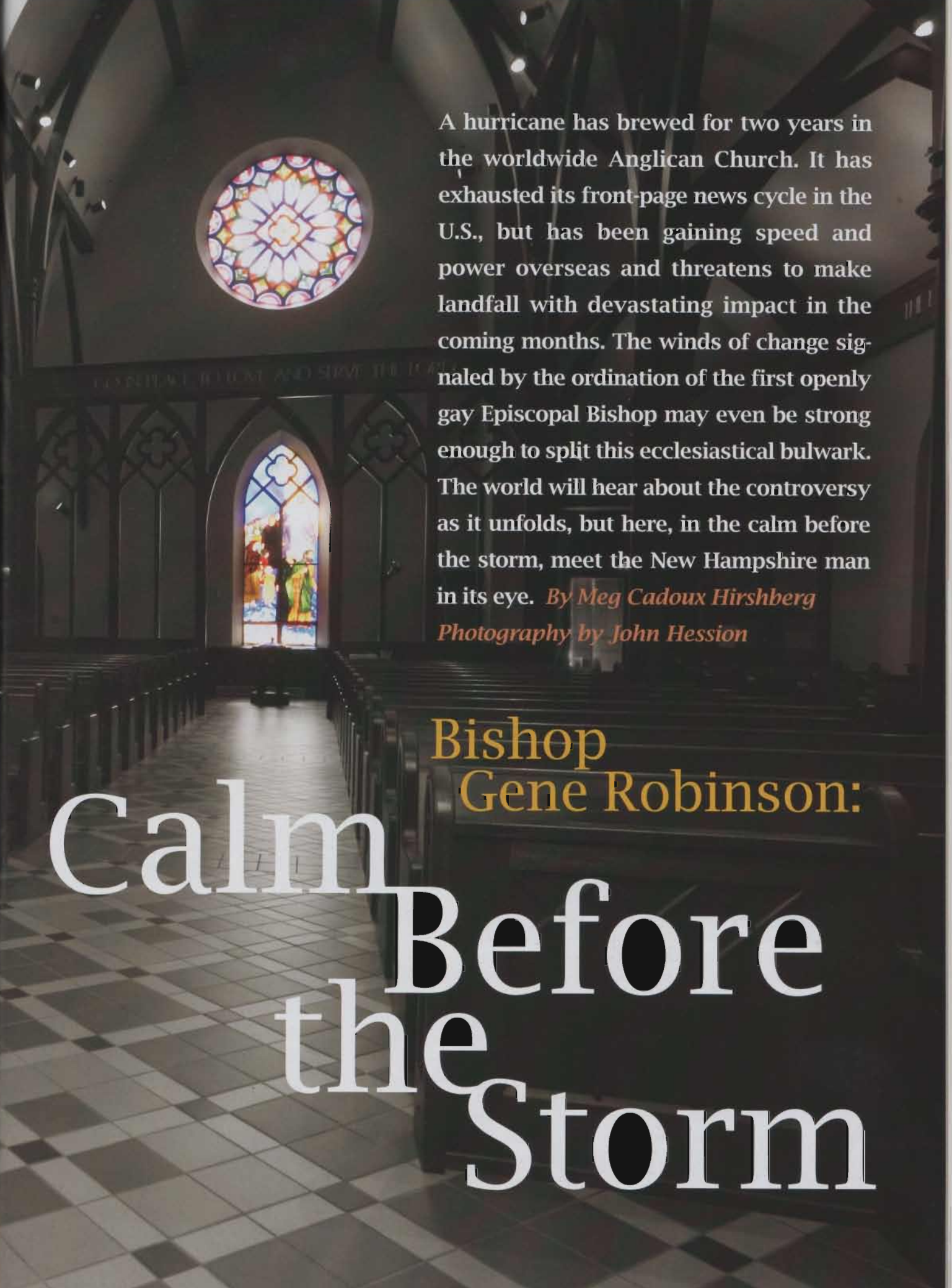




EVERYTHING

...AL HA...RE...M...

