

Briefly noted

News in the [August 11, 2009](#) issue

A Michigan-based Christian relief group, International Aid, has closed its doors amid financial struggles, and World Vision, one of the largest evangelical relief agencies, has eliminated about 75 positions. International Aid needed to collect about \$1.5 million in the past two months to balance its \$70 million budget, but only gathered between \$150,000 and \$200,000, according to CEO Gordon Loux. Meanwhile, about 50 members of World Vision's 1,200-member staff were laid off, and about 25 open positions will not be filled, said spokesperson Dean Owen. Private cash donations, which increased 4 percent during the last quarter of 2008, have begun to decline. Among other cost-cutting measures, World Vision is canceling merit raises for the second year in a row and increasing employees' contributions to premiums for health benefits.

The Russian Orthodox Church has welcomed a nationwide shutdown of casinos and other gambling houses under a new law, effective July 1, that restricts gaming to four remote, investment-starved regions of the world's biggest country. "Gambling games imposed on every street corner deprived people of freedom, and made them listen to deceitful promises," said Vsevolod Chaplin, the priest who heads the Church and Society Department of the Russian Orthodox Church. Chaplin said Orthodox clergy had frequently highlighted the "harm inflicted by gambling," and said Russians needed a reminder that "there are much more interesting and worthy things in life."