

<http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/worship-is-our-protest>

### **‘Worship is our protest’**

*In Ferguson, a predominantly black church focuses on healing its community by glorifying God*

**By Bobby Ross Jr.** | The Christian Chronicle

**FERGUSON, Mo.** — Brian Owens feels a need to protest.

But his protest doesn't involve waving a "hands up, don't shoot" sign, staging a "die-in" or chanting "I can't breathe" during a march.

"Worship is our protest," Owens told fellow members of the predominantly black Ferguson Heights Church of Christ on a recent Sunday.

It's the fight for hearts and souls — not the fight in the streets — that matters in "Christ's righteous revolution," the 34-year-old Christian said.

His comments came amid a national spotlight on high-profile police shootings of unarmed black men.

Violence that included gunfire, looting and buildings set on fire erupted Nov. 24 in this St. Louis suburb after a grand jury declined to indict officer Darren Wilson, who said he fatally shot 18-year-old Michael Brown in self-defense.

Nine days later, a New York grand jury chose not to indict police officer Daniel Pantaleo, who used a fatal choke hold on 43-year-old Eric Garner when the suspect resisted arrest.

The deaths of Brown and Garner — and similar cases nationwide — have sparked coast-to-coast demonstrations emphasizing that "black lives matter."

Here in Ferguson, the 200-member Ferguson Heights congregation has worked with other Churches of Christ to get food and monetary support to residents who barely could leave their apartments because of the large police and media presence, minister Conley Gibbs Jr. said.

At the same time, the unrest has prompted Church of Christ leaders of all races to meet together and discuss ways to make a positive difference, said Mike Root, minister for the Florissant Church of Christ, a 400-member, racially diverse congregation north of Ferguson.

“Jesus can heal us, Ferguson,” the Ferguson Heights church’s marquee sign proclaims.

### **How should Christians protest?**

In the aftermath of Brown’s Aug. 9 shooting death, Owens — a professional jazz singer with a voice recognized by many in St. Louis — said he has struggled with what his role should be.

“After all, I am an African-American man. I am the father of African-American men,” said Owens, who has four young sons and a daughter.

Unlike many of his fellow church members who commute to worship from 30 to 45 minutes away, Owens also lives in Ferguson — a town of 21,000 where two-thirds of residents are black but all except three of the 50-plus police officers are white.

However, Owens said God impressed upon him that he should not use picket signs, anger or the government as his means of protest.

“We are not surprised by the lawlessness of man, the arrogance of politics, the irresponsibility of the media, the dishonesty of religious leaders, the false teaching of self-proclaimed modern prophets or the inability of government to bring justice, fairness, equality and peace to this world,” he said in his 45-minute sermon.

“Because, after all, it’s the same system that crucified the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.”

Historically, Church of Christ leaders have not taken an active role in fighting racial injustice in America, said Tanya Smith Brice, a black scholar in South Carolina. Notable exceptions include Alabama church elder and attorney Fred Gray, who represented civil rights icons Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

“Heaven is our real home — that’s what folks said during the institution of slavery,” said Brice, a Church of Christ member who serves as dean of education, health and human services at Benedict College in Columbia, S.C.

Brice counters that Christians ought to be active in disrupting a system in which blacks are much more likely than whites to be killed by police.

“I think that Christians should be in the streets and at the policy table to effect these changes,” she said. “I think we should use the words of the prophets, from our sacred biblical texts, as support for what we do, as our voice against injustice.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, many black Churches of Christ failed to engage in the Civil Rights Movement, brushing aside such activism as a “social Gospel,” said James O. Maxwell, vice president for institutional expansion at historically black Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas.

Maxwell, who has preached for 56 years, said he sees an increased willingness today to engage in peaceful protests.

“Many blacks who are members of the church have gone to Ferguson just to be a part of the protests,” he said.

Retaliation and violence never mix with the Christian way of life, Maxwell said.

But if the good people in a community remain silent, he said, “then that means the wrong can continue to go on.”

“You can protest by preaching the word of God,” Maxwell said. “But why should we enjoy the privileges of freedom if we didn’t make any sacrifices to make a difference?”

