

Briefly noted

News in the [October 18, 2005](#) issue

Kathryn Wolford, president of Lutheran World Relief, visited West Africa in early September to see firsthand the effects of chronic food deficits in Niger and to offer additional assistance to partner agencies there. LWR is the overseas relief and development ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. “I am pleased to report that due to our incredible partners, our staff and our supporters, LWR was among the first aid agencies to get food distributed to severely affected communities in Niger,” Wolford said. “Even though the food crisis has faded from the headlines, it still continues and needs our constant attention,” she said. “The people who live in villages where LWR partners have been doing long-term development work fared better than others; the children were healthier and their parents were strong enough to continue working in their fields.”

After two years of acrimonious debate, the Canadian province of Ontario has said it will not permit the use of private Islamic tribunals to settle family disputes between Muslims. In a September 11 announcement that surprised both supporters and opponents of using Shari’a (sacred law), Premier Dalton McGuinty told Canadian Press that he would nix the use of all religious law in family arbitration. “I’ve come to the conclusion that the debate has gone on long enough,” McGuinty told the news agency. “There will be no Shari’a law in Ontario. There will be no religious arbitration in Ontario.” In May, the neighboring province of Quebec also rejected the use of Shari’a tribunals. McGuinty said religious arbitrations “threaten our common ground.” The move to use Shari’a in private arbitration surfaced nearly two years ago when mainly conservative Muslims demanded the same rights as Ismaili Muslims, who have used Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (CABs) since 1987, and Jews, who have operated private rabbinic courts in the province for decades.

Contrary to expectations, Baylor University regents emerged from their September 9 meeting without a new president for the 160-year-old Baptist school, and interim president Bill Underwood announced he had removed his name as a candidate for the president’s position. “I had never wanted to be the long-term

president of Baylor University. It's not a position I ever coveted," Underwood told reporters. He also said that since he had fired three high-level administrators, including provost David Lyle Jeffrey, on June 1, his first day on the job, he was a divisive candidate. Underwood had succeeded embattled president Robert Sloan, who stepped down early this year.

Once again, the House of Representatives has voted to allow religious social-service providers using federal money to discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion. The September 22 move culminated the latest in a long series of House floor fights over expanding government grants to religious social-service providers. House members voted 220-196 to add an amendment to a bill that would explicitly allow employment discrimination by religious providers in the Head Start early childhood education program. The vote came largely along party lines, with most Democrats opposed to the amendment and most Republicans in favor. Since 1972, federal law has barred Head Start providers from discriminating in their hiring practices on the basis of religion.