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**Commentary & Opinion**

RN-R columnists share their thoughts on issues pertinent to Christianity today, Page 2 and 3

**Pentecostal Groups ends racial divide**

The Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Council of the AOG have reconciled after nearly a century of racial division.

**Arizona Highlights Fight Over Gay Rights and Religious Liberties**

A recent bill in Arizona sparked national debate over civil rights.

**Pakistan's Harsh Blasphemy Laws Draw Criticism**



Prison, beatings and even death are often the result of blasphemy charges.

**Spain Invites Jews to Apply for Citizenship**

Correcting a blight on their history when they deported all Jews from Spain in 1492, the Government has invited Sephardic Jews to apply for Spanish citizenship.

**Inspired by St. Francis, Young People combine Spirituality and Social Action**

The Franciscan Earth Corps are groups of young adults who gather for fellowship, instruction and action in protecting the earth.

**COMMENTARY: US Should Ratify Disabilities Treaty**

The Senate is reviewing a global treaty to protect the rights and extend equal opportunities to disabled people around the world.

**Science and Religion Making Efforts to Cooperate**



Science groups and evangelical Christians push for more collaboration in impacting society.

# Cliff Wagner...the man, his music, and his message

## In remembrance of a great Branson performer and the life he lived.

By Dr. Paul Collins

If I had to use one word or title to describe my friend, Cliff Wagner, the word would be Christian. When Cliff Wagner died at the age of 47 the evening of February 3, 2004, Branson lost a faithful and shining example of the best of entertainment. No one ever graced a Branson stage with more integrity or moral content than the man born in Alaska, who grew up in Nevada, Missouri, and moved to this area in 1979. His multitude of friends included scores of people who came to town to see the shows. Over the span of years, many of them eagerly waited until intermission to say a personal hello to a man they loved.

Once, in a restaurant with Cliff in Springfield, Missouri (just up the road from Branson), an older couple passing through caught a glimpse of him and immediately reached out to him. As always, Cliff responded wholeheartedly without holding back. He never denied his fans an opportunity to experience his appreciation and love for them.

Cliff was a man whose trademark greeting to the men he met was to lean forward,

reach out his hand, and say, "How you doin' pal." When greeting a lady, he was always a great example of the way a man should show respect.

He had a work ethic that took him to his nightly performances even when he was ill. In his last position as the master of ceremonies for Presleys' Country Jubilee, he spent fifteen great years and never missed a performance.

Cliff Wagner the man was moral, ethical, and a public service minded Christian. For several years, he was the celebrity spokesman for The Center For Independent Living in Springfield. Many, many other organizations benefitted from his dedicated life. I never knew him to turn down a request to do a benefit.

As for his music, Cliff had a degree from what is now Central Methodist University in Fayette, Missouri. He studied by two years at Crowder College in Neosho, Missouri before investing three more years as a student at CMU. His BS in Music was the result of a work ethic and talent.

Cliff loved to sing. He loved to put together shows

outside of Branson for worthy causes. He recorded two projects but never was guilty of promoting his music ahead of the cause he was supporting. Many of us knew that he had the talent and the technical knowledge to have been a Branson "star" if he had been willing to put his charitable and ministry work on hold. He chose to serve rather than be served.

Cliff's ministry included trips to take the gospel into churches in an off-season tour. He called his trips "The One More Soul" tour. As a faithful Southern Baptist, he was a soul-winner for his Savior, Jesus Christ. I was privileged to watch and listen as this man of God would regale audiences in churches with his music, testimony, and a special comic character of his own creation. "Donald" was the comedic side of the performer/Christian/Music Minister. The church audiences loved "Donald."

Acts Ministry was honored to have the services of Cliff as our Minister of Music. Prior to our services, he handled the musical side of the services at a Baptist church in Reeds Spring,



**Cliff Wagner, performer, youth advocate, community supporter, and committed Christian died in an automobile accident on February 3, 2004. In his memory, the annual 'Cliff Wagner Tribute' is held in Branson with the proceeds going to non profit organizations in Taney County.**

Missouri, in the Branson area. When he came to Acts Ministry, one of the first things he did was line up a great family-oriented music show in Springfield. He recruited twenty singers and the soundman for two performances. The first was a 2:00 matinee with a full house. The second was a 7:30 performance with a standing room only crowd. This was in a 1120 seat theatre. The date was Saturday, October 30, 1999. It was a day to remember! He accomplished the feat because he recognized that Acts Ministry reflected his message of "One More Soul."

In newspaper jargon, they say no one reads the last paragraph of a story. I believe you will read these final comments.

In the little more than 10 years since Cliff transitioned to Heaven, he has been in the hearts and active memories of many of us who knew the man, his music, and his ministry. When I go to Heaven, I fully expect that Cliff will be among those sent to greet me. I can see and hear him now. With his hand reaching out to shake mine, I will hear him say, "How you doin' Doc. Welcome home, pal."

## US Abortion rate hits lowest level since 1973

By SHARON JAYSON

USA TODAY (RNS) The abortion rate in the U.S. has dropped to its lowest level since the procedure became legal in 1973, according to a new data analysis that reflects a 13 percent decline in both the abortion rate and the number of abortions from 2008 to 2011.

The report being issued Monday (Feb. 3) by the Guttmacher Institute in New York finds the 2011 rate declined to 16.9 abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44, second only to 1973, when the rate was 16.3 per 1,000.

Declines were seen in all but six states — Alaska, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, West Virginia and Wyoming — which saw either no change or an increase in abortion rates.

"A 13 percent drop over a three-year time period is a pretty steep decline. It's unusual," says Rachel Jones, the lead author of the study by Guttmacher, a research organization that supports the right to legal abortion

and seeks to expand access to information on sexual and reproductive health.

Jones attributes the decline to more women using "highly effective contraceptive methods such as the IUD" and the fact that the study period was during the recession and sluggish recovery.

"Births have been falling for awhile, and the recession certainly accelerated the decrease in births," says economist Ted Joyce of Baruch College in New York, who has studied reproductive health since 1985.

"When you consider the changes in contraception and the largest recession since the Great Depression, those two factors seem like compelling explanations for the decline," he says.

Guttmacher's analysis this year is the first to study state restrictions, many of which increased beginning in 2011. The report says states enacted 205 abortion restrictions between 2011 and 2013, more than

*Continued on page 8*

## The 3rd Annual Cliff Wagner Tribute Show

### Great entertainment to honor a great man, a great cause, and Vietnam veterans

By Dr. Paul Collins

BRANSON MO Cliff Wagner died suddenly on the 76 Strip the night of February 3, 2004. He died on the famous 76 Country Music Boulevard, a place where he worked and loved.

As a "non-star" known only to his fans, he epitomized the performers who make Branson work. Determined to see his face and name in lights as a tribute to him and to the others of his profession who labor in the Branson shows, I began to circulate the idea of a show to honor Cliff. Others joined the effort.

This is the third year in a row that you will have the opportunity to experience great entertainment in a great venue at a very, very reasonable cost. A \$10 ticket allows you to see and hear some of Branson's best.

A portion of your ticket price will go to benefit the Branson Chapter of the Disabled American Veterans.

This event happens on Friday, March 28 this year in the Baldknobbers Theatre at 2835 W. 76 Country Music Boulevard. The pre-show will be 10:30 A.M. and the show begins at 11:00. You are welcome to come early, meet new friends, and enjoy great performances until 2:00.

Cliff would be thrilled to be in the company of all of the people on the show including Colonel Hugh Milles (the most decorated



**Colonel Hugh Milles (the most decorated helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War) will Co-host the fund raising event with Barry Williams, best known as Greg on the Brady Bunch. A portion of the proceeds will go to the Branson Chapter of the Disabled American Veterans. Photo courtesy Hugh Milles**

helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War. Colonel Mills will co-host the show with Barry Williams (current Branson star and formerly Greg on The Brady Bunch).

Others performing will be Gary Doods, premier saxophone player and longtime Branson performer and funnyman Bob Leftridge doing the pre-show. Beginning at 11:00 you will be treated to performances by (The Incomparable) Jackie Brown, Buck Trent (Mr. Banjo), New South (Branson's best quartet), Doug Gabriel (a perennial favorite of the fans), Randy Plummer (Branson Legend of

the famous Plummer Family), Voices of Glory (stars of Ayo), The Baldknobbers (Branson's first show), Paul Eve (Johnny Cash tribute artist), CJ Newsome (star of Patsy Cline Remembered), and Janice Martin from the Showboat Branson Belle. In fact, do not be surprised by others who may do a walk-out to perform as a tribute to the veterans and to Cliff.

Someone will be honored with a plaque as the recipient of the 3rd Annual Cliff Wagner Tribute in honor of their accomplishments. The first honoree was Randy Plummer and last year Raphael

*continued on page 2*

**COMING SOON**  
**GROWING OUT OF AUTISM**  
With Jim Sharp  
Monday - Saturday  
7:30 am - 8:30 am / 11 am - noon  
2 pm - 3 pm / 5:30 pm - 6:30 PM  
9 PM - 10 pm

Jim is the parent of an autistic child and this program will discuss, how to survive and "grow" as a person and family because of the challenges of autism. A range of information from family outings and financial issues to the latest research and alternative therapies that are being used to enrich the lives of those touched by autism. A "must see" program for anyone touched by autism.

**ACTS TELEVISION NETWORK SHOWS**

Acts Ministry, Inc announces the launch of a new Christian TV network. Acts Television Network (ATN) is available now on the Internet. ATN will bring you some unique programming, including: Christian talk, teaching, Branson entertainment, & locally produced

shows not found anywhere else. Scan the code to see some clips.

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**BRANSON NOW**  
Thursdays 7:00 PM

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**Our Heroes**  
Tuesdays 7:00 PM

Veteran's share their stories, we highlight veteran's events and tackle issues of importance to veterans. Host, Sarah Hord works extensively with Military groups.



# Commentary

## Faith and Culture: Culture Wars - Science and Faith

There is a story in this issue of the Real News - Review about new efforts at cooperation between the realms of science and religion.

Everyone knows that a battle has raged for centuries over scientific discovery and religious beliefs. But does there need to be a “battle?”

Honestly I wish people would stop using this terminology. A battle implies enemies, sides and winning and losing.