Owens stressed that he was not saying a Christian cannot be involved in the political process or take part in the American system of government.

However, he cautioned fellow Christians to remember that they are first and foremost citizens of heaven — not of the United States.

“Our kingdom is not of this world. We can’t be distracted by things of this world,” Owens said. “Our response is worship because it is through our worship that people see the glory of God. It is when we love without hypocrisy that people see the glory of God.”

## **‘I saw myself in Michael Brown’**

Ferguson Heights church member Herbert Lomax Jr. grew up near where Brown was killed.

“I saw myself in Michael Brown because that could have very easily been me in that situation, had it not been for the grace of God,” he said.

Rather than join an organized protest, Lomax said he decided to collect school supplies for poor children in Ferguson. He asked fellow Christians to help him.

“The protests, there’s a place for that,” Lomax said. “But to me, a lot of it seemed very unorganized.

“I feel like it’s hard to give hope to somebody when they’re already grown and hopeless,” he said. “It’s better to start in their formative years, and one way I figured I could do that is by something as basic as school supplies.”

Ferguson Heights deacon Ken Anderson, who lives in Fairview Heights, Ill., said he doesn’t see anything wrong with protesting.

But Anderson, who is black, wonders about the priorities of some of the protesters.

“One of my biggest concerns is, when will we, as a black community, stop killing each other?” said Anderson, pointing to the prevalence of black-on-black slayings. “I know that this is a separate issue (from police shootings), but they’re not so separate in my mind.”

Why, he asked, doesn’t drug and gang violence draw the same kind of outrage as the police-involved shootings?

“There’s a lot of angles to all of this,” he said, “and at the root of it is the devil.”

Another Ferguson Heights deacon, Joe Douglas, said he joined a march to City Hall.

“We went down, and we sang hymns, and we talked about change,” Douglas said. “It was peaceful, and it was effective. I think people listened to it.”

For his part, Owens used his connections as a recording artist to organize the #HealFerguson Concert for Peace and Unity. The event, held on a Sunday night, drew a racially mixed crowd of about 300 to the Ferguson Heights church parking lot.

The concert got front-page coverage in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, where Owens described the goal as “healing through engagement.” He said he hoped to recruit 100 new volunteers for a local youth initiative.

“I’m not saying what other people should do,” Owens told *The Christian Chronicle*. “I’m saying, for me, if I’m going to minister to the community, the way I see it being most effective is we as a church being healthy, living lives that glorify God, and then being open to the opportunities that he brings us to impact the community.”

## 50-50 split: A Ferguson-area church models racial diversity

*'I wish the news cameras were up here looking at us'*

By **Bobby Ross Jr.** | The Christian Chronicle

**FLORISSANT, Mo.** — As national media attention focuses on neighboring Ferguson, minister Mike Root looks into the faces of the 400-member Florissant Church of Christ and sees an almost equal mix of whites and blacks.

“I think our biggest role is to model Christ-like behavior to each other,” said Root, discussing the racial unrest and protests — some violent — that have made headlines since Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black suspect, was shot to death by Darren Wilson, a white Ferguson police officer, on Aug. 9. “The Sunday after all that first happened back in August, I told the church here, ‘I wish the news cameras were up here looking at us.’”

What would the cameras see?

“They would see something very different because we love each other, and we care about each other, and we don’t even agree on everything politically,” said Root, the Florissant preacher for 10 years. “I think we are able to look beyond that, which you have to do to be a multiracial church. We have to have compromise and balance. That’s going to have to be reflected in our community, but we have to model it.”

The church has six black elders and six white elders.

Two of those elders — Stan Williams and Leonard Payne — said the congregation prays fervently for Ferguson and provides support for the Ferguson Heights Church of Christ, which intensified its benevolence program after the turmoil started in that community.

“I am so pleased that over the 35 years I have been here, this church has already been so far ahead of time in dealing with the fact that this surrounding community and the demographics have changed,” said Faye

Williams, Stan's wife. "Sunday, generally speaking for most churches, is the one day of the week where there is more separation of Christians than any other time, and that is just ridiculous."

Member George Barnes, a retired crane operator, said the Florissant church comes together to worship and has no real issues as far as race is concerned.

