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Pope delights crowds with his informality, message of reform on visit to Rio De Janeiro

By JANET TAPPEN COEHIO

RIO DE JANEIRO (RNS) In one of the most inclusive gestures of his visit here, Pope Francis donned a headdress offered to him from an indigenous South American Indian at a ceremony in the city’s grand municipal theater.

The gesture was greeted with shouts of surprise initially. Then the audience of Brazilian politicians and business people erupted into roars of approval and thunderous applause.

It was a compelling moment. Moments earlier, the pope had spoken about the state’s responsibility to respect and encourage “peaceful coexistence between different religions.”

“Between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option, and the key to developing a just and fair society as a leader is dialogue, dialogue, dialogue,” he said.

Though beset by heavy rain and chilly temperatures that forced last-minute venue changes and compelled many to wear winter clothes, the

weather did nothing to dampen participants’ enthusiasm for Pope Francis.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from 190 countries sang, danced and whooped it up through the downpour, waving national flags as they traipsed along the streets of central Rio during the week-long World Youth Day.

In his numerous appearances, Francis captured their hearts in ways his sedate and intellectual predecessor, Benedict XVI, never could.

Partly, that may be because Francis is the first pope from the Southern Hemisphere; until March, he was Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina.

Partly it may be his approachability. Francis delighted the crowds with his informality and spontaneity.

On Friday, the screams of the 1.5 million-strong-crowd seemed even more prolonged and intense as Francis abandoned all protocol in his drive to one of the most solemn events of World Youth Day on Copacabana beach: the re-en-



Pope Francis in his popemobile on the way to Copacabana Beach for the re-enactment of the Way of the Cross. RNS photo by Robson Coehlo

actment of Christ’s crucifixion, also known as the Way of the Cross.

Descending from his open top popemobile time and again, to the obvious distress of his security detail, he waded into the crowds, kissing old and young.

But this pope also carried a message that he wants to open the church to reform, and that message clearly resonated with his audience.

At Rio’s Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Sebastian on Thursday, he gave some 10,000 young Argentine pilgrims explicit instructions to take to the streets to “make a mess,” and “cause confusion and disorder.”

“I want to tell you what I expect as a consequence of World Youth Day,” he said. “I want to see the church get closer to the people. I want to get rid of clericalism, the mundane, this clos-

ing ourselves off within ourselves in our parishes, schools or structures. I want a mess...I want trouble in the dioceses!”

He warned that if the church doesn’t go out and spread the faith, it would become an observer rather than a doer.

Possibly realizing the alarm his words are likely to cause among traditionalists, Francis apologized in advance to bish-

See POPE on page 6

Church of England to draft new legislation on women bishops

By TREVOR GRUNDY

CANTERBURY, England (RNS) – The Church of England’s governing body reaffirmed its commitment to consecrate women bishops with the aim of reaching final approval on an issue that has for so long split the church’s ranks, no later than November 2015.

Meeting in York July 5-9, the General Synod agreed to consider new draft legislation by November this year.

This is the first time synod members have met since November 2012, when to the surprise of most of the British public, draft legislation to create women bishops narrowly failed to secure the requisite majority.

The meeting marks the first time the new archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby,

is in the hot seat with the question of women as bishops dominating the debate.

The synod is a three-tier structure. Last year’s legislation passed the House of Bishops and the House of Clergy, but failed to gain the required two-thirds majority in the House of Laity.

Even opponents are resigned to women bishops — but they are insisting on firm guarantees they can be looked after by male priests and bishops.

Those supporting women as bishops fear such concessions would mean a woman bishop would not have full authority in her own diocese. In addition, they worry that too much time is being given to people seen to be out of touch on sexual and gender issues in modern-day Britain.

Lutherans re-elect Matthew Harrison despite Newtown

By TIM TOWNSEND

c. 2013 St. Louis Post-Dispatch

(RNS) Members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod re-elected the Rev. Matthew Harrison as their president in a landslide, despite the so-called Newtown “debacle.”

The LCMS on Saturday (July 13) said Harrison won a second three-year term with nearly twice as many votes — 66 percent of the total, cast electronically — as the other two candidates combined.

Harrison made national news in February when he asked the pastor of a Lutheran church in Newtown, Conn., to apologize for participating in an interfaith prayer vigil following the Sandy Hook school massacre.

The synod’s constitution prohibits members from

taking part in worship services that blend the beliefs and practices of Lutherans with those of other faiths and Christian denominations.

Harrison later called his handling of the incident a “debacle.”

He apologized to the members of the Connecticut church, to the pastor in question, to the people of Newtown and “to the membership of our great church body for embarrassment due to the media coverage.”

“I handled it poorly, multiplying the challenges,” Harrison said at the time. “I increased the pain of a hurting community.”

The prohibition on worshiping with other Christians stems from the

See LUTHERAN on page 12

Heap wants to become the first humanist military chaplain

(RNS) If Jason Heap has his way, he’ll trade his Oxford tweeds for the crisp whites of a newly minted U.S. Navy chaplain.

“This is my chance to give back to my country,” said Heap, 38. “I want to use my skills on behalf of our people in the service. Hopefully, the Navy will see where I can be useful.”

But Heap’s goal is not assured. He fits the requirements— with master’s degrees from both Brite Divinity School and Oxford University. His paperwork is complete. He passed the physical tests and has been interviewed by a Navy chaplain. The only thing he does not have is an endorsement from a religious organization approved by the Navy.

And there’s the rub: Heap is a Humanist. He carries the endorsement of the Humanist Society, an organization of those who believe in the positive power of human potential, but not necessarily in God. The Humanist Society — like all organizations that represent nonbelievers — is not among the Department of Defense’s list of approximately 200 groups allowed to endorse chaplains.

“The military includes atheists, humanists and people with nontheistic perspectives and the military currently has no way to service them,” said Jason Torpy, president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, a group supporting Heap.

Asked why there are no nonbelievers in the chap-



Jason Heap, who is applying to be the first humanist chaplain in the military. Photo courtesy Jason Heap

laincy, Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen, a Department of Defense spokesman, responded by email: “The department does not endorse religion or any one religion or religious organization, and provides to the maximum extent possible for the free exercise of religion by all members of the military services who choose to do so.”

According to current government figures, the U.S. military has 1.4 million active duty servicemen and women in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. About 2,800 active duty chaplains serve them; the vast majority of

them Christian.

There are an estimated 13,000 active duty servicemen and women that identify as atheists or agnostics — more than the number of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus combined — all of which have their own chaplains. Add to that a significant number — more than 276,000 — who say they have “no religious preference.”

The ranks of the nonreligious are likely to grow. Last year’s study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found one-third

See CHAPLAIN page 5

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Commentary

Faith and Culture: *The fallacy of national religion*

I am an American and a Christian; two identities that I am deeply grateful for. However, sometimes those identities cause a conflict in and for me.

For instance, life liberty and the pursuit of happiness is an American Bill of Rights issue. Yet God tells me to lay down my rights, and at times, my happiness in self-sacrificing love for others.

Which is the higher ideal?

The Bill of Rights also guarantees freedom of religion. Does this apply to my identity as an American or my faith as a Christian?

As a Christian, it goes without saying I think Christianity is the correct approach to God. That would include a conservative, Biblical world view.

What if someone is an American Atheist, or Hindu, or Bud-

dhist or Muslim though? Does my constitutional right to believe and practice Christianity override other's right to freedom of religion; Or is it only freedom for the people who agree with me?

There is no doubt that our forefathers founded our nation with an understanding of religious freedom that was basically unheard of three centuries ago.

However we must keep in mind that they came to America seeking freedom from a state-run church -- not to establish a state-run church.

The sad truth is that history has repeatedly proven that it is disastrous when a church system controls politics (or vice versa.)

From the pagan Roman Emperors who slaughtered Chris-



Steve Highlander
Managing Editor RN-R,

tians to the Spanish Inquisition, during which a church-run state slaughtered Christians, the mix of political and ecclesiastical power combined proved fatal to society.

Throw in the crusades, and ultimately the tendency of Middle-Ages, European countries to declare the national religion for their citizens, and you have the conditions that led up to the founding of America.

The truth is that government and religion are two completely separate entities that require a

certain tension to coexist.

In his book, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, Mega-church pastor Greg Boyd points out that it is nearly impossible for a nation to be "Christian." For instance, Jesus taught his followers to "turn the other cheek," and to "love your enemies."

If America practiced this Christian virtue of turning the other cheek, on 911 we would have told Al Qaeda to take a free shot at California. We would also be sending aid and comfort to our enemies, not hunting them down and killing them. (Didn't Jesus said, "if your enemy is hungry feed him...")

Now don't get me wrong, I do not in any way say that we, as a nation, should not have protected American interests or fought for our freedoms.

The vast majority of Americans would have been appalled if our government would have applied Christian principles to Al Qaeda.

My point is, that at times, our country cannot act Christian, because a country has a responsibility to protect and serve it's citizen's rights and wellbeing.

This means that America must provide the same protections and freedoms, within legitimate limits of course, for all of its citizens -- even those I don't agree with.

Christianity compels me to share my faith with others, it does not compel me to force others to act like Christians.

Dr. Steve Highlander is a pastor, missionary, author and speaker. He holds a doctorate in Pastoral Theology and is a Certified Christian Counselor.

Upstairs Over a Vacant Lot: *Success doesn't have to be elusive*

There was a man who was an excellent door-to-door salesman. He claimed to hold the record for the most moves because he had lived in so many different houses in multiple locations. His other "claim to fame" was that he was "the world's most successful failure." I learned a lot from this jovial chain smoker. He would light a fresh cigarette immediately after mashing another in the ashtray. His coffee consumption probably supported the man in the old television commercials (and his donkey). One thing was certain; my friend knew the definition of success that suited him and his family. They were

all door-to-door salespeople, and they liked to move around the country.

So, what did I learn? For one thing, I learned that success could be defined on an individual or family basis. It is not necessary to have it defined by those in academia, a televangelist, the wealthiest people in town, or the "butcher, baker, and candlestick maker."

Secondly, I learned that a sense of humor helps you to overcome and make a comeback. My friend could make a laughingstock of his failure so he never became a laughingstock himself! What a gift! He was a guy you couldn't help but

like! He liked himself!

However, one of the really big success lessons I learned from him was to be a realist. If we can realistically take into account our abilities and circumstances, we are able to follow through with planning that makes sense. I am not going to insult your intelligence by relying on that worn out adage that "you can be the best at what you do, no matter what you do." I am not advocating that anyone settle for where they are and what they do. Planning makes the difference. Planning allows for the discovery of hidden talents. Planning opens the door to otherwise unseen opportuni-



Dr. Paul C. Collins
Publisher RN-R

ties. Success does not have to be elusive.

If there were a sequence to the realization and actualization of success, it would probably be something like this: begin with recognizing the possibility, accept yourself as you are, be determined to be more than you have been taught or conditioned to believe about yourself, and begin to plan. Remember, it is the planning that will be the instrument of

discovery and the leverage to open new doors.

Success does not have to be elusive. It is attainable at a level far above and beyond your ordinary expectations when you take the steps to do the extraordinary. There were regular folks and common people in the Bible who became "doers of exploits." You do not have to be a hero to be a doer of exploits. You can be you, and you can be successful in a new way.