A photograph of the interior of a Gothic church. The view is from the back of the sanctuary looking down the central aisle. The floor is made of light and dark square tiles in a checkered pattern. Rows of dark wooden pews line both sides of the aisle. At the far end of the church, there is a large, arched stained glass window with a colorful scene. Above this window is a circular stained glass window with a geometric, mandala-like design. The walls are dark with Gothic-style tracery. The lighting is dramatic, with light streaming in from the windows.

A hurricane has brewed for two years in the worldwide Anglican Church. It has exhausted its front-page news cycle in the U.S., but has been gaining speed and power overseas and threatens to make landfall with devastating impact in the coming months. The winds of change signaled by the ordination of the first openly gay Episcopal Bishop may even be strong enough to split this ecclesiastical bulwark. The world will hear about the controversy as it unfolds, but here, in the calm before the storm, meet the New Hampshire man in its eye. *By Meg Cadoux Hirshberg*

Photography by John Hession

**Bishop
Gene Robinson:**

Calm Before the Storm



It's a perfect afternoon for softball: warm but not hot, a little overcast, a light breeze ruffling the trees — a desultory summer day. For a precious couple of hours, the women players doing pre-game stretches on the scruffy field can actually forget that they are in prison. "Gene!" they call out, as Gene Robinson, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire, trots onto the field and joins them in jumping jacks. Once again, he's come to play ball, enlisting with parishioners at a local Episcopal church, St. Matthew's of Goffstown, to challenge the women prisoners to a game.

Before the game begins, Bishop Robinson mingles with the inmates, who are clad especially for this game in colorful shirts and baseball hats. Several of the women have come to know him well, from his previous visits. Many have corresponded with him by mail. He offers hugs, smiles, words of encouragement, a willing and attentive ear. "I don't get into their pasts too much," he explains later. "Instead, we talk about what they're thinking now, and what they'll do when they get out." Robinson huddles with a heavy-set woman convicted of murder. "We've become very close," she says later. "We have a connection."

The bishop strides over to speak with a prisoner who has set herself apart, seated on the ground and leaning against a chain

link fence. She is subdued and withdrawn as she watches the other women buzz around the field eating popcorn and discussing their batting order. Allison (not her real name), now in her early 20s, was convicted of murder at the age of 15. Robinson plops down next to her on the ground, rests his back against the fence and they begin to chat quietly.

Robinson has a special relationship with Allison. After he was elected Bishop of New Hampshire, she wrote him a letter stating that she was not a Christian, but that she had read about his election, and it gave her hope that if "someone like you" — an openly gay man living with his partner — could be elected bishop, then maybe somewhere there was a community that could love "someone like me," in spite of what she had done. Bishop Robinson contacted her immediately after receiving the letter, and so began building relationships with many of the women imprisoned in Goffstown.

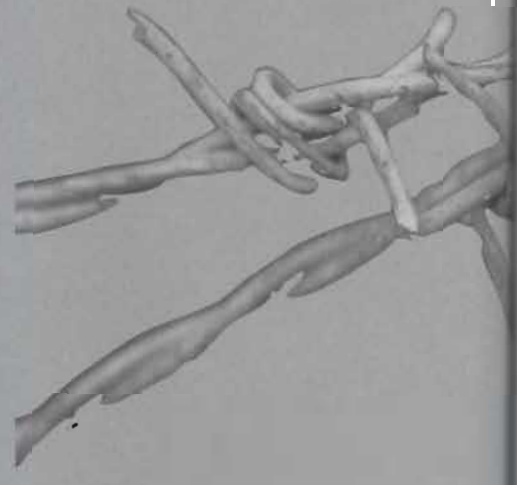
After their chat on the ballfield, Allison reflects on what moved her to write the letter: "He seemed courageous to me. I admired him. So I wrote him and he wrote back. It's been amazing to have him here. He's very down-to-earth, which is important to inmates. He's not too important to come down to the level of the bottom of society."