"I pray a lot that people on both sides will come together," Barnes, who is black, said of the situation in Ferguson. "You got bad people, and you got good people, on each side."

A white police officer — a Florissant member who has worked overtime since the St. Louis-area protests started — said the congregation emphasizes respect for differing opinions.

"We are Christians, and we're taught to love everybody," said the officer, a father of three who asked not to be identified out of concern for his family's safety. "We don't judge anybody on their opinions, so I think that if there were other congregations that were diverse like this, it would help."

The officer said he carries his respect for all people into his job.

"I'm not allowed to really express my religious opinions as a police officer," he said. "I just have to go out there and act like a Christian while I'm doing my job."

<http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/a-child-molesters-son-shines-a-light>

## **A child molester's son shines a light**

*Minister Jimmy Hinton strives to create awareness of the threat posed by pedophiles*

**By Bobby Ross Jr.** | The Christian Chronicle

**SOMERSET, Pa.** — Jimmy Hinton grew up at the feet of the wolf.

For 27 years, his father, John Wayne Hinton, proclaimed the Gospel to the sheep of the Somerset Church of Christ — a century-old congregation in this southwestern Pennsylvania coal-mining community.

“I went into ministry because of him,” said Jimmy Hinton, 35, the middle child of 11 brothers and sisters.

But three years ago, the son — who became Somerset's preacher in 2009 — learned a horrible secret: John Hinton was a longtime child molester who had sexually abused young girls and escaped discovery for decades.

Jimmy Hinton uncovered the truth after an adult molested as a child confided in him. The Holy Spirit, he believes, drove his response.

“I believe you,” he told the victim.

He reported his father to police and prompted an investigation that resulted in the pedophile preacher, now 65, pleading guilty to sexually assaulting and taking nude photographs of four young girls, ages 4 to 7.

While his father — inmate No. KP7163 — serves a 30- to 60-year sentence in Rockview State Prison, Jimmy Hinton works to help heal his home congregation and create awareness far beyond Somerset, a town of 6,300 about 75 miles east of Pittsburgh.

“Jimmy's voice has to be heard,” said Harold Shank, president of Ohio Valley University in Vienna, W.Va., who attended Oklahoma Christian University with John Hinton and considered him a good friend.

“Jimmy has certainly undertaken the mission of informing congregations of the dangers and also letting people know how to respond when things like this do occur.”

Jimmy Hinton has spoken on sexual abuse of children at Ohio Valley University’s lectureship and the Tulsa Workshop in Oklahoma. He and an associate, Jon Uhler, have launched a website at churchprotect.org.

“When I go and do seminars on abuse, I say, ‘If you’re looking for the weird guy who’s hiding in the bushes or even the guy that’s awkward to be around, you’re looking in the wrong place,’” said Hinton, who earned a bachelor’s degree in Bible from Harding University in Searcy, Ark., in 2001 and a master of divinity degree from Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tenn., in 2007. “By definition, a successful pedophile is somebody that you would least expect.”

### **A master manipulator**

His father’s secret forced Jimmy Hinton to rethink his entire life — and even his view of God.

“I wish I could stand here and tell you that Dad was a deadbeat, that he was an alcoholic, that he was physically and verbally abusive,” he said. “Because if he was all of those things, it would be a little easier to wrap your mind around how he was able to do the things that he did. But he wasn’t any of those things.”

John Hinton was a master manipulator.

A father of four young girls told *The Christian Chronicle* he was looking for spiritual support when he met John Hinton. The man had divorced his wife and received custody of the girls after she physically abused them. Little did he know that John Hinton would victimize them again.

“I just thought he wanted to be my friend,” said the father, whose name is being withheld to protect the identity of his daughters, who were sexually assaulted. “I even asked him one time to be my mentor because I was going through so much stuff that I was getting angry with God and wasn’t doing very well with my faith walk.”

John Hinton exploited the family’s vulnerability, showering the girls with gifts and — under the guise of giving the single father a break — volunteering to keep the girls overnight.

“If I could get ahold of him today, I’d kill him,” the girls’ father said.

But the father described Jimmy Hinton as “an amazing man of God.”

