



# Real News - Review

Religion in the News: International, National, Local

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## Commentary and Opinion

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

## 150th Adventists still looking for Jesus as they turn 150 this month

May marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the 7th Day Adventist Church  
Page 4

## Evangelicals: Promise in new immigration bill

A coalition of evangelical leaders are expressing cautious optimism about a bill a bipartisan group of senators introduced in Congress.  
Page 5



## Vatican supports adult stem cell research

Catholic church committed to finding cures for degenerative illnesses  
Page 6



## Home Run hits it 'out of the park'

The true story of baseball All-Star Cory Brand and his fight for sobriety through a Christian 12 step recovery program - Celebrate Recovery. Page 8

## Immigration issues impacting congregations

Many congregations are experiencing the turmoil of Immigration problems as members face deportation.  
Page 9

## Muslin leaders stand against terrorism

Us Islamic leaders denounce terrorism in the name of Islam  
Page 10

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## The Great Passion Play lives on

Facing financial difficulties, the Passion Play experienced a miracle of its own this year

EUREKA SPRINGS, AR (RN-R) by Steve Highlander

The Great Passion Play, known for its dramatic portrayal of the resurrection of Christ, has experienced a dramatic resurrection of its own.

Last year it looked as if the play would not continue in the 2013 season due to financial difficulties. In what could be described as no less than a "Christmas Miracle," The Great Passion Play rose from the dust to live, inspire and continue to bear witness to the Gospel message.

This "Christmas Miracle" began with the help of Christian Broadcaster Randall Christy who launched a campaign to save the Great Passion Play through his Oklahoma-based radio network. That effort raised \$75,000 in just 10 days. According to Christy, "it is a testimony as to what Christians can do when they come together with each person giving of their own resources."

The Great Passion Play at Eureka Springs, AR began in 1968. Since that time over 7.6

million people have witnessed that timeless story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection through the dramatic live performance. The outdoor amphitheater features a detailed set with authentic scenes, period costumes, and live animals and birds. The entire themed attraction, situated on 677 acres, is the largest outdoor drama in America.

According to assistant executive director Kent Butler, "The Passion play is both a ministry and a business. This year we will have 275 employees and 25 full-time volunteers who come in for the 6 month season running May through October."

For many people, the thought of future generations not being able to see the "Gospel" brought to life was simply unthinkable. For many of the long-time cast members, who considered it part of their personal ministry, it was especially tough.

Butler shared his own story, "I got my driver's license and became a roman soldier the



**The children enjoy a very human "Jesus Christ" as portrayed by Joe Smith of the Great Passion Play. During the course of this live hour and 45 minute Christian Spectacular, the audience experiences: Jesus the friend, the miracle worker, Savior and finally King of Kings and Lord of Lords as he reigns forever. Photo Courtesy of The Great Passion Play**

same year. My wife Mallory has been in the play since she was five. It was the involvement with the play that kindled our love and cemented our bond as a couple," he said.

When the cast and crew heard in October 2012 that the play might not open for 2013, they prayed for a miracle. By December their miracle was a reality.

According to Butler, "No one person or business gave

an especially large gift, it was each doing whatever he could, some giving their 'widow's mite.' Donations came from near and far and the money was raised in the eleventh hour."

No doubt many of our readers have vivid memories of the play and, because it will open again this season, others will have the opportunity to experience this unforgettable event.

This year the production has been reworked to present the timeless story in an even more dramatic fashion. Butler said, "After all, Jesus called them miracles. We have to call them special effects." He added, "We want people to be awe-inspired and amazed at the miraculous life that Jesus Christ lived."

Many who have seen the Great Passion Play are eager to ...continued from page 1

Continued on page 11

## Home-schooling family facing deportation

(RNS) When Uwe and Hannelore Romeike's asylum case was argued Tuesday (April 23) before a panel of federal judges, their lawyers didn't talk about poverty, war, or any of the reasons most immigrants cite in their bid to stay in the U.S.

Instead, they focused on a parent's right to teach their children at home, which isn't allowed in the Romeikes' native Germany. There, home-schooling families face fines, jail time and even loss of

custody if their children are not enrolled in a traditional school.

The Romeikes' lawyers also talked about their right to teach the Bible during the school day -- an angle that has spurred more than 100,000 U.S. conservatives to sign a petition to let the family stay in Tennessee, where they've made their home since 2008.

"In Germany there is basically religious freedom, but it

Continued on page 10

## Muslim Brotherhood sours Americans on Egypt's politics

(RNS) The Islamic political party known as the Muslim Brotherhood has soured American attitudes towards Egypt, arguably America's most important Arab ally, since its candidate Mohamed Morsi won presidential elections there in June 2012.

That's according to a poll released by the Arab American Institute in Washington D.C.

Morsi's term has been dogged by charges that he opts for authoritarian measures such as martial law. Muslim-

from 66 percent in 1997. At least some of the decline has been attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood, which won Egypt's parliamentary elections in January 2012, and to Morsi himself, who won the presidency last June by a 52-48 percent margin.

The poll, which was conducted in March, also found a huge gap in Americans' favorability ratings of the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslims themselves.

Americans had far more favorable views of Muslims than

## Over half of Americans do not think the Muslim Brotherhood party is committed to democracy in Egypt.

Christian clashes have also shadowed his term; there were clashes on April 5 in the town of Khosus that killed four Coptic Christians and one Muslim. Violence also marred the April 7 funeral for the Copts who were killed in that conflict.

According to the Institute's poll of 2,300 likely voters, only 36 percent of Americans had favorable views of Egypt, down

the Muslim Brotherhood. The survey found that 40 percent of Americans had favorable views of Muslims, while only four percent of Americans saw the election victories of the Muslim Brotherhood as a positive development.

Other key findings from the survey:

\* More than half of Ameri-

Continued on page 8

(RNS) George Beverly Shea, whose signature baritone voice was a standard feature of Billy Graham crusades for more than half a century, died Tuesday (April 16) at age 104.

He died after a brief illness, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association announced.

Shea, who was 10 years older than Graham, met the famous evangelist seven decades ago when he was working at Chicago's WMBI, a Moody Bible Institute radio station. The evangelist heard him singing on the program "Hymns from the Chapel" and asked Shea to sing on his new radio program.

"I've been listening to Bev Shea sing for more than 70 years, and I would still rather hear him sing than anyone else I know," the ailing Graham said in a statement. "I have lost one of the best friends I have ever had, but he and I look forward to seeing each other in Heaven relatively soon."

Shea, who lived about a mile from Graham in Montreat, N.C., sang before Graham preached as they traveled the globe, often "I'd Rather Have Jesus" or "Victory in Jesus."

"I have sometimes said that I would feel lost getting up to preach if Bev were not there to prepare the way through an appropriate song," Graham said in his autobiography, "Just As I Am."

In 1955, Shea made a couple of wording adjustments to the classic hymn "How Great Thou Art" -- one of Graham's favorites -- that have endured. He changed "consider all the works thy hands have made" to "con-



**Grammy-winning gospel singer George Beverly Shea (pictured here playing the piano in 2008) has died at 104 -- a life as full as it was long for the man behind the booming voice that for decades rang out at Billy Graham's crusades, and then years after Graham stopped holding big public events. Photo courtesy Billy Graham Evangelistic Association**

sider all the worlds thy hands have made" and modified "I hear the mighty thunder" to "I hear the rolling thunder."

"I got a bang when I used to hear Elvis Presley sing my two words," he told Religion News Service in a 2004 interview.

Graham spokesman A. Larry Ross said Shea -- who was the oldest living recipient of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award -- sang "How Great Thou Art" during each crusade, accompanied by a choir.

"He had his albums but he was primarily known for singing one song at each Billy Graham service," said Graham biographer William Martin. "That endeared him to everybody who went to his services or who saw them on the broadcasts for all those years."

Shea, who won his first Grammy in 1965 and was a 10-time nominee, recorded more than 70 albums of hymns. He was inducted into the Religious

see Mr. Shea page 4



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# Commentary

## Faith and Culture: Oh how I love me

If you want to take the pulse of a society, simply spend some time analyzing its advertising. In fact I want to challenge you to see how many times you can detect ads that are all about what ‘you deserve,’ or otherwise panders to the ego. The concept is, ‘if you buy this product you will be someone.’ I think J. G. Wentworth’s ads illustrate it best when people are yelling, “It’s my money and I want it now.” My other favorite is, “Get the credit you deserve.” My guess is that, if this ad is aimed at you - you don’t deserve credit.

All of this points to the fact that we have become a narcissistic society. Maybe a quick definition of narcissism is in order. Narcissism is a term that originated with Narcissus in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. Currently

it is used to describe a person characterized by egotism, vanity, pride, or selfishness. Basically narcissism translates to inordinate self-love.

Unfortunately, some recent studies have shown that narcissism has grown 30% in the college-aged population. Due to an over-emphasis on self esteem in the late ‘70s and ‘80s, we produced a generation that believes they are entitled to succeed just because they exist. Studies show that today’s college students think much more highly of themselves than their grade averages actually reflect.

Is it any wonder? We have raised the last two generations with an entitlement mentality. Despite the fact that many people are bemoaning the economy, we have 6-year-olds walking around with cell phones and \$200 iPods.

Speaking of 6-year-olds,



Steve Highlander  
Managing Editor RN-R,

MNS.com had a story recently about a 6-year-old millionaire. Isabella Barrett is all the rage in kiddie beauty pageant circles. She already has her own toy brand at Toys“R”Us and a commercial line of jewelry – Glitzy Girl. According to Isabella, “I’m a superstar, I have my own jewelry line, and I just love being the boss. I never lose at anything, and almost every pageant I enter I win. But what I love more than anything is shoes. I have over 60 pairs.” Seriously!? A 6-year-old with

60 pairs of shoes – move over Imelda Marcos.

The real problem with this whole trend towards encouraging a narcissistic society is that Christianity is just about as opposite as you can get from narcissism.

Jesus taught a disciplined self-denial for body, soul and spirit. He demonstrated self-sacrificing love in yielding to the cross for our redemption. He taught, “The first shall be last,” and “the servant shall be greater than the master.”

The fundamental teachings of Christ about humility and the need for forgiveness have no place in the current narcissistic mind-set.

Could it be that this is the reason so many of the millennial generation have checked out of church? Have we inoculated a generation against genuine Christianity by granting their

every wish without requiring commitment and accountability?

The even bigger questions are: “Can we reverse the trend?” And, “If so, how?”

If the church is to reach this generation we must do so by giving them something to love greater than themselves. A transcending love for God and the cause of Christ is one of the few things that will cause us to deny the natural - and society fostered – narcissistic tendencies. We need to offer the world a passionate relationship with a living God, not a set of dead rules and musty old practices that were better suited for yesterday. We need to love God more than ourselves.

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

## Upstairs Over a Vacant Lot

### Religions and religious people can disappoint the sincere seeker

Computer search engines place libraries, gossip columns, and other resources within easy reach. In my case, easy reach is my writing room just off the family room. From my second story perch, I can look out over our backyard or the deck. The vantage point gives me a sense of mastery over all that I survey. But when I delve into my computer using a search engine for information, I realize that there is a world ... nay, a universe ... that I do not control. I often pause to wonder if what I am reading is true or if it is simply a case of false information based

on someone’s venomous dislike for the subject.

As a case in point, the opinions expressed by one person of a certain faith may simply be the outcome of what he or she chooses to believe. Therefore, that person’s opinion of a certain religion or religious practice, may not have a sound basis.

I recently undertook to do an in-depth study of televangelism and televangelists. I have not completed the study because it is a very big subject, with many practitioners involved in the industry or business. I am old

enough to remember when the whole preacher on television thing began. I remember Oral Roberts on black and white television under the big tent. I remember Ford Philpot (Methodist from Kentucky) with his program The Story. It is likely that he was the first to telecast a ministry program in color. One of the original televangelists is a personal friend of mine. He long ago gave up television as a method of ministry, and lives in Minnesota where he gives counsel and leadership to many independent ministers of the gospel.