"These are exactly the kinds of people who Jesus was interested in," says Robin-

Above: Members of the St. Matthew's Episcopal Church accompany Bishop Robinson to the ballfield at the women's unit of the N.H. State Prison in Goffstown.

Right: St. Matthew's and the bishop challenge the inmates to a game of softball.

"These are exactly the kinds of people who Jesus was interested in."







Bishop Robinson officiates at a memorial service for Jonathan Daniels, an Episcopal minister from Keene who was one of the martyrs of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

“Sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms his child.’ That’s what God’s done for me — calmed his child.”

son later. “In both Old and New Testaments, they talk about visiting those in prison. I’ve baptized several women there. After my consecration they wanted to see my vestments, so I went over there and put them on for them. I’ve spent the last two Christmas Eves with them. It’s a very difficult time for them. Most have kids—it’s so hard for them to be without their kids on Christmas eve. We sing carols. It’s the highlight of my Christmas. It means a lot to the women that the bishop would care to spend time with them on such a day. I take any opportunity to reach out to those on the margins and bring them the good news.”

What could possibly be the good news for these women behind bars? “The ultimate good news,” says Robinson, “is that they are loved and accepted by God. They have 24 hours a day to sit there and think about what they’ve done, all the people they’ve let down. There are countless ways for them to feel unworthy of God’s love. I don’t have to even say these words to them — just by showing up, they get that message. One of my favorite philosophers is Woody Allen, who says that most of life is

just showing up — the ministry of presence. It’s not what you say, when you visit someone in a hospital or prison, it’s that you show up.”

It’s Robinson’s turn at bat. He’s dressed in shorts, sneakers and a T-shirt saying “Proud Episcopalian” that he had been given at a gay pride march he’d recently attended in New York City. Though on the opposing team, the prisoners shout out encouragement to the bishop — “Wait for yours, Gene!” “Go, Gene!” He hits solidly to center field — “Run, Gene, run!” There’s much cheering and excitement, and high spirits abound. After Robinson has had a few at-bats (and a few runs), the St. Matthew’s team captain asks him to rotate out so another player can have a turn. “Sure,” Robinson replies, and with a merry twinkle in his blue eyes, adds words that might apply to his entire ministry: “Until you get into trouble. Then call on me again.”

Robinson’s affinity for those on the margins, those in trouble, go back to his roots in rural Kentucky. His father, Victor, was a tobacco sharecropper, and the family didn’t even have running water until Robinson *continued on page 63*



Above: Bishop Robinson greets the parishioners after a Sunday service. He tries to visit each church in the diocese in a circuit that takes more than a year to complete.

Above and Right: The Bishop relaxes at home with his iPod and with his partner, Mark Andrew.

On June 7, 2003, delegates in Concord elected the first openly gay, non-celibate man to the office of bishop in the history of Christianity.

was 10. Born in 1947, Robinson had a tenuous beginning: he was paralyzed on one side of his body and his head was bruised and deformed. He was placed in an incubator and fed with an eyedropper. His father was asked to sign both birth and death certificates, and was told that even if the baby survived, he would likely be severely impaired physically and mentally.

As a young boy Robinson began to realize that he was different from other boys — reacting differently to *Playboy* magazines than his peers — but he knew better than to say anything about his feelings. Robinson went on to college at University of the South in Tennessee, which was owned by southern dioceses of the Episcopal Church. Though he grew up a Disciple of Christ, at college Robinson became enamored with the Episcopal Church: “I loved the church for its liturgy. And for the history, and the notion of the laying on of hands going all the way back to the apostles. There is a physical connection to all those who have worshiped God in this way.”