“Romans says that all things work together for good,” the victims’ dad said. “I told Jimmy, ‘If there’s any good that comes out of this, it’s because of what you’ve done.’”

The elder Hinton was not prosecuted in numerous other cases, including some in which the statute of limitations had expired, said Somerset Borough police officer Ruth Beckner, who investigated the allegations.

Beckner praised Jimmy Hinton’s effort to shine a light on the problem.

“He is making a big difference,” the detective said. “People that work in law enforcement see it a lot and are aware of things. ... People in the public don’t see what we see, so they’re not aware of things that happen.”

### **Devils dressed as ‘angels’**

The trusting nature of Christians and the frequent need for volunteers such as Sunday school teachers can make churches easy prey, said Shank, longtime national spokesman for the Christian Child and Family Services Association.

“The New Testament warns us that the devil is wise and cunning, and clearly, this would be a prime example of that,” Shank said. “We do know that there are people who are not what they seem to be, and they many times come dressed as angels of light.

“I certainly don’t think we need to start a witch hunt or become suspicious of every person. I just think we need to be prudent,” he added, noting that many churches require criminal background checks before someone can interact with children.

A background check would not have turned up a negative report on John Hinton. Still, a new policy at the Somerset church requires background checks, at least two adults in each children’s class and locked doors on every unoccupied room. Doors must remain open during classes.

“It may be overkill, but I don’t mind overkill when it comes to protecting our children,” said elder Bob Martin, a retired police officer.

## **‘Emotionally, I was destroyed**

Like many of the 80 souls who make up the Somerset church, Jennifer Riggs said she came to Christ because of John Hinton.

“Because he was very knowledgeable and very well versed, I hung on every word John preached,” said Riggs, 35.

“It definitely made me question a lot of things,” she said of his arrest. “But then, I had to realize that all those things are still true that he taught me, and the things I know are still true even though it came from a convicted felon.”

While the congregation’s recovery remains ongoing, she said, “I think we’ve healed a whole lot faster than we ever would have because of Jimmy.”

As a teenager, Jimmy Hinton worked on a 300-acre dairy farm owned by Jeff Miller’s grandfather.

Miller later followed Jimmy Hinton to Harding and became a Christian.

“I’ve seen a man kind of question it all,” Miller said of his friend’s response to his dad’s sins. “I can remember the night he told me. We sat here and cried together. I’ve seen a brother kind of go through the lament and be tested and come out with a faith that isn’t the health-and-wealth Gospel, but it’s been refined by the fire.”

Natalie Hinton, Jimmy’s wife and the mother of their two children, Eden, 4, and Cameron, 1, said she’d be happy never to see John Hinton again. However, her husband has not abandoned his dad.

Jimmy Hinton still writes his father and occasionally makes the 120-mile drive to visit him in prison.

“I have a lot of anger, and it’s hard,” Jimmy Hinton said. “But I can’t erase the fact that he’s my father.”

Behind bars, John Hinton is active with a Christian hymn choir and Bible studies, said Shank, who also has visited him.

“Are there signs of remorse? Yes,” Shank said. “Are there indications that he doesn’t understand what he’s done? Yes.”

Even from prison, the pedophile preacher has sent letters seeking pictures of children and expressing “love” for the girls he molested, said Jimmy Hinton and the victims’ father.

Despite his father's betrayal, Jimmy Hinton said his faith remains strong.

“But emotionally, I was destroyed,” he said. “I still struggle with the identity issue because I’m still trying to separate what was real and what was fake and what was manipulation throughout my whole childhood. I still don’t know.”

## Tips for protecting kids from sexual predators

By **Jimmy Hinton** | Minister | Somerset Church of Christ

**1. EDUCATE KIDS:** Teaching a child to say, “No, I’m telling!” is the most effective way to deter an abuser. We teach fire safety, tornado safety, pedestrian safety, etc., but not sex abuse safety.

**2. CREATE BOUNDARIES/POLICIES:** Parents should create appropriate boundaries for their kids and demand that schools, churches and daycares respect them. Policies must have clear guidelines for reporting suspected abuse.