My rambling could go on longer, but this is a good place to stop.

Dr. Paul Collins is the founder and VP of Operations of Acts Ministry, Inc and Publisher of the Real News - Review. He is an ordained Methodist Minister, Presiding Bishop of Acts Church International and currently serves as senior pastor of Acts Church in Springfield, MO.

Seasons of Reflections: *An awakening could be on the horizon*

Persecution is coming to the American church—not the institutions—but to authentic Christian believers—authentic Christians who are seeking the Lord daily and those authentic Christians that are worldly and carnal. Are we ready for persecution? Have our "feel-good" messages and motivational speeches prepared us for the spiritual war that has already crossed our threshold from our doorstep?

Christian brothers and sisters, if we do not allow God to change us there is no hope for our country. Are we praying for our own personal spiritual renewal? Are we allowing God full access to our daily lives to use us? Are we positioning ourselves to be sensitive and listening for that still small voice in the midst of such a busy chaotic world?

If unbelievers do not see God in us—they will never see Him until it is too late, that is—when every eye will behold Him and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

For too long, we Christians have isolated ourselves from the rest of our family, those who belong or affiliate with



LeAnn Kennedy
President, Acts Ministry

other denominations or independent churches. God has authentic adopted children all over the place! He finds his lost sheep everywhere—in all kinds of Christian churches and even in no church at all. We must learn to appreciate God's gifts to us that He has placed in other believers—even if they "camp" at a "site" that is not where we camp.

Persecution is coming to the American church. Without the mercy of Almighty God, the intensity and frequency may be determined by how we exercise our rights, both civic and spiritual. We should already have been prepared for war. Besides "yesterday," the next best time to prepare is today. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts . . . TODAY is the

day of salvation!"

We MUST reach out to our extended Christian family — again, I refer to those who "camp" at a "site" other than where we do. We must network. We must pray for each other. We must visit and get to know each other. In arrogance and pride we have thought of our other Christian brothers and sisters as less than ourselves, which means God's love is not yet perfected in us. If His love is not perfected in us, we will be fearful in the days ahead, for perfect love casts out all fear.

Our eyes are being opened to a rude awakening in this country, but we must PRAY for a GREAT AWAKENING! Revivals are started in the hearts of God's children.

Is Christianity personal? Yes, but it is also private; and I pray that the "rude awakening" that is dawning will lead to a "Great Awakening" as we fall on our knees, confess our own personal sins and the sins of our nation, repent, and seek our Great God with everything in us as never before.

Excerpted from Ms Kennedy's book Seasons of Reflection published by Acts Press.

Mind and Spirit: *Eating your heart out*

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you thought that you might die if you didn't get it? Or longed for something so much it made you sick? Or were envious of what someone else had to the point of an almost physical pain? Chances are, it really was affecting your health, and probably your heart. The term "eating your heart out" is thought to have originated from the ancient Greeks, Homer in particular, and described an old but also a very contemporary problem that has plagued the human race since the Garden of Eden. It speaks of an intense longing for what you perceive that you cannot have, such as something that is out of reach or belongs to someone else.

The media teaches us that "the heart wants what the heart wants," as if we had no choice in the direction of our desires. This is said in the context of exerting our freedom to seek happiness, but we need to be careful that our freedom does not infringe on the freedom of others in the process. Songs lyrics encourage us to ignore consequences when seeking pleasure, for "it can't be wrong if it feels right." The problem with pursuing these kinds of strong



Dr. Brooke Highlander
Associate Editor, RN-R

desires is that they are usually at someone else's expense, and take a huge toll on our relationships, on our health, and on society in general.

Our culture tells us that we can't control our emotions, but this is not biologically true. One of the things I tell people in counseling is that our emotions are like the caboose, and our thoughts are like the engine. What we think about strongly influences how we feel, so if I am thinking about how bad things are, I feel depressed. On the other hand, if I think about how grateful I am for something, my emotions swing upwards. T.D. Jakes once said that "lovers give, lusters take." As Christians, we have another dimension to consider in addition to monitoring how we think. We are adjured to think

Prominent American Jews embrace Kerry peace talks

By MICHELE CHABIN

NEW YORK (RNS) More than 100 prominent Jewish Americans with varying religious and political viewpoints have thrown their support behind the Israeli government's decision to restart long-stalled peace talks with the Palestinians.

In a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the 140 signatories — including former Sen. Joseph Lieberman; professor Alan Dershowitz; philanthropist Charles Bronfman; and Republican Jewish Coalition board member Morris W. Offit — said they appreciated the risks the government is taking to achieve peace.

While not everyone in the American Jewish community supports territorial compromise with the Palestinians, the letter represents a fairly broad consensus that Israel must take

some risks to reach a peace deal.

American Jews donate tens of millions of dollars every year to support Israeli institutions and programs. They also advocate on Israel's behalf on Capitol Hill.

The letter was initiated by the Israel Policy Forum, a non-partisan American organization that supports a two-state solution, and it thanks Netanyahu for "embracing" the process brokered by Secretary of State John Kerry.

"We recognize that achieving a two-state solution will require a territorial compromise that provides for a Palestinian state without jeopardizing Israel's security," the letter said. "It is our hope that (Palestinian) President Mahmoud Abbas will be similarly prepared to make the difficult decisions that achieving an agreement

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We believe that we can report the news with accuracy even though we see events through our paradigm as Christians.

The stories and opinions expressed in **The Real News - Review** do not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of Acts Ministry, Inc, its board or larger body of associates.

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of others as more than ourselves, and it is my and others experience that a great sense of well-being follows when we give our lives for our neighbor. If we were to worry more about what other people need than about what we think we have to have, not only would the other person be happier, but also I think we would find that we too are happier.

The Psalms say that if we "delight yourselves in the Lord... He will give you the desires of your heart" (37:4). There is a peace and a serenity that comes when we surrender the right to choose our own desires, and leave it up to our Creator to know what would most delight and fulfill us. It takes away the heart-munching stress that is so harmful to our psyches and bodies, and returns us to a state of joy.

Brooke Highlander is Associate Editor of the Real News - Review. She is an ordained minister, an applied psychologist, and a certified Christian counselor.

will require."

David Halperin, Israel Policy Forum's executive director, said the organization sought support from such a diverse group of Democrats, Republicans and centrists, and Jews from every religious spectrum "to demonstrate the broad base of support among American Jews for Prime Minister Netanyahu's entering the diplomatic process." Senior Rabbi Andy Bachman of Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, N.Y., said he signed the letter because "as a Jew deeply committed to Israel's peace and security, it is critical for both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Obama to know that we support their efforts to forge a lasting peace. I spend every summer in Israel and my sense is that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians desperately want peace."

Christian Economic Perspective

The laws of the kingdom of heaven (part one)

The laws of the kingdom of heaven (part one)

Last month, I discussed the importance of living from the kingdom of heaven. To do this, however, requires an understanding of the laws of that kingdom and how they operate. In this month's column, I will address two of the eight most significant laws of the heavenly realm Christians will inherit for eternity.

At the outset, it should be understood that I am not talking about the concepts of living under the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) as opposed to living under His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) or in the dispensation of the law versus the dispensation of grace. Instead, I am addressing the operational, or eternal and immutable, laws set out by God the Father and clearly articulated in the Word, which is Jesus (John 1:1).

The first law is the law of reciprocity. Much like Newton's third law of motion, which can be summarized by the phrase "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction," the law of reciprocity is most clearly stated in Luke 6:38, which begins with the words, "Give and it shall be given unto you. . . ." Since the fundamental principle of the kingdom of heaven is that of sowing and



Oliver Burrows , RN-R Economic Columnist

reaping, it should come as no surprise the one of the major laws of the heavenly realm (and thus a law under which Christians live here on earth) focuses on what occurs when we give.

The interesting part of what Luke 6:38 says about this law is that there is a return on giving that exceeds what is given. Unlike Newton's third law of motion, which talks about "equal" reaction, giving results in a "running over," which is consistent with the relationship between sowing and reaping. In the natural world, the expectation is to reap what is sown (corn begets corn, not soy-beans) and later than when the seed is sown (seed time leads to harvest), but very significantly more ("good measure—pressed down, shaken together" according to Luke 6:38) than what is sown. In the spiritual realm, the same three expectations exist.

The second law of the kingdom of heaven that I was to briefly address is the law of use. Although expressed in the natural realm as "use it or lose it," this law is best illustrated in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Here, Jesus talks about three servants given varying amounts of very tangible wealth, with two using those funds well (doubling their monies). The third, however, incorrectly thought the master to be a hard man and buried the monies given him. In the end, this servant was called wicked and lazy, had the monies the master had given him taken and given to the servant who had shown the greatest success, and was cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:29-30). In the spiritual realm, we are expected to use the time, abilities, and monies we have been given, and we will answer for our use (or lack of use) of them at the final judgment.

Rev. Oliver K. Burrows III is an ordained minister with Acts Ministry. He hosts two Christian and one sports radio program in Wausau, Wisconsin and across the Internet. Oliver can be contacted via e-mail at oliverburrows@economictruth.org and is available to preach as well as teach seminars.

A One Minute Devotional:

You may be small, but ...

I love to have God's Word come to the forefront of my mind. It is living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. This living Word lifts me up and helps me rise above any situation. There is an awesome peace that passes all understanding when the Word rises up in my mind. The following scriptures are some that came to mind that helped raise me up recently.

Many years ago, the Holy Spirit spoke to me about a situation. "He sees under every blade of grass and behind every tree. There is no place where anyone can go or hide for He sees and knows." Over the years, this Word has not been forgotten because every word He has given has raised me up. Have you ever felt as small as a grain of sand; so small and insignificant; a grain among so many? Think about these scriptures for they are for the grains.

"For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.



Nancy Collins RN-R Devotional Columnist

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed." (Psalms 139:13-16). Now read Psalms 139: 1-12, 17-18. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth." (Isaiah

44: 24). "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matthew 10: 29-31). "And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account." This is from Hebrews 4: 13.

"Therefore, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Consider him who endured..." (Hebrews 12: 1-29). Be blessed with His awesome peace wherever you are!

Nancy Collins and her Husband Dr. Paul Collins, co-founded Acts Ministry. She is recently retired from Maranatha Village in Springfield, MO.

A View From Jordan Creek

What if what the vast majority of Christians believe to be "the gospel" is, in fact, not such at all? What if the purpose of the incarnation was to bring to fulfillment the kingdom of God, not at some future point in time nor in heaven but here and now?

Such are the provocative theses of N.T. Wright's work, How God Became King, published in the spring of 2012. The prolific Wright, an evangelical Anglican, has migrated between ministry as a cleric in the Church of England, most recently as Bishop of Durham, and academia, currently serving as a professor of New Testament at St. Andrew's in Scotland. Many consider him to be the principal New Testament scholar of our time.

In this book, Wright challenges the church to take seriously the "middle of the gospels" that give account of the life and teaching of Jesus. He utilizes the classic creeds of Christendom to illustrate his view that we have so truncated our understanding of our faith that we have lost sight of the meaning of Christ's primary message. Wright notes that the creeds speak of the birth and the death and resurrection of Jesus but nothing in-between.

