

Briefly noted

News in the [July 15, 2008](#) issue

The nation's Roman Catholic bishops have approved, by a vote of 191 to 1, a policy statement condemning embryonic stem cell research. Their seven-page statement calls such research "a gravely immoral act." The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops took the vote June 13 at its semiannual meeting, held in Orlando, Florida. It was the conference's first statement exclusively on the subject and approved by the full body of bishops. Medical researchers say such research could lead to treatments for diseases such as cancer and diabetes, but the Catholic bishops consider embryos innocent human persons who should not be destroyed in the research process.

Fuller Theological Seminary, reputed to be the largest nondenominational U.S. seminary, feted its biggest-ever graduating class June 14 with 502 receiving degrees, topping last year's previous high of 483 graduates, at the main campus in Pasadena, California. As is Fuller's practice, the 59th annual commencement ceremony included some students who are finishing their classes in the summer, said a spokesperson. Pastor-author Rick Warren was given the seminary's inaugural Distinguished Alumni/ae Award.

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which serves 2,100 students in four locations, making it the fifth largest seminary in the U.S., announced that Dennis P. Hollinger will be its next president. He will take the helm August 1 at the main campus in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. Hollinger is currently president and professor of Christian ethics at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. In 2006 James Emery White, a megachurch pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina, was named president of the seminary, located north of Boston, but he stepped down less than a year later, citing family issues that prevented him from moving.

The Norwegian parliament, disregarding objections from some of the nation's churches, has overwhelmingly approved legislation giving same-sex couples the right to marry and to adopt children on an equal basis with heterosexual couples. Norway already allows gays and lesbians to enter into civil unions, but gay rights

groups had argued that the previous law did not go far enough. The Storting, as the parliament is called, voted 84 to 41 to approve the measure. It will take effect in 2009. Last November the state Evangelical Lutheran Church lifted an outright ban barring gays living in partnerships from serving in the clergy and ruled to allow individual bishops to decide whether to employ gays. At least six of the country's 11 Lutheran bishops support having gay clergy. Some 85 percent of Norway's 4.7 million people are registered with the state church. The legislation was opposed by the Catholic Church and the Christian Council of Norway.