

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.

SAUDI ARABIA AMONG TOP RELIGIOUS-LIBERTY OFFENDERS

Saudi Arabia once again topped the U.S. State Department's list of nations that failed to respect religious liberty. Bluntly stating that "freedom of religion does not exist" in Saudi Arabia, the State Department's 2003 Report on Religious Freedom listed numerous instances of religious persecution, noting improvement in only two countries—Laos and Kazakhstan—though hostility toward minority religions still exists in both. Also criticized were Egypt, for prosecuting people who hold unorthodox religious beliefs, and Iran, for officially sanctioning discrimination against minorities, Reuters reported. The State Department also listed China, which the report said selectively cracked down on unregistered churches, and North Korea, where the State Department cited reports of executions, torture and imprisonment.

ONLY HALF OF PROTESTANT PASTORS HOLD BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

A recent study by the Barna Research Group revealed that only 51 percent of ministers, representing a random cross-section of Protestant churches, have a biblical view on six core beliefs: the accuracy of biblical teaching, the sinless nature of Jesus, the literal existence of Satan, the omnipotence and omniscience of God, salvation by grace alone and the personal responsibility to evangelize. Released in January, the survey of 601 senior pastors in seven denominational segments discovered that Southern Baptists had the highest percentage

of pastors with a biblical worldview (71 percent), while Methodists were lowest (27 percent). Among the other segments examined, 57 percent of the pastors of Baptist churches (other than Southern Baptist) had a biblical worldview, as did 51 percent of nondenominational Protestant pastors, 44 percent of pastors of charismatic or Pentecostal churches, 35 percent of pastors of black churches, and 28 percent of those leading mainline congregations.

CALIFORNIA CASINO 'REBORN' AS A CHURCH

A former Fowler, Calif., casino reopened in January to a different crowd—worshipers. Jan. 11 marked the “grand opening rebirth” of the former Vineyard Casino that has been converted to Vineyard Worship Centre, a 700-member Assemblies of God (AG) congregation. The 49,000-square-foot casino, which reportedly cost \$15.5 million to build, closed in 1997, less than a year after it opened, The Selma Enterprise reported. It was vacant for seven years before the AG provided the \$2 million to buy the property.

MINNESOTA MAN WANTS \$126,000 CHURCH DONATION BACK

A 55-year-old man is suing a Cloquet, Minn., church because it won't give back a \$126,000 donation he gave during a deep depression five years ago, the Associated Press reported. Marcel Mager said he made the anonymous donation during a time of emotional distress and thought giving the church money would ease his pain. His wife had left him two weeks before the January 1999 donation. It was nearly their entire life savings. Five months later, Mager asked for the money back, but leaders at the Cloquet Gospel Tabernacle church said no. They had already used the money for a new family ministry space. Mager sued the church in 2002, and the issue has yet to be resolved. The pastor, the Rev. Richard Doeblner, said church leaders regret the situation but don't plan on returning the donation.

Gospel Artists Honored at Annual Stellar Awards

A who's who of gospel artists were recognized at the 19th Stellar Awards held Jan. 10 in Houston. Among the honorees were Byron Cage, whose awards included Male Vocalist of the Year and CD of the Year; and Kurt Carr, who earned Song of the Year and Producer of the Year awards for "The Presence of the Lord Is Here," recorded on Cage's self-titled CD. Among the other recipients were Vickie Winans, for Artist of the Year; and Lee Williams & the Spiritual QC's, for Group/Duo of the Year.

Pauline Parham Dies

Pauline Elizabeth Holman Parham, daughter-in-law of Charles Parham, who is considered the father of the modern Pentecostal movement, died Dec. 22 at her home in Rolling Hills Estates, Calif., The Dallas Morning News reported. She was 93. Widowed after 16 years of marriage to Robert Parham, Pauline Parham went on to pastor four churches and run two Bible colleges. She was also dean of women at Christ for the Nations until 1984. She is survived by her daughter, two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Former Baptist Head Returns to Pulpit

Jailed Baptist minister Henry Lyons returned to the pulpit upon his release from a Florida prison Nov. 29. Lyons, former head of the National Baptist Convention, told the congregation at First Baptist Institutional Church in Lakeland, Fla., that he had "truly, truly repented" of his sins, The St. Petersburg Times reported. Convicted of racketeering in 1999 and sentenced to 5-1/2 years in prison, 61-year-old Lyons said he

hopes to return to his former church in St. Petersburg.

If you have a news tip for Charisma News Service, e-mail us at charisma@.