emerging ethos.

Things are moving quickly. In just the past year, Episcopal leaders decided to make Robinson a bishop; the Massachusetts Supreme Court decided to allow gay marriage; the U.S. Supreme Court decided to strike down

Texas antisodomy laws and there was an eruption of city-sponsored civil unions and marriages.

The changes have created earthquakes across religious, legal and civic landscapes. Rumbles across the church's rigid patriarchal system have been particularly powerful, with no clear end in sight.

In the U.S., several top bishops are aligning themselves with the American Anglican



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