

Briefly noted

News in the [March 9, 2004](#) issue

The Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board will cease endorsing women for chaplain positions "where the role and function of the chaplain would be seen the same as that of a pastor." The move will apparently bring an end to the SBC's endorsement of new female chaplains for the military but apparently will not prevent women from serving as hospital chaplains. NAMB trustees took the action February 4 when they noted that military and federally employed women chaplains serve in a pastoral role because they administer the Lord's Supper and baptism, preach, counsel and perform weddings and funerals. Ordaining women to minister in that capacity would be inconsistent with the "spirit of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000," according to Terry Fox, NAMB trustee chairman and pastor from Wichita, Kansas. The document limits "the office of pastor" to men.

When United Methodists start their 11-day quadrennial convention April 27 in Pittsburgh, they will have to sort through some 1,500 to 1,600 petitions submitted by church agencies, regional conferences and other groups and individuals. The petitions for the 2004 General Conference cover topics from homosexuality and abortion to concerns over church structure and pension plans to procedural issues such as selection of future General Conference delegates, according to Gary Graves, the petitions secretary. As of late January, Graves had tallied 1,200 petitions and was still processing another 250 e-mailed petitions.

Conservative rabbis from the Rabbinical Assembly voiced their support February 12 for the controversial security barrier Israel says it needs to protect its population against the incursion of terrorists. During their meeting in Israel, the rabbis toured a segment of the barrier between the Jewish settlement of Gilo, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and the Arab village of Beit Sahur. In the past, Palestinian militants fired at Gilo from the village and neighboring Bethlehem, and the Israeli army responded by clamping a crippling security closure on the Palestinian population. The majority of Israelis support the construction of some sort of barrier to separate Israel from the Palestinians, although they do not necessarily approve of its current parameters. Palestinians, in contrast, say the barrier that they refer to as "the wall" violates their human rights by limiting their access to their land, jobs, schools and places of worship. Following days of deliberation, the rabbis concluded that the structure is "a legitimate tool of self-defense."

A missionary from South Kingstown, Rhode Island, was shot to death February 14 while traveling with three other American ministers in Iraq to establish a church. John Kelley, 48, was killed near Baghdad when occupants of a sedan drove near the car in which he was riding and opened fire, the Associated Press reported. Three other ministers were wounded, including Roland Vukic of Charlestown, Rhode Island, a member of Curtis Corner Baptist Church, where Kelley was a pastor for 18 years. Vukic described the church Kelley had pastored as an independent, fundamentalist Baptist church whose members aim to start new churches around the globe. U.S. paratroopers learned of the attack while patrolling the town of Mahmudiyah. They were told the Americans were being treated at a hospital in that town.

Three men who attacked a Presbyterian hospital in Pakistan last year were sentenced January 23 to death for the murder of four women. The women, all nurses, were killed in the August 9 grenade attack on the Taxila hospital, about 25 miles northwest of Islamabad. Three other men charged in the attack were set free because of lack of evidence, according to Presbyterian News Service. The hospital, which treats mostly poor Muslims, was founded in 1922 and is supported jointly by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbyterian Church in Pakistan. Raafat Zaki, the liaison to Pakistan for the U.S. church, said he was "content with the apparent fair process" but remained concerned about the use of capital punishment, which the church opposes.