

Century Marks

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A winner: Four years ago Shawn Vanzant had no place to live: his mother was dead, his father in prison and his older brother in trouble with the law. His basketball coach asked Lisa Litton, mother of one of Vanzant's teammates, whether she could take him in on a temporary basis. Vanzant now plays for the Butler University basketball team, which nearly beat Duke for the national championship last month. Though Litton suffers from cancer and lupus, she and her husband and three boys have unofficially adopted Vanzant. Litton can identify with Vanzant's situation: when she was six her mother walked out the door, and she's never seen or heard from her since ([Fanhouse](#), April 3).

As we forgive those who sin: Modern views of forgiveness tend to focus on the therapeutic value to victims of giving up feelings of retribution, letting go of a grievance and moving on. Such views can overlook the seriousness of the grievance and do nothing about the state of the offender, says Jesse Couenhoven. The traditional Christian view of forgiveness is rooted in God's prerogative to forgive the

sinner, set him or her free from sin and restore broken relationships. Divine forgiveness shows all humans to be both victims and perpetrators of sin. We are called to exemplify that divine forgiveness. “Only by seeking the good of those who sin against us can we enter into the newness of life we have been given. . . . Because of this, interhuman forgiveness is a special kind of duty: a duty without a corresponding human right, a gift to one another that we owe to God,” said Couenhoven (*Journal of Religion*, April).

Are women human? B. Julie Johnson argues that debates about prostitution leave out the voices of the women who are victimized by the prostitution trade. Those debates also avoid a fundamental question: If women’s bodies can be commodified, are women human? It is not enough just to delegitimize prostitution. The socioeconomic conditions that drive desperate women into prostitution must be altered. “The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 or less per day are women . . . and on average, women earn slightly more than 50 percent of what men earn worldwide,” said Johnson (*Prism*, March/April).

It’s not about them: Like the *Christian Century* (December 1, 2009), the *Christian Science Monitor* (March 29) has taken note of a resurgence of Calvinist teaching, which emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the depravity of humans. It notes that Capitol Hill Baptist Church, attended by “BlackBerry-wielding Millennials,” has grown sevenfold since senior pastor Mark Dever introduced Calvinist preaching there 16 years ago. The movement is partly a reaction to the prosperity gospel and “Jesus-and-me” style evangelicalism. Phyllis Tickle says that the new Calvinism’s focus on doctrine appeals to those “who absolutely need the assurance of rules and a foundation” during a time of cultural and religious upheaval.

Bishop Barbie next up? Julie Blake Fisher, an Episcopal priest in Kent, Ohio, presented her friend Dena Cleaver-Bartholomew, rector of Christ (Episcopal) Church, in Manlius, New York, with a homemade version of a Barbie doll—Rev. Barbie (see above). Her impeccably tailored vestments include chasubles for every liturgical season. She wears a black clergy shirt with white collar, a skirt and heels, and she carries a laptop, with a prepared sermon, and a Bible. In less than a week the Rev. Barbie drew nearly 3,000 friends on her Facebook page (RNS).

Wheeze control: An asthma preventive care program at Children’s Hospital Boston illustrates the challenge of containing health costs, says Dr. Atul Gawande. Inner-city children with severe asthma receive free inhalers from insurance companies. The

hospital provides a range of preventive measures—its nurses visit families after discharge to make sure children have medicine and know how to use it; it provides home inspections to root out mold; and it offers vacuum cleaners to families who don't have them. After one year of the program, the hospital readmission rate for young asthma patients dropped by over 80 percent and costs plunged as well. But empty beds meant lost revenue for the hospital (*New Yorker*, April 5).

Be happy: Researchers in Nova Scotia discovered that the happiest people had the lowest risk for heart disease and that the unhappiest people were the most at risk for cardiac problems. Possible explanations: happy people are more likely to adopt healthy lifestyles; happiness may produce chemical changes that protect the heart; genetic influences may ensure that people who tend to be happy are also predisposed to fewer heart attacks. Negative people can become happier by expressing gratitude regularly, practicing being optimistic, engaging in acts of kindness, practicing forgiveness and savoring joyful experiences ([WebMD](#)).

Down by the Jordan: Water has long been a source of conflict in the Middle East. According to a 2009 World Bank report, Israelis use four times as much water in the West Bank as do Palestinians, although Israel contests this. West Bank Palestinians are mostly prevented from digging their own wells and are often forced to buy water from Israeli sources. Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) sees a new opportunity for water cooperation in the region since the Jordan River has been seriously depleted as a result of overuse, drought and pollution. FOEME is working to get Israel, Jordan and West Bank Palestinians to work together to save this vital source of water (*National Geographic*, April).

Holy war? Al-Shabaab is the militant Islamic group that is in control of much of Somalia. Enforcing a strict version of Islamic law, it stones women alleged to have committed adultery and cuts off the hands of thieves. Al-Shabaab regards Sufism as a heresy, and it has been disinterring the bodies of Sufi clerics, claiming that Sufi devotees revered the deceased sheikhs at the expense of Allah. In response, Sufi clerics have called Somalis to a holy war against al-Shabaab (*The Week*, April 9).