

Briefly noted

News in the [April 6, 2004](#) issue

Proponents of traditional family values are championing a unanimous California Supreme Court ruling March 11 that halted—at least temporarily—gay marriages in the state. “What the court has done . . . is take a stand against the anarchy that has reigned in San Francisco since February 12,” said James Dobson, chairman of Focus on the Family. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom granted the first of more than 4,000 marriage licenses to same sex couples on that date, flouting a state law adopted in 2000 limiting marriage to a man and a woman. The move sparked a wave of local officials around the country issuing marriage licenses to gay couples in defiance of state laws. The California decision won’t void the marriage licenses already issued to gay couples—as the California attorney general requested—but delays a decision on the legality of granting licenses to same-sex couples until May or June.

Four Southern Baptist humanitarian relief workers were killed and a fifth was injured after an attack on their vehicle in Iraq on March 15. “It was evidently a drive-by shooting on the streets of Mosul,” a spokesman for the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board told RNS. “They had just arrived in Mosul to begin doing some survey work for possible future humanitarian aid projects.” The killings come as the Bush administration-led war to topple Saddam Hussein reached its first anniversary and a guerrilla insurgency continued to take its toll on civilian and military personnel as well as Iraqis. The Baptist dead included Larry and Jean Elliott, a couple from North Carolina who previously worked for the mission board in Honduras for decades before transferring to the Middle East in February.

The Russian Orthodox Church has expressed optimism about inter-church relations in Russia after the Vatican’s top ecumenist, Cardinal Walter Kasper, visited Moscow in February. “In the course of the Moscow talks, the cardinal presented a clear standpoint which was close to ours,” said a spokesman, Vsevolod Chaplin, deputy director of the external relations department of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Chaplin suggested that the Vatican is now returning to its former view of Orthodoxy as “a sister-church rather than an enemy organization.” Ecumenical ties have been tense in Russia since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet

Union, with Orthodox accusing the Catholics of engaging in proselytism.