Dr. Paul C. Collins  
Publisher RN-R

The headline of this article speaks about religions and religious people; in order to be fair, I will refrain from mentioning more who are of the Christian faith. I turn my attention to the non-Christian religions. They may not have their televangelists. They may not be as familiar to us as the television preachers. But, they are influential in their places of operation.

I have been studying religion from a time when computers were punch card separators that filled a large room; that

was a long time ago. I entered seminary in 1960, graduated in 1963, and have continued to research religion and religious people. In fact, I taught Religions of the World on the college level.

If you begin a serious study of religion and religious people, be prepared for disappointment that comes with the discovery of truth. If you study televangelism and televangelists, be prepared for disappointment that comes with the discovery of truth. In either case, you may find yourself doing what I taught my ethics students to do. I taught them that to find the truth they should follow the money.

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

## Seasons of Reflections:

### Have you ever prayed about how to pray?

I often wonder how I am to pray. Jesus gave us the model of the Lord’s Prayer and we are told in the book of Romans that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings in accordance with God’s will. We are told to keep praying and asking.

Of course, it’s our human nature to ask for the positive resolution of our problems or those of others. But while praying about how to pray I perceived the following: Our main prayer or request should be that those who are involved or affected be brought closer to the Lord Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. We know the scripture in the book of James that tells us that trials develop perseverance.

But consider our “suffering” as an opportunity for God’s glory to be revealed. Our whole reason for living is to know and glorify God. God can be made known in a variety of ways. Obviously, He is made known or glorified by a physical miracle as the healing of cancer—whether it be instantaneous or through His healing being de-



LeAnn Kennedy  
President, Acts Ministry

livered via medicine.

But have you thought about him being made known—literally—if our prayers are not answered in the way we want—in the case of a health crisis—that He is fully known if we stand before him face to face?

As Christians we should not fear the day we meet him—it’s the day we’ve been living for since our salvation. Remember the Apostle Paul who said, “I long to depart and be with the Lord, but it is better for you that I stay in the body.”

Has there been a time in your life where you have come

to know that sweet ecstasy of intimacy with the Lord Jesus that you longed to be translated into heaven? I know, it may not be a topic you could share with just anyone—for some may think you suicidal—but I’ve known that longing! And I was as far removed from depression as I could be!

The greatest joy in life is an intimate relationship with Jesus—one so strong that no thing or no one else really matters—even though we love family members and friends.

The more we see Jesus, the less we see of anything else. We rise above our problems—literally—the “problems” may still be there, but our spirit and soul are drawn into the presence of the Lord who is perfect love. And in perfect love, there is no fear.

(Excepted from Ms. Kennedy’s book, Seasons of Reflections, published by Acts Press.)

*LeAnn Kennedy is the Chairman of the Board and President of Acts Ministry. She is also a public school teacher.*

## Mind and Spirit: Faith’s Passion

Everyone believes. It is foundational to the human condition that we live our lives based on what we believe about the world and our place in it. I find it interesting that those who have impacted the world the most, for good or bad, have held the most intense beliefs. Ghandi, Hitler, Mother Theresa, Napoleon, Jesus. Popular jargon calls this intensity passion, but the word has been watered down by commercialism, wanting us to be passionate about what kind of breath mint we use.

Unfortunately, our technological society has produced so much ADD in our consciousness that it is hard to be passionate about anything. We’re too busy switching our attention from one thing to another to give our attention to that One Thing that would make us feel that “I was put on the earth for this!”

Humans have a foundational need for that sense of significance powerful enough to compel us to a passionate cause. Without it we may be dissatisfied with life and flounder about from one thing to another. Our sense of worth may diminish. It may cause depression and inhibit our ability to perform as well as we are capable of doing.

The Bible is full of references that relate to this topic. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “My



Dr. Brooke Highlander  
Associate Editor, RN-R

righteous one will live by faith; and if he draws back, I have no pleasure in him” (10:38). Acts 17:6 talks of the Christians who “have turned the world upside down”, and the Book of Revelation speaks of the Christians who “loved not their lives, even unto death” (12:11). These people found their cause and were able to devote themselves to it, passionately, single-mindedly, and with great joy, even if it cost them everything they had.

We hear of people like that, and it sings to something in even the most cynical of souls. We might mock their choices, but secretly we are all admiration and envy. I think we might be afraid that, if we committed ourselves so unreservedly to something, we could discover that we were wrong in our belief and be left feeling foolish and empty.

In the end, though, it is in

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

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# Christian Economic Perspective

## Living in the eye of the hurricane

As I mentioned in last month's column, there are only possible four outcomes to the course of action being pursued by governments and banks around the world, and none of them is good. This month, I want to explain more clearly the reasons behind and consequences of these fiscal and monetary policies.

The prevailing school of economic thought in the world today is known as Keynesian economics and based on the writings of John Maynard Keynes in his book, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money. Space does not permit me to delve into Keynes's personal background and his political and social views except to say that he was influenced not only by the economic turmoil preceding and during the Great Depression of the 1930s but also the views of Fabian Socialists. In summary, Keynes advocated abandoning the gold standard and printing fiat currency to prevent deflation as the basis of monetary policy, with the basis of fiscal policy being continual budget deficits to mitigate the effects of reduced consumer spending.

This being said, the result of printing fiat currency is the injection of large amounts of money in economies, which over time causes prices to rise



Oliver Burrows , RN-R Economic Columnist

and currencies to lose value, eventually, in cases of hyperinflation, becoming worthless. The result of continual governmental budget deficits is debt, and with no budget surpluses, or monies set aside during periods of economic growth (mistakenly called inflation) to offset or reduce that debt, the cost of and ability to repay becomes problematic. The result, as I stated last month, is sovereign default, with those holding that debt (usually in the form of government bonds) bearing the full force of the default. Given that financial institutions hold much of this debt, when governments are unable to repay their debt, the banking system is destabilized, resulting in bank and business failures.

If this scenario seems eerily familiar, it is because it is a summary of events over the past six years. While we are told that unemployment and consumer

price data seem to indicate an improving economic picture, a closer look at these data indicates more people are unable to find jobs with full-time hours or in their fields of interest or have given up completely looking for work and the real unemployment and inflation rates are much higher than reported.

As even a cursory examination of the facts indicates, we are indeed living in the eye of the hurricane. When the eye passes, we will feel the full force of the coming economic storm. In next month's column, I will address ways to prepare for and to endure this impending super-storm.

*Rev. Oliver K. Burrows III is an ordained minister with Acts Ministry. He hosts three radio programs (Experiencing the Word and Christian Economic Perspective heard on 1230 WX-CO-AM and ESPN Sports Den on Sports Fan 100.5) in Wausau, Wisconsin and across the Internet. Oliver and his wife Donna, who is also an ordained minister, have four adult children and one grandchild. He can be contacted via e-mail at oliverburrows@economictruth.org and is available to preach as well as teach seminars on a broad range of subjects.*

# A One Minute Devotional:

## Way down deep in my heart

According to a reference that I have used, the heart is symbolic of the intellectual, moral, and emotional functions of individuals; one's inner being.

The heart is the seat of desire. Romans 10:1-3 states, "Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness." The heart is the seat of love. In Mark 12:30-33, Jesus was answering some scribes about the commandments and said, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The heart is the seat of obedience as mentioned in Romans 6:17-19; of pride in Proverbs 16:1-9&18; rebellion as in Jeremiah 5:23.

Several years ago, I heard a word way down within me that I almost dismissed. It was a word that I would not have



Nancy Collins RN-R Devotional Columnist

said about myself. Due to this fact, I knew the voice must be the Holy Spirit trying to tell me something about myself. This one lesson has blessed me every day. It has made me very aware that deep within myself there is a place only He sees and knows. Hence, He is able to help us with what we don't know.

I had a most interesting conversation this week with a married couple who have been having their share of illness. He has cancer, and is going through treatment. She has a breast problem and is to undergo surgery. Many people are praying for him, but she has told very few people about her illness. Why? She said the

Holy Spirit has a plan to use her husband's illness for good; and it may bring salvation for some people involved with his care. Meanwhile, if everyone knew about her illness, this might detract from what the Holy Spirit wants to do. She is relying on a sovereign God who knows all and is in control. They have great peace in the midst of some very difficult illnesses.

Whether we agree with them or not, our response should be "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" as in Matthew 22:37. Proverbs 3:5-7 says to "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil."

May you hear His voice about all that you need to know! Praise His Holy name!

*Nancy Collins and her Husband Dr. Paul Collins, co-founded Acts Ministry. She is recently retired from Maranatha Village in Springfield, Mo where she was a care plan coordinator.*

# A View From Jordan Creek

Perhaps the most difficult moral/ethical issue we face in contemporary America is the pervasiveness of lying. Though rarely stated so starkly, the absence of truth is at the root of many intractable problems and crises. This epidemic of dishonesty is endemic in all spheres; individual and collective, personal and corporate, private and public.

Mendacity has been at the heart of major governmental debates and decisions regarding war and peace and economic and health policy over the past decade or so. Falsehood dominates the public discussion of such issues as well, emanating from the invective of so-called talking heads and pundits and infecting malicious emails and similar messages routinely forwarded by too many citizens without checking the facts.

Our political process is rife with lying, from the campaign commercials designed to deceive to the routine slandering of candidates at the office water cooler and in phone conversations and texts.

So too with much of the extensive efforts by businesses to market products and services, from advertising carefully constructed to mislead consumers to techniques of scheming in sales that ultimately swindle the buyer.

On a broader scale, the collapse of the financial sector was largely forged by an intricate system of fabrications and fraud ranging from scam mortgages, created by treachery in



Virgil Hill RN-R Columnist

marketing, to 'sophisticated' products constructed of duplicity and sold by means of misrepresentation.

The press has become both an enabler of misinformation and a purveyor of public relations pap and prevarication for favored parties. Journalism cannot be relied upon to seek the truth and report objectively as readers and viewers are expected to verify stories on their own, and discern fiction and fact independently.

Sneers are directed at persons who attempt to be 'reality-based' as cranks who just don't 'get' this 'post-modern' world. Similar derision and marginalization awaits anyone for whom veracity is a non-negotiable principle.

Institutions, such as some school systems, intended to inculcate the value of verity are themselves fraught with falsehood. Indeed, the routine practice of promulgating deceptive claims is now intrinsic to the culture of some of these entities.

Lying is so commonplace

that it has become the vernacular of our discourse. Dishonesty is so ubiquitous that encountering the truth often creates cognitive dissonance for the reader or listener.

Our language itself has likewise been corrupted by the insidious influence of lying. Words like 'spin' and 'disinformation' are now routinely employed to celebrate especially expert forms of deception.

Today, lying is widespread and widely accepted. Lying often has its rewards as proficient liars benefit from their perverse skill and are rarely held accountable for their lies.

This captivity to the casual convenience of spurious statements and propaganda permeates our culture.

Tragically, the church is not immune from the prevalence of untruth. From the spectacular scandals that envelop significant leaders and expose the fakery underlying their operations to the mundane manipulations within local ministries and congregations, people of faith have subjugated themselves to the same social standards that have infested the secular world.

But surely, it is Christians who must lead the way back from fable to a restoration of genuineness in daily life. Integrity and authenticity must be the marks of a people who follow the One who is "the way, the truth and the life" and who said that "the truth shall set you free."

# Acts Ministry, Inc. and the Real News-Review

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

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religions in a very professional manner while, at the same time, maintaining a Christian perspective.

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

Acts Ministry accepts no liability for the accuracy of news received via the wire services or submitted by others, and we cannot be held responsible for any statements made by reporters whether they are international, national or regional.

While reporting the news, we do not want to neglect our opportunity to present Christ to the reader. It is for that reason that you will find references to Jesus, how to receive him as Lord and Savior, and

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

If you want information about the simple plan of salvation, you can contact Acts Ministry by going to the website at [www.actsministry.org](http://www.actsministry.org). Or, you can call 417-886-0223.

