

ORU Accepts Donation, New Direction

Earlier this week Oral Roberts University unanimously accepted the remaining \$62 million offer made by Mart Green and his family, founders of chain stores Hobby Lobby and Mardel.



[01-17-08] On Monday Oral Roberts University (ORU) unanimously accepted the remaining \$62 million sum of an initial and conditional \$70 million offer made by the family that founded chain stores Hobby Lobby and Mardel.

"We stand together today knowing the future of ORU is strong," said Mart Green, the donating family's representative since November.

The donation was offered to the school days after ORU's former president, Richard Roberts, resigned amid a wrongful termination suit brought against him and the school by three former professors, one of which has since been reinstated.

Green said his family's proposal focuses on a new model of "shared governance" that carries forward ORU's "mission and founding vision for generations to come."

Green will assume chairmanship of a new board of trustees, which will replace ORU's board of regents. Former regents will transition to a nonvoting, newly formed board of reference.

Green will carry his family's lone vote on the board, which will be made up of nine to 22 members, beginning initially with 13 trustees.

Oral Roberts will continue as ORU's chancellor, and will also be named a lifetime trustee.

Americans Believe Marriage Unnecessary

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A recent poll discovered that a large percentage of Americans believe marriage is “unnecessary.”

A poll by Zogby International and AOL of more than 7,000 Americans 20 to 69 years of age found that 44 percent said marriage is not necessary for a life-long, fulfilling relationship according to the Associated Press (AP).

Mike McManus, president of Marriage Savers, a group that works to lower Christian divorce rates, finds the results of the survey alarming reports the AP.

“Unfortunately, the marriage message just doesn’t seem to be getting out to the public,” McManus said. “And what we have is a reflection of Hollywood morals ... in the culture.”

NAE Letter Referenced Allah As Biblical God

The National Association of Evangelicals leaders backed an apology letter to Muslims for the crusades and acknowledges Allah as the God of the Bible.



[01-16-08] Leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals have backed a controversial letter to Muslims that apologizes for the crusades and seems to acknowledge Allah as the God of the Bible.

The collaborative letter, initiated by Yale Divinity School and signed by many liberal Christian leaders, prompted strong reactions from other evangelical leaders.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary called the act “naiveté that borders on dishonesty.”

Islam expert Patrick Sookhdeo called it a “sell-out” and a “shock.” He urged those who had signed the document to withdraw their names reported.

“I find it difficult to understand how senior evangelical leaders in the West can join hands with other Christians who actually are betraying the Christian faith and their Christian brothers and sisters in the Muslim world,” he added.

Chinese Christian Bookstore Owner Released

Shi Weihan, a Chinese Christian bookstore owner, and two-dozen people associated with his case were released on bail Jan. 4. Officials decided to dismiss his charges due to “insufficient evidence.”



A Chinese Christian bookstore owner and two-dozen people associated with his case were released on bail Jan. 4, according to China Aid Association (CAA). Chinese officials have decided against a trial for Shi Weihan, dismissing

criminal charges against him.

In late November, Weihan, 37, was arrested in his bookstore near the Olympics Village in Beijing along with his younger brother and his wife, Jin Zhang, who were released after questioning, CAA said.

Weihan and the others were charged with illegal printing and distribution of Christian literature. According to Chinese law, a formal arrest warrant must be issued or the accused must be released after 37 days of administrative detention. Chinese authorities were unable to proceed with charges against Weihan due to “insufficient evidence,” CAA said.

Meanwhile, Zhou Heng, a house church leader in Xinjiang who was arrested Aug. 31 for receiving three tons of “illegally printed” Bibles, remains in jail despite being arraigned on the same charges as Weihan, CAA said.

Worship in China, which is atheist, is allowed only in party-controlled churches, and organizers of home churches face harassment, arrest and terms in labor camps or prison. Though Christian retailers can now legally operate, they are prohibited from selling Bibles.

Survey: Non-churchgoers Open to God, Closed to Church

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Among more than 1,400 non-churchgoing adults polled, 72 percent said God exists.

Tragically the same percent believe the church “is full of hypocrites,” while 44 percent agree with the statement, “Christians get on my nerves.”

Perhaps even more interesting for Christians are the study’s findings regarding openness to the message of Christianity.

Seven out of 10 non-churchgoers believe Jesus “makes a positive difference in a person’s life,” and 78 percent say they are “willing to listen” to someone share their beliefs about Christianity.

'Pirates' Movie Premiered Friday

The much anticipated 'The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything: A VeggieTales Movie' hit theaters nationwide on Friday.



(01-11-08) The much anticipated *The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything: A VeggieTales Movie* hit theaters nationwide Friday. The film—which was not previewed to newspaper movie critics—represents a remarkable turnaround for Big Idea, which went bankrupt in 2003 and was bought by Classic Media LLC, after the release of *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie*, according to *The (Nashville) Tennessean*.

After major studios turned it down, Big Idea self-financed *Jonah*, which made more than \$25 million in its theatrical run, according to . “We could barely get a meeting for *Jonah*,” Mike Nawrocki, who directed the *Pirates* movie, told the newspaper.