When we place people into easily identifiable groups of “us” and “them,” the “themes” are just as easily dismissed out of hand. It matters not that some of the “themes” might be in agreement with some of the “uses.”

I think it is for this very reason that both sides of the debate -- no matter which issue you are discussing or which side you are on -- need

to make the effort of mutual respect, thereby diffusing the need for so much defensive posturing.

Now, on to science and religion. For centuries science and religion have been at war. However, a large part of the problem is a total lack of knowledge -- on both sides.

Consider this: In 1610 Galileo Galilei published some writings confirming the earlier writings of Copernicus (1543) that the earth revolved around the sun, not the other way around. The Catholic Church considered him a heretic, and in 1633 placed him under house arrest for the rest of his life.

Do you agree with the established church doctrine at the time, or with Galileo? If you were a faithful believer at the time you most likely would have sided with the church - and you would have



**Steve Highlander**  
Managing Editor RN-R,

been wrong. Here is an example of religious dogma refusing to respond intelligently to scientific discovery.

Fast forward a couple of centuries and we come to Charles Darwin and his Origin Of The Species. The “Theory of Evolution,” proposed by Darwin was just that, an unsubstantiated working theory. It has never advanced out of the “theory” status.

Darwin, without the benefits of modern scientific discovery, had no way of knowing the complexity of DNA

and genetics or that one species could not just morph into something else.

In this case modern science more closely confirms the Biblical account of the “origin of the species,” however many scientific evolutionists steadfastly refuse to accept any type of creation account because of the ramifications that imply a “creator.” Since they do not want to acknowledge any type of deity, they refuse the implications of their own data.

I once heard a prominent evolutionary scientist say that they knew the current theory of evolution was not sustainable, but until something better came along they were forced to stay with it. Obviously creationism is not even an alternative.

Up until the mid 1960s almost all scientists believed in a static universe. That is, that

it always existed and had no beginning.

The first chapter of the Bible disputes this. Significant advancements in astrophysics now scientifically support the “beginning” of the universe.

For centuries science and religion were at odds because of misinformation on both sides.

Today, advances in astrophysics, quantum physics, genetics, biology and other scientific disciplines are closing the gap between science and religion - but is anyone listening?

*Dr. Steve Highlander is a pastor and author. He holds a doctorate in Pastoral Theology and is a Certified Christian Counselor. He can be contacted through his website at [www.c3ministries.com](http://www.c3ministries.com).*

## Upstairs Over a Vacant Lot: Encouragement, the best spring tonic

“Way back” in the “Olden Days” my mother made good use of a variety of “Spring Tonics.” I was one of the recipients. They were supposed to thin the blood after a cold winter in preparation for summer. We were led to believe that the brain would function better for the last semester of school, and we would have a head start on a great summer of running barefoot and going shirtless. It was a good life! We were all encouraged when “Spring Tonic Time” arrived. Its arrival meant we were out of the cold and heading for the more carefree days of a north central Missouri summer.

Moberly, Missouri was a special place to grow up. During World War II, the folks were in unity and supported the troops. Patrons

along my newspaper route displayed flags and made note in their front windows about sons in the military and those killed in action. Honesty prevailed --- except in the case of one customer who managed to avoid military service and failed to pay me for three week’s worth of the Moberly Monitor-Index. The newspaper was 15 cents a week. That came out to three cents an issue because the papers were delivered five times per week. Those were the days of my free enterprise!

Nearly everyone on my route encouraged me from the first day on the job at age seven until the last day at age fourteen. I had made my way up the ladder from 25 cents per week, to 50 cents, to \$1.80 while working for

Roger Sparkman. That latter salary was good enough that I was able to save money and buy the route. I had arrived! I had an employee named Gene Trine! The Monitor-Index taught the newspaper boys how to open a bank account and pay for the papers weekly by check. They rewarded our faithfulness in putting the newspaper on the patrons’ porches and our salesmanship in acquiring new customers. One year the reward was a trip to see the St. Louis Cardinals defeat the Philadelphia Phillies (the “Whiz Kids”) in a baseball game played in old Sportsman Park. A trip to St. Louis was an encouragement to keep up the good work.

The world I see through my seasoned eyes no longer bears much resemblance



**Dr. Paul C. Collins**  
Publisher RN-R

to the simpler times. Life is very complicated in spite of the Internet, time saving tools, fast cars, fast air travel, and fast food. Living is anything but simple in these days of confusion about medical care, a multitude of voices coming through the television, global unrest, and economic uncertainty.

Where can we find encouragement now, not tomorrow, but now? “Way back then,” I found it on my

newspaper route, sitting on our front porch listening to Napoleon (“Pole”) Gillespie spin almost believable yarns, and in my local church. The ladies in West Park Methodist Church were “old” when I was in elementary school. They were still old when I returned to my church for a visit after completing four years of college and three years of seminary, and they were continuing to encourage me. Try church for encouragement.

*Dr. Paul Collins is the founder of Acts Ministry and publisher of the Real News - Review. He is Presiding Bishop of Acts Church International and currently serves as senior pastor of Acts Church in Springfield, MO. Contact him through his blog at [www.drmpaulcollins.com](http://www.drmpaulcollins.com)*

## A faith-based education ... a way to a better future

W.E.B. Dubois said, “There is no education other than an education that is at once for making a living and living a life.” Too often, parents and students focus on the increased lifetime earnings correlated with a college education without considering the many other ways in which faith-based, post-secondary learning improves one’s life. Naturally, students need to be prepared and positioned to meet their career aspirations and to provide for their family; however, a faith-based education allows a student an education that is at once for making a living and living a life.

A faith-based education provides young people with an immediate positive affinity group on campus. The research on retention and

completion speaks loudly that student engagement and involvement on campus is highly correlated with a student’s probability of persistence to graduation.

We want our students to be engaged, and when they are engaged in groups that promote positive attitudes and prudent decision making, the probability of success in college is greatly enhanced.

The college-age years can be a trying time for young people. Quite often, it is a time when students experience a new level of freedom and the opportunity to make decisions completely on their own. While this is an important and necessary part of the maturation process, it is comforting to know that at faith-based institutions,



**Dr. Roger Drake**  
RN-R Columnist

students have a carefully woven safety net above which to “try their new wings.” It is more comforting to know that students are in an environment where their fellow students are facing the same challenges and can support each other.

While most colleges and universities offer some form of spiritual counseling, the faith-based institution provides students with a more complete set of scaffolding

to support them in their daily life and to lift them up to meet the challenges ahead. This supportive campus environment of the faith-based institution provides help for today and hope for tomorrow to all of our students.

The integration of faith and learning in the classroom is quite likely the greatest benefit of study within a faith-based college or university. When a student has the opportunity to live and learn in an atmosphere of active caring and Christian concern, there are paths opened to the student

that aren’t available in other types of educational environments. At faith-based institutions, students do not simply learn facts and recall them for an exam; students learn within a much broader framework that helps them contextualize their new knowledge in such a way as to improve their life, their faith, and the society within which they live.

There are many different types of faith-based colleges and universities. Many are affiliated with a particular denomination but welcome students of all faiths. Some

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By KEVIN KASEY

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Our newspaper, The Real News - Review, is printing close to thirty thousand copies each month, with

nearly 500 distribution points in the Kansas City, Springfield, Southwestern Missouri, and Northwestern Arkansas areas. The RN-R can be targeted distribution to your area. It is on the Internet, also.

The RN-R newspaper is also saved in PDF format and can be read online or downloaded for free on our website, [www.actsmediagroup.com](http://www.actsmediagroup.com). A complete archive of back issues is available so people can go back time after time to see it.

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*Kevin serves as Acts Radio Station Manager.*

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### ACTS MINISTRY

Springfield, MO  
65808 USA  
Phone: 417-886-0223

### Dr. Paul Collins

Founder - President

### Dr. James (Jim) Wining

Acts Media Group

### Dr. Paul Collins

Publisher

### Dr. Steve Highlander

Managing Editor

### Advertising and

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Jackie Scott, Sales

Manager 417-294-3149

Good and Faithful

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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.

To submit a story or to write the editor contact Steve Highlander at [editor@actsmediagroup.com](mailto:editor@actsmediagroup.com).

are thought of as “Bible Colleges,” while others are more loosely coupled to their denominational affiliation. While there are great schools in each category, parents and students should visit several; they will find the campus that “feels like home.” It is then that the student can experience an education that is at once for making a living and living a life.

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# Stress-free living: Our adolescent stress: Part 1

Few of us would like to relive our teen years, considering the hormones playing ping-pong with our brains, the unsettling life quests and questions. Who enjoys being off balance and on guard? Why, then, do we get stuck in those years?

Sometimes it is trauma: maybe dad drinks too much, or we risk too much experimenting with drugs, or we make misjudgments that color the rest of our lives. Further, the teen brain through age 24 has biological pitfalls that cause accidents, injury and death. Suicide has been rampant among teens for years.

Some of this mayhem is our fault.

Other cultures appear to have more reasonable expectations of life. We believe that we are magically entitled to lifelong happiness without the pursuit pa --- without the downs, the failures and recovery, the saw-sharpening drudgery needed for another sweaty workout in the wild woods of our dreams.



Judith Bonner  
RN-R Columnist

Further, we want to be somebody without the “do something” part. Drudgery, pain and low odds of success do not enter the adolescent brain without serious growth. When we encounter those dreary disappointments, we give in to great stress. Under stress we act like ADHD children: we ask, “Is this fun?” before giving up.

We think we need “stress management” without learning the skills that give us power over stress --- skills like clear analysis of issues, impulse control and accountability. We need more than stress management.

As a culture we have lost control over our emotions. Snake-like, they turn on us

to bite holes in our resolve. We drift into adolescent stress mode. You remember.

Infatuated with our own trip, we rarely help others on theirs. We lounge in the golden light of easy judgments, avoiding the work of learning. We don't want to learn and do what gives us power over our stressed feelings. Feelings are fun. Stress chemicals, then, gain control of us.

I suggest that we are stuck in a disastrous loop of our own making. Cortisol eventually kills us. Adrenalin pushes our brains into half-witted fight-or-flight mode. Small problems become wildfires of destruction. We are helpless --- unless I have some answers in next month's column!