# The Evidence of Faith's Substance

## O.T. Prophecy of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant

In 1947, young Bedouin shepherds, searching for a stray goat in the Judean Desert, entered a vacant cave and found sealed jars filled with ancient scrolls. That initial discovery by the Bedouins yielded 7 scrolls and began a search that lasted nearly 10 years, eventually producing thousands of scroll fragments from 11 of the Qumran caves. This was the discovery of what we know today as the Dead Sea Scrolls, which contain manuscript copies of the entire Old Testament except the book of Esther.

Historical, paleographic and linguistic evidence established the date of scrolls and the Qumran ruins to the late 2nd Temple Period, a time when Jesus of Nazareth lived. The scrolls were kept and preserved by the Essenes, a Jewish sect who inhabited Qumran (among other locations) from about 125 BC to 68 AD, when the Romans destroyed the settlement. They were students of Scripture and separated themselves from the world, regarding themselves as "God's elect" who would only fight in the final battle with the "sons of darkness" at the end of the world.

These manuscripts date to 125 BC, or 125 years before Jesus Christ. Before their discovery, the earliest copy of any Old Testament manuscript was the Cairo Codex, dating to 895 AD (895 years after Jesus Christ). So, if these Dead Sea Scrolls match the handwritten Old Testament copies we have today, we can logically conclude the Old Testament was reliably transmitted across the centuries before Christ.

But the most incredible find that points directly to Jesus Christ is found in the two Isaiah Dead Sea Scrolls "A" and "B." The book of Isaiah contains numerous prophecies of a fu-



Ed Croteau Guest Columnist

ture Messiah, who will come to earth one day to show God's love for mankind by voluntarily paying for mankind's sins. Nowhere is this detailed out for us more than in Isaiah Chapter 53.

The Isaiah Scrolls "A" and "B" match our Bible's book of Isaiah in over 95% of the text, with the 5% being minor variations in spelling. As far as Isaiah Chapter 53, read Josh McDowell's words below (taken from his book 'Evidence that Demands a Verdict'): "Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only 17 letters are in question. 10 of these letters are simply spelling changes (no impact on the meaning), 4 are stylistic differences (conjunctions), and the remaining 3 letters are in the word 'light.'" In Isaiah 53, for the 166 words, there is only one word (3 letters) in question after 1,000 years of transmission, and this 1 word does not change the meaning of the passage."

So any claim by a skeptic, that someone just added prophecies of Jesus into the Old Testament after His death, has been refuted by this data in the Dead Sea Isaiah Scrolls. But can we really claim that what was prophesied in Isaiah 53 before Christ is really pointing to Him? For example, in Acts 8:26-35, as the Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, he asked Philip, "Of

whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

Anyone who honestly wants to answer that question for themselves has only to follow the trail of seven major evidences. Let's do it together.

- Isaiah 53:1-2 -Messiah will have an obscure lineage - fulfilled in Jesus - John 12:37-38, Luke 2:7
- Isaiah 53:3-4 - Messiah's rejection - fulfilled in Jesus - Matthew 13:54-57, John 1:10-11, John 9:39-41
- Isaiah 53:5-6,8 - Messiah punished for us - fulfilled in Jesus - Romans 4:24-25, 1 Peter 2:24-25
- Isaiah 53:7 - Messiah's silence - fulfilled in Jesus - Matthew 27:38,57-60, 1 Peter 2:21-22
- Isaiah 53:10-11 - Messiah's sacrifice for us - fulfilled in Jesus - Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Isaiah 53:12 - Messiah's triumph - fulfilled in Jesus - Colossians 2:15, Mark 15:27-28, Luke 23:34

No other person in history fulfills just these seven prophetic descriptions of the Messiah. Jesus Christ stands alone as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

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

*Ed Croteau hosts a weekly study in Lees Summit, MO called "Faith: Substance and Evidence", with Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Faith-Substance-and-Evidence/37339129607296>*

# Mormons say they're OK with change in Scouts' gay policy for leaders

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) The compromise proposal from the Boy Scouts of America to allow gay youths -- while continuing to exclude gay leaders -- has picked up a powerful backer: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormon leaders, who sponsor more Scout troops than any other religious or civic group, announced Thursday (April 25) that they are "satisfied" with the BSA's plan.

"While the church has not launched any campaign either to effect or prevent a policy change," said a statement on the church's news-room website, "we have followed the discussion and are satisfied that BSA has made a thoughtful, good-faith effort to address issues that, as they have said, remain among the most complex and challenging issues facing the BSA and society today."

The BSA is scheduled to decide the issue next month.

"The current BSA proposal," the LDS church statement added, "constructively addresses a number of important issues that have been part of the ongoing dialogue, including consistent standards

for all BSA partners, recognition that Scouting exists to serve and benefit youth rather than Scout leaders, a single standard of moral purity for youth in the program, and a renewed emphasis for Scouts to honor their duty to God."

Kendall Wilcox, an openly gay Mormon filmmaker, sees the Scouts' proposal as "a step in the right direction, bringing the Scouts in line with the LDS church's policy of inclusion of LGBT people."

Wilcox is a co-founder of Mormons Building Bridges, a group of Latter-day Saints dedicated to improving relations with the gay community. The group has been hosting "Community Conversations" at libraries recently about the Scouts' latest proposal.

"I much prefer the previous proposal that would have left it up to local charter organizations to decide whether or not to include LGBT youth and

leaders," Wilcox said.

Other major Scouting sponsors -- United Methodists and Roman Catholics -- have not yet announced their positions on the BSA's proposed policy change. Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, told Baptist Press he wants to see the current policy upheld.

John Stemberger, founder of the Florida-based group OnMyHonor.net that opposes any change in policy, called the Mormon position "both perplexing and non-committal."

The statement, he said, "tries to dodge criticism from gay activists but still creates a myriad of problems for how to manage and ensure the safety and security of the boys in the program."

*(Peggy Fletcher Stack writes for The Salt Lake Tribune.)*

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# USA Religion

## As they turn 150, Adventists still faithfully expecting the Apocalypse

(RNS) Over the past 150 years, Seventh-day Adventists have built one of Christianity's most inventive and prosperous churches -- while praying for the world to end as soon as possible.

A small band of believers has mushroomed to more than 17 million baptized members, including 1.2 million in the U.S. Nearly 8,000 Adventists schools dot dozens of countries. Hundreds of church-owned hospitals and clinics mend minds and bodies around the world.

You might expect Adventists to celebrate their success while marking their church's 150th anniversary this May. There's just one problem: the church wasn't supposed to last this long.

Back in the 1860s, the founders of Seventh-day Adventism preached that Jesus would return -- and soon. That's why they called themselves "Adventists." By Second-Coming standards, the church's long life could be considered a dismal sign of failure.

"If you took a time machine and visited our founders in May 1863, they'd be disconcerted, to say the least, that we're still here," said David Trim, the church's director of archives and research.

Current Adventists aren't exactly excited about the anniversary, either.

"It's almost an embarrassment to be celebrating 150



**For 150 years the Seventh Day Adventists church has remained faithful in watching for the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to a 2010 Pew Research Center poll, almost 50% of Americans believe Jesus will return in the next 40 years. Photo courtesy General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

years," said Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, the church's director of education. "But it's also an affirmation of faith in Christ's return."

Adventist leaders have slated May 18 -- the Saturday before the 150th anniversary -- as "a day of prayer, remembrance and recommitment to mis-

sion." On May 21, Adventists will hold a small ceremony at church headquarters in Silver Spring, Md. Don't expect balloons or birthday cake.

"In one kind of way it really is a sad event," said Michael Ryan, a vice president at the church's General Conference, its top governing body.

"We're a church that by its name believes in the Second

Coming of Christ, and we have been hopeful that long ago Christ would have come and taken the righteous to heaven and this world would have ended."

But Jesus told Christians to occupy themselves until he returns -- advice that Adventists take to heart.

Ryan, the church's director of strategic planning, said he eagerly anticipates projects to open health centers in poverty-stricken communities and a 26-story hospital in Hong Kong. Besides worshipping on Saturday -- the biblical seventh day when God rested -- Adventists may be best known for their healthy lifestyles. Studies show they live about 10 years longer than their neighbors.

Of course, most Christian churches preach the Second Coming, and nearly half of Americans believe Jesus will return in the next 40 years, according to a 2010 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center. But few American churches have been built on the ashes of

apocalyptic dreams.

Adventism was founded in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment, which dashed the hopes of some 50,000 followers who expected Jesus to arrive in 1844. Some had sold their possessions and let their fields lie fallow. The celestial letdown drove a few insane, crushed under the weight of what social psychologist Leon Festinger would later call "cognitive dissonance."

But the movement did not disintegrate, as Festinger argued. Instead, early Adventists like James and Ellen White adjusted their beliefs. Something of divine import had happened in 1844, even if it wasn't the Second Coming, they taught.

Meanwhile, Adventist leaders brought dejected believers together, feeding the hungry and bonding over their shared disappointment. While keeping watch for Jesus coming in the clouds, Adventists also turned an eye to earthly time, setting Saturday as their Sabbath and

preaching the value of healthy living.

Over time, Adventists' social bonds and distinctive doctrines "led to the creation of a church which survives and prospers today as one of the fastest-growing denominations in Christendom," writes Stephen O'Leary, a scholar at the University of Southern California.

When those doctrines sail against cultural winds -- as when Adventists are forced to work on Saturday, or famous members back Creationism -- church solidarity strengthens, scholars say.

Adventist growth is especially intense in Latin America and Africa, where people are attracted to the faith's blend of ethereal optimism (Jesus is coming soon!) and earthly education (Eat your vegetables until he does.)

"It's a religious movement whose belief system compensates for both human needs and human longings," said Edwin Hernandez, a research fellow at the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Latino Religion.

But some Adventists worry that the church's modern success may bring Adventism full circle: a movement haunted by the hereafter becomes preoccupied with the present.

Adventism thrives because of the urgency of its message, argues church historian George Knight. Countless missionaries have crossed the earth to warn of Jesus' imminent arrival. "When that vision is gone," Knight writes, "Adventism will become just another toothless denomination that happens to be a little more peculiar in some of its beliefs than others."

But Adventist leaders say the apocalyptic pull is still strong at

church headquarters, especially during planning sessions. "I see that in our education system," said Beardsley-Hardy. "Not wanting to over-invest in building because Jesus is coming."

Beardsley-Hardy said she feels the same tension in her personal life. Should she sock away extra money in her retirement account, she wonders, or gratify immediate needs?

As a child, Beardsley-Hardy said she was convinced that every passing thunderstorm heralded the Second Coming. Now 54, with two children and two grandchildren, she said that sense of urgency is returning.

"I'm getting back to waiting," Beardsley-Hardy said. "But I'm kind of glad the Lord has tarried."

### Mr. Shea

*Continued from front page*

Broadcasting Hall of Fame in 1996, and the "Hall of Faith" of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists in 2008.

Shea's love for music shone through in the RNS interview, with his deep voice sometimes drifting into song as he discussed the range of hymns featured in his book "How Sweet the Sound: Amazing Stories and Grace-filled Reflections on Beloved Hymns and Gospel Songs."

He also put down the phone and played a few notes for a listening reporter on his 800-pipe, three-manual organ in his home.

In the same book, he recalled the Graham crusades' unofficial anthem, "Just As I Am," and a harrowing flight out of Newark, N.J., in 2000 when he wasn't sure if he would ever touch the ground again.

Clutching his wife's hand, he started to pray the text of the hymn. "If this was our time to meet the Savior," Shea wrote, "that's the song I wanted to be singing."

Born in Winchester, Ontario, Shea was raised on church music, with his mother singing it as he awoke on school days. He took the bass line around the dinner table when his family sang the Doxology -- beginning with the words "Praise God from whom all blessing flow" -- in harmony. As his father preached in their Houghton, N.Y., church, he would flip through the pages of the church hymnal.

"The rustle of the pages might have been a little distracting, but I know he forgave me," Shea wrote in his book.