**3. EDUCATE ADULTS:** Our Christian colleges and graduate schools are not training church leaders how to detect, prevent or deal with the aftermath of abuse. There is good reason why churches remain an easy target for abusers.

**4. ACCEPT REALITY:** Denial that abuse occurs in our churches has greatly multiplied the number of victims being abused.

**EXPANDED LIST:** [www.jimmyhinton.org](http://www.jimmyhinton.org)

<http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/inside-the-duck-dynasty-church>

## **Inside the 'Duck Dynasty' church**

*For home congregation, Robertson family's celebrity a blessing and a challenge*

**By Bobby Ross Jr.** | The Christian Chronicle

**WEST MONROE, La.** — Gasps of excitement wash over a crowded classroom at the White's Ferry Road Church of Christ as Phil Robertson arrives for Sunday school.

Seventy pairs of stargazing eyes follow the bearded, camouflage-clad Duck Commander as he shakes hands with fans, thanking a couple from Canada for sending their ducks down south.

The reality television star carries a well-worn Bible, the thick binding held together with duct tape, as he takes his seat facing the audience.

“Y’all looking at me saying, ‘That’s about the raggediest-looking Bible school teacher I’ve ever seen in my life,’” Robertson tells the class, a mix of yuppies in suits and shiny shoes and rednecks in faded jeans and mud-caked boots.

“God does not look at outward appearances, the clothes on your back,” the 67-year-old church elder adds as he opens his Bible to John 3:16 and begins sharing the Gospel.

“Duck Dynasty” — which set a reality TV record with nearly 12 million viewers of one episode last year — has made celebrities out of Robertson, his wife Kay, their four sons, their daughters-in-law, their grandchildren and even Phil’s quirky brother, “Uncle Si.”

All the Robertsons are longtime, active members of the White’s Ferry Road church, which meets just a few miles from the Duck Commander/Buck Commander warehouse in this northeast Louisiana town of 13,000.

The church itself has shown up at least a half-dozen times on the show, touted by the A&E Network as following a Louisiana bayou family as they operate a thriving duck call and hunting accessories business while staying true to family values.

Like his father, oldest son Alan Robertson — the clean-shaven member of the clan who describes himself as a “Jacob in a family of Esaus” — serves as a church elder.

“The biggest challenge is also the biggest opportunity — just the influx of people that come to services,” said Alan Robertson, who stepped down as one of the 1,500-member congregation’s ministers in 2012 to help run the family’s burgeoning business. “Sometimes, it’s overwhelming.”

### **‘This is their church family’**

Two police cars parked outside the church building and a dozen-plus members trained to help with security testify to the changes — and frequent out-of-town visitors — brought by the Robertsons’ success.

“We have people come in from all states, and it’s OK, even though some people say, ‘Well, that’s just not right,’” Kay Robertson said after posing for a photo with a family from Alabama. “But when you come here, you’re going to hear the Gospel of Jesus, and you’re going to hear everybody worshiping, praising God. So how can that be bad?”

On a daily basis, the church’s three secretaries — including an extra one hired to help with the flood of “Duck Dynasty”-related calls and emails — hear from fans touched by the show.

Many want a Robertson to pray with them or baptize them.

“I always tell them that it’s a possibility that Phil won’t baptize them or that one of the Robertsons won’t baptize them, but somebody here will,” secretary Luanne Watts said.

Some don’t understand the true meaning of baptism until arriving and studying the Bible, secretary Lori Easterly said.

“They’re like, ‘Oh, my word, I’ve never heard it like that,’” Easterly said.

Average Sunday morning attendance has jumped by more than 100 since “Duck Dynasty” premiered, church leaders said.

Even in an auditorium filled with 1,100 to 1,400 worshipers, depending on the number of visitors (and if there’s a tour bus that Sunday), it’s impossible to miss the bearded celebrities, their wives and children.

Missy Robertson, wife of Jase Robertson, lends her voice to the praise team as the congregation sings a cappella hymns, including “Listen To Our Hearts,” “Father, We Love You” and “Shine on Me.”

The church’s Celebrate Recovery addiction recovery ministry draws roughly 400 people each Friday night. The congregation’s willingness to embrace people with “hurts, habits and hang-ups” can be seen in the typical 20 to 30 minutes of special prayers for people who come forward to express specific needs each Sunday.

