

Briefly noted

News in the [February 6, 2007](#) issue

A Vatican official has upheld the wholesale excommunication of hundreds of lay Catholics affiliated with dissident and reform groups by a Nebraska bishop 11 years ago. Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln issued the excommunication order in 1996. It was confirmed in a letter late last year to Bruskewitz from Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, head of the Vatican's office in charge of bishops. Bruskewitz decreed that membership in the Catholic reform movement Call to Action, Planned Parenthood and nine other groups was "always perilous to the Catholic faith." Some members of Call to Action had appealed the excommunication, which led to Re's letter. Founded in 1978, Call to Action has 53 U.S. chapters and approximately 25,000 members, according to spokesperson Nicole Sotelo. The group advocates changes in the church, including the ordination of women and the removal of celibacy requirements for priests.

Three former college students who admitted in December that they participated in burning nine churches in Alabama last February face a minimum of seven years in prison because two firefighters were injured battling a blaze at Ashby Baptist Church. Wearing orange jail jumpsuits and leg irons, Matthew Cloyd, Russell Lee Debusk and Benjamin Nathan Moseley stood before a federal judge December 20 to enter guilty pleas to conspiracy and arson charges. They are scheduled to be sentenced March 28. The trio's lawyers said their clients remain remorseful for the string of fires that one federal agent characterized as committed by "drunken college students who were basically rampaging the countryside."