

New IRS rules require receipts for church donations

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New IRS rules require receipts for church donations

By Jeff Diamant

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—The next time you toss dollar bills into the church collection plate, consider asking the usher for a receipt.

New federal rules for the 2007 tax year—which took effect Jan. 1—forbid tax deductions for charitable donations unless the taxpayer can prove the donation through receipts or other official financial records.

Church giving lacks external focus, study reveals

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Church giving lacks external focus, study reveals

By **Matt Vande Bunte**

Religion News Service

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. (RNS)—An annual study of church giving shows most offerings go to activities and needs within local congregations, and activities focused beyond the congregations increasingly go unfunded as donations decline.

The authors, Sylvia and John Ronsvalle of Champaign, Ill.-based [empty tomb inc.](#), contend Christianity in the United States is becoming a “maintenance organization” that soon will have zero financial capacity for external ministry if the trends continue.

Semester missionaries merge vocational, ministerial callings

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Matt Miller
(left), a
semester
Go Now
Missions
missionary,
serves at
Greater
Good
Global
Support
Services.

Semester missionaries merge vocational, ministerial callings

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

ARLINGTON—Each week, Bryan Simpson leads a Bible study at Mitchell College in New London, Conn. At first, it was he and another person. Then someone else joined him. A third person has said he will start coming, but hasn't shown up yet.

And it doesn't matter to Simpson. He wants people to hear the gospel and study the Bible, but he's not focused on numbers. He's more concerned about discipling college students who have little knowledge of the Christian faith, helping them mature spiritually.



Matt Miller, a recent Stephen F. Austin State University graduate, explains his interest in mission in [this short video](#). (requires Windows Media Player)

People in house churches report greater satisfaction than conventional churchgoers

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People in house churches report

greater satisfaction than conventional churchgoers

By Adelle Banks

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Worshippers who attend services in independent house churches report higher levels of satisfaction than Christians in conventional church services, a new study shows.

[The Barna Group](#) interviewed more than 2,000 Americans about their experiences in traditional congregations and the nondenominational churches whose services are held in homes or other locations than a church building.

Jubilee USA urges multilateral debt relief

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Jubilee USA urges multilateral debt

relief

By Katherine Boyle

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—A coalition of religious and secular groups is working to ensure this month marks not only the beginning of a new year, but also a fresh push to eliminate the debts owed by impoverished nations.

[Jubilee USA](#) is using 2007 to advocate multilateral debt relief for poor nations, claiming they can ill afford to repay wealthy nations and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Do conservative evangelicals regret justifying Iraq war?

January 19, 2007

Posted: 1/19/07

Do conservative evangelicals regret justifying Iraq war?

By Robert Marus

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)—As the number of American soldiers killed passes

3,000 and Congress debates President Bush's latest strategy for winning the war, some Christians who supported invading Iraq in 2003 are wrestling with whether the invasion was a "just war" after all.

While most progressive evangelicals, mainline Protestant leaders and the Roman Catholic Church opposed the war prior to the March 2003 invasion, many Baptists and other conservative evangelicals justified the war in Christian theological terms.

Texas Baptist Forum

January 19, 2007

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Texas Baptist Forum

Drink to that?

The Baptist church has a dilemma—to condone or condemn the drinking of alcohol ([Jan. 8](#)). Has our lust for building bigger churches caused our pulpits to be silent on this issue?

<-- • [Jump to online-only letters below](#)

Letters are welcomed. Send them to marvknox@baptiststandard.com; 250 words maximum.



"The war in Iraq was unjust; to continue it now is criminal. There is no winning in Iraq. This was a war that should have never been fought—or won. It can't be won, and the truth is that there are no good solutions now—that's how unjust wars often turn out."

Jim Wallis

Sojourners e-mail newsletter

"The emerging Christian generation is more like the world than their predecessors. I think that shows the aggressive nature of culture. ... We do not realize how aggressive and corrosive culture is in the lives of our kids."