It is precisely that earthly preaching and teaching of "the gospel of the kingdom" that Wright examines. He does so not as an exercise in asserting biblical authority, inspiration and credibility against claims by critical contemporary writers, because he has engaged in that at great length elsewhere, nor as a sustained argument regarding the meaning of Pauline theology, because, again, he has



Virgil Hill RN-R Columnist

written copiously about that elsewhere as well.

Instead, the focus is on the meaning of the gospel as it is revealed through the entirety of the Bible.

To do so, Wright employs the analogy of a quadrophonic surround sound stereo system in which various of the speakers have been turned up either too high or turned down too low to allow full appreciation of the music.

Wright asserts that the 'loudspeakers' proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as the climax of the story of Israel and as the triumph of God over the powers have been essentially turned off. Conversely, he believes that the 'loudspeakers' announcing Jesus as Israel's God and the transformation of the people of God into the church have been turned up so loud that they have become distortions. The song he would have us clearly hear is "Our God Reigns."

Wright is not attempting to develop some novel interpretation of scripture but to call the church back to a faith and practice that is grounded in a thorough and faithful reading of the biblical texts. In so doing, as in his other many works, he conjoins scholarship with preaching and pastoral

insight in a manner that few, if any, current Christian writers can or do.

In a brief overview like this there is no pretense of doing justice to such a work. For those who would seek a longer exposition of this work, Wright's summation of his approach and findings is available through the online text of his C.H. Dodd Society lecture at:

http://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/pdf/ch_dodd_society_lecture_text_how_god_became_king.pdf

For those who prefer an audio/visual version of a similar presentation, Wright's appearance at Calvin College is also available online at:

<http://www.calvin.edu/january/2012/NTWright.htm>

Virgil J. Hill is a lifelong Ozarker and activist and is an ordained minister with Acts Ministry.

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BY PAUL COLLINS, Publisher RN-R SPRINGFIELD, MO – The Real News-Review newspaper is a part of the global outreach of a ministry headquartered in Springfield, MO. Begun in 1993, Acts Ministry is a non-profit, trans-denominational independent organization using several means to promote their mission statement which is, "Unity, In Christ, Through The Holy Spirit."

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live your life in accordance with his teachings. Please take note of the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of John. Embedded in the conversation between Nicodemus (a religious man of high standing) and Jesus, you find what may be the best known scripture verse in the Bible, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (NRSV) The word "may" is used twice. If you believe, you "may" not perish (in any way) but you "may" have eternal life.

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The Evidence of Faith's Substance

Why Believe Jesus is the Messiah, when many have claimed to be?

Isaiah 40:3-5 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be laid low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

America is on a path to repeat the sins of Rome, and the similarities are striking. Alfred Edersheim, in his classic, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah", chapter XI, outlines five parallels between the Roman culture at the advent of Christ and America today:

1) A Culture of Entitlement: "The free citizens were idle, dissipated, sunken; their chief thoughts of the theatre and the arena; and they were mostly supported at the public cost.... more than two hundred thousand persons were thus maintained by the State..."

2) The spread of atheism and self-deification: "Religion, philosophy, and society had passed through every stage, to ... lay between Stoicism and Epicureanism. Both ultimately



Ed Croteau RN-R Columnist

led to atheism and despair - the one, by turning all higher aspirations self-ward, the other, by quenching them in the enjoyment of the moment; the one, by making the extinction of all feeling and self-deification, the other, the indulgence of every passion and the worship of matter, its ideal."

3) The rejection of absolute truth: "... all religions were considered equally false or equally true... The only religion on which the state insisted was the deification and worship of the emperor. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right."

4) The end of marriage and traditional family, the spread of abortion: "The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Abortion,

and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated."

5) A culture of hopelessness: "Society could not reform itself; philosophy and religion had nothing to offer: they had been tried and found wanting. Tacitus declared human life one great farce, and expressed his conviction that the Roman world lay under some terrible curse."

But then, Edersheim documents the historical evidence of Christianity - the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3-5 in the arrival of Jesus Christ: "Can greater contrast be imagined than the proclamation of a coming Kingdom of God amid such a world; or clearer evidence be afforded of the reality of this divine message, than that it came to seek and to save that which was thus lost? On the 19th of December AD 69, the Roman Capitol was set on fire. Eight months later, the Temple of Jerusalem was given to the flames... upon the ruins of heathenism and apostate Judaism was the Church of Christ to be reared."

Ed Croteau is a resident of Lee's Summit and hosts a weekly study in Lee's Summit called "Faith: Substance and Evidence".

America's Moral Compass

Turn off the television

The American family today is clearly in trouble. Surveys indicate that satisfaction with the traditional American family was strong up until the 1950's, but a new breed of parents starting in the 1970's was unwilling to sacrifice for their children.

Why is it so many people in our culture are trying to redefine, weaken, and destroy the family?

In a study by researchers at the University of California – Santa Barbara, sexual content crops up in 75 percent of programs during the "family hour," the first hour of prime time when most kids are watching. This translates into eight sexual messages an hour, more than four times the amount found in programs samples in 1976.

If you don't insist on some standard of morality in the family and impose some dis-



Dee Wampler RN-R Columnist

cipline, you can't expect your children to obtain this morality and discipline from their peers.

Nothing seems to be off limits anymore on television. Programs discuss anything, provide pornography, and homosexual programming during prime time. And worse – these unbiblical views are changing the attitudes of Americans about adultery, and lewd behavior with increasingly proactive cable shows – enough that

would shock our parents and grandparents.

I am outraged and ashamed of what our nation has become. Do we really care about decency anymore? Are we awake?

Dee Wampler is an Author, Defense Attorney, Former Prosecutor, and a Native of Springfield, MO. He believes America needs a moral compass and advocates an honest look at America's Christian History.

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~Moses

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

USA Religion

Evolution of Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore

His first few weeks in office have been a kind of baptism by fire.

By BOB SMIETANA
c. 2013 USA Today (RNS)
Russell Moore, the new chief ethicist for the Southern Baptist Convention, has Jesus in his heart, Wendell Berry on his bookshelf and Merle Haggard on his iPod.

His first few weeks in office have been a kind of baptism by fire.

The 41-year-old Moore took over as president of the Nashville, Tenn.-based Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission on June 1, just as prominent Southern Baptists were calling for a boycott of the Boy Scouts. Then came the Supreme Court's recent decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act, which landed Moore in the spotlight as an opponent of same-sex marriage.

In between, he's been meeting with pastors and politicians about immigration reform, all the while keeping up a lively feed on Twitter. Moore, a native of Biloxi, Miss., and former seminary dean, is having the time of his life.

"A friend of mine called me 'giddy,'" Moore said. "I don't think I am giddy. But I am happy."

In recent years, Moore's



Dr. Russell Moore, former Dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, preaching in the chapel there in 2011. Moore recently resigned from the seminary to head up the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Photo by Theology 147, Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

face for evangelical Christian activists.

He's conservative but not angry, is skeptical about politics, and believes that kindness is

ity is all about," he said. "And that often leads us to confuse American civil religion with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Moore sees the recent Su-

a good thing, he said, as it will make churches take their faith more seriously.

He also hopes the change will help church members learn how to love their neighbors, especially those with whom they disagree. That's a lesson Moore had to learn the hard way.

In 2000, while a graduate student at Southern Seminary, Moore attended a meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, made up of moderate Baptists who clashed with conservatives in the 1980s and '90s over control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He wrote a series of critical stories about the meeting for Baptist Press, the convention's official news service. Cooperative Baptists called his reporting unethical and inaccurate. Moore said what he wrote was true, but his attitude toward Cooperative Baptists was unchristian.

"I was all too eager to fight like the devil to please the Lord," he said. "I had this motivation to be proven right — in a way that I don't think was the way of Christ."

Some years later, Moore became friends with the Rev. Joe Phelps, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville. Highland Baptist left the Southern Baptist Convention about 10 years ago and is known as a liberal congregation with openly gay members. Phelps and Moore are fans of Wendell Berry, a farmer and author known for his critiques of modern American culture. They met several times to discuss Berry's work and have coffee.

"What I appreciate about Russell is that he seems to have an open heart to other groups," Phelps said. "I find him to be shaped by love and his understanding of the gospel."

After he took office, Moore promised to work with other Baptist groups on issues such as religious liberty. Phelps said that was a good first step.

"We are not going to reunite, but we don't need to be adversaries," Phelps said.

Randy Davis, executive director and treasurer of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, is a fan of Moore. Davis, who is conservative, said Moore

comes across as level-headed and congenial.

"I think he is one of the sharper young men in our convention," he said.

Orphan care

One of the issues closest to Moore's heart is adoption and orphan care. He and his wife, Maria, who have been married for 19 years, have five boys. The oldest two, both 12, were adopted from Russia.

Moore said that before adopting his sons, he had been concerned about issues such as poverty and the plight of orphaned children in an abstract way. Visiting his boys in a run-down orphanage made those issues personal.

Adoption also led to spiritual changes. He and his wife dealt with infertility for years and had several miscarriages before eventually having three biological children.

The infertility caused great heartache, he said, and forced them to rely on their faith.

"There was a sense of desperation in that — it was something we could not fix," he said. "All we could do is cry out to God."

Immigration agenda

One of the next big issues on Moore's agenda is immigration.

Recently, Moore has been meeting with Hispanic Baptist pastors, whose congregations are affected by immigration.

"These are our church members," he said.

Moore's predecessor, Richard Land, was part of a group called Evangelical Immigration Table, a coalition of faith-based groups that supports immigration reform. Moore plans to continue that involvement.

He said his interest in immigration is connected to a bigger question of human dignity. He opposes abortion because he believes all human beings are created in God's image. His support for immigration reform also is tied to that belief.

"There is a way of dehumanizing unborn children by calling them embryos and fetuses, and there is a way of dehumanizing our immigration neighbors by calling them illegal aliens and anchor babies," he said. "That's not right."

"I think that is a misreading of what evangelical Christianity is all about. And that often leads us to confuse American civil religion with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

~Russell Moore speaking about "Bible Belt faith"

been a rising star among evangelicals as a blogger, preacher, adoption advocate and, until recently, dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He is a new

not a weakness. He's also critical of Bible Belt faith, which he says sees Christianity as a normal part of American life.

"I think that is a misreading of what evangelical Christian-

preme Court decision that struck down the federal ban on same-sex marriage as a sign that American culture and evangelical Christianity are parting ways. And that may be

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Evangelicals decry 'silence' on sexual abuse in churches

By ADELLE M. BANKS

(RNS) – More than 1,200 people have signed an online petition decrying the "silence" and "inattention" of evangelical leaders to sexual abuse in their churches.

The statement was prompted by recent child abuse allegations against Sovereign Grace Ministries, an umbrella group of 80 Reformed evangelical churches based in Louisville, Ky.

"Recent allegations of sexual abuse and cover-up within a well known international ministry, and subsequent public statements by several evangelical leaders, have angered and distressed many, both inside and outside of the Church," reads the three-page statement spearheaded

by GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment).

"These events expose the troubling reality that, far too often, the Church's instincts are no different from those of many other institutions, responding to such allegations by moving to protect her structures rather than her children."

In May, a judge dismissed many of the charges against Sovereign Grace, but lawyers for the victims appealed the verdict. Board members of Sovereign Grace have said they "abhor sexual abuse of any kind" and said they have not found evidence of a cover-up.

