

News Briefs

T.D. Jakes Seeks Pastors' Support for New Film

Seeking to duplicate the grass-roots campaign that led to the success of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, Bishop T.D. Jakes has been promoting his new movie, *Woman, Thou Art Loosed: The Movie*, in private showings for ministers in advance of its planned nationwide release this month, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported. Starring Kimberly Elise (*The Manchurian Candidate*), the movie tells the story of a woman searching for hope in prison after a lifetime of sexual abuse, poverty and addiction. The film is rated R and features strong adult content and language. Based on Gibson's success, Jakes said, audiences are receptive to Christian-themed films that aren't sugarcoated. He has planned a dozen private showings nationwide and hopes to open the film in 500 theaters.

Group Plans Christian 'State' in South Carolina

A Christian group seeks to get groups of 12,000 people to migrate to South Carolina in hopes of creating a Christian "state" that will be governed based on the Ten Commandments, *United Press International* (UPI) reported. Cory Burrell, 28, a co-founder of , said disenchantment with the current Republican administration prompted the project. He cited legalized abortion, the removal of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama judicial building and a lack of progress in banning same-sex marriage among the group's frustrations, UPI said. Though currently has only 600 participants, Burrell said he hopes to have 50,000 to 70,000 supporters by 2016.

Watchdog Group Fights Christians' Political Speech

Christian leaders are fighting attempts by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State to stop them from mobilizing their constituents around political issues, the Washington Times reported. The watchdog group is filing complaints with the Internal Revenue Service against ministers who speak out on political issues or candidates. So far the group has filed complaints against the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Rev. Ronnie Floyd of First Baptist Church of Springdale, Ark., and Charles Street African Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston.

CHRISTIANS ENCOURAGE ACTION ON SUDAN 'GENOCIDE'

Some 35 Christian leaders issued a letter to President Bush Aug. 1 advocating his continued action on what they have called genocide in Sudan. Since February 2003, the Janjaweed Arab militia has been murdering black Muslims in the western Darfur region in what many observers say is an attempt at ethnic cleansing. A broad coalition of Christian and human-rights activists have been staging demonstrations in front of the Sudanese embassy since June. But the letter—signed by representatives from such groups as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Assemblies of God—marked many of the signatories' first response to the Darfur crisis, though most have been longtime advocates for Christians persecuted in the south. "We view this as an opportunity to reach out to Muslims in the name of Jesus," NAE President Ted Haggard said, the Washington Post reported. Congress has declared the Darfur crisis "genocide," and the United Nations threatened economic sanctions if the Sudanese government did not end the conflict by Aug. 31.

CHRISTIAN DOCTORS SUPPORT ADULT STEM-CELL RESEARCH

The Christian Medical Association (CMA) sent a letter to Congress opposing embryonic stem-cell research and asking for their support for adult stem-cell research, Agape Press reported. More than 2,000 Christian doctors signed the letter, saying adult stem-cell research already is yielding successful therapies for patients. CMA executive director Dr. David Stevens said embryonic stem-cell research would produce abnormal embryonic stem cells and would inevitably exploit women in order to acquire human eggs for cloning, the Christian news service said.

SKY ANGEL FOUNDER DIES

Robert W. Johnson, founder of the nation's only Christian satellite TV service, died Aug. 5 from heart failure. He was 66. The chairman and CEO of Naples, Dominion Video Satellite and Sky Angel, Johnson devoted nearly 25 years of his life to building up Sky Angel, which broadcasts 36 TV and radio channels. In 1980, Johnson said God gave him the vision for Sky Angel, using what was then an emerging technology known as high-power direct broadcast satellite (DBS). Johnson believed DBS was the last opportunity for Christians to control the airwaves by offering Christian programming nationwide. A veteran of the Navy, Johnson is survived by his wife of 44 years, Jeanine, a son and three daughters. Johnson's son, Robert Jr., will serve as interim leader of the company.

BUSH ASKED TO STOP SOLICITING CHURCHES FOR CAMPAIGN SUPPORT

Sixteen prominent theologians and religious leaders have asked President Bush to stop seeking church membership directories

from Republican volunteers as a way to solicit campaign support from churchgoers, the Fort Worth, Texas, Star-Telegram reported. Co-written by Baptist minister Tony Campolo and Wake Forest University religion professor James Dunn, the letter calls on Bush to "repudiate the actions of his re-election campaign, which violate a fundamental principle of our democracy," the Star-Telegram reported. Signatories include retired Texas Christian University religion professor Ron Flowers and former Southern Baptist Convention President Jimmy Allen.