

Briefly noted

News in the [May 18, 2004](#) issue

The U.S. Supreme Court has decided not to consider an appeal of a lower court ruling that mealtime prayers at Virginia Military Institute are unconstitutional. Justice Antonin Scalia issued a strong dissent to the high court's April 26 refusal, saying the case raised key questions about church and state. "VMI has previously seen another of its traditions abolished by this court," wrote Scalia, referring to the court's 1996 decision mandating that VMI admit women. "This time, however, its cause has been ignored rather than rejected—though the consequences will be just the same." Virginia's attorney general had appealed the case after the Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last year that the suppertime prayers violated the First Amendment. Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which filed a brief in the VMI case at the appeals level, cheered the announcement. "The Constitution does not allow public schools to pressure students to pray, and this action is a reaffirmation of that important principle," said Barry Lynn, executive director of the watchdog group.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston has agreed to sell its ornate archbishop's residence and 43 surrounding acres to Boston College for nearly \$100 million, and could sell more land in two years for \$8 million more. The deal announced April 20 gives the cash-strapped archdiocese money to help finance an \$85 million settlement with victims of clergy sexual abuse. It also gives the Jesuit-run college needed room to expand. Under the deal, the Catholic-related college would acquire the archbishop's mansion, a former high school seminary, a retreat house and 43 acres in suburban Brighton for \$99.4 million. "It is good that we have been able to keep the property within the Catholic family," said Archbishop Sean O'Malley, who chose to live at the rectory of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

A survey by Barna Research Group found that Americans donated 8 percent more to nonprofit organizations in 2003 than they did in 2002. Close to two of every three households donated some money to a church, synagogue or other place of worship last year, according to the California-based polling group, which also calculated that religious giving represented 2.2 percent of donors' gross income. Barna's nationwide survey, described in a mid-April report, said that the mean

contribution of \$991 per household to all nonprofit organizations in 2002 rose to \$1,079 in 2003.