

Briefly noted: Paraguay's new president, church-property lawsuit

News in the [June 3, 2008](#) issue

World Council of Churches general secretary Samuel Kobia has congratulated Fernando Lugo, the former Catholic bishop in Paraguay known as the “bishop of the poor,” on his victory in Paraguay’s recent presidential election. “We have been moved by your statements, both during the election campaign and after being elected, that reflect the rich tradition of a Latin American Christianity that has struggled to follow Jesus amidst a reality marked by inequality and injustice,” Kobia said in a message published April 30. Lugo, who will be inaugurated August 15 for a five-year term, won with promises to redistribute income and undertake land reform. His success broke the political tradition of Paraguay, where the Colorado Party had ruled for 61 years. That party’s candidate, Blanca Ovelar, conceded defeat April 20. The Vatican opposes clergy members holding political office and had demanded that Lugo halt his pursuits. But the former bishop said he had resigned from the church and no longer must follow its laws. Lugo will be challenged by the nation’s high poverty and illiteracy rates; of the country’s 6.5 million people, 43 percent live in poverty, according to the Associated Press. Corruption is notorious in the country, and 300,000 peasant farmers without land are seeking assistance.

The Episcopal Church is suing a breakaway conservative bishop to gain control of property and assets in dispute since his California diocese seceded from the national church last year. Bishop John-David Schofield, of the Fresno-based Diocese of San Joaquin, was removed from ministry in March for leading about 30 congregations to leave the Episcopal Church and align with a South American Anglican church instead. He remains in control of diocesan property and bank accounts. Bishop Jerry Lamb, appointed to lead the diocese’s 18 or so congregations that remain loyal to the Episcopal Church, called the lawsuit “regrettable” but “necessary.”

The unofficial patron saint of those with HIV/AIDS is on the verge of canonization after Vatican officials attributed a second miracle to his intercession. The 19th-century priest Damien de Veuster, a Belgian known as Father Damien, spent more than 15 years caring for lepers on the island of Molokai in Hawaii. He died of leprosy

in 1889. Pope John Paul II declared Damien “blessed” in 1995. Statues of Damien, who is also considered the patron of Hawaii, stand in Washington, D.C., and in Honolulu.