Basyle "Boz" Tchividjian, the executive director of GRACE and a Liberty

University law professor, said Christians should be able to work together to protect children and care for victims despite theological differences.

Tchividjian, a grandson of evangelist Billy Graham, previously criticized leaders who spoke out in support of C.J. Mahaney, who had been named as a defendant in the SGM suit.

Signatories on the statement, which was released on July 17 but has attracted additional signers, include Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors; Michael Reagan, son of President Ronald Reagan; Paul Young, author of "The Shack"; and Jonathan Merritt, evangelical writer and senior columnist for Religion News Service.

Court: Law designating 'Israel' as birthplace unconstitutional

WASHINGTON (RNS) A federal appeals court has ruled unconstitutional a 2002 law that allows Americans born in Jerusalem to designate Israel as their birth country on their passports.

The lawsuit, brought by an American couple whose American son was born in Israel in 2002, challenged the government to uphold the law. Instead the court found it unconstitutional.

The State Department has not permitted Americans born in the city to list "Israel" as their birthplace on their passports, despite the law.

Both Israelis and Palestinians call Jerusalem their capital.

American policy has been that the status of Jerusalem should not be decided unilaterally by the U.S. To do so in favor of Israel, administrations have argued, would damage American credibility in the Arab and Muslim world.

The case hinges on the judicial consensus that foreign policy is generally the responsibility of the Executive Branch, not Congress.

"Congress plainly intended to force the State Department to deviate from its decades-long position of neutrality on what nation or government, if any, is sovereign over Jerusalem," reads the opinion from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Dis-

trict of Columbia Circuit.

The child at the center of the case, Menachem Zivotofsky, was born shortly after the 2002 law was passed, and his passport lists "Jerusalem" as his birthplace.

The attorney for his family, Nathan Lewin, said in a statement that he now wants to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, according to The Associated Press.

"We hope that before Menachem Zivotofsky's bar mitzvah he will be able to bear a passport that recognizes his birthplace as 'Israel,'" he wrote. That would be in two years when the boy turns 13, according to Jewish tradition.

Religious groups face uphill fight in House on immigration reform

By ADELLE M. BANKS
WASHINGTON (RNS)

Evangelical leaders, pushing for comprehensive immigration reform, will be back in Washington next week, praying and lobbying on Capitol Hill.

They'll need all the help they can get — divine or otherwise — after the Senate's immigration reform bill hit a brick wall of opposition in the Republican-controlled House.

Dozens of Catholic university presidents sent a letter Thursday (July 18) to Catholic members of Congress urging them to act, declaring, "We are part of an immigrant church in an immigrant nation."

From Nuns on the Bus to the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, religious forces have pressed lawmakers on a path to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants. They were largely successful in the Senate, but the outlook is less clear in the more conservative House.

"If anyone should be able to speak to some of these House Republicans, it should be particularly some of these evangelical groups," said Ruth Melkonian-Hoover, chair of the political science department at Gordon College, an evangelical school in Massachusetts.

"They should really be heard ... in terms of not only making a moral argument as to why Republicans ought to pay attention. I think many are making a very careful and prudent argument."

Members of the Evangelical Immigration Table — whose membership draws from many of the same sources as the GOP — are promoting principles of human dignity, family unity, secure borders, respect for the rule of law and fairness for taxpayers.

In their letter to House members, more than 90 Catholic educators urged them to "draw wisdom and moral courage from our shared faith tradition" that values human dignity: "We remind you that no human being made in the image of God is illegal."

The Rev. Kevin Wildes, president of Loyola University New Orleans, said he hopes they can help make a difference, especially for "children who made



Jesuit University students confer with Christopher Kerr, Executive Director of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, as they prepare to meet with Senator Barbara Boxer's staff to discussion immigration reform. Photo courtesy Ignatian Solidary Network

no choice in this matter but they're penalized for it."

"I'm just hoping that we can nudge at least some of the Catholic members of Congress," he said.

According to the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, almost one-tenth of the 535 members of Congress are graduates of Jesuit institutions. That includes 11 in the Senate and 41 in the House. Among them: House Speaker John Boehner, a graduate of Xavier University in Ohio.

Boehner has said the House will not consider "the flawed legislation rushed through the Senate" but he is open to a stand-alone bill that would offer legal status to children who entered the country illegally.

Proponents had hoped for House action before the August congressional recess. But Suzii Paynter, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said more time could be a help.

"I think the faith community has a very good opportunity to speak with their elected representatives back at home," said Paynter, who spoke at a July 10 forum on immigration reform at the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas.

She said they can discuss how the economy could improve with a path to citizenship, and how churches could offer free English classes to people completing language requirements needed for a green card.

But as religious advocates push for reform, opponents are pushing back as well.

"They'll do an ad in a district, but we'll go to our evangelical members and have them calling up the congressman, identifying the church that they go to, and saying, as an evangelical, 'I want you to put the interest of unemployed Americans first,'" said Roy Beck, president of NumbersUSA, which opposes comprehensive immigration reform.

NumbersUSA says about a third of its members are evangelical.

Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration, a fledgling ad hoc network, warned that comprehensive immigration reform will ease asylum. It sent a June letter to Congress — now signed by more than 1,200 people — to say that not all evangelicals support the Evangelical Immigration Table.

"They are getting to Congress members through a

well-funded campaign, and also some important concerns about the need for reform," said Kelly Monroe Kullberg, who spearheaded the letter and is president of Christians for a Sustainable Economy. "EBI desires both justice to citizens and kindness to guests."

The Evangelical Immigration Table, which claims 25,000 prayer partners, is planning a "day of prayer and action" on July 24. Both evangelicals and Democrats warned GOP leaders not to ignore their base on this issue.

"As Republicans worry about making gains among constituencies that opposed them in 2012 — women, youth, Latinos, African-Americans," Michael Wear, who oversaw religious outreach for Obama's re-election campaign, wrote in The Atlantic, "They would be wise to not discount the chance that they stand on the precipice of losing the support of one of the strongest elements of their base: evangelicals."

Humanist chaplains in the military

Continued from front page

of Americans under 30 — those most likely to enter the military — have no religious affiliation.

Heap and his supporters say the push for a military Humanist chaplain goes beyond the desire for recognition. They note that when soldiers seek mental health counseling it is noted in their record and reported up the chain of command. But consultations with chaplains are confidential, making them a safe place to discuss the problems soldiers routinely face — loneliness, fear, anxiety and other personal issues.

Heap is not the only candidate for the first Humanist chaplain in the military. There are three more, two of whom are already serving as military chaplains with endorsements from Christian groups. They asked to remain anonymous for fear of losing their endorsements, and therefore their jobs. That fear is real. An Army chaplain who sought to change his endorsement from Pentecostal to Wiccan — another unapproved group — in 2007 lost his position.

"Chaplain Mitch," a military chaplain since the mid-2000s, would not give his full name. He is endorsed by a Christian organization, but he's come to identify as a Humanist and would change endorsements, if permitted — something he feels would have very little effect on how he fulfills his duties.

"My whole being as a chaplain is to serve the needs of the soldiers and to ensure that, religious or not, what they need is provided for," he said. "But allowing Humanist chaplains would validate the life system and the ethics of thousands of soldiers who already identify as nonreligious and feel themselves patriotic individuals."

Still, there is resistance to the idea of nonreligious military chaplains. In June, two U.S. congressmen proposed an amendment to a bill calling for the appointment of military chaplains from nontheistic organizations, including Humanist ones. An uproar ensued and the amendment was defeated.

Humanist chaplaincies outside the military are gaining acceptance. Several U.S. universities, including Harvard and Stanford, have full-time Humanist chaplains, and more hospitals are including them in their ranks. There are Humanist military chaplains in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Kurt Fredrickson, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary who oversees a military chaplain training program, wonders what Humanist chaplains can offer that existing chaplains cannot. But Fredrickson recognizes that the spiritual makeup of the country — and its military — is changing.

"In the end, chaplains are very important, and if Humanist chaplains meet a need for our military, this concept must be embraced," he said.

Meanwhile, Heap is awaiting word from chaplaincy and recruiting leadership reviewing his application. Spokesman Christensen at the Department of Defense said he could not comment on anyone's application.

Torpy, of the Military Association of Atheists and Free-thinkers, has long been an advocate for reform in the chaplaincy. In 2011 he met with each of the chiefs of chaplains offices, he said, and has also had ongoing conversations with other chaplains at different levels.

"There is a need and there is capability," said Torpy. "And right now the chaplaincy is not doing their duty to these service members."

NC Muslims hope Governor Pat McCrory vetoes anti-Shariah bill

By OMAR SACIRBEY

(RNS) North Carolina Muslims hope they can persuade Gov. Pat McCrory, a Republican, to veto a bill that prohibits state judges from considering "foreign law."

"It's going to be tough," said Rose Hamid of Charlotte. "But I do believe there is a chance."

Muslims across the state oppose the bill they think is motivated by intolerance and may potentially infringe on other religious groups. Bills against judicial consideration of "foreign laws" are believed to really be opposing Shariah, or Islamic law.

If McCrory signs the bill, North Carolina would become the seventh state to have an anti-Shariah law, joining Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. In May, Alabama lawmakers approved a like-minded constitutional amendment that state voters will consider in 2014.

"It's a 50-50 shot," said Corey Saylor, a spokesman for the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations, which has sent out a national "action alert" urging Muslims to call and email McCrory to ask him to veto the law. "I'm hopeful that reason will prevail over bigotry and ignorance."

Jibril Hough, a spokesman for the Islamic Center of Charlotte, said McCrory has met North Carolina Muslims and knows that such a bill inflames hostility against Muslims. The bill doesn't specifically mention Shariah law, but it's clearly aimed at the legal system based on Islamic teachings.



N. C. Gov. Pat McCrory is under pressure from Muslim groups to veto a bill limiting foreign laws. Photo: courtesy State of North Carolina

"He knows what Islam is about, and how this might hurt Muslims here," said Hough, who said he was trying to get a meeting with McCrory about the bill.

"But he's also a politician."

McCrory's office did not return calls.

In June, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed an anti-Shariah bill adopted by his state's Republican legislature, asserting that it would make it harder for Missouri families to adopt children from abroad.

According to Gavel, a website that tracks state legislatures, South Carolina is the only state still in session that is considering an anti-Shariah bill, although that legislation is stuck in the committee stages.

Dozens of anti-Shariah law bills have been proposed in roughly 30 states in the last few years, and Muslim Americans expect many more bills in the years to come. "It's not a trend that's going away," said Saylor.

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World Religion

Satan worship worries Christians

Church leaders in Northeast India are alarmed at a growing number of young Christians turning to Satanism

By VISHAK ARORA
(RNS) Christian groups in India's northeastern state of Nagaland are working to quell the rapid growth of Satanism after reports that thousands of teenagers from churches had taken up devil worship in recent months.

The Vatican's Fides news agency recently reported that more than 3,000 young "worshippers of Satan" have been identified in Nagaland's capi-

of mostly Baptist associations and churches.

"Some of the Christian youth who have renounced Satan worship have told us that they would be called for services after midnight at the Kohima War Cemetery and other locations, and asked to wear black T-shirts and be called by their new nicknames," Longkumer said.

