

Briefly noted

News in the [August 26, 2008](#) issue

Nine faith leaders have joined to urge senators Barack Obama and John McCain to present a ten-year plan to combat poverty at their nominating conventions. The interfaith coalition—led by Steve Gutow, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA—sent letters to the two candidates asking them to propose a strategy in a prime-time speech to help the 37 million Americans living below the poverty line. “As people of faith, we believe it is immoral to ignore our nation’s most vulnerable populations,” the letter said. Other signers were David Beckmann, president, Bread for the World; Richard Cizik, vice president, National Association of Evangelicals; Michael Kinnamon, general secretary, National Council of Churches; Eboo Patel, executive director, Interfaith Youth Core; David Saperstein, director, Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism; Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general, Islamic Society of North America; and Jim Wallis, chief executive officer, Sojourners.

A Christian college in Colorado that requires students to attend chapel and staff to affirm that the Bible is “infallible” should be allowed to receive state scholarship funds, the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver has ruled. The decision overturned a 2007 lower-court ruling that found Colorado Christian University—located in Lakewood, a suburb of Denver—“pervasively sectarian” and thus ineligible for public money. The federal court said that state policies barring some religious colleges from receiving state funds violates the state constitution because Colorado allows students at Catholic and Methodist colleges to receive public scholarships. “The First Amendment does not permit government officials to sit as judges of the indoctrination quotient of theology classes,” wrote Judge Michael McConnell.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church elected a California pastor as its first female bishop at the denomination’s 48th quadrennial General Conference in Atlanta. Mildred “Bonnie” Hines, pastor of First AME Zion Church of Los Angeles, was the third bishop elected July 19 from a pool of 25 candidates, three of whom were women. Hines received her Doctor of Divinity degree from the Interdenominational

Theological Center in Atlanta. The AME Zion Church was formed in 1796 in New York City at a time when black members faced discrimination from white Methodists. The denomination says it has a constituency of 1.2 million in the U.S., plus overseas missions on every continent except Australia.

Giving to religious charities and congregations passed the \$100 billion mark for the first time in 2007, according to a recent report by the Giving USA Foundation. The donations to religious groups increased 4.7 percent over the previous year, bringing the total to \$102.32 billion. Overall giving to charitable causes reached \$306.39 billion in 2007, a 3.9 percent increase from 2006. Del Martin, chair of the Giving USA Foundation, said, "What you can't forget is that the 'little guys,' the families most affected by the economy, kept on giving despite any worries they might have about their personal situations." Three-quarters of all giving came from individual donations. Charitable giving consistently represents 2.3 percent of the average American's disposable income—a figure that held up in 2007, according to the June 23 report. The study was conducted by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.

Pope Benedict XVI met victims of clergy sexual abuse at the end of his visit to Australia on July 21, celebrating an early morning mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney with two male and two female abuse victims. "He listened to their stories and offered them consolation. Assuring them of his spiritual closeness, he promised to continue to pray for them, their families and all victims," said a Vatican statement. The unscheduled meeting followed an apology issued earlier during the pope's nine-day World Youth Festival visit, similar to statements made during his visit to the U.S. in April. However, the main victims group in Australia, Broken Rites, criticized the encounter as "stage managed," saying the victims were handpicked and the more outspoken ones ignored. Some victims have accused the Catholic Church in Australia of covering up abuse cases and stalling on compensation payments.