At age 23, he wrote the song "I'd Rather Have Jesus," which became another staple of Graham crusades. A few years later, the song's message inspired him to decline an offer to sing with a secular singing group.

Franklin Graham, who succeeded his father as the president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, recalled how "unassuming" the musician was.

"Even though Bev was 10 years older than my father, he never acted his age," said Franklin Graham. "He was absolute fun to be with."

In 2004, when he was sidelined by a heart attack, Shea had to miss Graham's evangelistic event in Kansas City, Mo. It was the first time in 57 years that he had missed a crusade.

One of his last public appearances with Graham was in 2010, when the ministry celebrated its 60th anniversary, Ross said.

Even in his later years, Shea awed listeners with his continuing ability to sing his signature songs. Martin heard him sing in Dallas in 2002, when he would have been 93.

"I commented on how remarkable it was," Martin recalled, "and he said, 'I think I sounded better when I was 90.'"

(Kevin Eckstrom contributed to this report.)

### White House advisory council recommends action on modern-day slavery concerns

WASHINGTON (RNS) A White House advisory council of religious leaders called for a global fund to address human trafficking and urged a new labeling system to help identify consumer goods that were not created with slave labor.

With a 36-page report released Wednesday (April 10), the President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships hopes to build awareness of the estimated 21 million people worldwide who are subjected to sexual exploitation or forced labor.

"Abraham Lincoln said if slavery is not wrong then nothing is wrong, and we know that sadly 150 years later slavery still exists," said Susan K. Stern, chair of the council and an adviser to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. "Today with this report we say, Enough."

The 15-member council made 10 recommendations to the White House, saying what they've learned about the scope of trafficking has driven them to galvanize national action.

One recommendation calls for a "Global Fund to Eradicate Modern-day Slavery," modeled on a fund that combated AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said she and other council members think such a fund "would encourage coordination and participation of philanthropists, governments and both religious and secular nonprofits to work toward abolishing modern slavery."

The council recommended a label for products similar to "Energy Star," which identifies energy-efficient merchandise, to counter sales of goods produced with slave labor. That would build on President Obama's executive order last fall that made it harder for federal contractors to engage in trafficking-related activities.

"We are all potentially, likely wrapped in garments that were produced with the suffering of enslaved people," said Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism.

Other recommendations include a national summit that could better coordinate the anti-trafficking work already being done by religious and secular nonprofits. Council members also hope a toolkit, an Ad Council campaign similar to Smokey the Bear and a designated hotline will help build awareness and strengthen prevention efforts.

Valerie Jarrett, senior adviser to the president, welcomed the report on human trafficking, which she called "one of the gravest crimes the world has ever known." She said the Obama administration would fight it in "lock step" with faith and community leaders.

Referring to the Bible's Book of 1 Corinthians, the administration's ambassador-at-large for trafficking, Luis CdeBaca, said the White House would be "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" if it did not execute the group's recommendations.

"We want to make beautiful music with you and we want that music to be music of freedom," said CdeBaca, whose State Department office was recommended for upgrading to "bureau" status by the advisory council.

During a brief comment period, several advocates for human trafficking victims welcomed the recommendations. They included Lisa Williams, a sex trafficking survivor and executive director of Georgia-based Living Water for Girls.

"Thank you for hearing us," she said, "and thank you for understanding we are not invisible."

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# Evangelicals see promise in new immigration proposal

WASHINGTON (RNS) A coalition of evangelical leaders who hope to shape national immigration reform is expressing cautious optimism about a bill a bipartisan group of senators introduced in Congress.

Richard Land, the public policy director for the Southern Baptist Convention, said the new bill passes the biggest hurdle for many evangelicals by not allowing “amnesty” but would instead require undocumented immigrants to work toward American citizenship.

“It provides an earned pathway to full legal status and then to citizenship for those who want it,” Land said Wednesday (April 17). “That is not amnesty in any dictionary in the English language.”

The tentative evangelical endorsement of the Senate blueprint could be key because more than any other religious group, white evangelicals harbor the most reservations about opening citizenship to immigrants in the U.S. illegally, according to a recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute.

Members of the Evangelical Immigration Table coalition came together last June on the premise that evangelicals’ experience with immigrants in their own parishes calls them to action as lawmakers try to forge a new immigration reform law -- an elusive goal that suddenly seems possible in Washington.

The Rev. Gabriel Salguero, a member of the group and president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, said the current push from evangelicals on immigration is unprecedented in its wide range of participating denominations.

“As evangelical leaders, we live every day with the reality that our immigration system is broken, and it’s not working,” Salguero said. “And it doesn’t reflect the values of human dignity and the respect for the rule of law that defines us as

evangelicals and defines us as Americans.”

Coalition members stopped short of actually backing the new immigration bill -- which requires more secure borders before new paths to citizenship open for those in the country illegally -- but left the door open if its final version reflects their principles.

Among other values, the bill should respect the integrity of U.S. borders, keep families intact and protect “the God-given dignity of every person,” they said.

Members of the coalition include World Vision, the National Association of Evangelicals, Sojourners, and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

Though immigration reform remains a tough sell in some corners of Capitol Hill, support from generally conservative evangelicals bodes well for the newly introduced bill, which has also drawn praise from President Barack Obama.

“This bill is clearly a compromise, and no one will get everything they wanted, including me,” Obama said. “But it is largely consistent with the principles that I have repeatedly laid out for comprehensive reform.”

According to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 71 percent of Americans believe immigrants who live in the U.S. illegally should be allowed to stay.

They are divided, however, on whether immigrants should be eligible for citizenship. According to the PRRI study, majorities of all major faith groups support legalization “provided they meet certain requirements,” including more than seven in 10 Hispanic Catholics and Protestants, two-thirds of Jews, more than 60 percent of Mormons, white Catholics and white mainline Protestants, and 56 percent of white evangelicals.

## N.C. minorities remain worried after religion bill is pulled

WILMINGTON, N.C. (RNS)

A resolution to allow North Carolina to defy the Constitution and establish a state-sanctioned religion may be dead in the state capitol, but minority faiths say there’s more than enough reason to remain nervous.

Some worry about the implications the bill has for North Carolina, a majority Protestant state with growing Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist populations.

Manzoor Cheema, a Raleigh resident and board member of the Triangle Interfaith Alliance, said he believes the resolution should be a wake-up call.

“I think this is a very disturbing development; very bad for our state. In my opinion, as a Muslim, a minority community member and immigrant from Pakistan, I believe that separation of church and state is fundamental and grants us many freedoms,” he said.

“But it’s a blessing in disguise to mobilize the interfaith community in North Carolina.”

On Thursday (April 4), Republican House Speaker Thom Tillis pulled House Joint Resolution 494: The Rowan County Defense of Religion Act 2013, just three days after it was introduced.

The bill declared that the state “does not recognize federal court rulings which prohibit and otherwise regulate the State of North Carolina, its public schools, or any political subdivisions of the State from making laws respecting an establishment of religion.”

GOP lawmakers said they wanted to protect the right of the Rowan County Board of Commissioners to offer sectarian prayers before public meetings, which were facing a legal challenge for running afoul of the separation of church and state.

“I gather what these legislators are saying is they want very much to turn back the clock, but the issue of whether or not states should follow constitutional law is settled,” said Michael J. Gerhardt, a law profes-

sor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and director of the UNC Center on Law and Government.

When word of the bill first surfaced, calls flooded the North Carolina’s ACLU office from several state Jewish federations and synagogues.

“People were horrified by this proposal because it sent a message of exclusion to them, that they don’t matter,” said Chris Brook, legal director of state chapter of the ACLU. “It’s a very unfortunate and confusing message to be sending in 2013.”

One of those callers last week was Eugene Barlaz, the Jewish community relations chair with the Jewish Federation of Raleigh/Cary. The moment he heard about the resolution, he started calling Tillis to ask for 30 minutes of his time. And then he called Jewish federations and synagogues across the state.

“A lot of people said to me, ‘Don’t waste your time. This will never go through.’ And my response was people read (Hitler’s) ‘Mein Kampf’ in the 1920s and said nothing would ever happen and look what happened,” Barlaz said.

In an interview with The



A coalition of evangelical leaders aiming to shape national immigration reform is expressing cautious optimism over a bill a bipartisan “Gang of Eight” senators introduced in Congress Wednesday (April 17). Richard Land (center), a leading pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention, said the new bill meets a major criterion of many in the evangelical community, in that it is not an “amnesty” bill, but would require undocumented immigrants to work toward American citizenship. RNS photo by Caleb Bell

## Black pastors: Gun violence isn’t just a problem for white suburbs

WASHINGTON (RNS) Black clergy have launched a new coalition to fight gun violence, saying they are undeterred by the recent failure of legislation on Capitol Hill and all too aware of the problem of gun violence.

At meetings held Tuesday (April 23) in Washington and Los Angeles, supporters of the African-American Church Gun Control Coalition called gun violence “both a sin and a public health crisis” and committed to a three-year action plan of advocacy, education and legislative responses.

“As people of God and as faithful members, we have the obligation to stir the world’s conscience and to call on our nation’s decision makers to do

what is just and right,” said the Rev. Carroll Baltimore, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, which convened the coalition.

“African-American clergy leaders hear daily the cries of the parents, family and friends of those whose precious lives have been snuffed out by guns and other types of violence.”

Denominational leaders have joined in recent multi-faith calls to address gun violence, especially after December’s deadly school shooting in Newtown, Conn. But the Rev. Stephen Thurston, president of the National Baptist Convention of America, said black pastors have dealt with such violence long before attention was drawn to gun violence in

predominantly white communities.

“This is what happens every day and every week in America in some urban city,” he said before the coalition meeting. “Within the black community, it has been happening for so long.”

Gun violence is the leading cause of death of black males ages 15-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Children’s Defense Fund reported that in 2009 black male teens were eight times more likely to die from gun violence than white teenage males.

The clergy blasted the Senate for defeating legislation to

*Continued on page 7*

## U.S. poll: Christians divided over legalization of marijuana



Lauren Markoe (“The National Post,” April 25, 2013)

Washington — American views on marijuana are evolving much like their views on gay marriage, according to a new poll, with many people ambivalent but growing numbers in favor of legalization.

The poll, conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service, found that 45 percent of those surveyed support the legalization of pot, compared to 49 percent who don’t. As with the gay marriage debate, older Americans and white evangelical Protestants are most opposed.

But generally, Americans don’t seem to have a moral problem with the growing pot legalization movement, which won referenda in Colorado and Washington state last November, and is gathering significant strength in at least seven other states. Fewer than one in four Americans (23 percent) think using marijuana is a sin, according to the PRRI poll, conducted between April 17 and 21.

One in three (35 percent) say the new liberalized laws are signs of moral decline in America.

“The only folks who embrace that idea are white evangelical Protestants. That’s a minority view,” said PRRI Research Director Daniel Cox, who noted that six in 10 reject the idea.

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# World Religion

## Vatican gets behind adult stem cell research

### Catholic church committed to finding cures for degenerative illnesses

VATICAN CITY (RNS) — Wading into one of the most controversial fields of modern medicine, the Vatican is pushing adult stem cell research as ethical and scientifically more promising than embryonic stem cell research.

That's despite assertions from many in the scientific community that it's important to pursue all types of stem cell research, including embryonic, to maximize chances of finding cures for diseases.

Harvesting embryonic stem cells requires the destruction of fertilized embryos -- which are considered nascent human life in Catholic doctrine. Adult stem cells can be safely taken from adult human beings.

The Vatican started promoting adult stem cells in 2011, when its Pontifical Council for Culture launched a collaboration with U.S. bio-pharmaceutical company NeoStem.

The Council will host its second major conference on the issue at the Vatican this week (April 11-13), with the aim of publicizing recent research and shedding the Catholic Church's

anti-science reputation.

"People don't have to choose between life and science," said Robin Smith, CEO of New York-based NeoStem and president of its nonprofit arm, the Stem for Life Foundation.

