

Briefly noted

News in the [March 24, 2009](#) issue

A new position to coordinate efforts against institutional sexism and sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church has been handed to a man by the denomination's Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Darryl Stephens, a deacon and a visiting assistant professor of Christian social ethics at the UMC-related Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, will start full-time on April 27. Noting that women are often favored for dealing with women's issues, M. Garlinda Burton, the commission's chief executive, said she thinks Stephens will bring "a fresh perspective." Among his tasks will be strengthening prevention education and developing training for the handling and just resolution of sexual misconduct complaints.

Virginia Theological Seminary, the largest of the Episcopal Church's 11 seminaries, was told by its board of trustees in February to reduce salaries and expenses by \$1 million in light of endowment losses and a gloomy economy. In recent months, the campus in Alexandria, which draws 67 percent of its budget from endowment funds, saw its portfolio value drop from \$144 million to \$97 million. Some immediate steps were taken, such as leaving vacant faculty and staff positions unfilled and starting an early retirement plan for seminary employees. "It is essential that we look to the long-term future of the institution and continue to be faithful stewards of the seminary's endowment," said Bishop Peter Lee of the Virginia Diocese, who chairs the board.

Australian religious leaders have made a commitment to a unified response to the devastating bushfires that have seared much of southeast Australia, particularly in the state of Victoria. "From within our various faith traditions standing together here today, we too offer . . . a commitment to work together for the common good despite our differences," the religious leaders said. Their statement was read at a service held in Melbourne on February 22 to mark a national day of mourning for the victims. Fires engulfed more than 2,000 homes and claimed more than 200 lives—the worst disaster Australia has known in recent times, and one that has triggered extensive arson investigations. The day after the memorial service, Australia was reported to be bracing for more fires as hot, dry conditions returned to

Victoria.