

Briefly noted

News in the [May 2, 2006](#) issue

A coalition in Arkansas of community groups and religious bodies led by United Methodist pastor Stephen Copley celebrated their victory for working families April 10 when that state's governor, Mike Huckabee, signed into law a \$1.10-an-hour increase in the state minimum wage. The Arkansas coalition is an affiliate of the "Let Justice Roll" living-wage campaign. The measure was passed overwhelmingly by the 135-member state legislature. Arkansas is the first state in the South to raise its own minimum wage above the federal level of \$5.15 an hour.

Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land, joined by other Protestant spokespersons, has urged Congress to approve a bill introduced last year that would give the federal government the authority to control the manufacture, promotion and sale of tobacco products such as cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Joined at an April 5 news conference in Washington by speakers from the United Methodist Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Land said that what they were asking was not "overburdensome." It would simply level the playing field between tobacco and other products overseen by the Food and Drug Administration, he said. Clergy "who may disagree on other issues" are in agreement on FDA regulation, said Conrad Braaten, senior pastor of Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington.

Romania's Orthodox Church has welcomed a government decision to cancel a "Dracula Park" entertainment complex near Bucharest, five years after the project was initiated to take advantage of the country's vampire legend. "Our church was against this project from the beginning—we regard the fact that it has now been dropped as something normal," said Constantin Stoica, the church's spokesperson. "Although the churches weren't consulted, they made clear that the Dracula myth had nothing to do with Romanian history, and this view was shared by many historians." The decision to cancel the building contract was made after "irregularities and delays" were discovered in plans for the attraction, the government said in a statement.