Gregory Kouckl

President of Stand to Reason in Signal Hill, Calif., commenting on research that shows young adults hold much more liberal views on extramarital sex, pornography, homosexuality and sexual fantasies than their elders (ABP)

"The whole 'Jesus is my boyfriend' thing is gross. Jesus is not your boyfriend. I mean, he is the lover of your soul, but he's not going to take you out on a date on a Friday night."

Connally Gilliam

Author of *Revelations of a Single Woman: Loving the Life I Didn't Expect* (The Washington Times/RNS)

In 1884, Leo Tolstoy wrote, “Then as now, it was and is quite impossible to judge by a man’s life and conduct whether he is a believer or not.” The overwhelming obstacle why people refuse to believe in Christ is not Christ himself but rather those who call themselves Christians. We must set ourselves apart, by word and deed, from worldly ways. Is having a glass of wine more important than the risk of hindering a believer or nonbeliever?

We, as a church, must choose to embrace or reject drinking. If we choose to condone it, let’s condone it publicly by putting a frozen margarita machine in our family centers. If we choose to shun drinking, let’s be bold in our belief.

On the Move

January 19, 2007

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On the Move

- **Leslie Anderson** to First Church in Whitesboro as children’s minister.
- **Martha Angell** to First Church in Amarillo as interim minister to children.
- **David Beirne** to Travis Church in Corpus Christi as pastor from Fox Avenue Church in Lewisville.
- **Paul Brand** has resigned as youth minister at First Church in Whitewright.

Global peace a growing priority for Christian groups

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Global peace a growing priority for Christian groups

By Hannah Elliott

Associated Baptist Press

DALLAS (ABP)—Worldwide, about 1.6 million people each year die due directly to violence. Violence is responsible for 14 percent of deaths among males aged 15 to 44 and 7 percent of deaths for females of the same age, the [World Health Organization](#) reports. And it's up to Christians to stop it, several groups working to promote peace around the world insist.

Steve Bostian, U.S. director of [Hope Unlimited](#), said his group's focus on investing in children in a Christ-centered way separates it from other attempts to eradicate violence among Brazil's 10 million street children. That investment in individuals rather than broad social change is a model for peace that Bostian—a former American Baptist missionary—hopes to spread.

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Time to call a mediator when focus turns from problems to personalities

January 19, 2007

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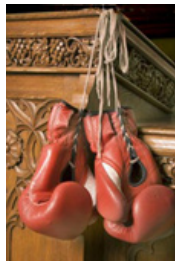
Time to call a mediator when focus turns from problems to personalities

DALLAS—When church members who disagree stop looking for solutions to problems and start focusing on personalities, it's probably time to call a mediator, said Sonny Spurger, a church mediation specialist with the [Baptist General Convention of Texas](#).

Sonny Spurger

Spurger points to five levels of conflict, identified by Speed Leas of the Alban Institute, as helpful markers for identifying how problems escalate to church fights.

- **A problem develops that needs to be solved.**



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Some people may have conflicting goals or values, and interaction may be uncomfortable. But at this point, the conflict still is problem-oriented, rather than personality-centered. If the problem is not solved at this level,

it likely will escalate to the next level where it becomes personal.

MAKING PEACE: Creating a congregational culture of peacemaking takes time

January 19, 2007

Posted: 1/19/07

MAKING PEACE: Creating a congregational culture of peacemaking takes time

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

NACOGDOCHES—Helping a church become a peaceable fellowship is a never-ending battle, Pastor Kyle Childress acknowledged. But as Christians wage peace within church, they learn skills that help them build bridges in a divided world, he added.

“It’s a round-the-clock, long-term thing,” said Childress, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches. “In the 17 years I’ve been here, one of the major challenges I consistently have had is helping people learn and practice reconciliation with one another.”

(Photo
illustration by
David Clanton)

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TBM chainsaw teams serve in Oklahoma

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TBM chainsaw teams serve in Oklahoma

By Barbara Bedrick

Texas Baptist Communications

DALLAS—Four Texas Baptist Men chainsaw teams headed to McAlester, Okla., to help residents hit hard by ice storms.

About three dozen volunteers from Harmony-Pittsburg Baptist Association, Collin Baptist Association, Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall and Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo made the trek to Oklahoma.