*Ms. Bonner is a member of the Missouri Synod Lutheran denomination, and lives in California. She is an author and conducts seminars on stress free living and she does workshops on the subject in prisons.*

# A View From Jordan Creek Real discipleship and the poor

Led by an aggressive “social journalism” project of the local daily newspaper, my community is currently undertaking its fifth or sixth major initiative to “combat poverty” in the past twenty years.

Having been an active participant in several of the prior efforts, I write from a perspective informed by both theory and practice. These experiences have prompted a more critical examination of such efforts than those now immersed in a similar endeavor are likely to entertain.

One major failing underlying each of these undoubtedly well-intentioned undertakings is the propensity to view the poor as essentially a separate species to be studied and subjected to experimentation. The so-called “culture of poverty” viewpoint can be especially pernicious in this regard as it posits poverty as being almost entirely the consequence of pathology.

Although some poverty is surely the result of bad behavior, much of our contemporary poverty stems directly from economic dislocation and much pathology results from poverty, not the other way around. Pervasive hopelessness is a certain pathway to negative social outcomes.

However, pursuing a “blaming the victim” approach does give considerable reassurance to middle



Virgil Hill  
RN-R Columnist

class people of their apparent moral superiority and prescribes policy options that fund programs which conveniently provide comfortable employment and salaries to middle class professionals.

Such a stance also dictates dubious interventionist strategies and tactics such as universal pre-K in order to ‘rescue’ the children of the poor. Such a view precludes any discussion of living wages for prevalent low-income labor or wide-scale re-industrialization.

This dominant paradigm also makes charity the principal means of addressing need. Again this reinforces the relative position of the benefactor over the beneficiary regardless of the intent of the giver.

The Bible certainly speaks to the ways in which individuals can create poverty for themselves through their actions or inaction. But it also fundamentally addresses structures of injustice, and from the Law to the Prophets to the Gospels to the Letters, cries out for justice for the poor.

The finest Christian organizations involved in work

among the poor do indeed seek to alleviate the immediate needs of people and remedy their personal problems, but they also faithfully advocate for the poor and engage in economic development and other long-term work to incarnate justice. They do so because they see the poor not as objects to be researched and manipulated but, in the spirit of Matthew 25:31-46, as the living face and embodiment of Jesus.

The late Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr., formerly Chaplain at Yale University and Senior Minister at The Riverside Church NYC once wrote, “Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to eliminate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation.”

We are ultimately called to both. In the words of Micah 6:8, “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

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

# Seasons of Reflections: Spring speaks through beauty and new life

Fragrance and beauty fill the air as the earth moves us into a position to receive the warmth of the sun. However, before the beauty of summer perennials is seen by the natural eye, much work and growth has already taken place underneath the surface of the soil.

As long as we have natural breath there will be areas in which we are to grow. Incredible, supernatural growth can take place, when we choose to cooperate with God as Holy Spirit even in a seemingly dead state of dormancy. As long as the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are a child of God, the life-giving blood of Jesus is the sap that will cause us to be spiritual perennials that will always bloom after a time of appointed rest.

Just as perennials are cut back and enter into a state of dormancy during the winter months and the promise of



LeAnn Kennedy

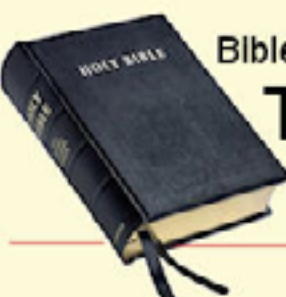
spring gives hope to future beauty, our spiritual development undergoes times of pruning as the ugliness of flesh and activities not conducive to sharpening our focus on God's plan for our lives is cut back. Even when it may seem that no growth is taking place, the promise of our God still stands that He continues to work in us to will and to act according to His purpose. In time, the fruit will be evidenced in the natural, a revelation to the garden in which we are planted and to the whole world of the tender loving care of the Gardener,

who planted the Seed and watered it with His Word. As the intensity of the rays of the love of His Son is received into the hearts of those who diligently seek Him, the bursting forth of great beauty is inevitable.

*LeAnn is a Junior High mathematics teacher and ardent Bible student. This article is excerpted from her book Seasons of Reflections, published by Acts Press.*

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**Bible Study Moment with Ed Croteau**  
**The Evidence of Faith's Substance**  
**Jesus Christ, the “Son of Man”**

Jesus's favorite name for Himself was “Son of Man”, occurring over 84 times in the Gospels. But the name “Son of Man” seems rather odd, maybe even a little unassuming. He would only rarely call Himself “Son of God” which sounds much more impressive, don't you think? Maybe if He had been a little more flamboyant back then, we Americans today would be more attracted to Him. After all, He would fit right in with our celebrity culture. We like to give people names that make them larger than life, especially in sports (like ‘King James’, or ‘Neon Deon’). But Jesus felt the name “Son of Man” highlighted to His audience something critical about himself that people needed to know.

We find our answer in the Old Testament. Only one time (of the 106 times it is used) does this name refer to God's Messiah. The other 105 times, it refers to a specific human being. That one Old Testament verse where the “Son of Man” points to God's Messiah, the Christ, is Daniel 7:13 that reads, “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the SON OF MAN, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

Guess which Old Testament verse for the “Son of Man” Jesus specifically applies to Himself at His trial when He answers the Sanhedrin's question if He is God's promised Messiah? Mark 14:61-64, is where Jesus specifically refers to Himself as the ‘Son of Man’ of Daniel 7:13. They condemned Jesus to be executed because they understood that Daniel 7:13 spoke of the Messiah, and they understood Jesus was claiming to be that Messiah (God in the flesh, the promised Savior of Daniel 7:13).

Now we can go back and answer our earlier question: “Why did Jesus choose to call Himself by what appeared to us as such an unassuming name?” It points to our God who, in complete humility, with no fanfare or public relations firm, lowered Himself to become part of humanity, to fulfill His promise to us, to not only make himself known to us, but make himself totally accessible to us. In describing the lowly nature of Jesus, C.S. Lewis said it best : “If you want to get the hang of it (the Incarnation), think how you would like to become a slug or a crab.” I don't know about you, but it's just another example of his constant urging to re-ignite my passionate love for Him.

*Ed Croteau is a resident of Lee's Summit and hosts a weekly study in Lee's Summit called “Faith: Substance and Evidence.” He can be reached with your questions through the Real News-Review.*

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# USA Religion

## Pentecostal groups agree to bridge a century-old racial divide

The Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Council of the Assemblies of God sign agreement to work together

By ADELLE M. BANKS

(RNS) When he was a boy, the Rev. Thomas Barclay noticed a difference between the worshippers of his small Pentecostal denomination and churches he visited of the larger Assemblies of God.

“Why are they all white and we’re all black?” he asked his father.

After a racial divide that lasted for nearly a century, the two denominations, the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Council of the Assemblies of God, have agreed to a new partnership.

Four years ago, after Barclay was elected as head of the UPCAG, he wrote a letter to George O. Wood, the general superintendent of the 65 million-member Assemblies of God. “I felt the Lord saying to me, ‘I’ve put you in this office to do a job,’” Barclay recalled. “I asked him what it was, and he told me to write this letter to the Assemblies of God.”

At a Feb. 11 service at the Assemblies of God headquarters in Springfield, Mo., Barclay and Wood signed a 12-point agreement to build cooperation that includes introducing their churches to each other and sharing resources, including the Assemblies of God Credit Union.

Wood said he didn’t even know the group existed until he received Barclay’s letter. That’s when he learned that in 1917, a missionary couple who had

sought support to travel to Liberia were refused by the Assemblies of God — which had started three years earlier — because they were “colored.”

In 1919, a group of black New England churches started the UPCAG and sent that missionary couple to Africa. Learning that history “pained me a great deal,” said Wood, who said he “apologized several times” to the UPCAG leaders.

“It’s just tragic that there was that epoch in America where the church caved in to the culture rather than transforming the culture,” he said.

Now, after leaders spent time getting to know each other, the much larger Assemblies of God hopes to learn more about urban ministry from the UPCAG and welcome its members to join in youth Bible quiz competitions, fine arts festivals and missions outreach.

The UPCAG has about 70 predominantly black churches in the U.S., the Caribbean and Liberia. The Assemblies of God has 360,000 churches worldwide; about 300 Assemblies congregations in the U.S. are predominantly black.

In recent decades, there have been other signs of improved race relations among Pentecostals — who came together for the interracial Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and then mostly went their separate ways. In 1994, black and



Center, Rev. Thomas Barclay and Dr. George O. Wood stand together when the Pentecostal organizations unite after nearly 100 years apart. Photo courtesy of Jorge Tobar

white Pentecostals met together for the so-called Memphis Miracle. Last November, officials of the predominantly black Church of God in Christ met with leaders of the Assemblies of God in Springfield in their first

official dialogue.

Both Barclay and Wood agreed that the new cooperation would be something short of a merger. But the memo of understanding between the two sides states their hopes that it will allow “the body

of Christ to become more united and effective before a watching world.”

“I believe that something wonderful and powerful is going to happen as a result of us coming together, working together for the kingdom,” said Barclay,

his church’s international presiding elder.

Added Wood: “It’s very healing to us that they come with such a gracious attitude and even initiated the action when we were the ones that did the wrong.”

## Satanist dismisses claims that accused Craigslist killer was part of satanic cult

By JOHN BACON

(USA Today) At least one Satanist leader is a non-believer when it comes to a Pennsylvania woman’s claims that she joined a satanic cult, then killed dozens of people over a six-year

period.

Miranda Barbour, 19, accused of killing a man in November that she met on Craigslist, made national headlines last week when she told a local newspaper she killed at least 22 others. Barbour, in a jailhouse interview, told The Daily Item in Sunbury that she was sexually abused as a child, joined a satanic cult when she was 13 — and that the cult leader helped her pull the trigger on her first kill.

“There is a secular idea that ‘the devil made me do it’ that has turned into ‘satanism made me do it,’” says Lucien Greaves, spokesman for The Satanic Temple, among the largest such bodies nationwide with a few hundred members. Barbour is not among them, he said.

Federal, state and local authorities say they are looking into Barbour’s murderous claims. Tuesday, a Pennsylvania prosecutor said there had been “no verification” of additional slayings, and authorities in North Carolina, where Barbour had also lived, expressed skepticism.

Greaves told USA TODAY he doubts two parts of Barbour’s story — that she killed dozens of people and that she was part of a satanic cult.

