

Minnesota City Halts Church Expansion Plans

✘ The City of Medina, Minnesota is trying to stop a 1,000-plus-member church from moving ahead with its building expansion plans—on its own property.

Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorneys filed a lawsuit Thursday on behalf of Woodridge Church against the city of Medina for allegedly manufacturing a new zoning ordinance to prevent the church from building a new 42,000-square foot facility.

Shortly after Woodridge Church submitted its application for the expansion, city officials placed a moratorium on church construction citywide for one year. During that time, the city created a new zoning district. The new district prohibits construction of any building over 40,000 square feet. The church's planned expansion is 42,000 square feet.

Congolese Youth Suddenly Interested in Gospel

In the past, youth in the Democratic Republic of Congo have not been altogether very responsive to the Gospel. Sam Vinton with Grace Ministries International (GMI) says, "In the past years, working with the young people, you really saw very little result. There was no enthusiasm, no excitement."

In recent months, however, that has begun to change. Nothing has happened politically or economically to make the country more hopeful. But for whatever reason, God has opened windows,

as Vinton puts it, for the Gospel to shine through.

Through GMI's work in local schools, over 100,000 have viewed the film "Godman," rendering about 18,000 professions of faith. These numbers already far surpass the expectations GMI had going in, but further reactions from students have been the real eye-opener.

"The thing that really impresses me right now—as I've read over the report sent in from what happened last year—is the additional number of students that have been brought to faith in Christ in the actual religion classes, chapels, services of the school: about 2,700 last fall semester."

More exciting is the way God is really transforming these students. Excited not only to receive but to give out the Gospel message, 66 students from four churches pulled together to raise enough money to reach a nearby island. It took 500 hours of work, but the students finally earned the \$240 they needed to go on the mission field.

The students spent four days on the island, doing house-to-house evangelism as well as conducting an outdoor meeting, which resulted in 32 more lives entering the Kingdom. By the end of it, the kids were not only overjoyed at what God had done, but confident in what He could do with them in the future.

"The important thing was to see the young people willing to go out there, spend four days out there on this island, share the Gospel, and come back and say, 'God can use us, even though we don't have very much,'" explains Vinton.

GMI is overjoyed with the transformation taking place in Bukavu, DRC, but there are still many challenges. So many people are coming to faith, that discipleship can get difficult. "I think the obstacle is: how do we get enough literature and pastors or chaplains who follow up?"

Vinton says this immediate follow-up is vital to harvesting true, new faith.

Sen. Rand Paul: End 'Welfare' to Israel

✘ Tea Party-backed Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) is calling for an end to "welfare" for Israel—and it's caused an outcry among pro-Israel supporters in the Body of Christ.

With the continued unrest in Egypt, along with concerns that the Muslim Brotherhood is working behind the scenes toward the destruction of Israel through this unrest, the notion of ending aid to Israel in this hour is stirring Zionists to action.

The debate comes in the wake of a newly released House GOP budget. Paul insists the budget falls short of the measures needed to deal with a federal deficit. Paul continues to defend stance on ending all foreign aid—including the \$3 billion the U.S. gives Israel every year—in the name of balancing the budget.

Obama Shares Intimate Details of Christian Prayer Life

✘ President Obama prayed for Egypt and shared his heart about his Christian faith at the National Prayer Breakfast on

Thursday.

Obama revealed that his mother, whose parents were Baptist and Methodist, grew up with skepticism about organized religion. That translated to few and far between church visits for the future president of the United States. Still, he credits his mother with “nagging” him constantly about values like honesty, hard work, kindness and fair play.

Obama’s earliest inspirations for a life of service? Faith leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King and the Baptist leaders, Catholic leaders like Father Theodore Hesburg, Jewish leaders like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, as well as Muslim and Hindu leaders.

Revolution in Egypt Takes Ugly Turn

✘ Although the protests started out peaceful enough, violence erupted Wednesday between government and anti-government supporters.

