

Charisma News Service

News Briefs

The following reports were released during the last month by Charisma News Service. Go to our Web site at www.charismanews.com to subscribe to the free weekday service or to access full-length versions of each day's stories. The site also includes a search engine so you can access archived news.

AUTHOR TIM LAHAYE NAMED MOST INFLUENTIAL LEADER

Tim LaHaye was named the most influential evangelical leader in the United States of the last quarter century by The Evangelical Studies Bulletin, the newsletter of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill. The quarterly publication chose LaHaye over Billy Graham, Campus Crusade for Christ's Bill Bright, Focus on the Family's James Dobson and broadcaster Pat Robertson, Religion Watch (RW) said. LaHaye was credited with popularizing creationism in the 1970s, helping translate "therapeutic ideas into an evangelical context" with books about the "Spirit-controlled temperament" and writing books that "set the stage for the rise of the Moral Majority."

COLORADO PASTOR SENTENCED TO 21 MONTHS IN PRISON

John Harris, who pastored First Assembly of God in Canon City, Colo., from 1991 to 1998, was sentenced in May to serve 21 months in federal prison for defrauding banks and other lending companies of \$556,206. The judge also sentenced Harris to five years supervised release after he serves the prison term. In addition, Harris will be required to pay \$364,802 in restitution to the victims. Harris and his wife, Linda, were

indicted last September for falsely claiming the loans were for the church. Instead the money was funneled into a secret bank account. Linda Harris, charged with one count of aiding and abetting her husband, pled guilty to wire fraud.

JIMMY SWAGGART SUED FOR ALLEGED COPYRIGHT WRONGS

Heirs of the late Finis Jennings Dake and Dake Publishing Inc. have accused Jimmy Swaggart Ministries and publishers Wolgemuth & Hyatt of copyright infringement and plagiarism. The lawsuit says that Swaggart took portions of Dake's works and published them as his own, Bloomberg News reported. The suit also claims that in some instances Swaggart acknowledged Dake's authorship but did not seek a license to use the passages. Filed at the end of May, the suit says that Swaggart and his publisher had "wrongfully taken and used plaintiff's proprietary works for their own benefit and profit."

PENTECOSTAL PASTOR MURDERED IN MEXICO

A Pentecostal pastor who was run out of his town was found murdered in April in Oaxaca state in southern Mexico. Compass News said Gilberto Tomas Pizo, 48, was shot and killed as he went to pray at his church near Villa Hilalgo Yalalog. Pizo had a wife and five children. A delegation from the Oaxaca Evangelical Committee for Human Rights sent to Yalalog to investigate the pastor's death was unable to reach the area because of poor road conditions and local people's suspicion of outsiders. One newspaper said police had demonstrated "very little interest in solving the crime." Local officials said Pizo had been forced to build his church on the outskirts of town when he decided to become a Pentecostal. In recent years local Roman Catholics have engaged in persecution of Protestants in Oaxaca.

ABC LAYS OFF RELIGION REPORTER

Peggy Wehmeyer, a Christian who has covered religion for ABC

News since 1994, will leave in October as part of a cost-cutting exercise, USA Today reported. An ABC News spokesman said the network had pioneered religion coverage “and will continue to focus intensely on issues of spirituality through specials, documentaries and regular news reports across all of our news programs.” Wehmeyer was hired after World News Tonight anchor Peter Jennings lobbied for more coverage of religious issues.

SCHULLER LAUNCHES TELEMARKETING

California televangelist Robert H. Schuller, founder and pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, has turned to telemarketing, using 30-second, upbeat messages to invite listeners to watch his Hour of Power TV show or visit his Garden Grove church, The Los Angeles Times reported. Church officials say the innovative approach—which has reached more than 400,000 homes in a single week—has increased TV ratings and Sunday attendance. The campaign also triggered about 50 complaints out of 80,000 calls from people offended by the church’s marketing tactics.

CHURCH GIVING TAKES DOWNWARD TURN

Churches could face a crisis because of changing attitudes about the collection plate. According to researcher George Barna, giving to churches dropped significantly last year. Seventy percent of born-again Christians gave to the church last year, down from 84 percent in 1999. The survey also found that although 32 percent of believers said they tithed, a check of household income found that only 12 percent actually did.