Barbour is charged with one murder — the fatal stabbing of Tony LaFerrara, 42, in November. She told The Daily Item she agreed to have sex with LaFerrara for \$100. She also said she told LaFerrara, 42, that she had just turned 16.

“He told me that it was OK. If he would have said no, that he wasn’t going to go through with the arrangement, I would have let him go,” she told the newspaper. Barbour and her co-defendant husband, Elytte Barbour, 22, could face the death penalty if convicted of the murder.

Greaves says he believes Miranda Barbour wants to make a media splash. And he said she is using Satanism to distance herself from the horror of murder.

“She wants people to believe that she killed for justice sake,” Greaves said. “She has turned herself into Dexter.”

Greaves says many people connect Satanism with evil, but that it really involves individuality, the quest for knowledge and rejecting arbitrary authority.

“We don’t even believe in the devil,” he said. “Most Satanists don’t.”

(John Bacon writes for USA Today.)

## Denver, CO Mennonites take first step toward gay ordination

By ELIZABETH EVANS

(RNS) On Sunday (Feb. 2), a Denver congregation of Mennonites licensed the first lesbian in a committed same-sex relationship, the first step toward ordination.

Theda Good’s licensure was celebrated by some Mennonite Church USA clergy and greeted with dismay by others.

Good was licensed for ministry as pastor of nurture and fellowship at First Mennonite Church of Denver, where she is currently on the staff. Originally from Lancaster, Pa., Good is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va.

Whether the Colorado-based conference, or region, of Mennonites will approve Good’s ordination isn’t clear. Good declined to be interviewed.

The Mennonite Church USA’s articles of faith include a provision that states: “We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.”

Karl Landis, pastor of Mount Joy Mennonite Church in Mount Joy, Pa., said he expects the move to pose a dilemma and “rough sailing for relationships among conference leaders.”

On the other hand, “Theda’s ordination is another step towards a more affirming position,” said Joanna Harader, pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence, Kan.

Keith Weaver, moderator of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, said he isn’t sure what lies ahead. “Now the struggle is how we live together?” he asked. Those who have convictions about the historic understanding of the church (with regard to marriage) are very concerned about this action.”

The Mennonite Church USA, the nation’s largest Mennonite body, is the result of the 2002 merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church.

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# National fight over gay rights vs. religious liberty

Kansas and Arizona bills reflect skirmish over rights of individuals to practice their personal beliefs

By SARAH PULLIAM BAILEY

(RNS) Gay rights are colliding with religious rights in states like Arizona and Kansas as the national debate over gay marriage morphs into a fight over the dividing line between religious liberty and anti-gay discrimination.

More broadly, the fight mirrors the national debate on whether the religious rights of business owners also extend to their for-profit companies. Next month, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether companies like Hobby Lobby must provide contraceptive services that their owners consider immoral.

The Arizona bill, which is headed to Gov. Jan Brewer's desk for her signature, would allow people who object to same-sex marriage to use their religious beliefs as a defense in a discrimination lawsuit.

other efforts are stalled in Idaho, Ohio and Kansas.

A bill in Kansas that passed the state House but appears dead in the state Senate was blasted by critics as a "gay segregation" bill, allowing businesses, hotels and restaurants to deny services or accommodations to gays and lesbians based on an employee's religious convictions.

Proponents cite the case of a New Mexico photographer who was sued after she declined to take photos of a gay commitment ceremony. In asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review her case, photographer Elaine Huguenin said she could take a portrait of a gay couple but not participate in their same-sex ceremony because it would violate her religious beliefs.

In ruling against Huguenin's case, New Mexico Supreme Court Justice Richard C. Bosson wrote

zenship."

The Arizona bill would broaden the state's definition of the exercise of religion to include both the practice and observance of religious beliefs. It would expand those protected under the state's free-exercise-of-religion law to "any individual, association, partnership, corporation, church, religious assembly or institution or other business organization."

The law was written by the conservative advocacy group Center for Arizona Policy and Alliance Defending Freedom, a prominent Arizona-based Christian law firm.

At the federal level, gay rights advocates for 20 years have failed to win passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would prohibit businesses from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.

"This is the next front in gay rights," said Adam Winkler, a law professor at UCLA. "These laws, by making this issue front and center, will encourage more efforts to pass a federal anti-discrimination law."

While the Kansas bill explicitly allows businesses and individuals to deny services to gays and lesbians, Arizona's law is worded more broadly to apply to anything that could violate a person's religious conscience.

The Kansas bill sparked some infighting within Christian circles. After commentator Kirsten Powers published a column in USA Today arguing that Jesus would bake a cake for a



Arizona Govern Jan Brewer is no stranger to controversy. Arizona received national attention last year over immigration bills. Photo Courtesy Arizona Governor's Office.

same-sex couple, it set off a chain of objections.

In response to some of the criticism he received for his quotes in the column, Atlanta-area megachurch pastor Andy Stanley tweeted: "Remember the time Jesus told everybody to quit paying taxes imposed by Rome? That was awesome." And: "Remember that awesome speech Jesus gave about defending religious liberty?" He later deleted the tweets.

The Kansas Catholic Conference released a defense of the bill, written on a model from the Washington-based Ethics and Public Policy Center. But even those debating Christians' role in the debate were hesitant to defend the wording

used in the Kansas law.

"I have no interest in defending the legislation that recently failed in Kansas," wrote Denny Burk of Boyce College. "I think that good people can disagree on whether that particular law would have been a good idea."

Arizona already has a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act that protects a person's free exercise of religion, similar to legislation in about 15 or so other states. The new law is simply strengthening the earlier one, said Charles Haynes, senior scholar at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center.

"Nondiscrimination is an important American value and a strong value on civil

rights. Religious freedom is also highly valued. It's a core commitment of our country," he said. "You have two very important claims, and the challenge is to balance these claims, especially when it comes to for-profit businesses."

Finding a balance between the two will be hard to navigate, said Douglas Laycock, a professor at University of Virginia Law School.

"It's hard to get the middle that protects the rights of gay individuals to marry and protects the rights of those who don't want to participate," he said. "Both gay rights and religious liberty people want rights for their side but not for the other."

***“Both gay rights and religious liberty people want rights for their side but not for the other.”***  
~ Douglas Laycock  
Professor at University of Virginia Law School.

Similar legislation has been introduced in Ohio, Mississippi, Idaho, South Dakota, Tennessee and Oklahoma, according to The Associated Press, while

that while Huguenin and her husband are “free to think, to say, to believe, as they wish,” the public accommodation of differing beliefs is “the price of citi-



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# World Religion

## Pakistan faces criticism for harsh blasphemy law

Charges of blasphemy against Mohammed or Islam in general often result in ‘vigilante justice’ by radical followers

By NAVEED AHMAD

ISLAMABAD (RNS) Mohammad Asghar, a 69-year-old paranoid schizophrenic, faces a death sentence in Pakistan for claiming to be the Prophet Muhammad in letters written to officials and police in 2010.

The retired British national of Pakistani descent is partially paralyzed after a stroke, but Pakistani courts have so far refused to acknowledge his physical and mental limitations.

The charges against Asghar recall the case of Rimsha Masih, a teenage girl who was alleged to have dumped torn and burnt pages of the Quran into a garbage heap nearly two years ago.

Rimsha, who is Christian, was also arrested under Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which stipulates a life sentence for defiling the Quran.

Later, it emerged that the torn and burnt pages were from an Arabic primer. Rimsha, whose lawyers claim she is developmentally disabled, was granted bail and whisked away in a helicopter amid tight security.

The Pakistan Penal Code prohibits blasphemy against any recognized religion, providing penalties ranging from life imprisonment to death.

The law has been widely abused in Pakistan, where some 247 blasphemy cases have been registered, affecting the lives of 435 people, since 1987, according to a

2013 report from the Center for Research and Security Studies, an independent think tank based in Islamabad.

Though the courts have not sentenced anyone to death for blasphemy, 52 Pakistanis have fallen prey to extrajudicial killings as a result of blasphemy charges. According to the CRSS research, 25 were Muslims, 15 Christians, five Ahmadis, one Buddhist and one Hindu.

The growing misuse of the blasphemy law has riled some Pakistanis and, increasingly, foreign powers. British Prime Minister David Cameron said he was “deeply concerned” about Asghar’s conviction. And British Foreign Minister Sayeeda Warsi spoke to Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif about restoring a moratorium on death penalty convictions for blasphemy. Sharif, younger brother of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reportedly assured Warsi a review of the death penalty freeze was forthcoming.

Pakistan risks losing vital British support for greater trade access with the European Union if it does not agree to a moratorium on the death penalty sentences for blasphemy convictions.

But Babar Sattar, a popular columnist for the Dawn newspaper and a constitutional lawyer, said that after two high-profile killings, the mood has become so



Rishma Masih, her face covered to protect her identity, is escorted by security forces after she is released from jail following a three week incarceration. It was later determined the evidence against her was fabricated. Phot source Wikimedia Commons

coercive that “a demand for amending the law is translated as blasphemy in itself.”

On Jan. 4, 2011, Punjab province’s outspoken governor Salman Taseer was shot 27 times from close range by his security guard Malik Mumtaz Qadri for favoring review of the blasphemy law.

Two months later, Minister for Religious Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic, was shot dead for questioning the blasphemy law. Though the Waziristan-based Taliban have admitted killing him, no one has been arrested for the crime.

“One way of curbing abuse of the blasphemy law can be to award life imprisonment or death sentence

for the false accuser,” said Tahir Ashrafi, a Muslim activist.

In rural areas of Sindh and Punjab province, Hindus and Christians have been forced to flee their homes after being threatened with accusations of insulting the Quran or the Prophet Muhammad.

Azhar Hussain, president of the Islamabad-based Peace & Education Foundation, which works for educational enhancement and religious reconciliation, believes the law leaves room for vigilantism owing to the weakness of law and order in the country.

“If Islamabad can’t suspend the law till its enforcement procedure is improved, the public needs to be educated about spirit and intent of the law,” Hussain said.

In one instance, Dr. Sajjad Farooq — who had memorized the Quran by heart — was beaten to death by a mob in the Punjab province on suspicion of committing blasphemy in 1995.

Aslam Khaki, a Supreme Court lawyer with doctorate degree in Shariah law, suggested that a committee consisting of religious scholars, lawyers and civil servants should examine

each allegation before a charge is brought.

