

Catholics paid \$615 million on abuse claims

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Catholics paid \$615 million on abuse claims

By Daniel Burke

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—The U.S. Catholic Church paid out \$615 million in costs related to sexual abuse claims in 2007, even as the number of victims coming forward fell for the third straight year, according to an annual report issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

More than \$526 million went to settlements between victims and Catholic dioceses and religious orders last year. That's an increase of 90 percent over 2006 and a new high for the U.S. church.

2nd Opinion: A microcosm of

the body of Christ

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2nd Opinion:

A microcosm of the body of Christ

When in Rome, doing as the Romans do usually doesn't involve attending an English-language Baptist congregation. For this Texan, looking for a church while living in Italy last fall required plenty of my own initiative.

Despite several false starts and only one month of Italian under my belt, I finally managed to find Rome Baptist Church near the famous Spanish Steps.

Organized in March 1963 as a mission to "serve the Americans who live in Rome," the church is now led full-time by Dave and Cat

hy Hodgdon, who moved to Rome from Colorado in 2001.

The church draws people from all walks of life and facilitates an atmosphere of openness and diversity, largely because of its heterogeneous congregation. Tourists or students like me join the church for just a few months, or even for just one Sunday.

Couple urges truce in war between faith and science

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Couple urges truce in war between faith and science

By Charles Honey

Religion News Service

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (RNS)—The poster in Deborah Haarsma’s office at Calvin College bears the bold title, “Long, long ago in galaxies far, far away”—appropriate Star Wars jargon for an astronomy professor.

It shows photos of galaxy clusters spied by Haarsma and two of her students using one of the world’s largest telescopes last summer.

Movie argues for gentler church approach to divorce

March 15, 2008

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Movie argues for gentler church approach to divorce

By David Briggs

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Divorced people no longer feel as if they are wearing a scarlet “D” on their chests when they walk into most houses of worship.

The prevalence of divorce has forced even the most conservative church leaders to grapple with the issue and explore ways to welcome people from unsuccessful marriages without giving up the ideal of a lifelong union blessed by God, church observers have noted.

DOWN HOME: A father’s love plumbs divine depths

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DOWN HOME: A father’s love plumbs divine depths

Sometimes, I think I know waaaaay too much about chick flicks and

fashion.

This is my Y-chromosome's fault.

See, I'm a daddy of daughters.

If I had produced different chromosomes and Joanna had produced boy babies, I'd probably know all about action movies, video games and the batting averages of left-handed pinch hitters in the American League.

EDITORIAL: U.S. faith swapping & relationships

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EDITORIAL: U.S. faith swapping & relationships

One word kept coming to mind as I read the new [Religious Landscape Survey](#) produced by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. I'll admit I felt guilty every time I thought that word, but I just couldn't get away from it. I said it out loud when I read that 44 percent of American adults have faith-swapped—switched religious affiliations or dropped their connections with faith altogether. And while I tried to think other thoughts, it crept back into my brain when I considered other facts, such as only one in four young adults are affiliated with any religious faith; and Protestants

comprise barely 51 percent of the population, down from two-thirds two decades ago; and 10 percent of the population are former Catholics; and almost 40 percent of American adults are married to someone from a different religion.



Promiscuity.

That's the word. I know it sounds judgmental, but I couldn't help thinking it. Americans are a religiously promiscuous people. We're movers. We change spouses, houses, jobs and communities more often than our foreparents changed tires. So, why should we expect faith—or no faith, as the case may be—would be any different?

Of course, Baptists historically have benefitted from a degree of religious promiscuity. We call it “conversion,” and our ranks have grown because we have presented a compelling reason for unbelievers to believe in Jesus and for Christian pilgrims unhappy in other sections of God's kingdom to immigrate to our shores, “through the water,” as it were. The evangelistic imperative, not to mention the Great Commission, bids us to beckon toward others.

Some Southern Baptists decry timidity on environmental issues

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Some Southern Baptists decry timidity on environmental issues

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—A group of Southern Baptists has launched a new initiative on the environment, saying that their denomination's past declarations on the issue have been "too timid."