"We want to correct the misunderstanding in public opinion on adult stem cells. People need to understand how far we are with research."

A decade ago, embryonic stem cell research attracted big-name support, from Nancy Reagan to Michael J. Fox, even as it attracted strong opposition from some religious leaders and prompted tight restrictions on federally-funded research by the Bush administration. The Obama administration has loosened those restrictions.

But Smith argues adult stem cell research has been more successful; she says there are around 4,300 treatments based on adult stem cells which are now in clinical trials, and only 26 based on embryonic stem cells.

Religiously-motivated restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, however, have reduced scientists' ability to pursue it.

Doug Melton, co-director of the Harvard Stem Cell Institute told Forbes magazine in January that all types of promising stem cell research



**Trying to shed its anti-science reputation of the past, the Catholic church is working closely with a U.S. bio-pharmaceutical company, NeoStem, in adult stem cell research. Adult stem cell research does not destroy a fertilized embryo - which many religious leaders have criticized as taking a life. Source: Stock photo**

should be pursued, but embryonic remains the "gold standard against which we measure other types."

The U.S. National Institutes of Health's position is that all lines of stem cell research should continue, because even with advances in adult stem cell

technology, problems persist.

"Adult stem cells are often present in only minute quantities and can therefore be difficult to isolate and purify," according to the NIH's website.

"There is also evidence that they may not have the same capacity to multiply as embryonic stem cells do. Finally, adult stem cells may contain more DNA abnormalities caused by sunlight, toxins, and errors in making more DNA copies during the course of a lifetime."

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of Pontifical Council, told reporters on Tuesday (April 9) that the upcoming meeting wanted to show that the Catholic Church did "not intervene only negatively" in the debate on stem cell research, and its commitment to finding cures was more than just "words."

Several leading world scientists will attend the Vatican-sponsored conference, including Britain's John Gurdon, winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine last year.

Ravasi stressed that research can "respond to the cry of those who suffer," especially those of families who have a relative affected by a degenerative illness.

According to proponents, adult stem cells promise to radically change medicine by enhancing the body's own capacity of healing itself.

Among them will be Jonathan Sackner-Bernstein, a vice-president of NeoStem, who will present his research on patients

that have suffered severe heart attacks.

Patients who survive an attack, he said, usually can't expect to live long lives.

But he hopes his research -- currently in clinical trials -- will improve life expectancy by using stem cells to "make the heart heal itself" and repair the damage done by the stroke.

Sackner-Bernstein said that adult stem cells draw on the body's own self-repair mechanisms, and "could enable patients to heal, perhaps as if they had never had the disease."

Vatican sponsorships of adult stem cells is not without controversy within the Catholic world itself.

In 2012, the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life was forced to cancel a conference on "Responsible Stem Cells Research." While the cancellation was officially caused by low registration, some members of the academy had complained that the lineup included researchers who had worked with embryonic stem cells, and called for a boycott of the conference.

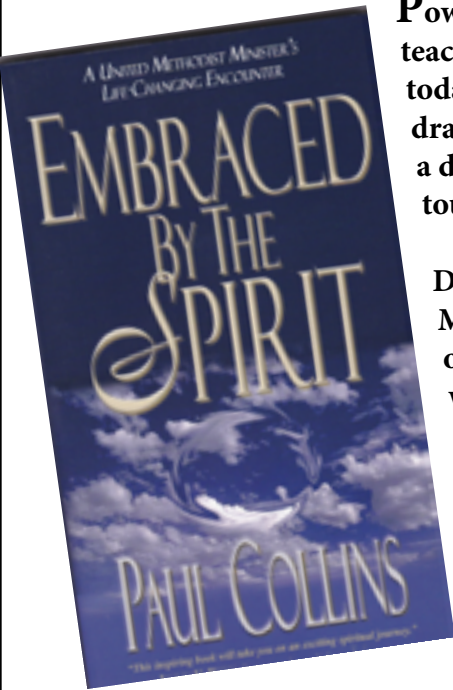
"We don't want to stigmatize those who do research on embryonic stem cells," said the Rev. Tomasz Trafny, who heads the science department of the Pontifical Council for Culture. "It is much more useful to focus on the results and the progress of adult stem cells."

For Sackner-Bernstein, the argument for adult stem cells is scientific rather than ethical, as research has shown that embryonic stem cells are often unpredictable and can even provoke tumors.

"I don't want to trade a disease for another disease. It would be disingenuous to say we can control (embryonic stem cells), these cells are much smarter than us."

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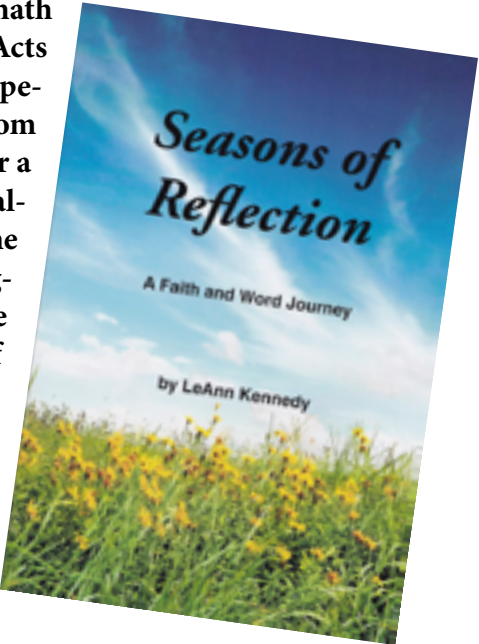
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## Pope Francis redirects traditional employee bonuses to charity

VATICAN CITY (RNS) — Vatican employees won't receive the special bonus they are traditionally awarded when a new pope is elected, the Vatican confirmed on Thursday (April 18), under orders from Pope Francis to give extra money to charity instead.

"On account of the difficult situation of the general economy, it seemed neither possible nor opportune to burden Vatican institutions with a considerable unforeseen extraordinary expense," the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said in an emailed statement.

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In place of the employees' bonus, Pope Francis ordered Vatican officials to make a donation to some "charitable organizations."

The money will be drawn from the pontiff's personal charity budget "as a sign of the church's attention for the many people who are suffering" from the global economic slowdown, Lombardi said.

In 2005, some 4,000 Vatican employees received a 1,000 euro bonus (\$1,300) upon the death of Pope John Paul II, and another 500 euros (\$650) upon the election of his successor, Benedict XVI.

Francis told journalists a few days after his election that he wanted a "poor church, for the poor," and he has brought a simpler and more sober style to the papacy.

He cut back on the liturgical pomp of his predecessor and has chosen to live in a Vatican guesthouse rather than in the luxurious papal apartments.

Lombardi stressed that the decision to forgo the bonus was not taken as a consequence of the Vatican's own financial difficulties.

In 2011, the Holy See's budget registered a \$19 million deficit. For the same year, the Vatican City State, which has a separate budget, posted a \$27 million surplus.

In December, the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, warned that the Vatican needed to adopt "effective" cost reduction measures in the face of a "continuing inability to increase revenues" on account of the global economic crisis.

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# Jerusalem court upholds women’s prayer rights at western wall

JERUSALEM (RNS) Women who want to wear prayer shawls while praying in the women’s section of the Western Wall are not breaking the law, according to a landmark decision handed down Thursday (April 25) by the Jerusalem District Court.

Israeli police arrested five women on April 11 who were dressed in prayer shawls while praying with Women of the Wall, an activist group that prays at Judaism’s most sacred site once a month.

Immediately following those arrests, a lower court judge ruled that the women had not violated “local custom,” a legal concept intended to keep the fragile peace at holy sites. The Western Wall is a remnant of the Second Temple that was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago.

Thursday’s ruling by the higher court upheld that ruling and rejected an appeal filed by the police, who argued Women of the Wall’s practices violate a 2003 Supreme Court decision and disrupt the public order.

Israel’s ultra-Orthodox religious establishment has long maintained that the group’s practices offend more traditional Jews, who believe only men are allowed to lead group prayers or wear prayer shawls.

Following Thursday’s ruling, Anat Hoffman, the group’s chairwoman, said that “today, Women of the Wall liberated



The “Wailing Wall” is the last standing portion of the second Jewish temple structure in Jerusalem. Multitudes of Jews and other visitors visit this holy site to pray each day. Recently there was a uproar from ultra-orthodox Jews who believe that only men can lead prayer groups. Stock photo source: 123FR.

the Western Wall for all Jewish people. ... We did it for the great diversity of Jews in the world, all of whom deserve to pray according to their belief and custom at the Western Wall.”

Shira Pruce, the group’s spokeswoman, said the struggle will continue until they see “girls permitted to have a bat mitzvah (coming of age ceremony) at the Wall with a Torah, with a tallit (prayer shawl) , or however they wish and believe.”

In a statement, Natan

Sharansky, the chairman of the Jewish Agency and a government emissary charged with trying to quell the dispute, said the ruling “only strengthen(s) the need for a sustainable, agreed solution, which will allow every Jew to feel at home at the Western Wall, as the basis for any resolution.” Sharansky had recently proposed adding a third egalitarian section that would allow mixed-gender prayers.

A spokesperson for the Justice Ministry told the Times of Israel that it was too soon

to comment on a possible appeal by the state prosecutor to the Supreme Court. A police spokesman could not be reached for comment.

## Gun Violence

continued from page 5

expand background checks and ban assault weapons, but vowed to continue to work for stronger legislation and safer neighborhoods.

“I think we’re more empowered, more fired up to make some changes,” said the Rev. Cynthia Hale, senior pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Ga.

At the Washington meeting, dozens of clergy heard from gun control advocates and political leaders, including Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Rep. Marcia Fudge, (D-Ohio), chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Other denominations supporting the new coalition

# Atheists angry at arrest of bloggers

Secular groups unite to protest the arrest of four Bangladeshi bloggers accused of blasphemy

(RNS) Several atheist protests planned for April 25 outside Bangladeshi embassies and consulates were postponed in the wake of Wednesday’s building collapse that killed at least 244 people in that country’s capital, Dhaka.

A coalition of secularist advocacy groups originally planned to rally in London and several cities in the U.S. and Canada over the arrests of four atheist bloggers who were charged with blasphemy in the officially Muslim nation.

Some of the protests were postponed until May 2 after Bangladesh declared Thursday a day of mourning for the victims of Wednesday’s collapse.

Thursday’s rallies in Washington D.C., New York and Columbia, Mo. were scheduled to go on as planned, but rallies in London, Ottawa, Calgary, Toronto and Dhaka were pushed back until May 2.

The U.S. groups -- led by American Atheists and the Secular Coalition for America -- decided to continue with protests as originally planned, while the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the U.S. and Canadian branches of the Center for Inquiry, and the British Humanist Association decided to postpone.

“My decision to continue ... is based on the fact that I feel this is an urgent problem,” American Atheists’ president David Silverman said. “People are in jail for doing nothing but self expression, and that is wholly immoral. This protest is weeks in the making, international in scope, and we aren’t canceling it because of an impromptu day of mourning imposed by the very people imprisoning atheists like us.”

Paul Fidalgo, director of communications for CFI, said the decision to postpone the rallies was difficult, and involved consideration of embassy and consulate workers who might have friends and relatives who are victims of the collapse.

“With their feelings in mind, and the fact that the officials’ attentions would be so firmly on their own country’s disaster, we thought it best to move the protest later to when it would have more of its own space,” he wrote on CFI’s website.

“And we also support the decision of those who opted to go ahead today. We all believe deeply in defending the right (to) freedom of expression.”

include the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and National Baptist Convention, USA.

**“Character is both developed and revealed by tests, and all of life is a test.”**  
Pastor Rick Warren

# After failed self-immolation, Tibetan says ‘I won’t repeat it’

DHARAMSALA, India (RNS) After more than 100 Tibetans have set themselves on fire, a man who tried and failed says he won’t do it again — but only because he doesn’t want to create trouble for the Dalai Lama.

“I won’t try to burn myself again,” said the 30-year-old survivor Dawa Dhondup, a shy and soft-spoken man in Dharamsala, the Himalayan seat of the Dalai Lama’s government-in-exile in northern India.

