

Briefly noted

News in the [December 28, 2004](#) issue

A fifth Methodist body has joined an ongoing effort to foster cooperation among black and white Methodists. The little-known Union American Methodist Episcopal Church joined the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union during the commission's November 19-21 meeting in Dallas, the United Methodist News Service reported. "We were first known as the Church of Africans," said Bishop Linwood Rideout, one of three bishops of the denomination. "We are known as an invisible strand of African Methodism because our founder was never given the recognition that he deserved." His 6,000-member denomination has congregations in New England, Jamaica and Liberia.

Pope John Paul II's foreign minister warned that the war against terrorism has spread "Christianophobia" in parts of the world where Western policy is believed to be determined by Christianity. Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo issued the warning December 3 at a religious freedom conference organized by U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican James Nicholson. "It should be recognized," Lajolo said, "that the war against terrorism, even though necessary, had as one of its side effects the spread of Christianophobia in vast areas of the globe where, wrongly, Western civilization or certain political strategies of Western countries are considered to be determined by Christianity or at least not separated from it." The Vatican has asked the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to condemn "Christianophobia" along with "Islamophobia" and anti-Semitism, he said.

France's National Assembly overwhelming adopted legislation November 30 legalizing passive euthanasia. But the bill does not approach the more expansive right-to-die laws elsewhere in Europe. With 548 out of 551 lawmakers voting in favor of a broader patient-rights bill, which permits withholding life-sustaining care, political support for the law crossed party lines, though lawmakers voted for it for sharply different reasons. Three lawmakers abstained from voting. Lawmakers opposed to euthanasia said they hope the legislation will set the boundaries of what is legally permissible in medicine. But other politicians and right-to-die associations hope the legislation marks the first step toward more far-reaching reforms, including

legalizing active euthanasia, sometimes called “mercy killing.”

The Episcopal diocese of Pittsburgh, headed by Bishop Robert W. Duncan Jr., has moved to “distance” itself from its denomination’s national leadership by approving a measure that asserts local control over certain theological controversies. An amendment to the conservative diocese’s constitution states that “local determination will prevail” when diocesan leaders determine the national church has made decisions it deems “contrary to the historic faith and order of the Anglican Communion.” The amendment, passed in November, was first proposed in 2003, when some clergy and laypeople in Pittsburgh were angered by the consecration of a gay bishop and a refusal to outlaw blessings for same-sex unions.

Fueled by membership growth in Latin America, Africa and Asia, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is reporting that its membership worldwide climbed in one year by more than 1 million to 13.6 million. The evangelistic Protestant, Saturday-sabbath church, whose headquarters is in Silver Spring, Maryland, also has extensive medical and health ministries. The denomination was formally organized during an era of the mid-19th century known as one of the religious “Great Awakenings” in the U.S., but its current membership in North America represents just 8 percent of its total.