

News Briefs

SWEDISH COURT CLEARS PASTOR ACCUSED OF HATE SPEECH

Pentecostal pastor Ake Green said he is relieved that a Swedish court has cleared him of charges that he incited hatred against homosexuals when he preached a sermon in 2003 saying homosexuality was “a cancerous growth in the body of society,” Reuters news service reported. In June, Green, 63, was sentenced to one month in jail for his condemnation of homosexuality, becoming the first person ever to be convicted under Sweden’s hate-crimes legislation passed in 2002. The court ruled that there was no indication Green “used his position as a preacher as a cover for attacking homosexuals,” Reuters reported. The court added that he had the right to preach “the Bible’s categorical condemnation of homosexual relations as a sin,” even if those views were “alien to most citizens.” Green said he would continue to preach as usual, “but I won’t be dedicating so much time to this issue,” Reuters reported.

CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST CHRISTIANS ARRESTED DURING GAY EVENT

Court of Common Pleas Judge Pamela Dembe dropped all charges against four Philadelphia Christians arrested while preaching during an October OutFest gay-pride event. “We are pleased and relieved for our clients that justice has finally been done in the criminal system, and though it is apparently slow and rusty, the system still works,” said Brian Fahling, senior trial attorney for the American Family Association, which is pursuing a civil lawsuit against the City of Philadelphia and certain local officials for allegedly abusing their power. Charges against a 17-year-old girl arrested during the event also were expected to be dropped.

COMEDIAN SAYS CHRISTIANS HAVE BRAIN DISORDER

Former Politically Incorrect host Bill Maher said Christians and other religious people have a neurological disorder that stops them from thinking, WorldNet Daily reported. The remarks were made during Maher's Feb. 17 appearance on MSNBC's Scarborough Country. The host of HBO's Real Time With Bill Maher said he believed the nation was "unenlightened" because of religion. "When you look at belief in such things as do you go to heaven, is there a devil, we have more in common with [Muslim nations] Turkey and Iran and Syria than we do with European nations and Canada and nations that, yes, I would consider more enlightened than us," Maher said. He added that he was not singling out evangelicals, saying voters had rejected same-sex marriage in states such as Missouri "because people are religious. They don't have to be evangelical, but they're religious."

ALABAMA LAWMAKER ISSUES \$5,000 BIBLE-VERSE CHALLENGE

An Alabama lawmaker offered \$5,000 to anyone who could show him a Bible verse that defined marriage as between one man and one woman, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Dozens responded to state Rep. Alvin Holmes' challenge, but none offered a satisfactory response. "I got lots of answers dealing with morality, but nobody told me anything new," the Democrat from Montgomery told the AP. "It doesn't say that a husband and a wife has to be a man and a woman." Holmes issued the challenge while debating a proposed ban on same-sex marriage in Alabama. Both the House and the Senate passed the proposed constitutional amendments to prohibit same-sex marriages. But the two chambers will have to agree on the same version of the amendment before it can go before voters in a statewide referendum, the AP said.

Stephen Sumrall Resigns

Stephen Sumrall, son of LeSEA Broadcasting founder Lester Sumrall, has resigned as pastor of the church his late father

founded, The (South Bend, Ind.) Tribune reported. During a Feb. 6 service at Christian Center Church in South Bend, Ind., Stephen Sumrall announced that he was stepping down as its pastor and resigning from his post as president of LeSEA Ministries and LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry. Sumrall said he would “continue his call to ministry” as a pastor with Provident Ministries International. Sumrall’s brother, Peter, who serves as CEO of LeSEA, said his brother’s resignation came as a complete surprise and that he did not know Stephen Sumrall’s future plans. Peter Sumrall’s son, David, is to serve as the church’s interim pastor. Stephen Sumrall began holding services in an area theater Feb. 13.

Florida Pastor Scrutinized For Opulent Lifestyle

Florida pastor Clint Brown has been the focus of headlines since details from his divorce papers were publicized in Orlando news media. The recording artist and pastor of FaithWorld in Orlando has faced scrutiny for allowing his church to pay for \$500,000 and million-dollar homes for himself and his wife, Angela, who filed for divorce last year. The Orlando Sentinel reported that FaithWorld also pays for two of Brown’s seven cars, though in 2002 his income topped \$650,000. Brown has declined to comment, but church members have come to his defense, describing Brown as down-to-earth and generous.

Ralph Reed to Run for Georgia Lt. Governor

Former Christian Coalition director Ralph Reed plans to run for lieutenant governor of Georgia in the state’s 2006 election. Current Lt. Gov. Mark Taylor, a Democrat, is expected to challenge Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue in that race. Reed, 43, promised to “work tirelessly” in support of Perdue, the Associated Press (AP) reported. When Reed led the state’s Republican Party from 2002-03, Republicans elected their first governor since Reconstruction, the AP said. Both

houses of the legislature have since come under Republican control.