



Rev. Otis Moss III of the Trinity United Church of Christ addresses the ire caused by the church's pastor.

Obama's church taking on image

CHICAGO (AP) — The new pastor of Barack Obama's Chicago church said during Easter Sunday services that recent national scrutiny of the church is a test that will only make the congregation stronger.

"Any time you go through a crucifixion experience... eventually they have to lift you up," said the Rev. Otis Moss III, who did not shy away from the controversy surrounding his predecessor at Trinity United Church of Christ, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr.

Wright retired from Trinity's pulpit last month but retains the title of senior pastor. Video from select parts of his sermons has surfaced online and on television in recent weeks.

Moss said Sunday that Wright's critics and the news media "are just lifting us up to give us the opportunity to speak love to this situation."

Obama, a Democratic presidential candidate, has responded to the flap by condemning Wright's statements but expressing admiration and support for the pastor who officiated at his wedding, baptized his two daughters and inspired the title of his best-selling book, "The Audacity of Hope."

In a speech last week that took the country's racial divide head-on, Obama — the son of a White woman from Kansas and a Kenyan father — said Black anger persists over injustice in America, and Whites shouldn't be surprised about the way it's expressed in sermons.

"The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour in American life occurs on Sunday morning," Obama said.

Trinity describes itself as "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian," a declaration some consider separatist and even racist. In recent days, a CBS News poll indicated most voters have heard at least something about Wright's comments.

But at the church itself, the "unashamedly Black" identity can be seen in the African and African-American art on the walls and windows, as well as in the traditional African clothing of the choir.

It can be heard in references to rapper Tupac Shakur in Moss' Easter Sunday sermon, which was titled "Gangster's Paradise."

Moss told the more than 3,000 worshippers at one of four Easter services that the controversy has opened an unprecedented dialogue about race.

"We are talking in ways we have never talked as a country," he said.

Trinity is fighting back, including by launching its own YouTube channel and blog.

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Leaders fear gun ban may be nixed

By James Wright
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Although Supreme Court justices appear to be leaning against upholding D.C.'s ban on handguns, Mayor Adrian Fenty says it's critical that the city maintain its ability to outlaw firearms.

"Make no mistake about it, this is a public safety case," Fenty said. "The reason the city council enacted the gun ban in the 1970s because crime was getting out of control and guns were the cause of a disproportionate number of fatalities. When the gun ban became law, violent crime dropped significantly in the city and has steadily gone down since then."

On March 18, the Supreme Court held oral argu-

ments on the case. Judging from their questions, a majority of the justices seemed to indicate that the Second Amendment permits individuals to possess firearms.

"This case will determine whether the District or any local political body has the right to determine whether citizens can possess firearms..."

The Second Amendment states: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., for example, asked: "What's reasonable about a total ban on possession?"

After listening to the attorney from the city in the

District of Columbia vs. Heller case, the Bush administration which opposes the ban and the attorney for Dick Heller, who challenged the handgun ban, banter with the Supreme Court, city leaders were pleased with what took place in the high court's chambers.

The law in question is the Firearms Control Regulations Act of 1975 which bans residents from possessing handguns unless they have a permit from the city to have one. Criminal penalties are imposed in violation of the law.

A high crime rate in the city at that time, as well as concerns about a nation's capital that is dangerous to live and do business in prompted the gun ban.

However, in recent years,

Congress and certain individuals have stated that the gun ban is unfair and it violates the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

D.C. Chief of Police Cathy Lanier said that a ban on handguns in the city is reasonable.

"When I came to this building [U.S. Supreme Court], I had to surrender my gun and I am the chief of police," she said. "That was good."

Dick Heller is a D.C. special police officer who carries a gun while on duty as a guard at the Federal Judicial Center in the city. He applied for a permit to keep a handgun in his home and was denied by the D.C. government.

He filed a lawsuit in U.S. (See Gun Ban, Page 5)

Man pleads guilty after verdict tossed

DALLAS (AP) — A man who was on death row for nearly 20 years until the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his verdict because of racial discrimination has pleaded guilty to the 1985 slaying for which he was originally sentenced to die.

Thomas Miller-El accepted a deal with prosecutors that spares the 56-year-old from heading to death row for a second time but virtually assures he will never leave prison.

A judge sentenced Miller-El to life in prison after he pleaded guilty to capital murder and aggravated robbery in the killing of Holiday Inn clerk Douglas Walker during a robbery. Walker and co-worker Donald Ray Hall were bound, gagged and shot. Hall, who was paralyzed in the shooting, identified Miller-El as the triggerman.

He waived his right to appeal in exchange for prosecutors not seeking the death penalty.

The plea should end a two decades-old saga in which Miller-El, who is Black, had his original conviction tossed in 2005 by the high court on the grounds of racial discrimination in jury selection.

The Supreme Court cited a manual, written in 1969 and used until at least 1980, that instructed prosecutors on how to exclude minorities from Texas juries. Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter called racial discrimination in Dallas County's jury selection process unquestionable.

Miller-El was sentenced to death row in 1986 by a 12-member jury that included one Black man. Prosecutors struck 10 of the 11 Blacks eligible to serve.

Doug Parks, Miller-El's attorney, said he believes jury selection practices have

evolved since his client's original conviction.

"There has been, over time, a change in attitude," Parks said. "The attitude currently in the DA's office is not conducive to the tone that existed back when Mr. Miller-El's case was tried."

Mike Heiskell, the special prosecutor assigned to the case, said the plea bargain "was the most advantageous way to end this case." He said he believed another jury would find Miller-El guilty but was unsure if it would return a death sentence.

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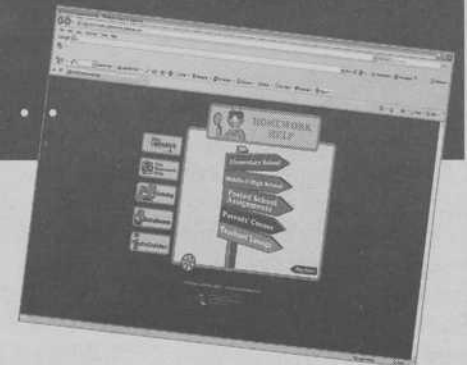
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