"We believe our current denominational engagement with these issues have often been too timid, failing to produce a unified moral voice," the initiative's statement reads. "The time for timidity regarding God's creation is no more."

Faith Digest

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Faith Digest

Hinn submits records to Senate committee. After several weeks of delay, televangelist Benny Hinn has submitted a “significant amount” of financial material to a Senate committee that is investigating the finances of six prominent ministries to make sure they are complying with tax laws that apply to other nonprofit entities. Jill Gerber, a spokeswoman for the Senate Finance Committee, said ranking Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa and his staff “will evaluate whether the material responds sufficiently but are encouraged by the demonstration of cooperation.” Joyce Meyer Ministries in Fenton, Mo., already provided materials that were reviewed by Senate staff. Kenneth Copeland Ministries submitted some materials. The other three ministries—Creflo Dollar, Paula and Randy White and Bishop Eddie Long—have yet to provide financial records.

Union Seminary appoints first woman president. Serene Jones, a feminist scholar who has taught 17 years at Yale Divinity School, has been named president of Union Theological Seminary. Jones, 48, is the first woman to head the 172-year-old nondenominational seminary located in upper Manhattan and affiliated with Columbia University. Jones will begin her duties July 1 at an institution that has served as a scholarly home for such major theological figures as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Jones is an ordained minister in both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.

Faith films still not flooding big screen

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Faith films still not flooding big screen

By Kim Lawton

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly

LOS ANGELES (RNS)—This year's batch of Academy Awards nominees for Best Picture portrayed some complex moral dilemmas: A pregnant teen figuring out what to do; a lawyer in an ethical crisis; a Western saga overwhelmed by evil; a romance doomed by lies; a clash between an oil man and a greedy evangelist.

But except for the unsavory clergyman in *There Will Be Blood* and maybe the title *Atonement*, there's little explicit treatment of religion.

Mel Gibson (right)
directs Jim
Caviezel in his
portrayal of Jesus
for The Passion of
the Christ. Movie
executives have
been chasing
“Passion dollars”
since the 2004
motion picture
became a megahit
worldwide, taking
in more than half a
billion dollars.
(RNS
photo/Philippe
Antonello/Courtesy
Icon Distribution
Inc.)

What has Hobbiton to do with Jerusalem?

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What has Hobbiton to do with Jerusalem?

By Jay Smith

Howard Payne University

Bible Belt Christians have struggled long with literature and film espousing a view of reality that confronts the values of our Christian life.

Some analysts say Huckabee may be new face of the Religious Right

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Some analysts say Huckabee may be new face of the Religious Right

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

ASHINGTON (RNS)—With the race for the Republican presidential

nomination now behind him, former candidate Mike Huckabee has many possibilities ahead: Potential vice president to John McCain? GOP adviser? Another run for the White House?

Anyway, many observers note, one thing seems clear: Huckabee is now a kinder, gentler fresh face of the conservative evangelical movement, poised to follow the path laid out by Pat Robertson, who transformed his failed 1988 campaign into a powerful movement of the Religious Right.

Mike Huckabee

IN BETWEEN: Mentoring: Is someone coaching you?

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IN BETWEEN: Mentoring: Is someone coaching you?

I retired from working with our Baptist General Convention of Texas churches in March 2006. I determined more work was needed to help pastors and other church leaders because too many ministers were being terminated, and little preventive (pro-active) help was coming forth from our offices. I felt it was time for me to focus on developing leaders as a “free agent” and not as a staff person.

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Soon I found myself working with a colleague, Kerry Webb, in training ministers and laypersons as leaders, not just followers. One of the extremely interesting discoveries for the two of us was the need to build a mentoring dimension into our training. Of course, how could we mentor others unless we were committed to going through that process ourselves?

We found a wonderful lady who became our coach. Actually, she was an executive coach, formally trained in a nationally recognized coaching certification process. Later, we determined each of our participants needed to experience that same coaching.

The Bible is loaded with examples of mentoring relationships. Some were with older-to-younger models (Paul/Timothy), others were with models in which age was not a big difference (Paul/Barnabas). It appears to me that younger ministers/laypersons today seem to be more open to the Paul/Timothy model. Regardless, this kind of relationship is vital to leaders today.