

Briefly noted

News in the [March 23, 2004](#) issue

Catholic leaders criticized the decision March 1 by the California Supreme Court requiring Catholic Charities to pay for birth control as part of its prescription plan for employees. In a case watched nationally, the state's high court ruled 6-1 that Catholic Charities of Sacramento does not qualify for an exemption as a "religious employer" because it does not primarily employ or serve people who are of the Catholic faith. Without that exemption, the court said, Catholic Charities must abide by the state's Women's Contraception Equity Act. "We do not doubt Catholic Charities' assertion that to offer insurance coverage for prescription contraceptives to its employees would be religiously unacceptable," Associate Justice Kathryn Werdegar wrote for the majority. "Catholic Charities may, however, avoid this conflict with its religious beliefs simply by not offering coverage for prescription drugs." Catholic Charities had argued that that option caused a conflict between the law and its religious beliefs because it felt "a moral obligation" to offer prescription drug insurance. Ned Dolejsi, executive director of the California Catholic Conference, said his organization will consider an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Muslims and Sikhs in Alabama applauded a decision February 20 by the state's Department of Public Safety to abandon its policy of preventing persons from wearing head coverings in driver's license photos. "We're very delighted," said Rajinder Singh Mehta, a NASA aerospace engineer and Sikh who came to Montgomery to protest the policy. Mehta said the change brings an amicable solution to the problems raised with the agency's ban on head coverings in license photos, a policy that had been in place since last March. DPS Director Mike Coppage said persons who wear head coverings for religious or medical reasons would be allowed to keep them on for photos, provided they don't cover the face.