Longkumer said he has seen membership forms for a

Nagaland's 2 million residents are Christians, and about three-fourths of those identify as Baptist.

The Rev. Ben Dang Toshi Longkumer, a Nagaland-based representative of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (no relation to Wati Longkumer), said the parents of numerous youngsters have expressed concerns about their children leaving home around midnight.

"Satan worship has considerably changed the demeanor and the worldview of the youth, though no criminal activity by them has been reported thus far," he said.

In April, church groups in the state-organized crusades to rescue youngsters from Satan worship. The Roman Catholic Church in Nagaland has said it is shocked to learn about the phenomenon and is working with Protestant groups to counter it.

The Rev. Zotuo Kiewhuo, senior pastor of Koinonia Baptist Church in Kohima, said the cult is spreading like "wildfire" due to an identity crisis among the youth of the state plagued with corruption, insurgencies and intratribal conflicts.

More than 90 percent of



The skyline of Mokokchung Village in northern Nagaland, India. Many youth in the region are turning to Satanism. Photo by Limasenla, courtesy Wikimedia, Creative Commons Public Licence

“Satan worship has considerably changed the demeanor and the world view of the youth.”

Rev. Ben Dang Toshi

tal of Kohima alone.

The actual strength of Satan worshippers is difficult to determine, but such groups also exist in Nagaland's largest city of Dimapur, and they are using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to expand their network, said the Rev. Wati Longkumer, director of the Nagaland Missionary Movement, a group

group calling itself the Black Bulls and inviting youngsters to become part of devil worship.

Longkumer's organization, part of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, which consists of more than 1,300 churches, has assigned its youth department to conduct a detailed report.

Pope Delights Crowds in Rio

Continued from the front page

ops worldwide for the defiance he is instigating.

Young people who flocked to audiences, seemed genuinely moved.

"I couldn't stop crying after I heard what he wants us to do," said Maria Ines Panuziou, a 31 year old Argentine. "It is so different and exciting."

Some suggested the new pontiff might even stem the exodus of Catholics from the church across the world.

Bishop Guido Gallese of Alessandria, Italy, said he's already seeing changes back home.

"A lot of people have started coming to confession because of the works of the pope since the beginning of his pontificate," Gallese said. "So I think that now this will have the

same effect on the young people who are present here."

Francis also appeared to be winning approval from other faiths. Rosa Marie de Souza, a leader of the African-based religion, Candomble in Penambuca, traveled more than 2,000 miles with a dozen of her followers to attend the festival.

"His warmth and respect for all faiths is inclusive, and we felt encouraged to be here today," she said.

On Friday, five young people — three Brazilians, one Venezuelan and one Italian — chosen by lottery during the registration for World Youth Day had the opportunity to make the sacrament of reconciliation, or confession, before Francis.

"I have not really been a

practicing Catholic for some time," said one of them, Renan Sousa, a 22-year-old from northeast Brazil. "But after meeting the Holy Father, I feel totally refreshed and committed to practicing my faith."

In his address to business leaders, the pope avoided all criticism of the organizational problems that have beset the festival.

The grounds of the stadium in Guaratiba where the vigil was meant to be held Saturday and the closing Mass Sunday (July 28), were so badly waterlogged by heavy rains that the venue was closed and the activities moved to Copacabana beach.

Pope Francis had specifically chosen Guaratiba in the west of the city as the location for the final events because he wanted the poorer communities in Rio to attend.

Despite predictions of rain, Rio was basking in brilliant sunshine Saturday. It reflected the mood of Francis' audience.

As the event for Brazilian business leaders and politicians came to a close, Francis was surrounded by dozens of young girls who knelt by his feet and offered him flowers.

Then, in a spontaneous ovation, the crowd clapped and repeatedly shouted his name — "Francisco."

Chinese Malay couple faces prison for posting photo of them eating pork

By RICHARD S. EHRLICH
BANGKOK, Thailand (RNS) A non-Muslim Chinese couple who posted on Facebook a photo of themselves eating pork during the Islamic month of Ramadan face up to 15 years in prison in Muslim-majority Malaysia for sedition and other crimes.

"They were charged under the Sedition Act, the Film Censorship Act, and the Penal Code," the Malaysia Chronicle reported on Thursday (July 18).

Alvin Tan and Vivian Lee — also known as Tan Jye Yee and Lee May Ling — pleaded not guilty at the Sessions Court in Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur.

"They have the potential to upload content that could stir anger," said Malaysia's Attorney General Abdul Gani Patail, demanding the man and woman be jailed pending their next hearing.

Tan, 25, and Lee, 24, are Malaysian citizens.

They allegedly posted a photograph of themselves earlier in July, smiling at a roadside restaurant while eat-

ing pork stew with chopsticks. The photo included a caption greeting Muslims during Ramadan, plus their personal website address.

That website displayed several of their YouTube videos including "Vaginas," "Sexual Fantasies," "Gays and Homosexuals."

In court, Mr. Tan said the dinner photo was meant as humor and not as an insult, and he also apologized in a YouTube video asking "for forgiveness for offending Muslims in this holy month of Ramadan."

Pork is forbidden for Muslims.

Ethnic Malay Muslims comprise about two-thirds of the Southeast Asian nation's population, compared to Chinese who form about 25 percent of Malaysia's total of 30 million people.

Malaysia's Chinese are mostly Buddhists or Christians and can eat pork.

The Sedition Act punishes any "act" or "words" that cause "hatred or contempt" or "disaffection" against the government, the justice system, any

"rulers" or "between different races or classes."

A first offense can result in three years imprisonment, but if the Chinese couple are also convicted under the film censorship and penal code, the total could be 15 years in jail, reports said.

To control and punish people, Malaysia uses secular laws inherited from colonial Britain plus some Shariah laws drawn from the Quran, depending on the geographical region, jurisdiction, and the suspect's religion.

In 2009, a Shariah High Court sentenced a Muslim woman to be whipped six lashes with a rattan cane, and fined \$1,400, for drinking beer in a nightclub.

Her sentence was later reduced to three weeks community service.

Religious police also arrest unmarried couples of the opposite sex if they are together with no one else in a room — a crime called "khalwat" — which bans such "close proximity."

Homosexuality, meanwhile, is illegal throughout Malaysia.

Islamist rebel vows to stop Sochi Olympics

Most wanted man in Russia urges the use of "maximum force"

By THOMAS GROVE
(REUTERS) Moscow - Russian Islamist rebel leaders urged their fighters on Wednesday to use "maximum force" to prevent President Vladimir Putin staging the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

Sochi, which is due to host the Games next February, is a few hundred kilometers (miles) from the volatile and mountainous North Caucasus region in southern Russia where there is almost daily violence. It was the homeland of ethnic Circassians until they were expelled in the 19th century.

Putin has promised tight security at the Games, on which Russia is spending more than \$50 billion.

"They (Russia) plan to hold the Olympics on the bones of our ancestors, on the bones of many, many dead Muslims, buried on the territory of our land on the Black Sea, and we as mujahideen are obliged to not permit that, using any methods allowed us by the almighty Allah," Umarov said in the four-minute video.

Russia's most wanted man, Umarov leads a group called the Caucasus Emirate which has taken responsibility for organizing many attacks, in-

cluding suicide bombings which killed 37 people at a Moscow airport in 2011 and at least 40 people on the Moscow subway in 2010.

In February 2012 Umarov ordered a moratorium on attacks on Russian targets outside the North Caucasus and called for a halt on attacks that would harm civilians, but made clear in the new video that this order had been rescinded.

Kremlin-backed Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said that the search for Umarov was going on every day.

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Survey: UK Muslims give more to charity than Jews or Christians

By TREVOR GRUNDY
CANTERBURY, England (RNS) When it comes to donating to charity, Britain's small but fast-growing Muslim community comes out ahead of other religious groups, a recent survey shows.

Conducted by ICM, a London-based polling agency, the survey shows the U.K.'s estimated 280,000 Muslims report giving more money annually to charity than Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews.

The survey, conducted on behalf of JustGiving, an online giving platform, also found a 70 percent rise in giving over the past two years from among Muslims to the charity-giving site.

"Our data shows many of Britain's Muslim communities are at the forefront of digital giving, driving an increase in zakat donations," said Zarine Kharas, JustGiving's CEO.

Zakat is the Muslim practice of donating to charity to help the poor. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, and donations typically rise during Ramadan when giving fulfills a religious obligation.

In 2012, British Muslims gave \$307,046 in donations to a variety of causes through JustGiving, compared to \$144,311 in 2010.

Following payday loan revelation, Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby offers to open credit unions

CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said he was embarrassed and irritated following revelations that the Church of England has invested millions of pounds in a company that financially backs England's leading payday lending company, Wonga.

Welby told the BBC: "We must find out why this happened and then make sure that it never happens again."

The Financial Times broke the news that the Church of England invested several million pounds in Accel Partners, the U.S. venture capital company that led to the launch of Wonga, which dominates the 2 billion pound payday lending market in England. Wonga charges annual percentage rates of more than 5,000 percent.

A spokesperson for Lambeth Palace, Welby's London home, said: "We are grateful to the Financial Times for pointing out this serious inconsistency of which we were unaware. We will be asking the assets committee of the Church Commissioners to investigate how this has occurred."

The Church of England's investment portfolio is estimated at 5.5 billion pounds, or \$8.4 billion. Church Commissioners oversee investments and the church's ethics explicitly bans companies involved in payday lending. There are no restrictions on the annual percentage rates payday loan companies can charge.

The paper's revelations have



Two Islamic women share some time on the Internet. Digital giving among Muslims is on the rise with an increase of over 50% from 2010 to 2012. A survey shows that U.K. Muslims give approximately \$567 per person per year. The same survey showed Jewish giving was \$412 per person and Christian giving was at just over \$300 per person. Stock Photo.

The donations went to various Islamic-oriented charities, including Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief and the Zakat Trust. Muslims also donate to individual mosques and earmark sums of money to non-Islamic causes. In 2010, Muslims in Manchester donated \$79,831 to develop a United Reformed Church building in a rundown

part of the city.

The ICM survey showed that Muslims say they donate about \$567 per person per year, with Jews (also numbering around 280,000 in the U.K.) in second place, with \$412 per person annually. Christians gave considerably less – just over \$300 per person, and atheists were at the bottom of the list, with \$177

donated.

The ICM survey asked 4,036 people – "How much, if at all, did you donate to charities last year?" Respondents were asked to exclude buying items from charity stores (such as OXFAM, the Red Cross, Save the Children) or sponsoring a charity event.

These findings follow a recent Pew Research Center poll of more than 38,000 Muslims in 39 countries that found that 77 percent said they donated regularly to charities.

"The supposedly conservative Muslim community is very much getting on board with new and improved ways to fundraise," said Khara. "To keep up with their congregations, imams should think beyond the collection plate when it comes to fundraising, as today people want the ability to respond immediately to need in a world which is increasingly cashless."

JustGiving was launched in 2001. It exists by charging charities a small fee on donations and reinvesting surplus cash into developing technology to make giving to charity easier.



Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the Church of England. Photo courtesy ArchBishopOfCaanterbury.org

Germany in the 19th century and soon spread across Europe and the U.S.