Dhondup drank kerosene and poured it all over his body before hundreds of Tibetans at a March 10 procession here to mark the anniversary of a failed 1959 uprising against Chinese rule. As he was about to light a match, fellow Tibetans and police overpowered him.

He has spent the last month undergoing treatment for the kerosene poisoning, and recently started a job as a cook at a Tibetan school.

Dhondup said he wanted to show solidarity with the 115 Tibetans who have self-immolated inside Tibet to protest Chinese rule and call for restoration of freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama.

While he doesn’t regret his actions, he regrets any head-

aches he caused for the Dalai Lama in his adopted home city. It was the first time a Tibetan had tried to self-immolate near the Dalai Lama’s headquarters.

Local police charged Dhondup with attempted suicide, and warned local Tibetans they could face restrictions if they tried to demonstrate on his behalf or otherwise cause trouble. A local Tibetan Youth Congress leader, Tenzin Tsundue, gave a written promise that no Tibet-

by the criticism that the recent spate of self-immolations have failed to bring change in China’s Tibet policy.

“I wanted the world to know Tibetans in Tibet are not alone in their suffering,” he said.

A Buddhist and believer in reincarnation, Dhondup said he didn’t know what consequences his action would yield in his next life. “Since I’m not educated, I had no other way to contribute; that’s all I thought of.”

He added that he wasn’t afraid of a painful death, nor was he devoid of hope.

“I believe Tibet will be free during my lifetime because of the Dalai Lama’s leadership,” he said. “But there’s no freedom in Tibet right now, and I wanted to do something about it. I won’t repeat it though.”

He added that he wasn’t afraid of a painful death, nor was he devoid of hope.

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**“I wanted the world to know Tibetans in Tibet are not alone in their suffering,” he said.**

ans in Dharamsala would attempt a similar act.

The attempted suicide raised concerns with the Indian government because China has accused the Dalai Lama of inciting monks and nuns inside Tibet to set themselves ablaze. New Delhi often uses the presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile as leverage with China, but generally avoids provoking the ire of Beijing.

Dhondup, who walked for five days from his home in southern Tibet to India at age 18, said he was deeply disturbed

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# Religion and Life

## HOME RUN hits it out of the park

LOS ANGELES, CA Samuel Goldwyn Films, in association with Provident Films, released David Boyd's (The Walking Dead, Friday Night Lights) HOME RUN on April 19, 2013. Past successes of the Goldwyn and Provident partnership include Fireproof, October Baby and Facing the Giants.

Baseball all-star Cory Brand (Scott Elrod) knows what it takes to win in the big leagues. But off the field, with memories of his past haunting him, his life is spiraling out of control.

Hoping to save her client's career after a team suspension, Cory's agent (Vivica A. Fox) sends him back to the small town where he grew up. Forced to coach the local youth baseball team and spend eight weeks in the only recovery program in town, Cory can't wait to return to his old life as

quickly as possible. As his young players help him experience the joy of the game, Cory discovers his need to find freedom from his past and hope for his future ... and win back the love he left behind ("Emma," played by Dorian Brown). With this unexpected second chance, Cory finds himself on a powerful journey of transformation and redemption.

Based on thousands of true stories, HOME RUN is an inspirational reminder that with God, it's never too late ... freedom is possible.

The Celebrate Recovery® program highlighted in HOME RUN is a forward-looking, real-life addiction recovery program that grew out of Southern California's Saddleback Church and is now found in churches all over the U.S. and the world.

Celebrate Recovery® was founded in 1991 by Pastor John Baker of Saddleback Church with the goal of overcoming life's issues with a twelve-step program based on Christian principles.

A Hero Productions Film in association with Impact Productions, HOME RUN is directed by David Boyd, with a screenplay by Brian Brightly, Melanie Wistar, Eric Newman and Candace Lee. The film is executive produced by Carol Spann Mathews and Tom Newman. HOME RUN stars Scott Elrod, Vivica A. Fox, Dorian Brown and Charles Henry Wyson.

According to Meyer Gottlieb, President of Samuel Goldwyn Films: "Just as audiences cheered when we released Facing the Giants with Provident



“Home Run” focuses on baseball all-star Cory Brand (Scott Elrod) whose alcohol abuse sends his life into a tailspin. After he is arrested for driving under the influence and suspended from the team for eight weeks, his agent (Vivica A. Fox, ) sends him back to his hometown where he reluctantly enters a 12-step recovery program and takes over coaching a local youth baseball team. Photo courtesy of HomeRunTheMovie.com

Films, we know they will be inspired by the compelling, moving and triumphant story of HOME RUN.”

Filmmaker David Boyd added: “I hope this film can be a

source of strength and understanding for the many, many good people in the world in need of a helping hand.”

Executive Producer Carol Spann Mathews added:

“HOME RUN portrays that no matter what burdens we may be carrying, we are not alone. There are others who have struggled with the same thing and have found a way through.”

## Muslim Brotherhood - politics

Continued from front

cans (53 percent) believe the Muslim Brotherhood is not committed to democracy while 15 percent said they were.

\* Nearly one-third of Americans, (32 percent) said they would be less likely to visit an Egypt governed by the Muslim Brotherhood, compared to five percent who said they would be more likely to visit.

\* Almost half of Americans, (47 percent) said the U.S. should stop providing financial aid to Egypt while it is governed

by the Muslim Brotherhood, while 22 percent said the aid should continue.

“President Mohamed Morsi needs to acknowledge the deep and long-standing problem of sectarian violence in Egypt and take decisive steps to address it before it escalates further,” said Nadim Houry, deputy director for the North Africa and Middle East program at Human Rights Watch.

In a statement, Houry also called on the Egyptian gov-

ernment to reform laws that discriminate against Christians' right to worship.

Egypt's new constitution, which took effect in December 2012, explicitly recognizes the right of Christians to have their own places of worship. But the Morsi government has not erased an earlier law that requires Christians, and no other religious group, to obtain a presidential decree in order to build a new church.

## Christian movie review: Home Run

### A pastor's perspective

Rev. Chad Bailey, Nevada, MO - The movie Home Run opened in theatres the weekend of April 19th.

Home Run is not just another sports movie; it is a riveting, heartfelt film on the life of Cory Brand, a former All Star baseball player whose life was caught up in addiction.

Home run offers hope and freedom through the power of God. This movie is a must see for everyone. Dealing with so many symptoms of addiction, the only place Cory could turn to was God!

Cory finds help in the twelve step program of Celebrate Recovery. Very resistant at first, fighting his manager, fighting loved ones around him and ultimately fighting himself, Cory finally gives in and attends the



Scott Elrod plays all-star Baseball player Cory Brand in Home Run. Photo courtesy of HomeRunTheMovie.com

meetings.

At the same time his manager signs him up to coach his nephews' baseball team, to re-

deem his character.

While coaching the team he makes another life-changing discovery about his past.

His life literally unravels and, at the bottom of the barrel, God begins to put the pieces together.

Trusting his life to Christ Cory finds freedom, redemption and a new life!

Home Run will challenge you to believe, and accept the fact that God ultimately desires good for your life.

As a Pastor I recommend you watch Home Run, take a friend or neighbor who might be struggling and pray how God could change your life as well as the ones who go with you.

Chad Bailey is the pastor of Pine Street Baptist Church in Nevada, MO

## Jackie Robinson's missing faith '42' movie leaves out an important fact

USA TODAY Eric Metaxas A new film about Jackie Robinson, titled 42 -- the number he wore during his historic career -- tells the triumphant story of how the Civil Rights icon integrated professional baseball by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. But there's a mysterious hole at the center of this otherwise worthy film.

The man who chose Robinson for his role, and masterminded the whole affair, was Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey, played by Harrison Ford. In their initial meeting, the cigar-chomping Rickey makes it clear that whoever will be the first African American in major league baseball will be viciously attacked, verbally and physically. So Rickey famously says he's looking for a man "with guts enough not to fight back." He needs someone who will resist the temptation to retaliate. Robinson agrees to go along with it.

But where did Rickey get that crazy idea and why did Robinson agree? The film doesn't tell us, but the answers to these questions lie in the devout Christian faith of both men.

### Why Robinson was chosen

For starters, Rickey himself was a "Bible-thumping Methodist" who refused to attend games on Sunday. He sincerely believed it was God's will that he integrate baseball and saw it as an opportunity to intervene in the moral history of the nation, as Lincoln had done.

And Rickey chose Robinson because of the young man's faith and moral character. There were numerous other Negro League players to consider, but Rickey knew integrating the racist world of professional sports would take more than athletic ability. The attacks would be ugly, and the



In 1942 Jackie Robinson made his Major League debut as the first black player. Photo pubic domain.

press would fuel the fire. If the player chosen was goaded into retaliating, the grand experiment would be set back a decade or more.

Rickey knew he must find someone whose behavior on and off the field would be exemplary, and who believed "turning the other cheek" was not just the practical thing to do, but the right thing. In their historic meeting, to underscore the spiritual dimension of the undertaking, Rickey pulled out a book by Giovanni Papini, titled Life of Christ. He opened to the passage about the Sermon on the Mount and read it aloud.

We know that Robinson's passionate sense of justice had gotten him into trouble earlier in life. But the patient mentoring of pastor Karl Downs convinced him that Christ's command to "resist not evil" wasn't a cowardly way out, but a profoundly heroic stance.

When he met Rickey, Robinson was prepared for what lay ahead and agreed. But it was a brutally difficult undertaking. Robinson got down on his knees many nights during those first two years, asking God for the strength to continue resist-

ing the temptation to fight back, or to say something he would regret.

### Will Hollywood learn?

But the filmmakers of 42 were evidently uncomfortable with all this and simply avoided it. To put it in baseball terms, they decided to pitch around it.

Of course, Hollywood has been skittish about faith and religion since at least the late 1960s. Even when it's almost impossible to avoid, filmmakers find a way. The Johnny Cash biopic Walk the Line omitted the central role Christian faith played in how Cash overcame drug addiction. Even in 2007's Amazing Grace, about British abolitionist William Wilberforce, the story of his conversion and the huge role faith played in his political efforts is essentially left out.

And now in 42, Hollywood's done it again, check-swinging a bloop single past the infield when a fence-clearing clout -- or at least extra bases -- was easily possible.

Omitting the role of faith in this story does a serious disservice to history -- and to the memories of Robinson and Rickey. But it's also financially foolish. The recent mega-success of The Bible miniseries and the cool \$600 million earned by Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ in 2004 are just two reasons why. The audience for faith-friendly films is huge and growing.

Which brings us back to another reason Rickey did what he did. He believed bringing African Americans onto the baseball field would bring them into the stands, too, and ticket sales would increase. Which is precisely what happened.

So isn't it time Hollywood integrated faith into stories where it rightfully belongs? Why should such stories be excluded from the mainstream in a nation that's filled with people of faith? If filmmakers do the right thing -- and break the "God line" - they'll find there are countless millions who'd cheer stories like that. And who'd pay to see them too.

(Eric Metaxas is the author of Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. He writes about Jackie Robinson in his new book Seven Men and the Secret of their Greatness. This column originally appeared in USA Today.)

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# Immigration reform hits close to home for some evangelical churches

(RNS) For Southern Baptist Pastor David Uth, immigration reform became a priority after a family in his Orlando, Fla., mega church faced deportation.

Bishop Ricardo McClin says it was time to speak up when members of a Church of God congregation he oversaw stopped worshipping in Jacksonville, Fla., because they feared detention.

As Congress appears close to hammering out new immigration policy, religious leaders -- and especially evangelicals -- say personal encounters with the current system have prompted them to advocate for reform.

"We've sensed in our church this growing understanding that immigration has a face," said Uth, pastor of First Baptist Orlando. "It has a name. It has a story."

A recent poll shows white evangelicals are less supportive (at 56 percent) than other religious groups of allowing immigrants living in the U.S. illegally to become citizens. But leaders say there's been a sea change in the last couple of years as they hear about church members being detained or deported and the effects of those measures on their families.