Robinson went on to the General Theological Seminary in New York. He had relationships with women but still felt that he was gay. He entered therapy for two years. Believing that this had helped him and that he was ready to commit to a heterosexual relationship, Robinson married Isabella Martin in 1973, after sharing with her the concerns he had about his sexuality. The couple had two daughters, Jamee (now 27) and Ella (now 23). In 1985 the couple separated amicably, when Robinson, who had entered counseling again, came face-to-face with his sexual orientation. Eighteen months later Isabella remarried and Robinson met the man who is now his partner, Mark Andrew. Andrew and Robinson remain friendly with Isabella, and they all enjoy cooing over their two granddaughters, Morgan and Megan. At daughter Jamee’s wedding, Mark Andrew walked Isabella down the aisle.

Robinson moved to New Hampshire in 1975, where he co-owned and directed a



The bishop inspects a photograph of civil rights martyr Jonathan Daniels at a memorial service in Keene.

girls’ summer camp. For the next decade he worked in a variety of youth programs, and, after coming out and divorcing, he founded Concord Outright, a support group for gay and lesbian teens. In 1988, Robinson became “Canon to the Ordinary,” which is the term for the bishop’s assistant, under Bishop Doug Theuner. He served in this role until Theuner decided to retire in 2002, at which point Robinson was nominated for the job.

The New Hampshire diocese formed a search committee, and received applications from all around the country. They narrowed the list to five. All applicants submitted answers to written queries, and appeared at several question-and-answer forums around the diocese of New Hampshire. For the election, each congregation in the diocese sent four delegates, in addition to clergy and retired clergy. On June 7, 2003, the delegates who gathered at St. Paul’s Church in Concord elected the first openly gay, non-celibate man to the office of bishop in the history of Christianity. In August of that year, Robinson received the consent of a majority of U.S. bishops, and finally was consecrated in November of 2003, under heavy security due to the many threats on his life.

“Gene was the homeboy, everyone knew and liked him,” says Mike Barwell, who is a communications consultant for the diocese. “They weren’t electing a gay bishop; they were electing a bishop who happens to be gay.” This thought is echoed by Judith Esmay, an attorney who chaired the election and transition committee for the diocese, and who joined the Episcopal Church in 1986. “Gene was so well-known. He was held in the highest possible esteem as an administrator and as a preacher. In a sense we’d already tried him out as bishop material and knew exactly what we were getting. I know this sounds soupy, but he is beloved. He is the most disarming guy, because he bears no arms at all.”

However, much of the worldwide Anglican Communion (of which U.S. Episcopalians are a part) is up in arms about Robinson’s election as bishop. The storm surrounding his consecration two years ago this month continues to rage, to the point where some have predicted an inevitable schism in the Anglican Communion if Robinson does not step down. The fierce debate over homosexuality in the Church has pitted traditionalists, notably from the African branch of the Anglican community, against those with more liberal views. Most conservative Anglican leaders want the American Episcopal Church suspended and even expelled if it does not repent of Gene Robinson’s election, and promise never again to ordain a gay bishop.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, considered something of a leader and spokesperson for the Anglican Church, has not taken a clear stand on the controversy, and clearly wishes it would all just go away. He has acknowledged that he doesn’t expect the next few years “to be anything other than messy as far as all this is concerned.” Archbishop Williams has refused to meet with Robinson and by others on his behalf. Last year, a study group commissioned by the archbishop asked that the bishops involved in Robinson’s ordination apologize for causing “deep offense” in the Anglican community. The U.S. Episcopal Church was asked not to attend international meetings for the next three years. “We’ve been un-invited from Thanksgiving dinner,”

**Raven's Nest
Psychic
Services**
*Experience a Soul-to-Soul
Connection...Past, Present and Future!!!*

Raven and Beckah Duclos offer individual and group consultations as Mediums, specializing in connecting with loved ones who have crossed over enabling closure and personal healing to begin.