This year, the British government pledged to spend 38 million pounds to support the sector, but small credit unions which lend money on a short term basis to poor people often lack expertise and fail to handle loan applications quickly, unlike the personnel at Wonga, which is respected and quick.

Welby said that the Church of England would consider setting up its own credit unions. Asked what the annual percentage rate needed to be to make them profitable he said, "about 70 to 80 percent."

Welby, who heads the 80 million-strong worldwide Anglican communion, said he agreed that was still high but better than what Wonga and others charged.

"We've got to live in the real world," he said. "And the real world is very complicated and you can't escape the complexity."

Malaysia court quashes Hindu children's conversion to Islam

Kuala Lumpur - A Malaysian court on Thursday ruled against the 2009 conversion of three Hindu children to Islam without their mother's knowledge, a verdict welcomed by non-Muslim groups.

A high court in the northern city of Ipoh declared the conversion of Indira Gandhi's children, now aged five, 15 and 16, by their father to be unconstitutional, said Indira's lawyer K. Shanmuga.

The judge ruled that the father had failed to take the mother and children to Islamic authorities for their consent to the conversion, in a rare verdict in the multiracial but Muslim-majority nation, Shanmuga said.

"It is the first time ever that a child's conversion certificate has been quashed by a high court," he told AFP.

Indira, a kindergarten teacher in her late 30s, faced losing custody of her children after her husband converted himself and them without her knowledge.

Under Malaysian sharia law, which governs civil matters for Muslims, a non-Muslim parent cannot share custody of converted children.

Indira, a Hindu, got a

2010 high court verdict to award her custody. But her husband went into hiding with their youngest daughter and the conversion remained in dispute.

Earlier this month Malaysia withdrew an Islamic law which allows one parent to give consent for a child's conversion, after an outcry.

Opponents said it discriminated against minorities despite government promises to address their grievances.

Religious groups welcomed Thursday's verdict.

"We are very happy about that decision. But it must be accepted by all the Islamic and other government agencies," said Mohan Shan, an official with the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.

Conversions of children and "body-snatching" cases -- in which Islamic authorities tussle with families over the remains of people whose religion is disputed -- have previously raised tensions.

More than 60 percent of Malaysia's 28 million people are Muslim ethnic Malays, but it also has sizeable Chinese and Indian minorities who are non-Muslims

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Religion and Life

Shariah 101: What is it and why do states want to ban it?

Shariah is the Islamic code of conduct which many countries have adopted (or want to) as the law of the land

By OMAR SACIRBEY (RNS)
North Carolina lawmakers on Wednesday (July 24) approved a bill to prohibit judges from considering “foreign laws” in their decisions, but nearly everyone agrees that “foreign laws” really means Shariah, or Islamic law.

North Carolina now joins six other states — Oklahoma, Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Tennessee — to pass a “foreign laws” bill. A similar bill passed in Missouri, but Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed it, citing threats to international adoptions.

The bills all cite “foreign laws” because two federal courts have ruled that singling out Shariah — as Oklahoma voters originally did in 2010 — is unconstitutional.

So what’s the big deal with Shariah?

Many Americans think of Shariah as an Islamic legal system characterized by misogyny, intolerance, and harsh punishments. Some anti-Islamic activists warn that Muslims are trying to sneak Shariah into the American legal system in ways that do not reflect U.S. legal principles or beliefs.

Many Muslim Americans counter that Shariah is essential to belief, and that any harsh punishments or unconstitutional aspects associated with Islamic law have either been exaggerated, abrogated or are superseded by American law.

Muslims around the world have varying views about what Shariah entails, and its role in personal and public life. So what exactly is Shariah? Here are five facts that might help make sense of this complex and often misunderstood term.

1. What is Shariah?
Shariah is an Arabic word that literally means a path to be followed, and also commonly refers to a path to water. The term is broad, encompassing

both a personal moral code and religious law.

There are two sources of Shariah: The Quran, which many Muslims consider to be the literal word of God; and the “Sunnah,” the divinely guided tradition of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad.

The interpretation of Shariah is called “fiqh,” or Islamic jurisprudence. Because fiqh is man-made, it can be changed; Shariah, for many Muslims, is divine and cannot be changed.

Some Muslims use the term Shariah to apply to both the injunctions in the Quran and Sunnah, and the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. Islamic law consists of Shariah and fiqh.

2. What does Shariah cover?

While often thought of as a legal system, Shariah covers personal and collective spheres of daily life, and has three components – belief, character, and actions. Only a small portion of the “action” component relates to law. In fact, only about 80 of the Quran’s 6,236 verses are about specific legal injunctions.

•The “belief” component of Shariah commands Muslims to believe in God, the angels, prophets, revelation, and other metaphysical and physical aspects of the faith.

•In terms of “character,” Shariah commands Muslims to strive for traits like humility and kindness, and to avoid traits such as lying and pride.

•“Actions” include those relating to God, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, as well as actions relating to other humans, such as marriage, crime, and business.

Some actions relating to other humans can be regulated by the state, while actions relating to God (as well as belief and character) are between an individual and God. Nevertheless, some Muslim-majority



An Islamic women wearing a traditional hijab, symbolizing, modesty, privacy and morality. Photo source: 123RF Stock photo

countries have criminalized violations of the belief, character, and action components of Shariah.

3. Who is qualified to issue rulings on Shariah?

Shariah was systematized between the eighth and 10th centuries, some 200 to 300 years after Muhammad received his first revelation. Many people believe that, by the end of the 10th century, the core components of Shariah had been exhaustively debated. That said, changes in Islamic society force scholars to look at Shariah anew, with new interpretations expressed in fatwas (religious edicts) and legal opinions.

Interpreting Shariah is done by jurists known as “fuqahaa” who look at the practicality of both time and place regarding how a ruling can be applied. In places where Shariah has official status, it is interpreted by judges known as “qadis.” Fiqh interpretations divide human behavior into five categories: obligatory, recommended, neutral, discouraged, and forbidden.

Over the centuries, Islamic legal analyses and opinions were compiled in books that judges used in deciding cases.

Secular courts and Shariah courts coexisted in Islamic lands, with the Shariah courts often taking responsibility for family law matters. With the arrival of European colonization, many of these legal opinions were codified into civil law.

4. Where is Shariah the law of the land?

Professor Jan Michiel Otto of the Leiden University Law School in the Netherlands divides legal systems of Muslim countries into three categories: classical Shariah systems, secular systems, and mixed systems.

In countries with classical Shariah systems, Shariah has official status or a high degree of influence on the legal system, and covers family law, criminal law, and in some places, personal beliefs, including penalties for apostasy, blasphemy, and not praying. These countries include Egypt, Mauritania, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Maldives, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

Yemen, and certain regions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the United Arab Emirates.

Mixed systems are the most common in Muslim-majority countries. Generally speaking, Shariah covers family law, while secular courts will cover everything else. Countries include: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Libya, Morocco, Somalia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Oman, and Syria.

In several Muslim-majority countries, Shariah plays no role: Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Albania, Kosovo, and Turkey.

Some countries have Islamic family law courts available for their Muslim minorities: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, India, Israel, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

Mistaken identity produces threats for retired pastor

By MOLLY VORWERCK c. 2013 USA Today

(RNS) Death threats were the last type of phone calls George A. Zimmermann thought he’d get after serving for 55 years as his Pennsylvania community’s preacher.

And he never thought he’d be mistaken for the man headlining news these days: George Zimmerman, the Sanford, Fla., neighborhood watch volunteer acquitted in the fatal shooting of unarmed teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

Zimmermann, 78, retired to Deland, Fla., 16 years ago from his post at Georgetown United Methodist Church in Paradise, Pa. He said his time in Florida had been relatively peaceful and uneventful — until the phone calls began trickling in.

According to Zimmermann, he started receiving the calls immediately after Zimmerman (with one n), 29, shot the teenager.

“In the beginning, I received four or five calls,” Zimmermann said. “I’d say, ‘Hey, you got the wrong person. I don’t live in Sanford.’ And then it stopped.”

Until the first night of the trial.

On June 25, Zimmermann was awakened by two calls in the middle of the night from protesters, although he said they were tame in comparison with the one he received July 14, a day after the verdict was reached.

“Hey (expletive), you’re the one who killed Trayvon Martin, when your (expletive) get out, you’re dead,” the caller said in a message left on the answering machine. “Wherever you go, you’re dead. Wherever you’re trying to

In the United States, there are no Islamic courts, but judges sometimes have to consider Islamic law in their decisions. For example, a judge may have to recognize the validity of an Islamic marriage contract from a Muslim country in order to grant a divorce in America.

Some Islamic scholars argue that true Islamic belief cannot be coerced by the state, and therefore belief in Shariah should only come from the individual and not be codified by the state.

5. Does Shariah really prescribe harsh punishments like stoning adulterers?

Yes, but many of these punishments have been taken out of context, abrogated, or require a near-impossible level of evidence to be carried out. For someone to be convicted of adultery, for example, there must be four witnesses to the act, which is rare. The Quran also prescribes amputating the hands of thieves, but (and this is often forgotten or unmentioned) not if the thief has repented.

Other Shariah scholars say such a punishment system can only be instituted in a society of high moral standards and where everyone’s needs are met (thereby obviating the urge to steal or commit other crimes). In such a society, the thinking goes, corporal punishments would be rarely needed.

That said, corporal punishments have been used by Islamic militant groups in places like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria, and governments in Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Aceh state in Indonesia and elsewhere.

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“They’re just shooting in the dark, It doesn’t make sense — I’m in a different town. But I guess when you’re upset you do things without rationally thinking about it.”

Pastor George Zimmermann

Mistaken for the man who shot Trayvon Martin

hide, you’re dead. Watch your (expletive) move. You think you’re free. You’re not. You better get ready to dig a 6-foot hole, cause you know you’re fixing to go,” according to a report by Orlando news station WFVT.

Zimmermann, who was not home at the time of the call, recorded the message on

his answering machine. He reported the incident to the Volusia County Sheriff’s Office.

“I know they’re venting their emotions, but I had no idea that my name would create such a hassle,” he said.

Zimmermann said a couple of the calls he’s received have been from out-of-state numbers, but more have been from Florida. He has changed his phone number, and since July 14, he has not received any more intimidating calls.

“They’re just shooting in the dark,” Zimmermann said. “It doesn’t make sense — I’m in a different town.

“But I guess when you’re upset you do things without rationally thinking about it,” he said.

Since Martin was killed, a number of individuals with unintentional

ties to Zimmerman have been accosted in similar cases of mistaken identity:

• A Florida man who had never owned a cellphone before being released from prison in May 2012 was randomly assigned the number Zimmermann was using when he called 911 the night he killed Martin. Junior Alexander Guy, then 49, received multiple intimidating phone calls before changing his number.

• Lori Tankel of Winter Park, Fla., was forced to change her number after receiving nearly 100 calls from protesters assuming she was Zimmerman, reports WFTV. Her cellphone number was one digit removed from Zimmerman’s old number.

• Although he lived thousands of miles away from Sanford, Jorge Zimmerman of Cumberland, R.I., received nearly half a dozen or so angry messages sent to his Facebook page from individuals accusing him of murdering Martin, says Rhode Island news station WPRI. He has deactivated his Facebook account.

