

Briefly noted

News in the [January 29, 2008](#) issue

A majority of American cities participating in a recent survey have seen an increase in the number of requests for emergency food assistance, the U.S. Conference of Mayors reports. The Washington-based conference, in its annual Hunger and Homelessness Survey, said in mid-December that 16 of the 19 cities that responded to questions about hunger saw increases in requests for emergency food aid in the last year. In addition, an average of 17 percent of people seeking food assistance are not receiving it. Nineteen of 23 cities in the analysis expect requests for food assistance to increase this year. The lack of affordable housing was the most common cause of homelessness for households with children. Other causes included poverty and domestic violence. For single individuals, mental illness and substance abuse were among the most common causes.

India's Christian groups and churches are demanding urgent protection, saying they have been hounded by Hindu extremists in the country's eastern state of Orissa, where reportedly nine people have been killed in attacks since Christmas. "Christians are brutally attacked by the fundamentalists, and law and order is fully missing, especially in Kandhamal, where the fundamentalists have taken charge of the whole district," said a January 2 appeal by Christians to India's National Human Rights Commission. The Roman Catholic Church, the ecumenical All India Christian Council and other church groups issued the joint appeal. They said more than 60 churches have been torched, some 600 Christians' houses burned down and more than 5,000 Christians displaced due to the orchestrated anti-Christian violence in and around Kandhamal. The Christians were killed in violence that was sparked by Hindu groups destroying holiday decorations December 24.