The violence quickly spread around the city in the form of looting and arson. There were reports of gangs of thugs supporting President Hosni Mubarak. These bands attacked reporters, foreigners, and rights workers while the army rounded up foreign journalists.

The spreading lawlessness comes at a time when Global Advance is preparing for two strategic events in the Middle East in 2011. President Jonathan Shibley was in Egypt last week when the protests started.

Attacks on Indonesian Churches Spiked in 2010, Group Says

✘ Violations of Christians' religious freedom in Indonesia jumped from 12 incidents in 2009 to 75 last year, according to a report from the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace.

Setara Institute researcher Ismail Hasani said at a press conference last week that 43 incidents involved attacks on churches and other security threats, sealing of worship venues and prohibition of activities, among other violations. Other incidents among the 75 violations included blocking churches from establishing places of worship and banning services and other religious activities.

Those involved in the violations acted primarily as members of community organizations, Hasani said.

"Most violations were committed by community groups – 70 incidents by groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which was responsible for 17 incidents, the Islamic People's Forum (FUI), which committed 11, and the Islamic Reform Movement (GARIS) which committed 10," Hasani said. "Individuals were responsible for five incidents, and the Communication Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) committed three."

Egyptian Pastor Speaks Out on Muslim Brotherhood

✘ An Egyptian-born Christian whose father remains in the Middle East is speaking boldly about the situation in his homeland.

Shaddy Soliman, pastor of Every Nation Church in Lake Mary, Fla. and co-author of *Islam and Terrorism*, is sounding the alarm about what he sees as an attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood to ultimately destroy Israel.

Hassan al-Banna, a pan-Islamist who opposed the secular tendencies in Islamic nations, formed The Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. It was he who birthed the credo, "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."

Charisma magazine caught up with Soliman in this exclusive one-on-one interview to discuss his take on the crisis in Egypt, why the U.S. shouldn't push democracy there, and what the Bible has to say about this historic event in the making.

Islamic Somali Militants Confiscate Christian Farms

✘ Bringing Muslims to Jesus is bringing a new wave of persecution in Somalia.

Members of an Islamic Somali extremist group have confiscated farm lands owned by Somali Christians and Muslims who attended Bible studies in the cities of Afgoye and Baidawa. Al-Shabaab

is the name of the group behind the persecution, International Christian Concern (ICC) reports.

It's not a one-time incident, either. The Islamists have confiscated eight farms since January 19. A Somali church leader confirmed to ICC that five of the farms were owned by Somali Christian converts from Islam and three were owned by Muslims who attended Bible study groups to learn about Christianity. Most of the landowners fled their homes and remain in hiding. There are also unconfirmed reports of additional Christian farm seizures in Dinsor and Burhakaba districts.

ECI: EU Should Prevent Middle East Radicalization

In an open letter to Baroness Catherine Ashton, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Coalition for Israel (ECI) is calling on the EU to prevent a further radicalization of the Middle East by engaging in dialogue with all the democratic forces in Egypt.

Here is the part of the text of the open letter penned by ECI Director Tomas Sandell:

“Despite its stated goals to promote democracy and human rights in the Middle East, the EU has not given sufficient support to a democratic opposition. For many years the European Commission has been accused of letting

Report: Crimes Against U.S. Churches Rising

✘ We read a lot about persecution against Christians through arrests and beatings. But church facilities themselves are also under attack, as highlighted in the New Year's Eve church bombing in Egypt.

But the problem goes well beyond Egypt—for the past two years, arsonists have attacked an average of 100 churches—and well beyond facility and personal attacks. For example, Internal theft has cost congregations an average of more than \$250,000 per incident, and almost every area of crime against Christians and their places of worship is rising.

So says a report from the Christian Security Network (CSN). "Crimes against Christian Organizations in the United States—2010" contains findings that Jeffrey Hawkins, CSN executive director, describes as "the tip of the iceberg."