

Briefly noted

News in the [February 10, 2009](#) issue

The religious makeup of the new 111th Congress roughly matches the overall American religious landscape, with overrepresentation among Jews and Mormons, according to a new analysis by the nonpartisan Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Just over half (55 percent) of House and Senate members who took office January 6 are Protestants, compared to 51 percent of the U.S. population. The second-largest group, Catholics, make up 30 percent of lawmakers, compared to 24 percent of all Americans. Among Protestants, Baptists lead in the House and Senate, at 12 percent, followed by Methodists (11 percent), Presbyterians (8 percent), Episcopalians (7 percent) and Lutherans (4.5 percent).

Louisiana Episcopal bishop Charles Jenkins has announced his retirement, noting health and other issues. “My struggle with health issues since Katrina has not been a secret,” Jenkins wrote in a widely distributed letter, alluding to the hurricane that flooded New Orleans in 2005. “My PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) was exaggerated by the experiences of the mandatory evacuation in Hurricane Gustav. The symptoms that accompany the PTSD now seem deeper and more frequent.” Under his leadership, the diocese established its Jericho Road Housing Initiative, which has built homes in Central City, Louisiana. Jenkins said he will remain bishop of the diocese until the end of 2009.

Nepal’s Supreme Court has given its consent to same-sex marriages, ordering the country’s Maoist-led government to craft laws to guarantee full rights to gays and lesbians, including the right to marriage. “This is a landmark decision for the sexual minorities and we welcome it,” said Sunil Babu Pant, Nepal’s first publicly gay lawmaker and a leading gay rights activist in South Asia. The Supreme Court ordered the government to set up a seven-member committee to study same-sex partnership/marriage laws in other countries and recommend similar legislation for enactment by Nepal, where Hindus are the dominant religious group in a population of 27 million.