

# Briefly noted

News in the [September 7, 2010](#) issue

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has reported that its baptized members totaled 4.54 million in 2009—a net loss of 90,850 members and a one-year drop slightly larger than losses in the previous two years. Its number of congregations declined by 48 last year from close to 10,400 churches nationwide. Total receipts for ELCA congregations exceeded \$2.6 billion, down 2.94 percent from 2008. However, the collective assets of the denomination's churches grew in 2009 by 1.2 percent to \$20.9 billion. "Many ELCA congregations remain surprisingly healthy from an economic perspective," said David D. Swartling, ELCA secretary.
- Kenyan churches will respect the verdict of citizens who voted in favor of a new constitution for the east African nation—a constitution which was opposed by many Christian leaders—says Cardinal John Njue of Nairobi. "Kenyans have voted after having heard what the various people had to tell them," Njue told an August 5 news conference as results showed two-thirds of voters supporting the new constitution in a referendum conducted the previous day. "We respect the outcome of the referendum, where a larger number of Kenyans have voted to accept this proposed constitution," said Njue. The new constitution places restrictions on the powers of the president and would institute a bill of rights for citizens. It was drawn up after violence claimed more than 1,000 lives following a disputed election in 2007. Many Christian leaders in Kenya campaigned against the document because it contains clauses that they say will allow abortion, entrench Muslim courts and limit freedom of worship. The new law is a key measure in a pact negotiated between President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, former political foes who formed a coalition government.
- Seven top leaders of the Baha'i faith who have been incarcerated in Iran since 2008 have each received jail sentences of 20 years after six months of court

hearings that ended on June 14, according to the Baha'i World News Service. Bani Dugal, representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations, said lawyers plan to appeal the verdict. "The allegations are pretty irrational and aren't very reasonable," she said. Accusations against the seven include charges of espionage and propaganda activities against the Islamic state. The seven leaders served Iran's minority Baha'i community of some 350,000, which hard-line clerics in Tehran consider an illegal sect.