

LOCAL

**BANK ROBBERY SUSPECT SOUGHT**

A man with a deformed left eye, left, is being sought for a bank robbery at Commerce Bank on Sixth Avenue this week, police said yesterday. Anyone with information is asked to call police at (800) 577-TIPS.

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Christians fight gay marriage

Black evangelicals join white groups to form moral voting bloc

MIDTOWN Black evangelical church leaders are joining their white counterparts in attacking gay marriage, and they are gearing up to get their agenda on the local political map.

Local and national church leaders met yesterday for the "summit on marriage and moral values in New York and America" at The King's College in the Empire State Building. They discussed the "black contract with America on moral values," a platform that strongly opposes gay marriage developed by Bishop Harry Jackson, founder of the Maryland-based High Impact Leadership Coalition.

Political ties

By adopting a position similar to the white evangelical movement, Jackson said a powerful new voting bloc would emerge, altering the traditionally-Democratic black vote.

Evangelical base

- Of the nation's 40 million evangelical Christians, 1.5 million live in New York City.

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"We come together in New York City to send a strong message to elected officials and candidates for public office in New York and across America: vote against gay marriage, abortion, and for other moral value issues or evangelical Christians throughout the U.S. will continue to vote you out of office," he said.

"This is the first time the white-led evangelical movement is standing lock-step with black leaders over values, and it's not going to polarize, but galvanize the church," Jackson said. "What you're seeing is a new kind of multi-racial coalition that tackles black issues because they are biblical issues."

For the Rev. Joseph Mattera, executive director of summit

organizers City Action Coalition, this was just the beginning of political ascendancy for evangelicals here.

"We are involved in organizing a major grassroots effort, not just on the mayoral level or the macro-level, but on the local level for City Council," Mattera said. "But we're not pushing a political agenda; we have a moral agenda."

Strong support

"It's a tough situation in New York, because we don't want to be gay bashers, but the bible is clearly against homosexuality," said the Rev. Michel Faulkner of the Central Baptist Church on the Upper West Side. "In terms of the upcoming mayoral election, can our position change anything? Perhaps

not in this particular election, but it will definitely have an impact, a revelation."

Opposing forces

A coalition of hundreds of churches and synagogues across the state has been working with gay rights group, the Empire State Pride Agenda, on the "pride in the pulpit" campaign. The group was denied access to yesterday's summit.

"We're united around one concept: government should provide all New Yorkers and families the same rights and responsibilities and should not be in the business of picking one faith's policy over another," said Joe Tarver, spokesperson for the Empire State Pride Agenda. He added that the summit does not speak for all people of faith. "There are many different religious viewpoints."

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