

Briefly noted

News in the [August 22, 2006](#) issue

Wearing white vestments and later donning colored silk stoles, 12 women were ordained July 31 as deacons and priests aboard a riverboat in Pittsburgh by a group claiming that such rites are valid Roman Catholic ordinations. After the ritual, the eight who had been proclaimed priests by the group Roman Catholic Womenpriests danced and sang “We Are Chosen,” holding hands with their female bishops. More than 350 guests cheered and applauded. The Diocese of Pittsburgh declared that none of the ordinations is legitimate and that those involved have excommunicated themselves. “This is both a political and a sacramental action,” said Patricia Fresen, one of three co-consecrators. She says she was ordained a bishop in secret by an active Catholic bishop in Europe. This was the fourth rite that Womenpriests has held since 2002, and the first in the United States.

A former top director with the Internal Revenue Service has filed a complaint against the Missouri Catholic Conference, claiming that the nonprofit group broke rules against politicking in a statewide fight over embryonic stem cell research. Washington-based lawyer Marcus Owens said the Catholic group tried to intimidate Missouri politicians into returning campaign donations given by supporters of the research, according to news reports. Owens worked for the IRS for 25 years, including ten as director of the Exempt Organizations Division, says his law firm’s Web site. Several religious groups in Missouri, including the advocacy agency for the state’s four Catholic dioceses, are urging state lawmakers to reject a constitutional amendment that would protect embryonic stem cell research from efforts to ban it. Larry Webber, the conference’s executive director, said “10 to 15” lawmakers had returned campaign donations. The group will continue to fight the constitutional amendment despite Owens’s complaint, Webber added.