

News Briefs

BUSH CAMPAIGN CRITICIZED FOR CHURCH SOLICITATION

The Bush campaign has been accused of manipulating religion for political gain. The flap started after Bush opponents got wind of an e-mail Luke Bernstein, a Bush campaign coordinator in Pennsylvania, sent out June 1. In the message Bernstein said he hoped to enlist 1,600 Pennsylvania churches to help pass out campaign information to churchgoers, encourage voter registration and serve as a gathering place for voters “friendly to President Bush,” the New York Times reported. Steve Schmidt, a campaign spokesman, said the e-mail was meant to “build the most sophisticated grass-roots presidential campaign in the country’s history,” the Times said. Critics said the message blatantly violated the separation of church and state.

SUPREME COURT DISMISSES PLEDGE CASE ON TECHNICALITY

On June 14, the Supreme Court dismissed Michael Newdow’s case challenging the constitutionality of the phrase “one nation, under God.” An atheist, Newdow sued to ban the Pledge of Allegiance from his daughter’s school, saying it violated the separation of church and state. But in their ruling, eight members of the court agreed that Newdow, who is in a custody battle with his daughter’s mother, did not have sufficient custody of the child to claim legal authority to speak for her. Several Christian groups praised the decision, but

expressed concern that the pledge remained intact because of a technicality. "Instead of settling this question once and for all, the Court has left the nation to wonder if God's name will be found unconstitutional if another challenge is brought in a procedurally correct fashion," said Focus on the Family founder James Dobson.

ROD PARSLEY LAUNCHES 'CENTER FOR MORAL CLARITY'

Pastor Rod Parsley will be touring Ohio through the month of September encouraging people to register to vote. The campaign is part of a new initiative he launched called the Center for Moral Clarity (), which is aimed at mobilizing Christians to engage in public policy issues. Senior pastor of World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio, Parsley said he wants to "be an agent of change who will help drive America into a paradigm shift that will bring us back to the discarded values of the past." Saying prayer, information and activation are the primary means he will use to shape the culture, grow healthy families and strengthen the nation's moral base, Parsley began his campaign in July, urging Christians to write their senators asking them to support the Federal Marriage Amendment.

CHRISTIANS SEEK TO DEBUNK THE DA VINCI CODE

Several Christian authors are taking on Dan Brown's best-selling novel, The Da Vinci Code, which claims Jesus Christ impregnated Mary Magdalene and married her. In Breaking the Da Vinci Code (Thomas Nelson), Dallas Theological Seminary professor Darrell Bock argues against the history presented in Brown's novel. Harvest House recently released The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code by Richard Abanes to help Christians answer questions raised in the book, a spokesman for the

company said. For similar reasons, Cook Communications released Cracking Da Vinci's Code, co-authored by James Garlow and Peter Jones. Meanwhile, the Oscar-winning duo of Ron Howard and Brian Grazer (A Beautiful Mind) recently announced plans to produce a film version of the book, which has sold more than 6 million copies.

Black Baptist Groups to Meet in Show of Unity

After more than 100 years apart, the leaders of the National Baptist Convention USA (NBC), the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America will meet in Nashville, Tenn., Jan. 23-28 to discuss issues facing the nation and their organizations, the Tennessean reported. The idea started with William J. Shaw, president of the NBC, the oldest of the four denominations. He said one of the meeting's goals is to send the message to politicians that there are Christian viewpoints besides conservative evangelical perspectives, the Tennessean said.

Movie Chain Sued Over Passion Film Sales

Mel Gibson's Icon Distribution is suing Regal Entertainment Group for at least \$40 million, claiming the nation's largest movie chain withheld revenue from The Passion of the Christ, the Associated Press (AP) said. An attorney for Icon said Regal agreed to pay Gibson's company 55 percent of the profit from the receipts, but reneged in May and offered only 34 percent, the AP said. Icon filed suit June 7. Regal, owned by Christian billionaire Philip Anschutz, would not discuss the lawsuit.

Jesus Film Mailing Under Way in California

Churches across the nation are raising money to distribute copies of the Jesus film to their communities. Recently digitally remastered and released on DVD, the Jesus film is being mailed to homes in California this month as part of a project the late Bill Bright initiated in 1992 (). Since then, almost 20 million videos have been mailed to homes across the country.