Through the years, those accused of blasphemy have sometimes been smuggled out of Pakistan to Europe to allow tempers to die down. In June, Canada’s CBC News reported that Rimsha now lives at an undisclosed location in Toronto with her parents and siblings.

Asghar’s lawyers have appealed and are hoping for the best.

(Naveed Ahmad is a freelance journalist based in Pakistan and Turkey. Follow him on Twitter @naveed360.)

## Pope Francis overhauls Vatican finances, names Australian cardinal as comptroller

By DAVID GIBSON

VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Francis on Monday (Feb. 24) launched a sweeping reform of the Vatican’s scandal-plagued financial system by naming one of his closest advisers on reform, Australian Cardinal George Pell, to head a powerful new department that will oversee the entire management of the Holy See.

The new Secretariat for the Economy, with Pell acting as a unique kind of Vatican comptroller, will have “authority over all economic and administrative activities” in the Vatican, according to a statement summarizing Francis’ decree.

The aim is to streamline a famously byzantine governance system by eliminating redundant offices, increasing accountability and financial safeguards, and generally bringing the Vatican into line with accepted accounting and procurement practices.

The changes also provide for an official who will be empowered “to conduct

audits of any agency of the Holy See and Vatican City State at any time” — a remarkable degree of authority in a bureaucracy where offices are known for zealously guarding their own turf.

The role and structure of the Vatican bank, a separate entity, will not change for now, though major changes in that institution are said to be coming.

“The changes will enable more formal involvement of senior and experienced experts in financial administration, planning and reporting and will ensure better use of resources, improving the support available for various programs, particularly our works with the poor and marginalized,” Monday’s Vatican statement said.

This action is the most concrete step that Francis has taken after a months-long review of the Curia, the centuries-old Vatican bureaucracy whose dysfunction and scandals helped push Pope Benedict XVI to



Cardinal George Pell, Photo by Gavin Scott.

resign the papacy a year ago this week.

Two weeks after that, on March 13, the cardinals elected Francis in large part because he was seen as an outsider who could clean house and overhaul the Curia.

The decree by the pope, known as a “motu proprio,” meaning by his personal initiative, may augur other major changes to come in the Curia, said Vatican officials.

The new financial department will actually implement policies set by another new oversight group set up by Francis on Monday, a

*Continued on Page 9*

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# Sephardic Jews eager to apply for Spanish citizenship

In 1492 all Jews in Spanish held lands were forced to convert to Catholicism, leave the country or face death

By MERITXELL MIR and ANA BERNAL

MALAGA, Spain (RNS) After the Spanish government recently announced it would grant citizenship to the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain five centuries ago, Amit Winder of Tel Aviv began dreaming of a bright future on the Costa del Sol. Winder, a 36-year-old Israeli who runs his own video company, said the outrageously high cost of living in Israel, and the seemingly never-ending conflict with Palestinians, have given him second thoughts.

"I could take all my money to Spain, buy a house and start my business (there)," he said. "That would cost me the same amount as buying a one-bedroom apartment in Tel Aviv."

On Feb. 7, Spanish Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon announced a bill that would allow Sephardic Jews dual citizenships, calling it one laden with "deep historic meaning" that would compensate for shameful events in the country's past.

tain Catholic orthodoxy in the kingdom.

Some of the estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Jews living in Spain at the time — historians disagree on the true number — converted to Catholicism and stayed but the majority migrated to North Africa, the Balkans and what was then the Ottoman Empire, bringing the Spanish language and culture with them.

Sephardic organizations estimate that as many as 3.5 million Jews could potentially apply for a Spanish passport (out of 14 million Jews in the world). The reaction from the Sephardic community has been huge, partly triggered by an unofficial list of potentially qualifying last names of Spanish origin published by Israeli newspapers.

"The measure is an act of historical justice," said Sebastian de la Obra, director of Casa de Sefarad, a Cordoba museum and cultural center devoted to Spanish Jewry in the south of the country.

Spanish embassies and Sephardic associations



Town center of Belmonte, Portugal, home to many Sepharic Jews who were banished from Spain. While Portugal originally resisted the Spanish Inquisition that began in 1492 and even provided refuge to a number of Spanish Jews fleeing for their lives from Spain, the Inquisition came to Portugal in 1536 and lasted until 1821. Countless thousands of Jews were slaughtered, often by being burned alive at the stake after undergoing horrible torture. Other Jews converted to Christianity but a number also became "Crypto-Jews" -- Jews who took on all the outer trappings of Christianity but remained true to their ancestral faith. Belmonte was one of the centers of the Crypto-Jews and today there is an active synagogue as well as museum dedicated to the town's Jewish history as well as the many citizens of the town who were murdered.

"Sephardic certificates" has received more than 600 emails and untold phone calls in the last week, federation officials said.

Sephardic Jews were already able to apply for

hold dual nationalities, is what has sparked unprecedented interest. But they warn the bill still needs to be approved by the Spanish parliament, which could take up to a year.

Spanish nationality.

Jews of Spanish heritage have ended up all over the world and it's difficult to trace a family tree without ending up with a broken branch. Continuous expulsions, wars and the Holocaust make it difficult for families to document their origins.

That's Winder's worry. His grandmother's last name originated from the southern Spanish city of Cordoba but he cannot trace his maternal ancestors further back than the 17th century.

"They all came from Syria," he explained, guessing that some of his ancestors arrived there after being expelled from Spain in the 15th century.

Besides sentimental reasons, the bill would offer applicants an opening to Europe.

"The high expectations created by the government's announcement are fed by emotions but also, by the benefits of getting a European Union passport," said de la Obra.

That's the case of Hilla Lousky-Vigdor, a 34-year-old Israeli veterinarian living in London. Her father moved from Morocco to

Israel and her last name appeared in the list published by newspapers.

"It would be nice to have a foreign passport as the Israeli one has so many limitations and you need a visa to travel to half of the world," she said. "It would also give me an easier chance to work abroad."

Although applauded by many in the Jewish community in Spain, the announcement has also spurred speculation.

"Why is Spain, one of the most restrictive countries in terms of immigration and asylum, now offering citizenship to a potential large number of people?" asked de la Obra.

Eliezer Papo, director of the Sephardic Studies Research Institute of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva, Israel, said he has no reason to question the bill.

"In this case the conspiracy theories don't work because Spain has been trying to compensate the Sephardim for the past 100 years," he said.

During the 20th century, Spain passed several laws to ease Jewish access to Spanish passports.

"There is a true will in Spain to remove one of the blemishes in its history and to recognize Sephardic Jews as part of the Spanish identity and culture," said Papo.

Today, about 40,000 Jews live in Spain. Despite a common past, most Spaniards know little, if anything, about Judaism.

"Sephardic Jews kept the language and the 'romancero' (Spanish folk ballads) not to please any government but because it was their culture — they didn't have another one."

Papo was born in Bosnia and used to speak Ladino with his grandmother. He said he would apply for Spanish citizenship, but not to move to Spain permanently.

"I will go to the Cathedral of Granada and wave my new passport in front of Catholic Queen Isabel's tomb," he said laughingly.

*"There is a true will in Spain to remove one of the blemishes in its history and to recognize Sephardic Jews as part of the Spanish identity and culture."*

~ Sebastian de la Obra

director of Casa de Sefarad, a Cordoba museum and cultural center devoted to Spanish Jewry

Spanish Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 by an edict of the Catholic monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, during the height of the Spanish Inquisition, an effort intended to main-

around the world are being inundated with calls and emails. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain, which according to the draft would be in charge of expediting

Spanish citizenship but the process was long and arduous, and forced petitioners to give up their current passports. Observers say the new provision, which would allow applicants to

For the moment, the bill fast-tracks the process and provides six different ways to prove Sephardic origins, such as "having a Sephardic last name," "evidence of belonging to the Sephardic community," or speaking Ladino — a form of medieval Spanish spoken by Sephardic Jews. Once the bill is passed, the Sephardim will have a window of two years to obtain

## War-torn churches shelter Muslims in Central African Republic

By FREDRICK NZWILI

(RNS) Churches in Central African Republic are caring for thousands of Muslims who have been trapped in a cycle of revenge attacks, perpetrated by a pro-Christian militia.

Since December, Anti-Balaka militias have been emptying Muslim quarters and avenging earlier attacks by the Seleka, an Islamist militia. The Seleka rampaged through the country in early 2013, terrorizing Christians and ransacking churches, hospitals and shops.

Now that the Muslim president Michel Djotodia has stepped down, Seleka is being forced to withdraw from its strongholds, as the center of power shifts, amid a mass exodus and displacement of Muslims.

In Baoro, a town in the northwest, a Roman Catholic parish is caring for more than 2,000 Muslims who can't flee. A group of Catholic sisters in the town of Bossemptele is sheltering more than 500 Muslims, providing food, water and medicine.

"Now is the time for [people] of good will to stand up and prove the strength and quality of their faith," the Rev. Xavier Fagba, a priest in Baoro, told the BBC.

One reason Muslims are able to take shelter in churches is because the country's religious leaders



A man in Central African Republic shows a bandaged arm following an attack in the violence. Photo by Nestor Aziagbia

believe this is a nonreligious conflict, said the Rev. Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbango, president of the Alliance of Evangelical Churches in the Central African Republic.

"We have been traveling to the provinces telling people to understand this is not a religious conflict," said Guerekonyame-Gbango. "This is contributing some tolerance, although many people, including Christians, have taken up arms. This is regrettable."

Roman Catholic Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga of the Bangui Archdiocese has welcomed Imam Omar Kobine Layama, president of the country's Islamic Community, to live with him in the church compound.

"I live alongside him and I ask Christians to do likewise," Nzapalainga said in a statement Tuesday (Feb.

18) for Caritas, the international relief organization. "Love should be a characteristic of Christians. You can't call yourself a Christian if you kill your brother. You can't call yourself a Christian when you hunt him down."

Last week, CAR interim President Catherine Samba-Panza said she was "going to war" with the Anti-Balaka, who she described as having replaced a "sense of their mission" with warfare and killings.





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# Religion and Life

## Inspired by St. Francis, young adults protect earth

### National social justice program urges young adults to connect spirituality with action

By RENEE K. GADOUA  
SYRACUSE, N.Y. (RNS)

On a recent Saturday, members of the local Franciscan Earth Corps stocked shelves and cleaned storage rooms at a food pantry. In early March, the group will screen “Triple Divide,” a documentary about hydrofracking. Later this spring, they’ll put up bluebird boxes at a retreat center.