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Springfield Ministry brings hope to the hopeless

Couple invest their lives in ministering to the homeless in Springfield

By STEVE HIGHLANDER
Editor RN-R

SPRINGFIELD, MO – Night is falling. It's time for bed. A mother gathers the kids and they all climb into the broken-down car that serves as their home: living room, bedroom and family room combined.

Other families might live in tents nearby.

They are the luckier ones who actually have some type of shelter over the heads. Others sleep on the ground in the open air. Such is the life of the homeless.

This is the world that Rev. Dennis and Becky Coad have chosen to embrace on a daily basis. The Coads founded Crosswalk Journey Ministry in 2009 as an outreach to the homeless in the Springfield area.

At last count Springfield is home to over 800 homeless people – those that they could find and count, anyway. The real figures are higher and fluctuate as transients come and go, and life circumstances change.

“The main thrust of the ministry is to get hope back into people so they can step with confidence back into society,” Dennis said. “We teach the true Gospel of Jesus and help



A typical “home” for a homeless person. Hope is the main ingredient missing in the lives of many homeless people. It is this hope – through Jesus Christ – that the Coads bring, along with food and clothing. Prayer is as important as food, clothing in the lives of the homeless in and around Springfield. Crosswalk Journey Ministry makes sure that the people they reach out to get their needs met, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Photo: Crosswalk Journey Ministry. Scan the QR code in the photo above to see a news video.

late to and care for those on the fringes of society. Because God saved us at our lowest point, we know He can save others at their lowest point also. This is the hope we share.”

Four years ago God began putting it into the Coads' hearts to minister to the homeless

woman had severe back pain. As they prayed for her the lady was healed and the pain went away. She asked them to pray for her daughter to come back home. The lady had no idea where her daughter was. They prayed on the street that day for a family restoration. Dennis and Becky began Christian discipleship with the woman -- teaching her about the love of God and taking her to Church. Two months later the woman called to say her daughter had come home, but was pregnant and living on the streets. She wanted to know if they would be able to help her too? As they ministered to the practical, emotional and spiritual needs of this young woman, she discovered the love of God that changes souls. Soon after, they were able to help her get a home. Before long the mother was also off the streets.

How has the ministry impacted individuals? Here are some statements of people who have been helped by Crosswalk Journey Ministries.

“We gave up completely, we had lost all hope and had no idea people cared like Crosswalk Journey.”

“Since [they] have prayed for family restoration we have now got back with our family.”

“Since [they] have prayed for me, I have not wanted another drink”

“We have not eaten in days and we prayed last night and here you are today bringing us food”

Ministering to people and meeting needs take time, money and other resources. They have a free store and food pantry in Republic, but they are

only open by appointment. The Coads have a dream of getting a building in Springfield that can house a free store, food pantry, prayer rooms, a kitchen for preparing hot meals for weekend outreaches and chapel services. They also need another passenger van and a car.

Crosswalk Journey Ministries is in need of people who want to help people. There is always a need for food for the pantry and to prepare for hot meals. Since many are homeless, camping gear, tents and other items that do not use electricity are very helpful. Finances, prayer, donated items and time make all the difference to those with no hope. You can make a significant difference in the lives of people in your area. To find out more about this ministry, visit their web site at www.crosswalk-journeyministry.com. To help the hopeless contact Crosswalk Journey Ministry at 417-894-7155.

A Prayer and \$35

A Missionary Story

By Dr. STEVE HIGHLANDER,
Director, South East Mission Teams - USA

Six years ago there were no known Christians among the Aeta tribe on Negros Island in the Philippines. In December 2011 I had the privilege of speaking at the 4th anniversary celebration of the Aeta Tribal Church of the Philippines.

In six years the Aeta have gone from an unreached people group, known for drunkenness and violence, to a spiritually healthy and growing Christian community with 5 established churches, and official recognition by the Philippine government as an indigenous church.

The Aeta Christians now number over 1000. Earlier this year almost twenty students graduated from the International School of Ministry (ISOM) conducted in their village. This is an amazing feat, considering that before they became Christians, none could read or write English.

The Datu (chief), Rostom, and his village elders quickly accepted the Christian message. Rostom's grandfather has been a very powerful and famous witch doctor on the Island. As tribal chief, all his grandfather's tribal fetishes were passed down to Rostom. In a public ceremony Datu Rostom and the elders burned the ancient witchcraft fetishes and declared the Aeta tribe would be Christians and worship God.

All of this started with a prayer and \$35. One day a pastor from the United States stood on the deck of a seaside restaurant at Moal Boal on Cebu Island in the Philippines and looked across the ocean at Negros Island (meaning “black” in Spanish) and prayed God would send the light to that dark Island.

That man, George Rennau, was the son-in-law of Richard Bartz, Director of South East Asia Mission Teams (SEAMist). Little did he know that soon a SEAMisT missionary would have an opportunity to travel to Negros and meet the chief of the Aeta tribe. A short time later I was setting in my office chatting with Richard over the Internet when he asked me if I had \$35. He needed \$35 to send missionary pastor Rodel on an exploratory trip to Negros. The \$35 covered his travel, meals and the ferry boat trip across the channel. God used that prayer and an initial investment of \$35 to transform the lives of the Aeta tribe.

SEAMisT recruits and trains missionaries to target unreached people groups in S.E. Asia. To date they have planted church among several previously unreached peoples. For more information visit seamist.org.



The Fourth Anniversary Celebration in the first Aeta Church building in Canggehob, Mabinay on Negros Island, Philippines. Photo by Steve Highlander

“We have not eaten in days and we prayed last night and here you are today bringing us food”
Testimony from a homeless family

them find deliverance from the strongholds of the world. Sometimes we assist with family restoration and a return to a normal way of life. We do this by discipleship, bible study, praying for healing, and with love.”

Dennis has a special affinity for the homeless and those bound by insurmountable problems. Prior to his conversion to Christianity, he was an alcoholic and an heroin addict. He was also diagnosed with several mental illnesses and spent time in prison. Hopeless, he turned to God -- and the power of God set him free instantly from all of those problems. It is this same hope and power that the Coads now share with others.

According to Dennis, “We are just two people who love God and whom God loved, even when we were unlovable. Our life experiences have given us the ability to understand, re-

and helpless. In the beginning they started taking food, clothing and hope to Commercial Street in Springfield, an area frequented by many homeless, needy and those addicted to drugs and alcohol.

Today the ministry still provides food, clothing, hope and more. Becky shared the heart of the mission, “We go in and show love and don't judge them for what they are doing, or have done. We direct them to resources to get off the streets, and when they get into their own place, we take them supplies they need. Our goal is to get them off the streets and placed back into society where they can live a productive life.” The Coads also run a van service Sunday mornings, picking up the people they have connected with and taking them to church.

One day the couple encountered a homeless woman on Commercial Street. The

Anti-Semitism on downward slide but still rampant online

By LAUREN MARKOE

(RNS) The Anti-Defamation League's study of anti-Semitism in the U.S. shows a 14 percent decrease in incidents during 2012, the second consecutive year of a downward trend.

Overall, the ADL counted 927 anti-Semitic incidents — including assaults, vandalism and harassment — down from the 1,080 incidents reported in 2011. Abraham H. Foxman, the ADL's national director, called the trend “encouraging.”

“While these numbers only provide one snapshot of anti-Semitism in America, to the extent that they serve as a barometer the decline shows that we have made progress as a society in confronting anti-Jewish hatred,” he said.

The ADL has conducted its annual survey since 1979. The recent decline in anti-Semitic incidents contrasts to findings in many European countries, where anti-Semitic incidents continue to rise. In France, for example, the Jewish Community Security Service recorded 614 anti-Semitic acts in 2012, compared to 389 in 2011 — a 58 percent jump.

But the ADL report also showed a proliferation in the U.S. of some expressions of anti-Semitism, including vandalism, online expressions of hatred toward Jews, and anti-Jewish hostility on college campuses — where the ADL says anti-Israel sentiment too



Neighbor reported that a car belonging to an owner two homes down was spray-painted with swastikas and “Jew” in bright yellow paint in Alexandria, Virginia in March 2012. Photo courtesy Anti-Defamation League

often have turned anti-Semitic. Vandalism rose 33 percent, with a total of 440 incidents reported in 2012. Most took place on public property or at individual homes, and Jewish institutions were targeted in 13 percent of the total cases.

Online expressions of anti-Semitism “are simply too numerous to track,” according to the report, and are only counted “if they specifically target an individual.”

“While we cannot point to any single explanation for the fluctuations from year to year, the declines of the past several years occur within the context of the continued proliferation of hatred online,” said Barry Curtiss-Lusher, ADL national chair.

“This explosion of viral hate is impossible to quantify, but it

may have led to a migration of sorts where the haters and bigots are more likely to take to the Internet to express themselves anonymously, rather than acting out in a public setting,” he said, adding that the potential audience for online hatred numbers in the millions, and the danger is that it can fuel real-world violence.

The report also describes increasing hostility against Jews on college campuses, with a total of 61 incidents reported in 2012, up from 22 incidents reported in 2011.

“Some of those incidents included the use of anti-Semitic imagery under the guise of anti-Israel activism, with conspiracy theories about Jewish political and economic control being voiced on campus,” according to the report.

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Religion in Society

ANALYSIS: ‘Pagan’ is getting a makeover

Paganism is becoming decidedly more mainstream, but how many people understand the term?

By DAVID GIBSON

(RNS) Is calling someone a “pagan” a bad thing or a badge of honor? Do we even know what the term means?

Those questions were prompted by a recent speech by Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput in which he lamented the decline of faith and morals in the modern world. “Even many self-described Christians,” he declared, “are in fact pagan.”

And it doesn't sound like he meant that as a compliment.

In an email, Chaput declined to elaborate on what he meant by that line, which came near the end of a 3,000-word address delivered in June to an international association of Catholic leaders meeting in Spain. The archbishop said “the words and the context of the words speak for themselves. It is all quite obvious.”

Others, however, aren't so sure his message is clear given the many meanings of “pagan.”

“It's kind of a sliding word,” said the Rev. Patrick McCollum, a leading practitioner of pagan religion and a peace activist who promotes religious pluralism.

In its original context in the ancient world, “pagan” simply meant a “country dweller” and was only mildly derogatory — like “hick” or “redneck,” said McCollum, who lives near San Francisco. A pagan may have been viewed as uncultured, but there was no particular moral or spiritual opprobrium attached to the label.

Yet as the Abrahamic religions, particularly Christianity, began to spread, “pagan” took



Forn Sed Sweden holding a blót during their annual thing (meeting) June, 2011 in Scania, Sweden. The thing and the blót was held under a birch, a tree connected to the goddess Frigg. To the left is the “Priestess of the Council” Birka Skogsberg and to the right the “Priest of the Council” Martin Domeij while officiating the blót. Both are dressed in ceremonial clothes with red clothing over white clothing. At the tree is cultic images depicting the Norse deities Forseti, Freyja, Freyr, Frigg, and Thor. From the tree trunk a birch trumpet is hanging. On the ground is a drinking horn, an oath ring, and a ceremonial hammer. Photo by Achird, compliments of Wikimedia Commons.

on negative connotations as the antithesis of the “true faith” of the monotheists. Pagans were polytheists who believed in various gods and held to questionable moral codes. Buddhists

and Hindus and everyone else who were not Christians were labeled as pagans and thus doomed in the afterlife.

