

Faith Digest: Violence threatens touring artifacts

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Violence threatens touring artifacts. Fighting in Mali has delayed the American tour of a unique exhibit featuring centuries-old texts and artifacts from Timbuktu, an ancient center of Islamic learning. “The Legacy of Timbuktu” was scheduled to open April 20 at the [Fort Worth Museum of Science and History](#), but curators from the International Museum of Muslim Cultures in Jackson, Miss., which is organizing the exhibit, could not travel to the Saharan city to retrieve several manuscripts and artifacts it planned to display. Instead, the Fort Worth museum will host a preview exhibit featuring 10 manuscripts and several artifacts loaned from the Mississippi museum’s permanent Timbuktu collection.

That exhibit opens June 1, while the traveling exhibit will start Jan. 1, 2015, said Okolo Rashid, executive director of the Mississippi museum. About 1 million ancient documents have been discovered in Timbuktu in recent years, providing scholars a treasure trove of ancient Islamic culture. That legacy, however, has been threatened by al-Qaida-linked extremists who last year seized control of large parts of Mali, including Timbuktu, and destroyed tens of thousands of centuries-old manuscripts.

Megachurches doing well in tough economic times. In spite of economic woes, many of the nation’s largest churches are thriving, with increased offerings and plans to hire more staff, a recent survey shows. Just 3 percent of churches with 2,000 or more attendance surveyed by [Leadership Network](#), a Dallas-based church think tank, said they were affected “very negatively” by the economy in recent years. Close to half—47 percent—said they were affected “somewhat negatively,” but one-third

said they were not affected at all. The vast majority—83 percent—of large churches expected to meet their budgets in 2012 or their current fiscal year. A majority of large churches also reported offerings during worship services were higher last year than in 2011. Even though some churches have ministries that provide other income, such as schools or wedding chapel rentals, an average of 96 percent of their budget comes from members' donations. Most megachurches surveyed spend 10 percent or more of their budget beyond their congregation on causes ranging from local soup kitchens to world missions. Another sign of economic wellbeing: Most large churches report they expect to give staff at least a 1 percent raise in the next budget cycle. Most also expect to increase staff modestly, and hardly any—just 6 percent—expect to reduce the number of staffers. The survey of 729 church leaders was released Feb. 19.

Retired pope polls well in U.S. Pope Benedict XVI never inspired the deep love and admiration enjoyed by his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, but Americans—particularly American Catholics—still look favorably upon the recently retired head of the Roman Catholic Church. A Washington Post-ABC News poll also shows nearly two in three Americans (64 percent) strongly approve of the pope's unexpected decision to retire because of his failing health. More than half (54 percent) of Americans and three-quarters of Catholic Americans look favorably upon Benedict, who retired Feb. 28. Before he died in 2005, John Paul's positive ratings were higher—67 percent among all Americans, and 87 percent of American Catholics. The poll of 1,006 adults, conducted Feb. 13-17, had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.