And once a month, they’ll gather to talk about Franciscan spirituality. The Syracuse group is among 10 Franciscan Earth Corps chapters started last year. At least six more groups are organizing as part of a push by the Franciscan Action Network, a social justice group that aims to transform the world in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

The national, ecumenical program encourages young adults, aged 18 to 35, to connect social and environmental justice activities with Franciscan teachings that stress the interconnectedness of creation.

“Without religion and spirituality, all you’re doing is reordering everything on the outside and not affecting anyone on the inside,” said Rhett Engelking, who directs the corps through the Washington, D.C.-based Franciscan network.

Jess Saville, a doctoral candidate at Syracuse’s State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, understands the connection.

As she stacked cans of food, she described how her research on phytoremediation — using plants to restore contaminated soil

— reflects a core Franciscan understanding of the interconnectedness of nature.

“We’re dependent on the plants to clean up nature,” she said.

Franciscan Earth Corps stresses prayer, service and creation stewardship. Those elements echo the philosophy of the 13th-century saint who said: “We are all creatures of one family.” Projects emphasize care for the Earth and the Franciscan ideals of simplicity and sustainability.

Also guiding the corps is St. Francis’ poem, “Canticle of the Sun,” which describes Sister Moon and Brother Wind, “and every kind of weather through which you give sustenance to your creatures.”

St. Francis, named by Pope John Paul II as patron saint of ecology, is the model corps groups look to as they try to rebuild the brokenness of the church and the world. It’s the message St. Francis is said to have received from Jesus in 1205 while praying at the run-down Church of San Damiano near Assisi, Italy.

Kelly Moltzen, a registered dietician who belongs to the Bronx chapter, is concerned about the food system’s effect on the environment.

“Livestock production creates 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions,” she said. “Eating more fruits and vegetables that are naturally made will make us healthier and the environment more healthy.”

Her chapter recently built a greenhouse and screened “A Place at the Table,” a documentary about hunger. The group is considering creating a church garden or

food-share program to supply fresh produce.

Moltzen works to improve nutrition and access to healthful food for a poor community susceptible to obesity and diabetes.

“I’d like to get more of the churches involved in getting healthy food,” she said. “That’s the ‘repair the house’ concept.”

Franciscan spirituality stresses the sacred web of life, said Sister Caryn Crook, a Franciscan who is trained as a biologist and works with the Syracuse chapter.

“We learn so much about our Creator by being in creation and through studying an ecosystem,” she said. “Everything works together to create one — mutuality, co-operation, sacrifice. We can emulate this relationship.”

Engelking, the corps project manager, hopes to move the conversation “beyond the bird bath” image of St. Francis.

“We see Francis as more than this quaint and harmless icon of being nice to animals,” he said. “He’s someone who wants to live in right relationship with creation.”

Pope Francis, the saint’s namesake, has recently appealed for the protection of the environment and the care for the weakest members of society.

Franciscan spirituality, Engelking said, requires a shift from egocentrism to eco-centrism. “Instead of thinking about me and my needs, I am looking outwards to my relationship with the world,” he said.

In addition to the Syracuse chapter, Franciscan Earth Corps chapters ex-



A group photo of participants in the 2013 Franciscan Earth Corps launch in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Amanda Schulz

ist in Albany, N.Y.; Long Island, N.Y.; Silver Spring, Md.; Tampa, Fla.; Milwaukee; Charlottesville, Va.; and Little Rock, Ark.

The Rev. Sam Fuller, a Capuchin Franciscan ministering in a parish in Middletown, Conn., is helping launch a chapter in the

greater Hartford, Conn., area. He and other Franciscans put together an Earth Day march addressing climate change; a similar event is planned for April 27. The Hartford chapter will present “Melting Ice, Mending Creation: A Catholic Approach to Climate Change”

next month.

“It’s not so much debating the science or the politics,” Fuller said. “The wisdom of the Earth is so much deeper than the politics. St. Francis calls us deeper to discover God’s love in oneself and in creation.”

## Abortion numbers lower

Continued from front page

in the entire previous decade combined. However, the 2008-2011 study period doesn’t include that surge because many restrictions didn’t take effect until late 2011 or later. During the study period, 106 new abortion restrictions were implemented.

“We didn’t find any clear associations between abortion restrictions and declines in abortion rates,” Jones said. “We saw drops in abortions in the states that had restrictions, but they were not substantially bigger than what we saw in

other states.”

“No evidence was found that the overall drop in abortion incidence was related to the decrease in providers or to restrictions implemented between 2008 and 2011,” the report says.

Randall O’Bannon, of the National Right to Life Committee in Washington, D.C., which opposes abortion, views the new report as “significant progress.”

“We’re seeing some tangible results,” he says. “Obviously, we have had some impact.”

Whether the next report

in three years will reflect continued declines depends on how the courts rule on state laws that would effectively restrict access to abortion providers, economist Joyce said.

“The courts haven’t ruled whether these are constitutional,” he said. “It really depends on whether those more serious restrictions go into effect. If they do, you’re likely to see an increased decline in abortion rates.”

The study, published online in the journal Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, also finds an increase in the proportion of abortions that were early medication abortion. The non-surgical procedure uses the drug mifepristone, often called the abortion pill or RU-486, or the drug misoprostol. An estimated 239,400 early medication abortions were performed in 2011, representing 23 percent of all non-hospital abortions, an increase from 17 percent in 2008, the report says.

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# COMMENTARY: US Senate should ratify disabilities treaty

Over 125 countries have ratified the treaty, President Obama has signed it, now awaits ratification by congress

By CURTIS RAMSEY-LUCAS (RNS) Nearly one billion people worldwide live with a disability but many do not enjoy the same rights, freedoms, and opportunities as those without a disability.

In many countries people with disabilities are denied basic rights to family life, education, or even a name. People with mental or physical disabilities are often kept against their will in institutions in deplorable conditions, chained to beds or confined to cages. Even in countries where they are not forced into institutions, many people with disabilities are effectively prisoners in their own homes because of widespread physical inaccessibility. Throughout the world people with disabilities face poverty because of severe employment discrimination.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, known as the disabilities treaty, is designed to address these injustices

else. The treaty would help eliminate the severe human rights abuses currently being perpetrated against people, especially children, who are denied basic rights because of their disabilities. It represents an international effort to expand opportunity and achieve full participation for people with disabilities, and it presents an opportunity for the United States to further its leadership in the international community.

Inspired by and modeled after the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, President George W. Bush negotiated the disabilities treaty in 2006. As of late last year the treaty had been ratified by 125 countries and the European Union. Though signed by President Obama in 2009, the treaty awaits ratification by the U.S. Senate.

Critics contend the treaty will create a legal basis for the United Nations to



A project for disabled persons in Viet Nam. It is reported that more than six million Vietnamese people (or approximately 7.8 %) over the age of 5 have a disability, However the World Health Organization places the estimate at 15.3%. Projects like this one ensures that disabled people have opportunities to work and earn a living like everyone else. Photo by Peter van der Sluijjs, via Wikimedia Commons

Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., noted in an op-ed late last year, “ratifying the agreement will not affect

Corker, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had been in negotiations with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., over legislative language that might have addressed his concerns about the treaty and its implementation. But Corker has left the negotiating table and continues to oppose ratification.

I would respectfully encourage Corker to return to negotiations and to consider the long history of Republican support for the rights and dignity of people with disabilities including from such architects of the ADA as former Sen. Bob Dole, former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, and former White House Counsel C. Boyden

Gray, who, among others, support ratification of the treaty.

More than 40 national religious organizations have voiced their support for the treaty. They join a broad coalition of more than 700 U.S. disability, civil rights, business, and veteran organizations likewise voicing their support.

My faith teaches that each person is created in the image of God and therefore, regardless of physical or mental disability, has the same inherent dignity and rights. The teachings of many religious traditions encourage us to seek justice for all and that includes people with disabilities, and Baptist history is rooted in a deep and abiding concern for the freedom of the individual.

In just a generation since

the ADA became law, our society has made great strides in becoming more open and accessible to people with disabilities. Now we have an opportunity to extend those gains globally through ratification of the disabilities treaty and participation in its implementation. Rather than sitting on the sidelines, let's offer our decades of experience and expertise to this effort. Dignity demands and justice compels we do no less.

(Curtis Ramsey-Lucas is managing director, resource development, American Baptist Home Mission Societies. He represents the group on the steering committee of the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition, a program of the American Association of People with Disabilities.)

**“My faith teaches that each person is created in the image of God and therefore, regardless of physical or mental disability, has the same inherent dignity and rights. The teachings of many religious traditions encourage us to seek justice for all and that includes people with disabilities....”**  
~ CURTIS RAMSEY-LUCAS

and inequities.

This treaty provides a framework for countries to develop laws and policies that afford people with disabilities the same basic rights and fundamental freedoms as everyone

infringe on the parental rights of parents of children with disabilities and that it will violate U.S. sovereignty by allowing the U.N. to challenge the policies and practices of individual states. But as former Senate

current enforcement of the ADA or create additional causes of action under the treaty. The Americans with Disabilities Act would remain the controlling U.S. law.”  
Frist's successor, Sen. Bob

## Pope tackles Vatican issues *continued from page 6*

Council for the Economy that will comprise eight cardinals and bishops from around the world — not the Roman Curia — and seven lay experts “of different nationalities with strong professional financial experience.”

Francis' move also removes Pell — a vocal conservative and frequent lightning rod for criticism — from the Australian hierarchy and places him in a Roman role that will make use of his administrative talents and perhaps reduce his visibility on doctrinal matters.

Pell, 72, announced in a letter to his staff on Monday that he would be leaving Sydney for Rome at the end

of March. The letter was disclosed by Catholic blogger Rocco Palmo. Pell has been in Rome throughout the past week, which has been an unusually busy stretch even by Francis' standards.

The week began with meetings between the pope and his “Council of 8,” sometimes known as the “C8,” which he set up as a kind of kitchen cabinet of cardinals from around the world to advise him on reforming the Vatican and other initiatives. Pell is a member of the C8.