Decades ago, Catholic school kids collected money for “pa-

gan babies” — funds that were sent to missionaries in places like Africa to minister to non-Christian children, and perhaps save their souls. (The term was retired long ago, and isn't coming back — though it did have a brief resurrection as the name of a West Coast band.)

Eventually, a “pagan” turned

into something far more problematic — someone “who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods,” as the Merriam-Webster dictionary puts it. “An irreligious or hedonistic person.” It was perhaps no coincidence that, when an outlaw motorcycle gang in suburban Washington, was looking for a

fearsome name, they settled on the Pagans.

Pagans were seen as anti-religious, dangerous people who would lure believers into atheism or even occult practices. But that's not the case any longer, if it ever was, say contemporary pagans like McCollum.

“What pagan has come to mean in modern times is people who are more attentive to our connection to the Earth, the world we live in, and our interconnectedness with everything in it,” he said. There are even Christo-Pagans who believe in Jesus and don't think Christianity and pagan beliefs are mutually exclusive.

Above all, pagans insist that even if they are not Christians, they nonetheless have strong religious and moral convictions about caring for others and the Earth. They are not, they insist, anti-religious libertines looking to corrupt your soul.

“Except in the rarest instances, I never meet nonspiritual, nonbelieving pagans,” McCollum said.

As far back as the 1950s, Christian apologist C.S. Lewis, an icon to many evangelicals today, was extolling pagans as having more in common with traditional Christians than with “post-Christians” who are indifferent about faith.

“The gap between those who worshiped different gods is not so wide as that between those who worship and those who don't,” Lewis said in a well-known lecture. “I find it a bit hard to have patience with all those Jeremiahs in press or pulpit who warn us that we are relapsing into paganism.”

Since then, pagans have also benefited from a number of other trends.

One is that Christian churches, including some Catholics and evangelicals, have developed a theology that promotes a reverence for the Earth and a spiritual rationale for protecting the environment. That provides important common ground for dialogue and action with pagans.

Paganism is also becoming decidedly mainstream.

See PAGANS on page 12

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Can a horror film lead people to God?

Based on a true story, “The Conjuring” was written by two brothers who wanted to share the power of God over darkness.

By KEVIN EKSTROM

(RNS) The box office hit “The Conjuring” has all the requisite features of a standard horror flick: creaky doors, mysterious things that go bump in the night, creepy dolls and a dead witch who seizes the body of an unsuspecting mother.

It also has an unexpected background character for a horror film: God.

Filmmaker brothers Chad and Carey Hayes say their film isn’t your typical “Christian” movie fare, but it nonetheless carries a strong religious message that can appeal to faith-minded audiences. It is, they say, a “wholesome horror film.”

“The Conjuring” centers around the real-life Ed and Lorraine Warren, a pair of ghost-hunting “consultants of demonic witchcraft.” In 1971, they were called to a 19th-century Rhode Island farmhouse where things had gotten downright spooky.

“To have two characters that were so strong in their faith, we didn’t have to preach it, we didn’t have to thump it, we just had to show it,” Carey Hayes said in an interview. “Their faith was the sharpest tool in their toolbox.”

ghosts make life unbearable. Armed with an array of cameras and recording equipment, the Warrens set out to identify and expel the evil spirit.

“Something awful happened here, Ed,” the clairvoyant Lorraine Warren (played by Vera Farmiga from “Up in the Air”) says to her husband.

The Warrens pinpoint the demon of a witch connected to the Salem witch trials as the culprit, and recommend an exorcism. When a priest is unavailable, Ed Warren steps in to perform the rite himself, and it doesn’t sit well with the demon named Bathsheba, who hijacks the body and soul of the mother, Carolyn Perron (Lili Taylor).

“God brought us together for a reason,” Lorraine assures her husband before the blood-curdling exorcism begins. “This is it.”

As far as horror films go, the \$20 million “The Conjuring” is fairly tame. It’s more “The Blair Witch Project” than “A Nightmare on Elm Street.” And that’s what could help attract religious viewers who perhaps haven’t seen an R-rated film since the blood-soaked “The Passion of the Christ.”

“We wrote a film that doesn’t



A scene from “The Conjuring” with Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga. “The Conjuring” is a film based on the true story of Ed and Lorraine Warren, a pair of ghost-hunting “consultants of demonic witchcraft.” Photo courtesy Grace Hill Media/Warner Bros.

and distributing family-friendly Christian fare. In fact, he said, the horror genre is exactly where Christian filmmakers need to be.

“The gospel is sharing this idea that it can take only a small amount of light to dispel a whole lot of darkness,” said Downes, who was not involved

on the Christian market. They brought in Grace Hill Media (whose earlier credits include work on “The Lord of the Rings” and “Man of Steel”) to help push the film to religious audiences.

It seems to have worked. “The Conjuring” took in a surprising \$41 million in its opening weekend.

The Hayes brothers describe themselves as “Christians” without wanting to go into further labels or detail, and they’re convinced of the reality of demonic forces and spiritual warfare.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,” Chad Hayes said, easily quoting from the New Testament Book of Ephesians. “If you think about it, our movie fits all that.”

Ed and Lorraine Warren, who were devout Catholics,

dedicated an entire room in their house to a collection of demon-possessed artifacts. They have reels and reels of film of real-life exorcisms, and there’s more than enough material for a sequel, the Hayes brothers said.

The film ends with an on-screen quote from Ed Warren, who died in 2006:

“Diabolical forces are formidable. These forces are eternal, and they exist today. The fairy tale is true. The devil exists. God exists. And for us, as people, our very destiny hinges upon which one we elect to follow.”

For their part, the brothers say it’s more than a bunch of Hollywood make-believe.

“We’re 100 percent aware of the reality that there is darkness and there is light,” Carey Hayes said. “We’ve seen it. We’ve witnessed it.”

“We’ve seen things,” Chad chimed in, “that I wish we never saw.”

Penetrating society and solutions ... The story of Acts Ministry, Inc. and ActsFest

By DR. PAUL COLLINS

SPRINGFIELD, MO – The Acts Ministry all conference was in Springfield, MO this past July 18-21. According to participants, it was a phenomenal success! The reports were accolades for the effort that went into its planning, execution, and contents.

Beginning on Thursday at 10:00 in the morning on the 18th, Actsfest (as the annual conference is called) featured reports from the ministers, churches, and ministries during the opening session. In the afternoon on Thursday, the delegates were treated to the testimony and music of Brandon Mabe and Megan McCombs.

Friday morning was devoted to a presentation by a panel of experts in various fields regarding mental health, children’s issues, homelessness, and other matters very common to all communities across the U.S. The panel was comprised of local men representing a broad spectrum of community activity and included the editor of the local newspaper, an authority on autism, a professional counselor, a college professor, and an executive with an organization that assists with hunger and homeless issues.

Friday afternoon the group was intrigued by the story of the restoration and reclamation of the Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, AR. Rev. Randall Christy made the presentation and told of the divine direction he received to rescue the play and its land from foreclosure. It was an inspiring success story.

Friday night’s activities began with an hour of singing led by Raphael Thompson, a very special Christian pianist and singer. The hour of singing was followed by a “Holy Spirit Victory Celebration and Healing

Service.”

Saturday morning the ladies met for “pastries and A Program.” Their meeting began at 10 A.M. and concluded at noon. After time for rest, the entire conference enjoyed the Annual Awards Banquet at 6 P.M. Steve Schultz was honored with a plaque for distinguished service as the sound engineer for Acts Ministry services. Kevin Kilmurray was named as the recipient of the Margaret Comer Light-house Award for his behind the scenes work with Acts Television Network. The inspiration and entertainment was provided by Rev. Dennis Eversen and his son, Clayton, with a hilarious, original, comedic routine about money. The inspiration was provided by the trio called Voices of Glory, who made a strong showing in 2009 as contestants on America’s Got Talent television show. The blended voices of the two brothers and their sister gave everyone a lift! They have a regular show in the Hughes Theatre in Branson, MO. The show is called Ayo.

Sunday afternoon was the highlight of the Actsfest. At 2:00, there was a very special service of ordination and Holy Communion. Four people were ordained. Marlene Miller (ministers to the elderly), Michelle LaMountain (missionary to Africa), and Richard and June Bartz (semi-retired missionaries to Southeast Asia), were set apart for ministry as clergy with Acts Ministry.

All of the sessions were on the campus of Maranatha Village, a beautiful retirement facility owned by the Assemblies of God. Even though Acts Ministry is independent and trans denominational, the Assemblies of God have been gracious hosts for many years.

Pagans

Continued from page 10

The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey showed dramatic growth among the various communities that come under the pagan umbrella, such as Wiccans and Druids. Those who identified specifically as pagans went from 140,000 in 2001 to 340,000 in 2008.

In addition, the U.S. military in 2007 approved the pagan pentacle as a religious symbol that veterans may request for their tombstones, and pagan groups are continuing to establish seminaries and clergy certification programs across the country.

None of this means, however, that the word pagan can’t be deployed as a critique, the way Chaput seems to have intended.

“In the common currency, words have a certain balance, they have a certain weight and the words that he’s using could broadly be taken as judgmental,” said Lawrence Cunningham, an emeritus professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and a prolific Catholic writer.

“Here’s a little test you could use,” Cunningham told Philadelphia’s NBC affiliate, which produced a detailed story on the archbishop’s speech. “Would Pope Francis use that language? My inclination is to think that he probably wouldn’t.”

Pedophiles

Continued from page 11

tected status.

The Matthew Shephard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act lists “sexual orientation” as a protected class; however it does not define the term.

Republicans attempted to add an amendment specifying that “pedophilia is not covered as an orientation.” However, the amendment was defeated by Democrats in Congress shortly after President Obama took office.

Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., stated that all alternative sexual lifestyles should be protected under the law.

“This bill addresses our resolve to end violence based on prejudice and to guarantee that all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability or all of these ‘phillias’ and fetishes and ‘isms’ that were put forward need not live in fear because of who they are. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this rule.”

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Lutherans

Continued from front

synod’s 19th-century history in Germany, when its members were forced by the government to accept Calvinism against their will — and fled to the United States to preserve their religious freedom.

Harrison’s goals for his next term include recruiting, training and raising funds for more “career missionaries.”

The 2.4 million-member church, based in Kirkwood, is the second-largest Lutheran denomination in the country, after the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which has twice as many members.

A just laicism allows religious freedom. The state does not impose religion but rather gives space to religions with a responsibility toward civil society, and therefore it allows these religions to be factors in building up society.

~Joseph Ratzinger

Clocks stopped every night at 3:07 a.m. Unseen forces were tugging at the legs of the family’s five daughters as they slept. The family dog is found dead, and strange things are making scary noises in the dark and mysterious basement.

The Perron family seeks out the Warrens’ help when the

have any slashers, no gore, nobody gets killed,” Carey Hayes said.

“And no sex or foul language,” his twin brother Chad added.

That’s a recipe for box office gold, said Bobby Downes, president of EchoLight Studios, which is committed to making

in the film. “This is one avenue where we can powerfully communicate the gospel in a way that’s attractive. I don’t think we have to be limited by the genre.”

The Hayes brothers demurred when asked about the film’s faith-based marketing campaign, but Warner Bros. studios clearly has its eyes set

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