The Evangelical Immigration Table has mounted a six-figure campaign that includes Christian radio ads, distribution of more than 100,000 bookmarks urging congregants and members of Congress to read Bible passages about "welcoming the stranger" and plans for an April 17 lobbying day in Washington.

McClin, a former district supervisor for the Tennessee-based Church of God, said a predominantly immigrant church in Jacksonville shut down after going through ups and downs in attendance by fearful worshippers.

"One Sunday there's a service, we had 80, 100 people," he recalled. "And the following Sunday there would be nobody."

"I can't pretend that everything is going to be okay because of faith," said McClin, now a pastor in Kissimmee, Fla. "Faith has to be put to work."

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, a longtime advocate for immigration reform, said personal experiences are what have driven many non-Hispanic clergy "off the fence."

"This is now a Christian issue," said Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic



Many foreign families came to the United States seeking a better life. Some of them also found a church family. Now with the threat of deportation, the families and the churches are being torn apart. Churches are looking for ways to combat the problem.

Christian Leadership Conference. "It's not a political issue. It became a Road-to-Damascus moment."

In January a broad network of churches -- including mainline Protestant, historically black, Orthodox, Catholic and evangelical and Pentecostal leaders -- issued a statement calling on Congress and the president to improve the laws. "Each day in our congrega-

tions and communities, we bear witness to the effects of a system that continues the separation of families and the exploitation, abuse, and deaths of migrants," declared Christian Churches Together in the USA.

Jim Wallis, the evangelical founder of the anti-poverty group Sojourners, said some Christians have seen a passage from the Gospel of Matthew in a new light. It includes the verse that reads: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

He said a "biblical conversion" is occurring, along with a relational one.

"When you worship with people, you get to know them and you get to know their lives and their families and their kids. and so stereotypes go away," said Wallis, author of the new book, "On God's Side:

What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned About Serving the Common Good."

And you understand who they are and that changes you." Evangelical leaders are hoping to use newfound support to galvanize Congress. Scores of pastors are meeting with legislators in their home districts and in Washington, urging them to take the "I Was A Stranger" challenge and study related Bible verses for 40 days.

Last week, Rep. Randy Hultgren, R-Ill., met with evangelical leaders at an Aurora, Ill., church. His spokesman, Josh Wessell, said Huntgren, who attends an evangelical church, committed to personally read the several weeks of Scripture and took extra bookmarks to share with members

of his congressional Bible study group in Washington.

Wessell said the congressman's primary focus has been border security but he is in an "information-gathering phase."

"He's seeking input from folks, particularly leaders in the faith community, on how to successfully balance federal immigration policy with his faith and biblical principles," Wessell said.

Beyond the biblical focus, some evangelical leaders are addressing immigration reform for strategic reasons.

While some predominantly white evangelical congregations may not have any immigrants in their pews, denominational leaders are aware that immigrants are contributing to the growth of their churches, said Matthew Soerens, U.S. church training specialist for World Relief, a founding member of the Evangelical Immigration Table.

"If you're in a denominational office, you know that," he said, "and you don't want to see the part of your church that is growing deported."

## Catholic Army chaplain receives medal of honor from Obama and possibly Sainthood from Church

WASHINGTON (RNS) A candidate for sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by President Obama Thursday (April 11) at the White House.

The Rev. Emil Kapaun, a priest who served as an Army chaplain in the Korean War, was recognized for his bravery on the battlefield and in a prisoner-of-war camp.

During battles, Kapaun would run into enemy fire to save wounded Americans or comfort the dying. When he was captured and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp, he defied the guards in order to care for other soldiers, physically and spiritually, until he died in 1951.

"Father Kapaun has been called a shepherd in combat boots," Obama said. "His fellow soldiers, who felt his grace and his mercy, called him a saint -- a blessing from God -- I can't imagine a better example for all of us."

Obama presented the medal to Ray Kapaun, Emil Kapaun's nephew.

Several POWs who survived the camp also attended the White House ceremony. Ray Kapaun said that though he never knew his uncle, their stories have brought Emil Kapaun to life for him.

"If not for these men, I may not have had such a lifelong personal relationship with my uncle," Ray Kapaun said. "I thank them dearly and honor

them today for having the strength to survive."

The POWs who survived the camp have been petitioning for the past 60 years to have Kapaun awarded the military's highest honor. The Rev. John Hotze, who began the investigation for Kapaun's sainthood in the Catholic Church, said the medal was a "long deserved recognition to his service to his fellow soldiers."

In 1993, Kapaun was declared a "Servant of God," the first step towards sainthood in the Catholic Church. For Kapaun to reach canonization, the Vatican must find proof of two miracles attributed to Kapaun's intercession.

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# Religion in Society

## Muslim leaders: We stand against terrorism

WASHINGTON (RNS) by Kevin Eckstrom American Muslim leaders said they stand against terrorism committed in the name of Islam, trying to distance themselves from the suspects in the Boston Marathon bombings who were identified as Muslims with ties to Chechnya.

"We will never allow ourselves to be hijacked by this attempt, and we will not allow the perception to be that there is any religion in the world that condones the taking of innocent life," said Nihad Awad, national executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

As the manhunt intensified in and around Boston, Muslim leaders convened a press conference Friday (April 19) to denounce the attacks and to urge the media not to link their faith with violent extremism.

Authorities say brothers Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, 19, and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, planted the bombs at the Boston Marathon on Monday before going on a deadly rampage across the city in the early hours of Friday morning. The older Tsarnaev

was killed in an exchange of gunfire with police while his younger brother fled.

Officials say the Tsarnaev family is originally from Chechnya, a restive region whose civil war with Russia has spawned waves of extremists. It remains unclear, however, whether the Tsarnaev brothers identified as militants for Islam.

Imam Benjamin Abdul-Haqq of Washington's Masjid Muhammad mosque, said identifying as a Muslim is different from acting like one.

"Just because they say they're Muslim doesn't make them Muslim," Abdul-Haqq said at the press conference convened by CAIR and other leading Muslim groups. "These are criminal acts, not religious acts."

American Muslim leaders have gone to great lengths to stress that their religion does not condone violence and that terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam contradict the faith. Muslim groups appealed to Americans not to rush to judgment and not to lash out at innocent people.

"Every faith has within it he-



Imam Mohamed Magid of the Islamic Society of North America said Muslim Americans should not be held responsible for the acts of other militant Muslims. RNS photo by Kevin Eckstrom



retical elements, and unfortunately some young people will listen to those elements," said CAIR spokesman Corey Saylor. "What you're looking at now is a force that is pushing back against that loudly and clearly."

The Muslim leaders from CAIR, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Islamic Society of North America and

other groups expressed frustration that they are once again being forced to defend their faith against the actions of extremists.

"As a Muslim American community, we should not be held accountable for the acts of any individual," said Imam Mohamed Magid, president of the Islamic Society of North America.

## Home School Family

Continued from front page.

ends at least with teaching the children," Uwe Romeike says in a video produced by the Home School Legal Defense Association, the Christian organization providing the family's legal support.

Home-schooling families in Europe have become a cause celebre for some U.S. conservatives. The Arizona-based Alliance Defending Freedom is working with two Swedish home-schooling families, including Christer and Annie Johansson, who lost custody of 11-year-old Domenic when they refused to enroll him in public school. The Romeike case is unusual in a system backlogged with people trying to escape violence and persecution. The Romeikes are comparatively well off, and come from a country that hosts more than twice as many refugees as the U.S.

But because they home-schooled their five children (a sixth was born in Tennessee), they faced high fines and tension with local authorities. At one point, police forcibly corralled the oldest children into a van and delivered them to school.

"That is persecution," said Mike Donnelly, a lawyer with the Home School Legal Defense Association.

In a Board of Immigration Appeals decision last year, lawyers arguing for the U.S. Department of Justice said the family wasn't targeted because of their faith -- any parent who doesn't enroll a child in school faces the same consequences.

"By mandatory schooling we try to ensure extremely

high standards of learning for all of our children," said Stefan Messerer, a spokesman at the German embassy in Washington.

Uwe Romeike said in 2010 that his family only started using the religious freedom argument when they applied for asylum. The primary reason his family home-schools, he said, is to avoid bullying.

Talk show host Glenn Beck pledged \$50,000 to support the family, and warned last month that the case is a bellwether for religious liberty.

"When America says you don't have the fundamental right to raise your children up to the Lord as the way you see fit ... we are no longer Americans," he said.

Most Germans who home-school, many of whom are Christians, do so in secret. It's estimated that hundreds or thousands of German children are home-schooled, according to interviews with advocates and lawyers.

"There are new cases cropping up all the time," said Jürgen Dudek, a Christian home-schooling father of eight. His family, one of just a few that is open about home schooling, faces a near-constant cycle of fines and court appearances.

Dudek spoke last week at a homeschooling conference in Minnesota, and plans to attend the Romeikes' hearing. Even if the Romeikes win, he said, his family will remain in Germany.

"We wouldn't want (the German government) to be triumphant in ousting the Dudek family," he said.

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# Boy Scout proposal fails to garner support from groups

## Conservatives and liberal religious leaders are not happy

By ADELE M. BANKS (RNS) Conservative and liberal religious leaders may not agree on much, but both are expressing displeasure with the Boy Scouts’ proposal to accept gay members but reject gay leaders.

The Boy Scouts of America released its draft proposal on Friday (April 19) that will be voted on at its annual meeting in May.

“No youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone,” reads the proposed resolution, which also notes that the Scouts “will maintain the current membership policy for all adult leaders of the Boy Scouts of America.”

Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee, told Baptist Press that he supports a “no” vote.

“Though this resolution is more acceptable to those who hold a biblical form of moral-

ity than what was being considered before, we would still prefer no change in the policy,” he said.

Scouting officials had earlier proposed dropping the gay ban for both adults and children, but then reconsidered after massive resistance from religious groups and conservatives.

The policy shift would leave intact the Scouts’ ban on atheists and other nonbelievers, who decline to say the Boy Scout Oath because it begins: “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law.”

The Rev. Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, called the proposed resolution “a step in the right direction,” but criticized its decision on leadership.

“It is abhorrent to continue to discriminate against scout leaders,” he said.

Leaders of Scouting groups

sponsored by religious organizations, including Mormons, United Methodists and Catholics, said their groups are mulling the Scout proposal.

According to the BSA, religious organizations comprise 70 percent of its sponsoring organizations. Mormons, Methodists and Catholics -- the three largest groups -- sponsored more than 1 million of the 2.6 million Scouts in 2011.

The Religious Relationships Task Force unanimously requested that the Scouts postpone a possible removal of the ban on gay members and leaders so they would have more time to consider it.

R. Chip Turner, national chairman of the task force, said his group did not have an official statement on the new proposal.

“As you might imagine, there’s a variety of opinions among our faith groups,” he said.

# The Great Passion Play

take others to see it for the first time. Jackie Scott, who has seen the play many times said, “One of my favorite things is to take a first-time visitor to experience the play. Seeing it once again through their eyes brings back the excitement and thrill of the experience.”

While the play itself is certainly worth the trip to Eureka Springs, there is much more to experience on the grounds during the day prior to the evening performance of the Great Passion Play.

The “Christ of the Ozarks” statue, overlooking Eureka Springs since 1967 is being restored to it’s original splendor. The group is seeking donors to help with the restoration project. For a tax-deductible \$10 gift you can light the statue for one night as a memorial to a person or organization.

Other adventures await you on the grounds of the Great Passion Play. You will meet “David the Shepherd” and see a demonstration of a sling shot, like the ones used during biblical times.

“The Parable of the Potter” features a live potter creating a vessel on his wheel. As he does he shares the story of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who God sent to the Potter’s House to learn a lesson. The story can best be described as a loving reminder that, no matter what we feel our faults and failures may be, and no matter how many regrets we may have, God the Father has not given up on us and He will never throw us away. You will be impacted by the fact that God is patiently re-working and making us into his unique masterpiece. “I personally, have seen this presentation several times and never managed to make it through without shedding some tears,” Scott said.

