

Briefly noted

News in the [February 7, 2006](#) issue

The Florida Supreme Court has overturned that state's school-voucher program, saying it violates the Florida Constitution. But the court's decision January 5 did not address whether state money for parochial schools violates Florida's religious freedom laws. Lower state courts had ruled against the Florida Opportunity Scholarship Program as well, citing a church-state separation provision of the Florida Constitution. But the high court's decision turned on a different provision of the state's charter, one that requires "a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high-quality system of free public schools." The voucher program violates that constitutional requirement, a 5-2 majority of the court said, because it "diverts public dollars into separate private systems parallel to and in competition with the free public schools that are the sole means set out in the Constitution for the state to provide for the education of Florida's children."

Though his killing by Iraqi captors had not been officially confirmed, a memorial service was held January 14 in Jamestown, North Dakota, for civilian contractor Ronald Schulz by his congregation, St. John Lutheran Church, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Schulz, 40, an ex-marine and electrician involved in rebuilding efforts in Iraq, was taken hostage by an Iraqi insurgent group in late November, and may have been killed by his captors in December. A videotape posted on a Web site, supposedly by the Islamic Army of Iraq, showed a person being shot and killed, but his face was not shown. No way existed to verify the person's identity except that Schulz's identity card was posted on the site—circumstantial evidence that it was Schulz who was killed.

Calvin College has tapped Claudia Beversluis, the dean for instruction at Calvin, as its first woman provost after a nationwide search that attracted almost 60 nominees. If she is approved by the Calvin board of trustees this month and the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in June, Beversluis will take over for Joel Carpenter, who will end a ten-year tenure as the chief academic official at the Grand Rapids, Michigan, campus to become director of a new institute at Calvin, the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity.

More than 2,000 delegates, advisers and visitors from the 340-some Christian bodies that are members of the World Council of Churches will gather in Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 14-23 for the ninth convening of the WCC Assembly, the organization's supreme legislative body. The assembly meets every seven years, and this meeting will mark a change from standard legislative decision-making to agreement by consensus for important actions and statements. Since its formation in 1948, the WCC has held eight assemblies, the most recent in 1998 in Harare, Zimbabwe.