

Faith Digest: England debates veils in court

September 21, 2013

England debates full-face veils in courtrooms. A senior judge in England, leading members of Parliament and human rights activists are calling for an urgent debate on the explosive issue of whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear veils when they testify in court. The call for national debate follows Judge Peter Murphy's ruling that a 22-year-old Muslim woman standing trial on charges of intimidating a witness at a north London mosque must remove her facial veil, called a niqab, when testifying so the jury can better evaluate her facial expressions. If she refuses, the woman—known only as Defendant D—could face a prison sentence for contempt of court. The judge's ruling came days after Birmingham Metropolitan College overturned its ruling that students, staff and visitors must remove face coverings. The ruling followed protests by Muslims who launched a petition against the college decision, attracting 8,000 signatures in less than 48 hours.

American remarriage rates plunge. A new analysis of federal data provided to *USA Today* shows the national remarriage rate has dropped 40 percent over the past 20 years. The analysis of data comparing 2011 with 1990 shows that in 2011, just 29 of every 1,000 divorced or widowed Americans remarried, down from 50 per 1,000 in 1990; 2011 was the most recent year available for the review. The remarriage rate has dipped for all ages, with the greatest drops among those younger than 35—a 54 percent decline among ages 20-24, and 40 percent for ages 25-34. Much of the drop is due to the rise of cohabitation and older ages for first marriage—almost age 27 for women and almost 29 for men.

Catholic school launches ecumenical institute for black pastors. A

110-year-old Catholic graduate school in San Antonio has launched an ecumenical interdisciplinary program for African-American church leaders—the first of its kind among Roman Catholic schools in the United States. The Sankofa Institute for African-American Pastoral Leadership at [Oblate School of Theology](#) welcomes students from all Christian denominations. J. Alfred Smith, professor at the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Oakland, Calif., chairs the institute's council of elders.