When they’re in town, Phil and Alan Robertson join fellow elders in placing hands on those people and lifting them up to God.

On occasion, minister and elder Mike Kellett must remind guests to refrain from taking photos of the Robertsons during the assembly.

“This is their church family. Let them enjoy their church family,” Kellett said one Sunday, joking that he and associate minister Trent Langhofer would be down front to sign autographs after the service.

“We keep it light if we can because we’re honored that people would come,” the preacher said. “It’s not too bad, but it is a challenge every now and then.”

### **‘I was ... a sinful scumbag’**

Phil Robertson, a one-time honky-tonk owner, gave up his heathen lifestyle in the 1970s.

He’s a tenacious personal evangelist who has brought hundreds of souls to new life in the Ouachita River.

“I was an evil man, just a sinful scumbag, before I ran up on him,” Robertson tells the Sunday school class, writing the name of Jesus on a whiteboard and circling it.

“I’m just glad I’m out from under it,” he says of his old way of life.

“I’m glad you are, too,” Kay Robertson chimes in from the audience.

Upon hearing the voice of “Miss Kay,” four children from Texas seated on the front row — wearing “Happy! Happy! Happy!” shirts and Duck Commander hoodies bought at the warehouse store — twist their heads around.

The Morgan and Morris families made a special trip from Kingwood, Texas, near Houston, to see the Robertson family's hometown and eat frog legs and crawfish at Willie's Duck Diner, owned by Duck Commander CEO Willie Robertson.

"They're just good people that we can relate to," said John Morgan, a Southern Baptist father of three who praised Phil Robertson's Bible knowledge.

Dan and Betty Ann Stovell from Beamsville, Ontario, heard about the class while shopping in the "Duck Dynasty" section of a West Monroe department store.

"I was amazed at how very well informed he is and how he is so dedicated to his Bible studies," Dan Stovell said of Phil Robertson. "I was truly impressed. There was no pulling the wool over his eyes."

### **'Plain, blunt man who loves God'**

Back in December, Phil Robertson found himself at the center of the nation's culture war after he characterized homosexuality as a sin in an interview with *GQ* magazine.

In the Sunday school class, Robertson alludes to the controversy as he reads from Acts 2 and reflects on the 12 apostles. All but John died for their faith, he tells the class — an idea propagated by Christians in the second and later centuries.

The Bible itself refers only to Peter and James the son of Zebedee dying as martyrs, said Jeff Peterson, a New Testament scholar at Austin Graduate School of Theology in Texas. The book of Acts tells how all the apostles suffered for the faith, but not how the others died.

Given the sacrifices the apostles made, Robertson brushes aside the criticism he has endured.

"You really believe I'm worried about that?" he says.

Kay Robertson said the family has received thousands of letters in support of her husband.

While she'd prefer he use less colorful adjectives, the elder's wife said he's simply "a plain, blunt man who loves God."

"He's trying to get as many people to heaven as he can, and he's doing it any way he can," Kay Robertson said. "The man asked him about sin ... and he made a list of sins."

“Duck Dynasty” remains the top cable show on Wednesday nights, but ratings have slipped.

Robertson’s remarks “shifted the show from something that people outside of Southern and rural areas might watch out of curiosity and intrigue into a brand identified with a particular worldview that large swaths of America will not support or condone,” said Craig Detweiler, a communications professor and pop culture expert at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif.

But rather than a backlash, the 5.2 million viewers for a recent episode likely reflect the normal quick shelf life for a reality series, said Joe Adalian, West Coast editor for *New York* magazine’s pop culture site *Vulture*.

“Whatever the cause, ample data argues in favor of the theory that ‘Duck (Dynasty)’ has passed the point of being a weekly Nielsen phenomenon and is now simply a really big hit,” Adalian wrote for *Vulture*.

The Robertsons know the show won’t last forever.

But as long as the cameras roll, they intend to keep entertaining Duck Nation.

“While we’re on TV and able to have a platform to get the Gospel out, we want to do that,” Alan Robertson said.

