

# People

News in the [September 9, 2008](#) issue

A New Testament scholar at Vanderbilt University Divinity School has been nominated to become senior minister of New York's Riverside Church, one of the nation's most prestigious pulpits. **Brad R. Braxton** would succeed **James A. Forbes**, who served at Riverside 18 years until his retirement last year. The multiracial, interdenominational congregation near Columbia University will vote on the nomination September 14. Braxton told the *New York Times* that if installed he hopes to continue the dual legacies of "congregational care internally, and bold, courageous, prophetic action externally, for which the Riverside Church has been known now for so many years." At 39, Braxton would bring a youthful profile to the post; Forbes was 71 when he retired. Braxton previously taught at Wake Forest University Divinity School in North Carolina. Author of three books in Pauline studies, he holds a master's degree from Oxford.

**Todd Bachman**, a member of Christiania Lutheran Church in Lakeville, Minnesota, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was fatally attacked August 9 while touring the Drum Tower in Beijing. Bachman, 62, a business executive and former regent of Wartburg College in Iowa, was stabbed to death by the attacker. His wife, Barbara, underwent eight hours of surgery after being stabbed and was hospitalized in serious but stable condition. A Chinese tour guide was also injured. The assailant, a 47-year-old Chinese man, died after he leaped off the tower following the attacks. Elisabeth McCutcheon, the Bachmans' daughter and a 2004 U.S. Olympic volleyball player of Irvine, California, was with her parents at the time of the incident but was uninjured. An open letter from McCutcheon and her husband, Hugh McCutcheon, coach of the U.S. Olympic men's volleyball team, expressed thanks for the concern shown to them.

**Mazen Asbahi**, a Chicago lawyer recently appointed as the Muslim outreach director for Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign, resigned less than two weeks after taking the job. Asbahi told the campaign in an e-mail message August 4 that questions about his brief affiliation with an Islamic investment fund caused him to withdraw from his volunteer position "in order to avoid distracting from Barack

Obama's message of change." Asbahi, who was appointed to the campaign post July 26, said he agreed to serve on the board of the Dow Jones Islamic Index Fund in 2000 but resigned within weeks when he learned of allegations against another board member, an Illinois imam.

**Gradye Parsons**, elected in June to succeed Clifton Kirkpatrick as stated clerk, or top executive, of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), underwent successful open-heart surgery August 7 in Cleveland. The surgery was to repair an aortic aneurysm that was first diagnosed several years ago but had worsened in recent months, according to the Presbyterian News Service. Parsons was expected to recuperate in August at his home in Louisville, Kentucky.

The United Methodist Church's last white bishop in Zimbabwe, an ardent advocate for justice during that nation's colonial era, died August 8 in Inverness, Florida, at age 101. The election of **Ralph Edward Dodge** in 1956 as a Methodist bishop for central and southern Africa marked the only time that a U.S. Methodist missionary was given such a post in the colonial territories of Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), said the United Methodist News Service. Dodge led the church in Rhodesia for eight years before being expelled in 1964. He argued at length for racially inclusive churches and for black representation in the white-minority-led country. He was reelected while in exile to serve another four years. In 1997 he returned to Zimbabwe for the centennial celebration of the church there and received an honorary doctorate of law degree from the Methodist-supported Africa University.