

Briefly noted

News in the [December 30, 2008](#) issue

Before more than 6,000 congregants in three Sunday services November 30, the pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles apologized for using church credit cards to pay for at least \$122,000 in personal expenses and having failed to pay federal taxes for several years, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Pastor John J. Hunter, 51, has headed the prominent, politically influential congregation since 2004, when Cecil “Chip” Murray retired. Hunter, a former Seattle pastor, told the *Times* that he is working with tax officials to pay taxes, penalties and interest over 17 years and with First AME leaders to institute stricter financial accountability policies.

Vladimir Putin, the Russian leader who came to power in 1999 on the coattails of a brutal war with Chechnya, was among the first visitors to a huge new mosque, described as the largest in Europe, when it opened this fall in Chechnya’s capital, Grozny. Ramzan Kadyrov, the former breakaway republic’s strongman president, took Putin to the mosque at a time when the Russian Orthodox Church, along with the Russian government, has drawn closer to the Islamic world. “I think that not only the Chechen people and the Muslims of Chechnya can be proud of such a mosque but also all the Muslims of Russia,” Putin said in reports on Russian television. The new mosque, which can hold 10,000 worshipers and is part of a complex that includes a hotel, has minarets over 200 feet tall.