

Briefly noted

News in the [March 11, 2008](#) issue

Wiley S. Drake, pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park, California, who was notified last month by the IRS that it was investigating his endorsements of Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee, has again urged his followers to pray that heavenly wrath should befall Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Americans United blew the whistle last August on Drake's backing of Huckabee on his church-affiliated radio show and in a press release distributed on church letterhead—acts that could result in loss of tax exemption. Drake appealed February 14 for followers to engage in “imprecatory prayers.” “Trying to turn God into some sort of heavenly hit man is repugnant,” said Americans United executive director Barry Lynn.

Church and aid workers were warning that the situation in Gaza by mid-February was deteriorating as Israelis and Palestinians continued to face off more than two weeks after Israel cut the electric power supply to Gaza in response to Palestinian missile launchings into Israel. “This is a very severe humanitarian crisis,” said Valentina Maggiulli, the Jerusalem local coordinator for the World Council of Churches-affiliated Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel. “There are no basic supplies and it is very cold.” Israel says it will maintain the blockade against Gaza and continue the small-scale military operations—which have killed 16 Palestinians, including one civilian, since February 4—as long as the militants from the Islamist Hamas group launch Qassam missiles. “The rockets launched into Sderot [in Israel] targeting a civilian population have to be strongly condemned. On the other hand, you have 1.2 million Gaza residents sitting in a situation where they don't have basic supplies,” said Maggiulli.