

Briefly noted

News in the [January 13, 2004](#) issue

Bishop V. Gene Robinson, elected in June as the first openly gay bishop of the Episcopal Church, was named the Religion Newsmaker of the Year by members of the Religion Newswriters Association. His approval and consecration, and the ensuing threats of schism in the U.S. church and the wider Anglican Communion, also were cited as the top religion news story of 2003—a ranking shared with criticism of the Anglican bishop of Vancouver, British Columbia, who approved same-sex unions. About a third of the 240 RNA members took part in the annual survey. The second-rated religion news story was opposition to the war in Iraq by many religious communities and its support by many evangelicals. Third in the RNA's top ten for 2003 was the controversial definitions of marriage coming from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court—which ruled that gay couples have a right to civil marriage—and the U.S. Supreme Courts striking down a ban against homosexual sodomy.

A delegation led by the National Council of Churches, recently returned from the Korean peninsula, urged the Bush administration to reengage North Korea in peace talks. The seven-member delegation delivered 420 metric tons of refined wheat flour to the isolated communist nation and met with Christian church councils on both sides of the demilitarized zone along the heavily fortified border. The delegation, led by NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar and John McCullough, executive director of Church World Service, discussed their findings with the State Department.

Three Dutch denominations—the nation's largest two Reformed churches and one Lutheran church—will merge May 1 to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Its 2.5 million members will make it the second largest church after the 5-million-strong Catholic Church. After 40 years of negotiations, the churches' three synods meeting in Utrecht approved the union December 12, though only with a slim two-thirds majority by the Netherlands Reformed Church. While the Evangelical Lutheran Church has only 15,000 members, an ecumenical official of the Lutheran World Federation said the decision had far-reaching significance for Reformed-Lutheran relations.