Medium Sessions • Tarot Readings
Psychic Investigations • Psychometry
Pet Psychic Services
Energy Readings • Classes

603-232-7931

BROOK RIDGE
...because the best things in life are carefree
For people 55+ in Hooksett, NH.



Open House October 6, 1-7pm
Priced from \$190,000*

- Lawn Care & Snow Removal.
- Single Floor Detached Homes.
- 2 Bedrooms, 2 Baths.
- 2 Car Garages.
- Natural Gas. Central Air.
- Full Basements & Attic Space.
- City Water & Sewerage.
- Walking Trails.
- Optional 3 Season Room.

Models Open! Tues. - Sat. 11-4pm
Call 603-485-7400

BROOK RIDGE
by Jensen
Discover the good life!

HOOKSETT, NEW HAMPSHIRE
www.brookridgenh.com

continued from previous page

says Mike Barwell, the diocese communications consultant.

Leading the charge against Robinson and the ordination of gays is Nigerian Archbishop Peter Akinola, who has called homosexual conduct "lower than that of beasts." Akinola stated that "the consecration of Gene Robinson clearly demonstrates that authorities within the U.S. Episcopal Church consider that their culture-based agenda is of far greater importance than obedience to the word of God."

"The word of God" is the touchstone here, and the sticking point. What exactly is the word of God on this matter? Liberals would say that Jesus said much about love and compassion, and nothing at all about homosexuality. Conservatives counter that there are several places in the Bible, such as Leviticus 18:22, which reference homosexuality as a sin. Yet the same Leviticus "Holiness Code" also deems sinful cattle inbreeding, round haircuts, wearing garments of two materials and sowing fields with two kinds of seed. Clearly, posit the liberals, Scripture is not followed to the letter, and was written in a certain historical context, so why single out those few passages?

Because, says Tim Rich, the Episcopal priest who is Robinson's assistant, "the way evil works is that it cloaks itself in righteousness ... Since June of '03 we've spent all this time talking about the gay issue. Meanwhile a child dies every 10 seconds in Africa from poverty. So shame on us, and shame on the African bishops for breaking relationships with caring groups in the U.S. because of Gene Robinson. Shame on all of us for getting so consumed with sexuality, which Jesus didn't mention at all in the four Gospels."

The storm surrounding Robinson has swirled through New Hampshire as well. While numbers are fuzzy and hard to come by, it appears that while a minority did leave the Episcopal Church in New Hampshire after Robinson's election, many have come back, and other new members have joined. There has in fact been a slight decrease in donations to the church in the last few years, but that decline is hard to disentangle from general economic conditions. However, one of the more painful results of Robinson's ordination was the dissolution of one New Hampshire congregation, the Church of the Redeemer in Rochester.

"The day Gene Robinson was elected bishop, I thought I would die," says Sue DeLemus. She had attended Church of the Redeemer since 1995. Her husband Jerry was the senior warden of the church. "Bishop Robinson — I hate to even call him bishop — is not up to the standards of being a bishop. He's a practicing homosexual. And, he's not married and he's having sex. Christianity is exclusive, it's hard. You can follow the word of God as it is in the Bible, or not. A leader in the church needs to be held to a higher standard. You can't do whatever you want as long as it feels good."

After Robinson's consecration in November of 2003, the parishioners of Church of the Redeemer ultimately decided they would rather dissolve than be subject to a homosexual bishop. They turned over their church keys at a dramatic meeting with Robinson, rented space at another church in Rochester and reformed independently. The congregants recently celebrated their first year as St. Michael's Church, and although Episcopalians, are not recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury and do not communicate with the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire. Similarly, dozens of parishes all over the United States are in open revolt over Robinson's election, and have asked to be guided by bishops who did not vote for Robinson.