There was also a meeting of a separate committee of 15 cardinals, plus a commission of financial experts, who focus only on economic matters. That was

followed by a two-day summit of more than 150 cardinals to discuss changing the church's approach to hot-button issues like divorce and cohabitation, part of a two-year consultation Francis launched.

On Tuesday, the pope is to release a letter on family issues.

In between, Francis over the weekend added 19 new members to the College of Cardinals in ceremonies in which he warned them against the kind of “court intrigue” that had plagued Benedict's papacy.

In 2012, the so-called “Vatileaks” scandal erupted after one of Benedict's personal assistants passed internal documents to the media

that revealed all manner of intrigues and plotting in the Curia. The memos revealed repeated protests — which went unheeded — about corruption that cost the church millions of dollars.

The Vatican bank has also been plagued by charges of malfeasance and has struggled to conform to international banking standards. Monsignor Nunzio Scarano, who worked as a senior financial official in the Vatican for years, is currently on trial on charges of laundering money through the Vatican bank and for plotting to smuggle millions of dollars into Italy to help rich friends avoid taxes. | END

## Vatican theologians OK alleged miracle attributed to Pope Paul VI

By ERIC J LYMAN

ROME (RNS) Vatican theologians have given their approval to a miracle attributed to the intercession of Pope Paul VI, moving him a step closer to sainthood.

The team of medical professionals and doctors that advise the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints already had approved the same miracle in December. Now that a panel of

theologians has signed off, the miracle only requires a review by Pope Francis to be considered official.

When that happens, Paul will be beatified - the final step before sainthood. A second miracle is typically required for canonization.

In the early 1990s, a pregnant woman was told her fetus had serious problems that usually result in brain damage. Doctors advised

her to abort, but the woman refused, praying for the intercession of Paul based on the writings in his 1968 “Humanae Vitae” encyclical about the defense of human life.

The child was born without problems, and now that the child is a young adult and remains healthy, doctors and theologians agree he was completely healed.

Paul was a pivotal pope for the Roman Catholic Church.

He oversaw the conclusion and implementation of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The cause for the beatification of Paul, who was pope from 1963 to 1978, was started in 1993, allowing him to be called a “Servant of God.” Last year, Pope Benedict XVI declared that Paul “lived a life of heroic virtue,” allowing him to be called “Venerable.”

## Vatican City likes its wine

*Per capita consumption is highest in the world*

By ERIC J. LYMAN

ROME (RNS) Tiny Vatican City consumes more wine per capita than any other country in the world, according to information from the California-based Wine Institute.

According to the Wine Institute's latest statistics, the Vatican consumed 74 liters of wine per person, around double the per-capita consumption of Italy as a whole. A standard bottle of wine is about .75 liters.

And while some of that consumption is clearly related to ceremonial Communion wine, Italian press reports say it's more likely because Vatican residents are older (the lack of children are figured into the statistics), are overwhelmingly male, are highly educated and tend to eat communally — all factors that tend to lead toward higher wine consumption.

Another factor: the Vatican's small size that makes it easy for per-capita figures to be distorted by the activities of a small group, or in the case of the Vatican, a single supermarket that sells wines almost tax-free.

Other microstates, including Andorra (46 liters per person) and the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, off the coast of Canada (44 liters per capita), still fall far short of Vatican levels. Luxembourg, another small country — though with a population of 535,000 that's many times larger than the Vatican's estimated population of 800 — is No. 2 on the list, with a per capita consumption of around 56 liters per year.

Among big countries, France and Italy lead the way, each with little more than half the per-capita consumption of the Holy See.



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# Religion in Society

## Science group, evangelicals push new collaboration

By CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN (RNS) Scientists and Christian evangelicals can collaborate for the good of society but it will take some serious effort, experts said as they launched a new campaign to change perceptions between the two groups.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science and its Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion program released a major research project on Sunday (Feb. 16), at the AAAS annual meeting in Chicago, and announced an upcoming series of conferences mixing believers, scientists and many who are both.

The massive survey of views on God, religion, science included 10,241 respondents and took a particularly close look at the views of evangelicals and people in science-related occupations.

The concern is not whether “science and religion can co-exist. They already do,” said lead researcher Elaine Howard Ecklund, a sociologist and director of Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program. “The question is how to do it well.”

“The stakes are very high,” said Galen Carey, vice president for government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals, which is an advisor on the project.

Carey shared the stage with Ecklund in panels, press conferences and a live chat on the research and dialogue plans.

“We face so many issues as a nation and a world community where the contributions of both are needed

to bring a better world,” he said.

Among the findings of the study, “Religious Understandings of Science”:

- \* Nearly 36 percent of scientists have no doubt about God’s existence.

- \* 18 percent of scientists attended weekly religious services (compared with 20 percent of the overall U.S. population).

- \* 17 percent of scientists consider themselves evangelical.

- \* 15 percent of scientists consider themselves “very religious” (19 percent of the overall population).

- \* 13.5 percent of scientists read religious texts weekly (17 percent overall).

Ecklund said 72 percent of evangelical scientists, and 48 percent of all evangelicals, see opportunities for collaboration across the two worldviews. Carey said there are more than 2 million evangelical scientists committed to both faith and science and able to serve as a bridge.

But not everyone is singing “Kumbayah” around the campfire.

“If you are looking for conflict, there’s a place to find it in the data,” Ecklund pointed out in a live online chat for AAAS’ “Science” magazine. The study reports:

- \* 22 percent of scientists and 20 percent of the general population think most religious people are hostile to science.

- \* 22 percent of the general population thinks scientists are hostile to religion.

- \* 27 percent of Americans feel that science and religion



A distant galaxy as seen by The Galaxy Explorer (GALEX), an orbiting space telescope. Photo courtesy California Institute of Technology

are in conflict.

- \* Of those who feel science and religion are in conflict, 52 percent sided with religion.

The groups are not synonymous. The study found:

- \* Evangelical Protestants are 23 percent of the general population but 17 percent of scientists.

- \* Catholics have a similar gap — 24 percent of the population but only 19 percent of scientists.

- \* For mainline Protestants, the gap is smaller — 27 percent overall and 25 percent of scientists.

- \* Atheists, agnostics and people with no religious identity are 22 percent of scientists but, according to this study, just 15.5 percent of the general population.

By almost every measure of religiosity — attending worship, reading sacred texts and prayer — evangelical scientists claim higher levels of observance than evangelicals in general.

About 19 percent of the general population and 16 percent of all scientists say they consider themselves to be “very religious.” However, among evangelicals, the rate rises to 44 percent and for evangelical scientists, it’s 51 percent.

On whether they have “no doubt” that “God really exists,” evangelical scientists (85 percent) and evangelicals in general (87percent) are statistically tied. Both share higher rates of conviction than the general population (55 percent) and scientists in general (35.9 percent).

Ecklund, Carey and Jennifer Wiseman, director of DoSER, said the survey data would serve as a basis for a series of regional conferenc-

es in 2014 leading to a national conference next year. While the hot-button issues such as evolution may remain points of tension, both groups must persevere to

classes to foster thoughtful discussion between science and religion.

“We respect the fact that science has a role to play,” Carey said. “It doesn’t have

***The concern is not whether “science and religion can co-exist. They already do. The question is how to do it well.”***  
~ Elaine Howard Ecklund

Director of Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program.

build connections, they said.

Ecklund cited shared concerns such as bringing diversity to the science professions, a focus on social justice and solving issues such as food insecurity or care for the environment. “I don’t want to sound Pollyanna-ish but we can start with areas of commonality,” she said.

Carey said the NAE is preparing a resource booklet for pastors and Sunday school

a way to study spiritual reality. It doesn’t mean spiritual reality isn’t there. We believe it is. But it has to be approached by using different methods and tools.”

But Carey also reiterated that “science needs the understanding, support and funding of society. ... We share a common vocation in the search for truth. ‘All truth is God’s truth,’ as Augustine said. “We have the same calling to serve society.”

## 84-year-old nun gets 35 months for breaking into nuclear facility

By AMANDA MURPHY (RNS) An 84-year-old nun was sentenced to nearly three years in prison on Tuesday (Feb. 18) for breaking into a Tennessee nuclear facility in July 2012.

Sister Megan Rice and two other anti-nuclear activists were convicted last May of breaking into a federal complex that stores enriched uranium.

“Please have no leniency on me. To remain in prison for the rest of my life would be the greatest honor you could give me,” Rice told the federal judge at her sentencing hearing, according to USA Today.

U.S. District Judge Amul Thapar in Knoxville said he wanted the sentence to send a signal that others need to work for change within the bounds of the law.

The three activists have been in custody since May, when a federal jury convicted them of damaging the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, and could have received up to 20 years for the crime.

Rice, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, broke into the Tennessee facility with Greg Boertje-Obed, 58, and Michael Walli, 64. The three used wire cutters to slice through multiple security fences.

Boertje-Obed and Walli were each sentenced to 62 months. In addition to their sentences, the three will receive three years of supervised probation after their release.

Unexpected snow delayed the original sentencing, which had been sched-

uled for Jan. 28. Then, a federal judge ordered that the three pay nearly \$53,000 in damages to cover facility repairs.

The Tennessee facility, also known as the “Fort Knox of Uranium,” was used in the development of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in the summer of 1945.

The protesters belong to Transform Now Plowshares, an interfaith group that advocates nonviolent resistance to nuclear weapons.

Once inside the fence, the three spray-painted messages, including “the fruit of justice is peace,” and splattered blood on one of the buildings.

The three also beat hammers against the walls of the facility in reference to the Bible’s Isaiah 2:4, “They shall beat swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

When approached by a guard, the three lit candles, sang songs and offered to break bread.

Defense attorneys stressed that the three were “completely nonviolent” and said that should be taken into account during sentencing.

But Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeff Theodore argued that even though he has great respect for their dedication to their cause, the three should be sentenced according to federal guidelines because “they are not above the law.”



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# Jamie Coots, co-star of ‘Snake Salvation,’ dies of a snakebite

By BOB SMIETANA

(RNS) Pastor Jamie Coots, a serpent-handling pastor and co-star of the “Snake Salvation” reality television show, died Saturday (Feb. 15) after suffering a snakebite during a church service. He was 42.

Coots, pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name in Middlesboro, Ky., was found dead at his house around 10 p.m.

Coots had been bitten at the church and passed out there, Middlesboro Police Chief Jeff Sharpe said. Sharpe said emergency workers went to the church and to Coots’ home but his family members refused medical care. The police chief said there were no plans to press any charges in relation to Coots’ death.

