

Briefly noted

News in the [July 25, 2006](#) issue

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, the TV newsmagazine program hosted by Bob Abernethy, has been renewed for a tenth season this fall with a \$6.25 million grant from its longtime supporter, the Lilly Endowment. In addition, Mutual of America Life Insurance gave a grant of \$250,000 and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided \$100,000, according to an announcement by Thirteen/WNET New York. The program is broadcast by more than 280 PBS outlets nationwide in time slots selected by the stations.

Coinciding with the news that Hong Kong has been termed the fourth most expensive place in the world by an international company that assesses cities, the Christian Conference of Asia is closing its offices there and moving to Thailand's second city of Chiang Mai. "Frankly speaking, financial consideration is one of the main reasons for the relocation," said General Secretary Prawate Khid-arn of the umbrella organization for regional church councils. "Living expenses are increasing every year in Hong Kong," he told ENI. "We need to utilize the financial resources of the CCA responsibly." The CCA accounts for 14 national church councils and nearly 100 church bodies in the Asia-Pacific region.

A recent ruling by Colombia's highest court that legalized some forms of abortion has fueled a heated debate—and even threats of excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church—in a country normally consumed by political violence. The 5-3 ruling overturned a longstanding law—among the most restrictive in Latin America—that had outlawed all abortions and imposed jail sentences for women who had the procedure and those who performed it. The Constitutional Court of Colombia decriminalized abortions in cases of rape or incest, if the mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy or if it is determined that a fetus is so deformed that it could not live outside the womb. By some estimates, nearly a quarter of all pregnancies in Colombia end in abortion, and unsafe abortions are the third leading cause of maternal mortality in the country, according to abortion rights proponents. With the Colombia ruling, Chile and El Salvador are now the only nations in Latin America that still have a total ban on abortion.

Christians in Nepal have joined in widespread rejoicing over the country's dramatic political developments, which have marked the end of the Hindu kingdom and its transformation into a secular country. "The Christian community of Nepal welcomes all the decisions taken by the reinstated parliament," including the nation's secularization, said the National Christian Council of Nepal. In scrapping the monarchy, the legislature passed a resolution in May making the king a taxpayer and stripping him of all executive powers. The proclamation also brought the armed forces under the control of the government and renamed the Royal Nepal Army as the Nepal Army. "We are thrilled by these dramatic developments," Kalai Bahadur Rokaya, general secretary of the Christian Council, told ENI while visiting New Delhi. "None of us expected things would change so fast." Democracy was restored in Nepal following massive protests in April, and legislative measures lifted bans on religious conversions, church building and other functions.