

Briefly noted

News in the [December 26, 2006](#) issue

The committee that interprets religious law for the Conservative Jewish movement, the centrist branch within North American Judaism, has accepted a legal opinion that allows for the ordination of gay rabbis and the blessing of same sex unions. The committee, however, also approved two other opinions that uphold the movement's current ban on both, leaving it up to local congregations and seminaries to make their own decisions about which position to follow. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, whose 25 voting members are rabbis, accepted on December 6 three of the five opinions presented. The most permissive opinion, written by Rabbis Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins and Avram Reisner, allows for the ordination of gay rabbis and the blessing of same sex unions, but retains a ban on male homosexual sex. It is not uncommon for the committee to adopt different opinions, but four of its most conservative members resigned after the debate, including Rabbi Joel Roth, whose paper was one of those accepted.

Presbyterian and Jewish leaders have promised to work toward a "renewed engagement" after the PCUSA last summer revised its policy on divesting from companies involved in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, November 29, the faith leaders said they "discussed frankly and openly our different perceptions of the situation in the [Middle East] and found some ways to begin working together in this area that has most divided us in the past." The joint statement produced by the meeting was signed by Clifton Kirkpatrick, the denomination's stated clerk, as well as top officials from three branches of Judaism: Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. No Orthodox representative was present.

The widow of an American soldier killed in Afghanistan has finally gotten what she said her husband would have wanted: a pagan religious symbol placed on his government-issued gravestone. Roberta Stewart, widow of Sergeant Patrick Stewart, saw the Wicca grave marker dedicated December 2 in a ceremony at the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Fernley. She had been engaged in a yearlong battle with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. But Nevada governor Kenny Guinn short-circuited the controversy, getting the state veterans'

affairs department to issue Stewart's gravestone with the Wicca pentacle. The state agency maintains the cemetery.