Coots, whose father is also a serpent handling preacher, was a legendary figure among a small group of Pentecostal believers who practiced the so-called “signs of the gospel” found in Mark 16; among them, taking up serpents.

Serpent-handling believers say the Holy Spirit can protect them from harm while they handle venomous snakes. Some, like Coots, refused medical care — saying God would heal them. If he died, that would be God’s will.

At his church, services began with a warning: “There’s death in that box.” The warning referred to the wooden boxes, often decorated with crosses and religious symbols, that serpent handlers use to transport rattlesnakes and other venomous serpents.

In the past, serpent handlers had been secretive about their worship services. Handling serpents in worship is outlawed in most states. Many states also ban possession of rattlesnakes and other venomous serpents.

Coots first attracted national attention in the mid-1990s, when he and his friend, the late John Wayne “Punkin” Brown, were featured in the best-selling book “Salvation on Sand Mountain,” which profiled serpent handlers. Brown died in 1998 from a snakebite. Coots often carried one of his friend’s snake boxes with him during services.

In 2008, Coots was arrested after Kentucky police found dozens of poisonous snakes at his home — he later got permits to own snakes in that state. Last year, Coots was arrested near Knoxville after state troopers found snakes in his car. He pled guilty to violating Tennessee’s ban on possessing venomous wildlife and received a year’s probation.



Pastor Jamie Coots, co-star of National Geographic’s “Snake Salvation” reality show, is shown handling a rattlesnake during a church service at his church Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus’ Name. Photo courtesy National Geographic Channel

Still, he remained undaunted in practicing his faith and in spreading the word about his faith.

In the fall of 2013, he and Pastor Andrew Hamblin of Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, Tenn., starred in “Snake Salvation,” a reality television show on the National Geographic Channel. The show was not renewed for a second season. Hamblin was with Coots when he died.

When their show was announced, Coots said that being on television would allow him to preach about Jesus to a bigger audience.

“If one person sees it and it converts them or causes them to go to a church, then it will be worth it,” he told

The Tennessean.

In recent years Coots had also taken to social media to spread his faith. On Sunday morning his Facebook page was flooded with comments from family, friends and fellow believers, mourning his death.

“Dad past away yesterday,” wrote Cody Coots, Jamie’s son. “I’m missing him so much... If anyone has anything to give to help would be greatly appreciate. RIP dad I love hope to see you on the other side.”

## Imprisoned in England Islamists vow to continue their fight

By TREVOR GRUNDY

CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Two-thirds of imprisoned Islamists in England have told police and prison authorities that they will never change their violent ways.

Of the 150 offenders who are in prison or on parole, 110 have refused to engage with a government-designed program called Contest, a counterterrorism strategy that seeks to change the ways of religious extremists after their release from jail, as well as guide young adults away from religious extremism, according to a government document.

Usama Hasan, a senior researcher in Islamic studies at the Quilliam Foundation, a Muslim anti-terrorist think tank based in London, said the low interest in the program reveals the extent of the challenge ahead.

“Twelve years after the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., you’ve still got the majority of these people not wanting to deal with any examination or discussion of their hard-line ideas,” he said.

Raffaello Pantucci, senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, said challenging the ideas of extremists while they were in prison was “doomed.”

In an interview last month with The Times of London, he talked of the lower-tier foot soldiers of terrorism masterminds.

“You would expect the foot soldiers to be more reachable,” he said. “However, if they’re doing long prison stretches for their ideas, they might feel this is a part of their cause, being a warrior, so it might in fact strengthen their beliefs rather than weaken them.”

The way jailed Islamic extremists snub nonviolence

courses is a burning issue facing the police and public.

On Wednesday (Feb. 26), a judge sentenced two Muslims who killed British soldier Lee Rigby on a South London street last May.

Michael Adebolajo, 29, and Michael Adebowale, 22, used knives to kill the 25-year-old fusilier and later screamed at onlookers that they had been told to do this by Allah.

Judge Nigel Sweeney told the men they had betrayed Islam “and the peaceful Muslim communities which give so much to our country.”

Adebolajo, who was sentenced to life in prison, replied: “It is not a betrayal of Islam; you don’t know anything about Islam.”

Adebowale, who was sentenced to 45 years in prison, yelled out, “I swear by Allah, Britain and America will never have any safety.”

## Bombs explode in Zanzibar as religious tensions flare again



St. Monica’s Anglican Cathedral in Stone Town, Zanzibar. A bomb exploded nearby shattering the calm in this popular tourist destination. Photo via Flickr

By FREDRICK NZWILI

(RNS) After months of calm in Zanzibar, two homemade bombs exploded Monday (Feb. 24) near St. Monica Anglican Cathedral and the Mercury restaurant, a popular hangout for tourists visiting the Indian Ocean archipelago.

No one was hurt, but one day earlier, four people were injured in another explosion, targeting an Assemblies of God church.

The attacks are blamed on the secessionist Uamsho, a religious group pressing for the full autonomy of the archipelago. Uamsho, which means “awakening” in Swa-

hili, is also known as the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation.

“The bomb blasts have caused a lot fear among Christians here,” said Zanzibar Anglican Bishop Michael Hafidh. “We are very concerned.”

With the increasing attacks, church leaders say they believe the assailants want to frighten non-Muslims to leave.

The semiautonomous archipelago off the coast of Tanzania is mostly Muslim, and assailants have targeted churches, burning some and killing or severely injuring Christian clerics.

Last February, a Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Evaristus Mushi, was killed by unknown gunmen, while in September, another Catholic priest, the Rev. Anselmo Mwang’amba, was seriously injured when attackers splashed him with acid.

In August, two British teens volunteering with a local church nursery school suffered severe burns in a similar acid attack.

“This is not the first time churches have been targeted,” said Hafidh. “I think the attackers are people who do not want us here.”

*Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.*

~ Albert Einstein

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# Acts Radio internet station announces new programming

The new lineup includes well know programs by Dr. James Dobson, Dr. Tony Evans and shows like Point of View

"New and Improved" has been a big advertising slogan for years. Acts Radio is not new. We been around for several years, but we certainly are improved.

Acts Radio is pleased to announce some major changes to its internet radio programming.

Acts Radio's format now is all Southern, Country and Bluegrass Gospel music, mixed with teaching from some of the best instructors this country has to offer.

We have joined forces with several major music publishing companies to include Daywind records to bring you the latest and greatest music from the national scene. Don't worry. We will still be playing your favorites from ICGMA and the CGMA as well as other great local and regional artists from across the country.

We will continue to play your favorite shows like Believers Bluegrass, Branson Gospel Grove and Gaither Homecoming radio. At Believers Bluegrass their goal is to share great Gospel Bluegrass music to the world, and in doing so to spread the love of Jesus to everyone. Believers Bluegrass can be heard Tuesday nights at 8 pm and Thursday afternoons at 2 pm.

Branson Gospel Groove

plays interviews and music from your favorites in the Gospel music industry with hosts Jerry and Sharon Mays of Heart to Heart.

BBG is aired Thursday evening at 8 pm and again Saturday afternoon at 4 pm.

Gaither Homecoming Radio plays Saturday afternoon at 3 pm and again on Sunday evening at 8:00. Your friends at Homecoming Radio bring you soul touching music and heart changing lyrics. We sincerely hope that Homecoming Radio gives you what you are looking for with host Bill Gaither and a slew of guests.

Last but not least, Branson Then and Now returns with your host Brandon Mabe, emcee of the Baldknobbers show in Branson, MO.

Brandon and his guests take a look at where Branson has been and where it is today. Branson Then and Now can be heard Thursday afternoons at 3:00 and again at midnight Saturday night.

Joining our musical lineup is Gospel Express with Al Tanksley. GE is serving up great Gospel music with insight into the songs and artists Monday through Friday at 11 pm.

The really big changes are coming in the area of talk and teaching. We are

adding a morning block for a great time of learning Monday through Friday. It will kick off at 9 am with "Family Talk" with host Dr James Dobson. Dr Dobson provides sound biblical advice on Christian marriages, families and parenting.

"The Urban Alternative" with Dr. Tony Evans will be at 9:30 am. Evans believes God made you on purpose for a purpose. His heart is to lead you to an understanding of what that purpose is and support you.

We are in negotiations, but it looks like Compassion Radio with Norm Nelson will be joining us at 10 A.M. followed by Family Talk Today with Dennis Rainey at 10:30. The Dr. Carol Show, a weekly radio program addresses every area of health - physical, emotional, relational and spiritual. Dr Carol will give us her insights Wednesdays at 7:30 pm. and again on Friday at 2 PM.

Anchoring our evening will be Point Of View, Monday through Friday starting at 8 pm and lasting for almost two hours, with the hosts bringing insights on today's events from a unique Christian perspective with in depth coverage on issues not found anywhere else.

At Midnight and Noon



**Dr. James Dobson, host of Family Talk Radio and past president of the well known Focus on the Family ministry will be a regular feature on Acts Radio. Photo courtesy Family Talk Radio.**

hear stories of the amazing forgiveness and restoration of lives that can only come from Jesus Christ in the radio drama "Unshackled." Real life stories that are dramatic accounts of hopelessness, and the hope that changes everything. Unshackled, the award-winning radio drama from Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago,

*No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.*  
~ Albert Einstein

grips the heart with compelling and relevant stories of transformed lives.

Never fear, your old favorites are still here. Autism Outreach with Jim Wining and Jim Sharp, lending advice and information to the families of Autistic children from their own personal experiences and in-depth research. Autism Outreach can be heard Monday and Saturday mornings at 8:00 and again Wednesday evening at 7:00.

A Short Trip Around My World with Dr. Paul Collins, takes a look at life through a Biblical perspective. Dr. Collins' message is both en-

lightening and thought provoking. Dr. Collins can be heard Wednesday evening at 6:30 and again Friday afternoon at 2:30.

You can find all this life-changing programming on Acts Radio by going to [www.actsmediagroup.com](http://www.actsmediagroup.com) and looking on the left side of the home page for our link. You will also be able to go to the soon to be completed website [www.actsradio.com](http://www.actsradio.com).

If you are interested in getting your message out by sponsoring any of these shows just Kevin Kasey at 816-237-6724. As always, Thanks For Listening.

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