

Briefly noted

News in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a predominantly white denomination whose structure includes five official ethnic associations for African Americans, Native Americans and Alaskans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and those of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage, decided in 2006 that it needed one more group. That came about November 1 when 40 white Lutherans of European descent approved the formation of the European American Lutheran Association and elected officers. It's no reactionary group, however. It's "a group of white Lutherans who seek to dismantle structures within the ELCA that give privilege to white people and disadvantage people of color," said its president, Katherine B. Long of Redmond, Washington.

The Georgia (Southern) Baptist Convention has decided to refuse gifts from a historic member church, First Baptist of Decatur, which last year called a woman as pastor. Messengers to the November 9-11 annual meeting approved a policy change authorizing convention leaders to decline funds from churches "not in cooperation and harmony with the approved work and purpose" of the convention. The pastor, Julie Pennington-Russell, said the Decatur church in the last two decades has affiliated primarily with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate breakaway group formed in 1991. The church reportedly gave about \$10,000 in 2007 through the SBC's Cooperative Program.

Colorado-based Focus on the Family will reduce its staff by about 200 positions because of economic conditions. Said spokesperson Gary Schneeberger on November 18: "It's simply a fact that the economy is affecting our donors and, therefore, affecting us." The staff reductions, which will decrease the number of employees from about 1,150 to about 950, include 149 people whose positions will be eliminated; also, 53 vacant positions will be cut. The ministry, founded by religious broadcaster James Dobson, also will stop publishing four of its eight magazines. The ministry encountered a \$5 million shortfall on its \$151 million budget in the fiscal year that ended September 30.