

# Briefly noted

News in the [August 25, 2009](#) issue

**The nation's largest group of atheists** and agnostics filed a federal lawsuit July 14 to stop the engraving of "In God We Trust" and the phrase "one nation under God" in the new Capitol Visitor Center. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, a Wisconsin-based church-state watchdog group, claimed that the engravings are unconstitutional and would exclude the 15 percent of Americans who identify themselves as nonreligious. "They wanted this up there because they think God is the foundation of our government," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, copresident of FFRF. "Boy, are they misinformed." The House and Senate passed resolutions in July approving the inscription of the mottos in prominent areas of Capitol Visitor Center, which serves as the entrance and security-screening point for tourists. Senator Jim DeMint (R., S.C.), who sponsored the bill in the Senate, said references to God should not be censored for political correctness.

**Turkey's government has agreed** to grant indefinite permission for Christian worship at a historic church in Tarsus, the birthplace of St. Paul, said the head of the country's Catholic bishops' conference. "I'm confident the church in Tarsus could soon change from being a museum to a center of spiritual pilgrimage," said Bishop Luigi Padovese, speaking after the close of worldwide commemorations to mark the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of St Paul. Padovese said the Turkish government had already given its consent for Christian services in the church after a record influx of 416 Christian groups from 30 countries to Tarsus during the Year of St. Paul, which ended in June. "For the first time, Turkish Muslims have witnessed Christians not as tourists, but as praying pilgrims," said the bishop.

**Thousands of Japanese Christians** marked the 150th anniversary of the beginning of Protestant missionary work in Japan recently at a two-day assembly in Yokohama. Participants from the traditional, evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Japan declared their determination "to be united and cooperate." The 600,000 Protestant Christians in Japan constitute a religious minority of about 0.48 percent of the total population. Yokohama is where some of the earliest Protestant missionaries from the U.S. arrived in 1859, despite a government ban on Christianity that lasted until 1873. Nobuhisa Yamakita, the moderator of the United Church of Christ in

Japan, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, called on participants to "go cheerfully with joy to tell the gospel" in order to rekindle church growth.