

## Local News

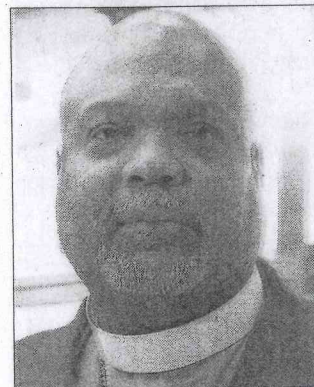
# Handful of area pastors for Romney

## Their rationale: Vote Bible, not race or political party

By Joey Matthews

Pastor Stephen A. Parson Sr. said he uses the following litmus test or checklist to choose which political candidates he supports:

"I'm pro-life, anti-same-sex marriage, pro-prayer in schools, pro-entrepreneurship and pro-business," the longtime pastor of the Richmond Christian Center on South Side stated.



Rev. Ellison



Bishop Glenn

"Those who have those views today happen to be the ones running on the Republican ticket," he said of the candidates he is supporting in the Nov. 6 election. "They are (Senate candidate) George Allen, (House Majority Leader) Eric Cantor and, yes, (presidential candidate) Mitt Romney."

Pastor Parson stated.

Pastor Parson publicly put his stamp of approval on the national Republican presidential ticket when he delivered the invocation at an August rally for vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan at Richmond International Airport.

Pastor Parson and other black clergy who support Republicans are in a small minority. More than 95 percent of black people voted for President Obama in 2008 and the overwhelming majority are expected to back him again this go-round.

In Virginia, an estimated 700,000 black people voted in 2008, the majority overwhelmingly for the president. That was nearly 20 percent of the state's total vote of 3.7 million and a 46 percent increase in black participation over 2004.

President Obama, with huge support from the black community and black clergy, became the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Virginia since Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Pastor Parson stated he tells his congregation members, "Don't vote party or race; vote Bible."

"Unfortunately, our president and the Democratic platform seem to be the total opposite of what we as believers have ministered and stood for."

President Obama drew fire from some black clergy in the spring when he endorsed same-sex marriage. Most said they still plan to vote for him.

Pastor Parson, a longtime Republican supporter, also is among a group of ministers statewide that have formed a group called "Clergy for Allen."

Other Richmond-area black clergy in the group include Bishop Gerald O. Glenn of New Deliverance Evangelistic Church on



Jerome Reid/Richmond Free Press

**Pastor Stephen A. Parson of the Richmond Christian Center leads the invocation at a rally for Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan at Richmond International Airport in August.**

South Side, Bishop Leon Benjamin of New Life Harvest Church on South Side and the Rev. Joe Ellison, evangelical director of the Allen campaign.

Rev. Ellison's job: To recruit more ministers to endorse Mr. Allen's campaign.

The group was formed in October 2011 and announced in a release by the campaign of Mr. Allen, the former Virginia governor and senator. He's in a neck-and-neck race with Democrat Tim Kaine, another former Virginia governor and Richmond mayor, for the soon-to-be open Senate seat of Jim Webb.

Rev. Ellison, a longtime Republican, also supports Mr. Romney and Rep. Cantor. He declined an interview request with the Free Press because he said he needs permission

from the Allen campaign to do so since he's a paid staff member.

Phone calls and email requests to the Allen campaign requesting an interview with Rev. Ellison were not returned.

On his Facebook page, Rev. Ellison, states he supports candidates who are pro-life, pro-business, pro-strong military, anti-same-sex marriage and for welfare reform requiring recipients to work.

He also states on the page that pastors are taught not to endorse candidates to their congregations, but to speak about the issues of the day.

Rev. Ellison said he's been called "an Uncle Tom" and "a sell-out" for supporting Republican candidates.

Pastor Parson also said he has endured similar name-calling.