

News Updates

DESPITE OPPOSITION MORMONS BREAK GROUND IN BOSTON

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, undaunted by the threat of a lawsuit, has begun construction on its \$30 million Boston Temple. The Mormon edifice is being built in the city of Belmont, which limits the height of structures in residential neighborhoods to 67.5 feet. A 139-foot steeple is at issue.

Originally, the Mormon church planned to build a three-story, 94,100-square-foot building with six spires, but scaled back to the current plan. The temple will be built on an 8.9-acre tract next to a current stake house or church. The formal ground breaking ceremony, with leaders from Salt Lake City, was held June 13.

In April, a zoning permit was issued by the city allowing the building to be built under its current design with the 139-foot steeple intact. However, in May, six residents filed a lawsuit in Middlesex Superior Court, "contending that the town violated its own special permitting authority and misapplied a special exemption for churches to the project."

According to a report in *The Boston Globe*, Grant Bennett, bishop of the local LDS congregation, believes a judge will ultimately side in favor of the LDS church. "We plan to build the building without the spire, but expect to add it as designed once the appeals process has concluded," he said.

John Forster, a resident opposing the temple, said the Mormons' action is "a tactic of intimidation and an attempt to change the momentum in their favor."

"We expected this might happen, even though they kept telling us they were negotiating with us as good neighbors, because this is how they got their meeting house built over the town's objections 20 years ago. In that instance, even though they were denied a parking lot permit, they built their structure and then sued the state successfully for the parking lot," Forster added.

The temple, when completed, will accommodate LDS church members from Southern Canada and New England.

--MKG

NEGATIVE DAY FOR POSITIVE THINKER

The Rev. Robert Schuller was questioned by FBI agents for five hours about allegations that he physically assaulted a flight attendant. All other passengers in the plane's first-class section also were detained for questioning. According to an Associated Press story, Schuller "roughed up" a United Airlines flight attendant after he refused to hang up the

televangelist's garment bag and then later refused to serve him fruit without cheese.

Schuller, who gained fame as a "positive thinking" preacher, was traveling to New York City, on the June 28 cross-country flight to speak at the memorial service of Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X.

Schuller denied assaulting the flight attendant, but admitted that he might have touched him. "I'm very proud of who I am. I am innocent. I have not broken a single one of the Ten Commandments. I have not broken any of the teachings of Jesus Christ, and so I'm proud of my faith and message," Schuller said at a July 1 news conference after the incident.

An airline representative said Schuller "made physical contact with the flight attendant and the flight attendant was injured." The attendant went on medical leave following the episode claiming physical pain consistent with whiplash.

Schuller indicated that he was making attempts for reconciliation with the man. In August, the Crystal Cathedral pastor pleaded not guilty to a count of misdemeanor assault, but then read an apology in court and agreed to pay a \$1,100 fine and undergo a six-month diversion program.

--MKG

DENNIS RODMAN FINED FOR INSULTING MORMONS

Chicago Bulls basketball star Dennis Rodman has received the largest fine in the history of the National Basketball Association for his disparaging comments about followers of the Mormon religion. Rodman's remarks, and the subsequent fine, came in June as the Bulls played the Utah Jazz in the NBA championship finals.

Following a road loss by the Bulls to the Salt Lake City-based Jazz, Rodman said, "It's difficult to get in sync because of all the (expletive deleted) Mormons out here. And you can quote me on that." He said his remarks were brought on by Jazz fans who were making obscene gestures at him. According to an Evangelical Press report, the controversial basketball player had made lewd comments about Mormons on two other occasions.

Rodman later apologized, claiming, "If I knew it was like a religious-type deal, I would have never said it. I'm sorry about that." Bulls coach Phil Jackson also tried to rationalize Rodman's remarks by stating, "To Dennis, a Mormon may just be a nickname for people from Utah. He may not even know it's a religious cult or sect or whatever."

--MKG