

THE Nation.

Obama Invites Gay Bishop to Give an Inaugural Prayer

By John Nichols
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Apparently, it pays to complain to President-elect Barack Obama. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Obama clearly felt a bit burned by the outcry over his selection of Pastor Rick Warren, an evangelical preacher with a nasty track record when it comes to respecting the rights of lesbians and gays, to deliver the invocation at his inaugural.

So Obama has tapped the right Rev. V. Gene Robinson, the only openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church, to deliver the invocation at the inaugural concert to be held at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday, January 18.

The New Hampshire bishop had this to say: I am writing to tell you that President-Elect Obama and the Inaugural Committee have invited me to give the invocation at the opening event of the Inaugural Week activities, "We are One," to be held at the Lincoln Memorial, Sunday, January 18, at 2:00 pm. It will be an enormous honor to offer prayers for the country and the new president, standing on the holy ground where the "I have a dream speech" was delivered by Dr. King, surrounded by the inspiring and reconciling words of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. It is also an indication of the new president's commitment to being the President of ALL the people. I am humbled and overjoyed at this invitation, and it will be my great honor to be there representing the Episcopal Church, the people of New Hampshire, and all of us in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

Here's the word from National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Rea Carey: President-elect Obama has made a stellar choice in selecting Bishop Gene Robinson to offer the prayer at the Lincoln Memorial to kick off the inaugural festivities. Bishop Robinson is an inspiration to millions worldwide because he lives out the ideals of courage, humility and truth speaking. This is certainly a good sign that our nation is indeed moving forward. President-elect Obama's wise choice of Bishop Robinson, as well as that of Rev. (Joseph) Lowery (who will give the benediction at the presidential inauguration on Tuesday, January 20) and Rev. (Sharon) Watkins (the first woman ever asked to deliver the sermon at the post-inaugural National Prayer Service on Wednesday, January 21), continues to add to the historic nature of this inaugural celebration. For the first time in history, an out gay man will lead the nation in opening the transfer of power from one administration to another -- and every person watching in the U.S. and around the world will have seen it. That, alone, is change.

Human Rights Campaign president Joe Solmonese says: Bishop Robinson models what prayer should be--spiritual reflection put into action for justice. It is encouraging that the president-elect has chosen this spiritual hero for all Americans to lead the nation in prayer at the Lincoln Memorial inaugural concert.

True statements all. But the spiritual highlight on the Lincoln Memorial concert may come from another source.

The rumor -- as yet unconfirmed by the Obama transition team -- is that Bruce Springsteen will appear.