

Briefly noted

News in the [April 4, 2006](#) issue

Key U.S. Catholic bishops told 55 Catholic Democrats in the House that there is no wiggle room in church teaching on abortion, and that they are duty-bound to work against “the destruction of unborn human life.” The statement March 10 by three top leaders of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops was a response to those who issued a public statement in late February asking for room to disagree on abortion. The bishops, in turn, said they were willing to work together on issues affecting the “poor and vulnerable” but would not budge on church teaching that says abortion is gravely immoral. The lawmakers said the “primacy of conscience” led many of them to support abortion rights, but the bishops suggested that stance was illegitimate if the lawmakers’ position was contrary to church teaching.

The Church of England’s Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) has refused to back a call for divestment from Caterpillar, the U.S. manufacturer of bulldozers used by the Israeli Army to demolish Palestinian homes. The demand had come in February at the church’s general synod, which adopted a resolution “to heed the call from our sister church, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East,” for divesting. The decision sparked protests from British Jewish leaders and former archbishop of Canterbury George Carey. On March 7 the Anglican advisory group said its members had reaffirmed a September 2005 decision not to divest but to continue to engage with Caterpillar. “The decision was taken in the specific context that there are no current or projected sales of Caterpillar equipment for use by the Israeli government,” said John Reynolds, who chairs the EIAG, which advises the Church of England’s three investing bodies.

Changing course, Sweden’s chief prosecutor has ordered an inquiry into death threats posted on a religious Web site against 129 gay Swedes. “I am ordering a new investigation because it is inappropriate and illegal to use biblical texts to threaten people,” chief prosecutor Sven-Erik Alhem said in an interview from his office in the southern city of Malmo. Another prosecutor had previously said he would not pursue an investigation because he thought a Swedish Supreme Court decision made even hateful religious speech allowable. Alhem said that under the headline “Sodomites,” the names of musicians, priests, athletes and TV celebrities were posted on a Web

site affiliated with a right-wing Christian group, Phineas Priesthood. The Web site quoted Leviticus 20:13, a biblical verse that says, according to the New International Version: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."