

Briefly noted

News in the [May 1, 2007](#) issue

In a labor settlement brokered by Atlanta's Carter Center and backed by Presbyterians, fast-food giant McDonald's and a coalition of Florida farm workers announced an agreement April 9 to double the wages and improve working conditions for tomato pickers who supply the restaurant chain with tomatoes. The settlement with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers was preceded in 2005 by an agreement with YUM! Brands, the parent company of Taco Bell. Clifton Kirkpatrick, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), said the two developments "just may be the tipping point for the entire fast-food industry in a real move toward human rights and fair food for everyone."

The number of allegations of sexual abuse against Catholic clergy dropped 9 percent in 2006, according to a survey of U.S. dioceses and religious orders released in mid-April. While 70 percent of the 714 allegations reported last year occurred between 1960 and 1984, at least 17 cases occurred in 2006—a slight increase from the 13 incidents that were reported for 2005, according to data from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "This is a sobering report," said Bishop Gregory Aymond of Austin, Texas, chair of the Bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People. "The decline in reported cases is good. Most allegations were for behavior which took places decades ago, but the fact that there are any recent cases at all is very disconcerting."

Three former Birmingham college students are headed for federal prison cells after a judge April 9 ordered them to serve sentences ranging from seven to eight years for a series of rural church fires last year. U.S. District Judge David Proctor sentenced Matthew Cloyd, 21, and Benjamin Moseley, 20, to eight-year prison terms for setting fire to nine churches in west Alabama. Russell DeBusk, 20, who confessed to setting five fires, received a seven-year sentence. In addition, the judge ordered combined restitution of \$3.1 million. The sentences came after an emotional hearing in which pastors from burned churches spoke of forgiveness, defense lawyers urged leniency and the judge quoted scriptures assuring the trio that good can come from bad.