About Robinson, Sue DeLemus says: "He's an extremely smart and charismatic man. He cares about people, but he's twisted and lost. He's putting his seal of approval on homosexual behavior." Later she adds, "I hope I haven't come off as a bigoted person. Homosexuals are welcome in our church. I don't reject their orientation, just the practice. We're called to respect the dignity of each person. But the issue is the leadership role of Gene Robinson. His homosexual behavior is my business if he's a leader in my church." Clearly, the subject of the rift in the church is a difficult one for her: "This is all really hard," she says, "because the desire is to just get along."

DeLemus's husband Jerry, the former Redeemer vestry warden, foresees imminent schism in the Anglican Church: "His election is a deal breaker, definitely." He adds: "I fear for Gene on judgment day. I pray for him. People at my church grumble that I do that. But who needs a doctor but the sick? Gene is in great peril spiritually. He is misleading his flock. He is causing great destruction within his church."

He has put himself in harm's way with Christ. The gay issue is his main platform. Everything else takes second seat to that. It would be a great victory for Christ if Gene repented."

Robinson views his homosexuality not as a curse, but as a blessing: "I'm grateful for the experience of being gay, of being on the outside," he says. "It's my little window on what it's like to be a woman, to be black, to be handicapped, to be a prisoner. I know about experiences that push people to the margins of life. I know what it's like for the church to tell you that you are an abomination. That's the good news that changed my life: to hear God saying, you are my beloved. In you I am well pleased."

"The fact is," says Tricia Rose Burt, an artist in Peterborough who sought Robinson's counsel during a personal crisis, "we're all 'not normal' in some way. As an artist, I often feel different from other people. Gene showed me that my real issue was not about feeling like an outsider, and not about my heartbreak, but about feeling unloved by God. He nailed it. Against the backdrop of God's love, my problems take on a different perspective."

Gene Robinson is an unlikely agent provocateur. He is a small man, with close cropped graying brown hair and lively blue eyes aided by rimless glasses. He has a relaxed demeanor, is an attentive listener, has a quick sense of humor and loves a good joke. His office is filled with books and photos of his family. Everything about him is calm and comfortable — he is not one to pontificate or harangue. He seems so ... normal. Which is exactly how his assistant, Tim Rich, describes him: "He's a pretty ordinary guy. He's a great dad, a giddy, sloppy, stupid, crazy grandpa and a loving partner, whose mate happens to be a man. The most profound thing about his ministry is that he is such an ordinary, warm decent guy. It's pretty hard not to like him. He makes God accessible to all kinds of people. He brings this ability to show people how Scripture bears on our daily lives, and how God's forgiveness challenges our daily lives, because he himself is so forgiving and walks with such grace."

One of Robinson's parishioners recently remarked that the bishop "preaches

with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other." Robinson agrees: "If I can't make my way from the 2,000-year-old scriptures to today's newspaper, I would consider that a failure. Something there points us in the right direction for today's issues — the Bible talks about care for the poor, peacemaking, loving your enemies, the danger of accumulating wealth." Robinson tries to stay focused on these values in his ministry. He is clearly deeply saddened by the loss of the Rochester parish and by all the turmoil in the church, but feels called by God to continue on this path. According to Tim Rich, "Gene hasn't gotten sucked into this back-drop. The controversy over his election hasn't sidetracked him. He has a vibrant and fruitful ministry."

"There are two things I love the most as bishop," says Robinson. "The first is my regular visitations to the parishes. There are forty-nine, and I get to each one about every year and a half. I deliver a sermon, meet with the local minister, youth groups, parishioners and the vestry; go to a potluck supper; perform baptisms and confirmations. I visit shut-ins and people

THE HOME OF TEDD AND CHRISTINE BENSON, *founders of Bensonwood*



Unique spaces for unique people (and friends).

Tedd and Christine Benson built their home in the same fashion they design and build all of their clients' homes—with creative flair, attention to individual lifestyles, and smart functionality.

