

News Briefs

Assemblies of God Elects New General Superintendent

George O. Wood was named general superintendent of the Assemblies of God (AG) during the denomination's 52nd General Council meeting in Indianapolis in August. Wood, who has served as the AG's general secretary since 1993, replaced Thomas Trask, who resigned in mid-July with two years remaining in his term. Wood was one of five men elected to the AG's executive leadership. L. Alton Garrison, former executive director of U.S. missions, was named assistant general superintendent; John Palmer, former executive presbyter of the North Central Region, was elected general secretary; Zollie L. Smith Jr., president of the AG's National Black Fellowship, was named executive director of U.S. missions, becoming the first African-American elected to the denomination's executive leadership team; and L. John Bueno was re-elected to serve as executive director of world missions.

Evangelical Leaders Express Support for Two-State Solution in Middle East

In a letter to President Bush published in The New York Times July 29, influential evangelical leaders urged the Bush administration to continue efforts to negotiate a two-state solution to the Middle East conflict, breaking with the exclusively pro-Israel view common among many Christians. The 34 evangelicals, including the heads of such groups as World Vision, Fuller Theological Seminary and Vineyard USA, stated they sought "to correct a serious misperception" that "all American evangelicals are opposed to a two-state solution and creation of a new Palestinian state that includes the vast majority of the West Bank." The letter added that blessing and loving people (including Jews and the present state of Israel) does not mean withholding criticism when it is warranted." John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel, told The New York Times that "Bible-believing evangelicals" would reject the letter's assertion and that his group is strongly "opposed to America pressuring Israel to give up more land to anyone for any reason."

Evangelist's Tax-Evasion Indictment Dismissed

A California judge has dismissed the tax-evasion indictment filed against evangelist Morris Cerullo in July 2005. In his Aug. 8 ruling, San Diego federal Judge Roger T. Benitez said federal prosecutors and Internal Revenue Service agents misled the grand jury on the primary legal issue in the case by not telling them that the donor's intent determines whether money given to ministers is taxable earned income or a nontaxable gift. "The grand jury asked repeatedly how to distinguish a gift from earnings," Benitez wrote in his decision. "... Yet, the prosecutor and the revenue agent witnesses failed to tell the grand jury that the donor's intent is the most critical factor." In July 2005, Cerullo was indicted for allegedly filing false tax returns between 1998 and 2000, and under-reporting his income by \$550,000 during that time. Benitez said prosecutors argued that all the money Cerullo received from preaching engagements was earned income. But the givers' intent was never determined because prosecutors didn't interview any donors.

Imprisoned Chinese House-Church Leader Admits Guilt

The prominent founder of a house-church network in southern China has reportedly admitted some level of guilt related to his prior conviction, China Aid Association (CAA) reported in August. Pastor Gong Shengliang, founder of the underground South China Church, was arrested in 2001 in Hubei Province and sentenced to death for "organizing and utilizing a cult organization to undermine law enforcement, to intentionally cause bodily injury and to commit rape." International pressure during his resulting high-profile trial commuted his sentence to life in prison. CAA said initially Gong was thought to be innocent of all the allegations. But the advocacy organization conducted an "extensive independent investigation" and was sent a letter in which Gong acknowledges some culpability.

David E. Schoch Dies

David E. Schoch, a prophetic minister who became prominent in the Latter Rain movement of the 1950s and 1960s, died July 19 in his Benbrook, Texas, home. He was 87. Schoch founded what is now known as City at the

Cross in Long Beach, Calif., and ministered around the world during 60 years of ministry. Funeral services were held in Fort Worth, Texas, July 26. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Audene; a brother, daughter, son, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

LaMar Boschman Resigns From Worship Institute

Worship leader LaMar Boschman resigned as president of and the International Worship Institute, which he and his wife founded 21 years ago, after admitting to a moral failure. "I am so deeply sorry to tell all of you that I have had an ongoing problem with ambition, pride, and coveteousness," Boschman wrote in a statement posted on the Worship Institute Web site. "My extreme narcissism has resulted in self-indulgence and a moral breakdown. I have a deep regret for the realization of how this has brought, and will continue to bring, harm and pain to those I love dearly." Steve Fry has been named president of the organizations, which offer training in worship ministry through conferences and workshops.