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But after the blockbusters *The Passion of The Christ* and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, doors began to open, Nawrocki said. Before those two films, “it was unheard of” for a studio to invest heavily in faith-based movies, he added.

Now, studios have embraced the potential of faith-based films. “If you can tell a story with a biblical world view well, I think there is a big audience for that,” Nawrocki, the voice of Larry the Cucumber, told *The Tennessean*. “In a country where 90% of the people believe God exists, you are going to strike a chord.”

In the summer of 2006, Universal Studios agreed to fund the new VeggieTales movie, which stars Larry the Cucumber, Mr. Lunt and Pa Grape (Elliot, Sedgewick and George) as three wannabe heroes.

Universal is also promoting *Pirates* heavily, which includes spots on network television and ads on billboards. “It's fun to make a movie when your house is not on the line,” Phil Vischer, co-creator of VeggieTales and the voice of Bob the Tomato, told the newspaper.

Alcohol Costs Church \$6,000

A Missouri church loses thousands in funding after the pastor refused to forbid members from alcohol consumption.



Karis Community Church in downtown Columbia, Mo., recently lost \$6,000 in funding from the Missouri Baptist Convention because the church's pastor, Kevin Larson, refuses to forbid members from drinking the occasional brew.

In December, the *Columbia Tribune* reported that the executive board of the convention voted 28-10 to cut funding for all Acts 29 churches (a church-planting network) because of what the board viewed as an abuse of Christian liberty by Acts 29 members.

Larson denounced the decision, adding, "They are shooting themselves in the foot because they are cutting ties with the most successful church-planting organization out there."

Prayer Services Held for Kenya

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Dec. 27 election—the date the country’s opposition party accused President Mwai Kibaki’s re-election a farce.

The one-hour prayer service, which was broadcast over radio and television airwaves throughout the country, also included hymns, poems and inspirational messages in an attempt to be a catalyst for peace in a nation rife with political turmoil. Since the election many believers have fled their homes and are hiding in churches and police stations across the nation, the Assemblies of God (AG) news service reported.

Since early last week—after an AG church was set on fire, killing 50 and severely burning 80—leaders of the AG have asked that all Christians join in praying for an end to the escalating violence that could be made worse by a pending million man march led by opposition leader Raila Odinga.

“What needs to be remembered is that the Assemblies of God has church members from all the major tribes, who not only live in peace, but worship together in the same congregations,” said Randy Hurst, AG World Missions’ communications director. “This is entirely a political conflict that has unfortunately inflamed tribal prejudices.”

Photo Credit: Louise Clarke

U.S. Charismatic Movement Continues Growth

A study released Monday found that slightly more than half of all Protestants in the U.S. identify themselves as charismatic or Pentecostal. This number has risen six percent in the last decade.



In the last decade there has been a steady increase in the

number of charismatic or Pentecostal Christians, revealed a new study released on Monday by The Barna Group.

The report found that slightly more than half of all Protestants in the U.S. identify themselves as charismatic or Pentecostal. In less than a decade, the number of total adults in America who claim to be charismatic or Pentecostal jumped from 30 percent to 36 percent—the same percentage of all Catholics who remarkably fit Barna's charismatic designation.

The charismatic orientation is most popular among the nonwhite population—a sector of the population that has seen explosive growth, said George Barna, founder of the Barna Group. “It is not surprising that the Pentecostal community in America has been growing—nor do we expect it to stop making headway.”

The Barna survey coincides with recent reports revealing the charismatic expression growing particularly fast in the Hispanic community, which was once known for its exclusive devotion to traditional Roman Catholicism.

Research by the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life has shown that a number of Hispanic Catholics are either leaving the Catholic Church for charismatic Protestant congregations, or are practicing a charismatic form of Catholicism.

The study included not only mainline Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ but also included four of the 10 nondenominational churches that categorize themselves as charismatic.

“We are moving toward a future in which the charismatic-fundamentalist split will be a historical footnote rather than a dividing line within the body of believers,” Barna said.

“Young Christians, in particular, have little energy for the arguments that have traditionally separated charismatics and non-charismatics. Increasing numbers of people are recognizing that there are more significant arenas in which to invest their resources.”

The Faith of England is Changing

Attendance at Church of England services fell by 20 percent from 2000 to 2006, and the denomination is now almost half the size it was a generation ago reports the Telegraph.



According to a study by Christian Research, attendance at Church of England services fell by 20 percent from 2000 to 2006, and the denomination is now almost half the size it was a generation ago reports the U. K. newspaper the *Telegraph*.

Likewise, Methodist congregations have dipped 33 percent over a 10-year period, and Baptist churches are seeing similar results.

Meanwhile, Pentecostal congregations have grown a whopping 23 percent since the new millennium, with more expected as the immigrant community expands.

“We are growing at such a fast pace that our only problem is finding enough places to worship,” says Tunji Adebayo, a property consultant for numerous Pentecostal churches told the *Telegraph*. “People tend to focus on the decline of other churches and have been largely unaware of our success. But that is beginning to change.”