<http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/phil-robertsons-oldest-son-doesnt-want-him-pigeonholed>

## Phil Robertson's oldest son doesn't want him 'pigeonholed'

*'Beardless bro' Alan Robertson says he'll be surprised if the Duck Commander focuses on homosexuality at the Tulsa Workshop*

By **Bobby Ross Jr.** | The Christian Chronicle

**WEST MONROE, La.** — What would Jesus do?

What will Phil *say*?

“Duck Dynasty” patriarch Phil Robertson made national headlines when he described "homosexual behavior" as sinful in a provocative interview with *GQ* magazine.

Later this month, the 67-year-old Church of Christ elder will take the stage at his first major speaking event since the A&E Network suspended him over his remarks and then quickly reinstated him.

The March 21 event is one that needs no introduction to most members of Churches of Christ: the Tulsa Workshop in Oklahoma.

The free annual gathering started in 1976 and was known for many years as the “Tulsa International Soul Winning Workshop.”

“I think it’ll be memorable, and I think it’ll be rousing for sure,” said Phil's son Alan Robertson, a fellow elder of the White’s Ferry Road Church of Christ, the family’s home congregation in this northeast Louisiana town of 13,000. “Get Dad with a houseful (of people), and it should be good.”

But the oldest of Phil Robertson’s four sons doesn’t expect his father to dwell on the subject that caused so much media attention a few months ago.

“I don’t want him to get pigeonholed,” Alan Robertson told *The Christian Chronicle*. “I think that’s part of the move of the evil one to marginalize him or anybody else causing a good spiritual impact in the Kingdom. That’s part of our job to make sure we don’t let the devil pull that off.”

“Reaching the World is Worth the Cost” is the title of the planned keynote that the Duck Commander and his beardless son Alan will deliver in an arena that seats 7,000 souls.

Terry Rush, senior minister for the Memorial Drive Church of Christ in Tulsa and a longtime workshop organizer, predicts an overflow crowd.

“Of course, the regular workshoppers are pumped, but his presence will draw so many from the community and surrounding areas who are searching for a new hope,” Rush said. “He will communicate the sober need to surrender to the one who paid the price.”

### **What is sinful?**

In the *GQ* interview late last year, the writer asked Phil Robertson: “What, in your mind, is sinful?”

“Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men,” the Duck Commander said.

Then he paraphrased 1 Corinthians 6:9: “Don’t be deceived. Neither the adulterers, the idolaters, the male prostitutes, the homosexual offenders, the greedy, drunkards, the slanderers, the swindlers — they won’t inherit the Kingdom of God. Don’t deceive yourself. It’s not right.”

Kay Robertson said her husband proceeded to talk “about all of the ways you can come to Christ, and the Gospel, and Jesus, and God’s grace, everything.

"He said all that, but they only ... emphasized one sin, not all the list of them," the self-described duck diva told the *Chronicle*. "It was a way to get a controversy going.”

Phil Robertson is the best friend any sinner could have, said Rush, the Tulsa minister.

"He never got over his conversion," Rush said of Phil Robertson's decision to turn away from a life of drinking and carousing in the 1970s. "Talk to him or to his family, and what you hear from each is a faith and a drive in God that grows newer than it was yesterday. I love it, love it, love it!"

That comment might make Phil Robertson "happy, happy, happy!"

(A mini-controversy was stirred in Church of Christ circles when The Associated Press attended a White’s Ferry Road church service and erroneously reported nationally that “the controversy barely resonated above the organ music.” Church leaders assured dozens of concerned callers from throughout the U.S. that the congregation still sings a cappella with no instrumental accompaniment, as do most Churches of Christ.)

**Phil the diplomat?**

Alan Robertson said he expects his father to stay focused on the good news of Jesus in Tulsa — and not single out any particular sin.

“Dad’s going to be real open about what the Bible says about everything, but I wouldn’t foresee him bogging down and spending a lot of time talking about that,” the beardless bro added, referring to the controversy.

But then Alan Robertson chuckled.

“Then again, it is my dad,” he said in a joking tone. “If telling my dad to be more diplomatic in his approach to saying things worked, I would have done it a long time ago.”

What will Phil *say*?

Stay tuned.