

People

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

A lifetime's worth of inspirational sermons, and the man who wrote and delivered them, 79-year-old Presbyterian minister **Frederick Buechner**, were honored at a special ceremony last month at the Washington National Cathedral (Episcopal). The author of 30 books was the star of the April 5 event. "'Tell the truth,' he would say to us budding preachers. 'Tell the truth of our lives as candidly and overtly as we can,'" said Samuel T. Lloyd III, dean of the cathedral. Lloyd said that reading Buechner's guide to sermons, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale*, changed his life. "We are grounded, more honest, more aware preachers because of Fred," Lloyd said. Buechner shared two excerpts from his new book, *Secrets in the Dark*, and heard praise from writer and religion teacher Barbara Brown Taylor of Piedmont College and author Thomas G. Long, professor of preaching at Emory University. Long declared that Buechner transformed much of American preaching. Buechner ended the evening by asking for silence, to celebrate "the preciousness of this moment." He closed his eyes and arched his neck so he faced the sky as silence enveloped the room. He broke the silence with parting words from his novel about the 12th-century saint Godric. "What's lost . . ." said Buechner, taking a long pause, "is nothing to what's found."

The conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy has named as its new president the former managing editor of Prison Fellowship's BreakPoint ministry. **James Tonkowich** started work at the Washington-based group in mid-March. He succeeds Diane Knippers, who died of cancer a year ago. The institute, founded in 1981, is known for its criticism of liberal mainline Protestant denominations. J. Budziszewski, a Catholic who chairs the IRD board of directors, noted that Tonkowich, like IRD's first president, Kent Hill, is an ordained minister in a nonmainline denomination, but "is firmly committed to reforming the mainline while at the same time helping the IRD to build alliances with other groups, such as evangelicals." Ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America, Tonkowich worked for Charles Colson's Prison Fellowship from 2001 until this year.