Another exhibit on the grounds is one of the only full-sized replicas of the Tabernacle of Moses in the world. You can enjoy an in-depth teaching of the tabernacle and it’s many symbolic meanings each day at 10 AM.

A large section of the grounds is taken up with the “Holy Land,” a historically accurate replica of sites in Israel.

The Bible History exhibit reminds us of the sacrifice Christians have made down through the ages - and, in some places, even to this day - to preserve the written word of the scriptures. The Sacred Arts Museum has beautifully restored and preserved artistic treasures to enjoy.

You may also want to catch a buffet dinner and concert with the Williamsons before the Monday evening performance.

New this year are back stage tours and guests being a part of the production.

This is one experience the whole family will enjoy and remember for years to come. According to Butler, “We’re more than play, we are a spiritual experience.”

You can find out more about the Great Passion Play and all the other attractions on their



Christ of the Ozarks has been watching over Eureka Springs Ark. for nearly 50 years. The statue is 67 feet tall and 65 feet wide. A fund raising drive is currently underway to restore the monument from weather damage.

web site at [www.greatpassion-play.org](http://www.greatpassion-play.org). See their site for a complete schedule of events, to purchase tickets or products,

to inquire about group discounts and tours or to donate to this Christian ministry.

## MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT ....

# Marriages By Design

Over the last couple of decades we have seen the divorce rate increase by leaps and bounds. Additionally, more and more couples are choosing to live together to test the waters of whether they can co-habitat as a future married couple. Surprisingly enough, these situations are as common for people in the church as they are for those who aren’t in the church.

**Marriages by Design (MBD)** was started about 12 years ago by Todd Carter, and Andrea Blackwood Carter, as a result of these trends. “Twelve years ago we started the MBD ministry as a class in our local church and we had two other couples as partners,” Andrea said. “The basis was to inform couples how important their marriage is to God, how to honor Him with it and have a great, fun marriage. We have enjoyed great success over the last decade and have helped many couples to not only remain married by drawing closer together.”

Over the years MBD has experienced some changes and our original partners have been led to do other things, so Todd and Andrea carry on MBD, in other ways. According to Todd “God birthed a desire in our hearts to help couples know what their roles are as a husband and a wife based on what God’s word says.” “We also try to help those who aren’t married yet, or who are living together, to understand how important marriage is to God. God wants to minister to everyone.”

Andrea relates how they refer to themselves as “fellow strugglers” because they are no different than anyone else; they have just learned to let God control our relationship. Like most couples that have been married any length of time, the Carters have a lot of life experiences in which we have learned great lessons and gained Godly wisdom. They have used the experiences as incentive for growth in their marriage and their relationship with the Lord.

“Our ministry is growing because God is leading us every step of the way by giving the boldness to be transparent in sharing our experiences as we speak into the lives of many men and women. God has given us a passion for helping couples learn that every answer to their struggles are in God’s word. We teach them that their help is only through God. They need to know that God takes them from where they are right now and moves them to a better relationship with Him and ultimately a great relationship with each other. We do make it clear that it depends on their choices! We have encountered so many hurting, desperate couples that just need to know how much Jesus loves them and wants their lives to be lived to the fullest and happy,” Andrea said.

“We have asked God to take MBD and use it in whatever way He sees fit. As God opens doors, we are walking in and the journey is absolutely fabulous. The reward of seeing husbands and wives make a complete heart change and totally sense the Lord is absolutely amazing. Does it mean all their problems are gone? Or that life is just rosy? No, but they know how to change the outcome to honor God. We love seeing the joy and restoration in their lives,” Todd shared.

**Marriages by Design** provides Life Coaching, mentoring, training for churches, and speakers for marriage seminars and classes. They also host their own seminars in Missouri. The Carters were recently licensed as ministers thru Acts Ministries in Springfield, MO..

The Carters are available to minister to your church or group. For more information or to book a marriage seminar visit their web site [www.marriagesbydesign.com](http://www.marriagesbydesign.com).



**Good marriages are not automatic. The old cliché, “All we need is love,” is really not true. Strong marriages need to be cultivated with purpose. Marriage seminars like Marriages By Design can be a critical tool for many couples - even if they are not experiencing problems currently.**

**“We have to learn to let God control our relationships.”**



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# Pope Francis’ preaching style is low-key

Francis celebrates a 7 am Mass every morning in the Casa Santa Marta chapel at the Vatican guesthouse

## Pope Speak

*Some choice nuggets from Pope Francis’ morning homilies:*

“If our heart is closed, if our heart is made of stone, then the stones will end up in our hands, and we will be ready to throw them at someone.”

“Sometimes in our life tears are the glasses to see Jesus.”

“In order to solve their problems, many people resort to fortune tellers and tarot cards. But only Jesus saves and we must bear witness to this! He is the only one.”

“Triumphalism” is ‘a great temptation’ for Christians. It is a temptation that even the Apostles had. ... Triumphalism is not of the Lord. ... The Lord teaches that in life not everything is magical, that triumphalism is not Christian.”

“The age of martyrs is not yet over, even today we can say, in truth, that the Church has more martyrs now than during the first centuries.”

“When the church doesn’t empower the laity it is “not the mother, but the babysitter, that takes care of the baby – to put the baby to sleep. It is a church dormant.”

“Christians don’t believe in “an ‘all over the place’ – god, a ‘god-spray’ so to speak, who is a little bit everywhere but who no-one really knows anything about ... We believe in persons, and when we talk to God we talk to Persons.”

“The ideologues falsify the gospel. Every ideological interpretation, wherever it comes from ... is a falsification of the gospel. And these ideologues, as we have seen in the history of the church, end up being intellectuals without talent, ethicists without goodness and let us not so much as mention beauty, of which they understand nothing.”



As Pope, Francis can command world-wide attention when he speaks, however he has chosen to present morning homilies in a much more private setting - the chapel of the Vatican’s guesthouse.

VATICAN CITY (RNS) When you're the pope, few things matter as much as what you say and, especially, where you say it.

From the pulpit of St. Peter's Basilica or an outdoor altar erected in St. Peter's Square, popes can command global media attention. Pope Francis, however, has settled in with a smaller congregation for his homilies that's more in keeping with his low-key style.

Pope Francis issued a powerful call for the protection of the environment and of society's most vulnerable people during his formal installation Mass at the Vatican, while qualifying his papal power as a "service" to the church and to humanity. Every day at 7 a.m., Francis celebrates Mass in the chapel of the Casa Santa Marta, the Vatican's hotel-style guesthouse

he has chosen to call home instead of the luxurious papal apartments. His brief, colorful homilies are delivered to small groups of Vatican workers, from policemen to doctors and bank employees.

Often quoting anecdotes from his time as a pastor and archbishop in Buenos Aires, Francis has used his morning homilies to offer spiritual reflections in an accessible, down-to-earth style – a far cry from the lengthy and highly intellectual public homilies of his predecessors.

According to the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, Francis regularly speaks off the cuff at Santa Marta, without any prepared text.

It is unclear whether these homilies are official papal texts; in fact, they are not published on the Vatican website.

But Vatican Radio and L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's semiofficial newspaper, have been reporting on them regularly, publishing extracts of Francis' texts.

Their recurrent themes – the risks of gossip and slander among Christians, the virtue of meekness, the threats of the

devil – offer an insight into the pope's main concerns, framed in simple imagery that a parish priest might use. The impression is reinforced by frequent photos of Francis sitting in prayer in the back seats at the end of the Mass.

The pope's morning homilies are "fascinating, a kind of mini-Magisterium," according to John Thavis, a former Rome bureau chief for Catholic News Service and a frequent Vatican commentator. "They seem designed to provide food for thought at a very accessible level."

In some cases, though, it is possible to find hints on how Francis might handle the bigger challenges he faces as pope.

On April 9, talking about gossiping and criticizing others as "temptations of the evil one who does not want the Spirit to come to us and bring about peace and meekness," he advised a course of action to deal with a community's internal problems: "Keep quiet, and if you have something to say, say it to the interested parties, to those who can remedy the situation ... not to the entire neighborhood."

On April 16, Pope Benedict

XVI's 86th birthday, Francis discussed the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), whose modernizing reforms became a point of contention after his predecessor tried to reconcile with ultra-conservative traditionalists who reject the council's reforms. Francis criticized "those who wish to turn the clock back" within the church.

As these homilies begin to draw more attention, there is a growing clamor for the Vatican to make them more fully available and explain whether they are part of the pope's official teaching.

"We choose not to believe that the full transcripts are being saved only for for-profit publication," wrote the conservative blog Rorate Coeli, which has been highly critical of Francis' papacy.

The morning homilies at Santa Marta started on March 21, just a week after Francis' election. The first "guests" were the staff of the guesthouse itself, followed by Vatican garbage collectors and gardeners.

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**Jesus - circa 27 AD**

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## COMMENTARY: Isolated in America

### Are Americans less connected than ever before?

(RNS) By Tom Ehrich

I wonder if social isolation -- not extremist religion or Chechen roots -- explains the two brothers who set off bombs during the Boston Marathon, killing three and wounding more than 170.

The older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was quoted as saying "I don't have a single American friend, I don't understand them." One emerging theory is that, he dealt with isolation in America by seeking his heritage in Chechnya and there, some think, found purpose in violence against his unwelcoming home.

In feeling isolated, the alleged bomber isn't alone. Isolation is the new normal in America.

More than one in four Americans have no friends for sharing troubles, a recent study of social isolation found. Those who do have friends tend to have only two. Just half of Americans believe they can count on anyone outside their home for support. Less than one in 10 counts the neighbor next door as a confidant.

Researchers blame television, long commutes and long hours at work to make ends meet. Other factors include aging in place and feeling isolated among new and younger neighbors; being immigrants and non-English speakers struggling to assimilate; feeling cut off from society by illness, physical abnormalities, race, gender and sexuality.

Give credit also to rampant sexual abuse and its lifetime consequence of shame and feeling different, as well as social disruption caused by lost marriages and broken families. Unemployment tends to drive people indoors or into



Despite the social media hype, over one-quarter of Americans say they have no friends to share their life struggles with.

part-time jobs away from their usual circles.

It takes an event like the Boston bombings or recent shootings for us to see how some angry, isolated people are taking refuge in weapons, and dream of revenge.

It's a wonder that we don't have more outbreaks of rage and violence. If isolation corrodes the soul and stokes the fires of self-loathing and resentment, we shouldn't be surprised when some loners -- from bullied teens to poorly welcomed immigrants to the jobless to desperately lonely elderly -- take arms against their troubles.

It makes me sad when I see churches close their doors to protect their assets, when they could be opening themselves to the isolated, and easing the loneliness. Many social service agencies are cutting back because of funding gaps.

Yet it makes me glad when I see people banding together in women's support groups, small faith communities, lunch buddies, church choirs, cycling groups, exercise circles -- the many ways we are able to get outside ourselves.

Small steps can go a long way. For example, as our church prepared to bring gospel music legend Richard Smallwood to New York to di-

rect singers from Park Avenue Church and Marble Collegiate Church, we knew it would sell out.

Three leaders of Lifeline, our recovery ministry, bought a block of 12 tickets for residents of Greenhope Services for Women, an extraordinary residential program in East Harlem for women seeking recovery from addiction. Several attend Lifeline.

We wanted them to feel connected with a world of sobriety and sanity, to know that life offers more than just the rough times and isolation they have known.

Not just by attending a concert, of course. There are no magic bullets in addiction -- or in any of life's agonies -- and no single-shot events. "One day at a time" takes work all the time.

Few of us go to the extremes of building bombs or carrying assault rifles into schools. But the acid of isolation is still there, eating away at our social fabric.

(Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York. He is the author of "Just Wondering, Jesus" and founder of the Church Wellness Project. His website is [www.morning-walkmedia.com](http://www.morning-walkmedia.com). Follow Tom on Twitter @tomehrich.)