Bensonwood homes exhibit world-class craftsmanship, and you'd be amazed at the efficiency with which we create such top tier spaces. Our combination of expertise, workmanship and innovation is unrivaled, as our process delivers quality and style, while minimizing risk, uncertainty, and wasted time. And the result is always an astonishing home for the whole family, pets included.



Partners for the life you're building.

877.203.3562 • www.bensonwood.com

in the hospital, and take communion to people who can't make it to church. I do open forums, and answer any questions.

"The second thing I really love is the chance to use the opportunity I have to represent the church in places we've been sorely missing, like the prison. I testify before the Legislature about issues affecting the poor and the most vulnerable, including children and women. Also about issues like gay and lesbian rights, affordable housing and MLK day.

"I have administrative duties at our office in Concord. I have a staff of 15 — mostly part-timers. We have a budget of around \$1 million. We provide services and perform outreach. There's the communication aspect, too — we have a diocese newspaper and Web site. And I have canonical requirements, like approving remarriages. I'm responsible for the pastoral care of the clergy and their families — I drop everything for that.

"I love being the bishop. It's so wonderful to do what you feel called to do."

Robinson is not surprised that his election has provoked a strong reaction: "Ultimately," he says, "this is about the end of patriarchy, the end of a time when straight white males make most of the decisions. Is

it any wonder there would be some resistance to that?" If anything, he adds, "the controversy has deepened my faith. From the time I was elected, the pressure on me to back down was so extreme. I felt God's presence so palpably then. I was reassured in my prayer life that I was doing the right thing. Scripture came alive for me. Scripture discusses the peace which passeth all understanding. God has kept a calm place in my soul. My assistant Tim gave me a piece of calligraphy that reads: 'Sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms his child.' That's what God's done for me — calmed his child."

All over New Hampshire, at meetings, sermons, baptisms and visitations, Robinson is for the most part just The Bishop, not The Gay Bishop. Without fanfare he energetically attends to the duties, both mundane and spiritual, of his job. And yet the hostility, shame and prejudice he's endured because of his homosexuality fuel his frequent exhortations to congregations to move outside of their personal comfort zone, to reach out to the afflicted and unloved. "Jesus was always in a little trouble," Robinson reminds parishioners. "He con-

fronted the powers-that-be on behalf of those who'd been cast aside." Compassion, Robinson says, is God's love coming through us. "You are," he sermonized recently, "the only Scripture some people will ever know."

True, Robinson was selected by his diocese because of their belief that, completely unrelated to his sexual orientation, he had the faith, vision and skills to be their bishop. But in the end, his homosexuality is integral to his ministry. It not only informs his message, but for his supporters, the very controversy generated by his election has added a justice component to his service that no one anticipated.

Tim Rich puts it this way: "I used to downplay the gay issue, but not any more. We were never seeking a gay bishop. But after his selection, I finally got that maybe there's an important theological piece here that has to do with Gene being gay. The kingdom of God was built just a little bit more when a gay man could be open about his sexuality and still be selected bishop. Isn't it a beautiful thing that this happened not in San Francisco but in crusty, conservative New Hampshire?" **NH**

You'll never leave empty-handed...

Mother & Child
CLOTHING AND GIFTS

www.mothersays.com

The best selection of unique, quality gifts



Visit our new 8,000 sq. ft. location!

Greystone Plaza, Amherst St.,
Rte 101A, Nashua, NH

886-6727 • www.mothersays.com

Reverse, refine, and rejuvenate.

Looking for visible results from your skin care regimen?

Approved by Board Certified plastic surgeon Mark B. Constantian, MD and monitored by Esthetician Jennifer Cross, Skin Solutions is an affordable total skin care program that corrects lines, acne, age spots, enlarged pores, rosacea or redness. With the right treatment, we are confident you can see results in the mirror within 3 months.

*Reverse • Refine • Rejuvenate your skin NOW.
Call 880-7700 and speak with Jennifer today.*

Skin Solutions

19 Tyler Street • Nashua, New Hampshire 03060 • www.drconstantian.com