In the April 2012 issue:

Religion in the News

On May 2, 2008, a Muslim mob from the Indonesian village of Saleman destroyed the neighboring Christian village of Horale. The attackers burned down 120 houses, three churches, and the village school. They also destroyed 37 acres of crops. Four Christians lost their lives and 56 were injured. The surviving Christians fled into the jungle. The villagers appealed their case to the local court, claiming that the village and surrounding land was their territory, but the court ruled in favor of the Muslims. The Christians appealed their case to a provincial court, which ruled in their favor. The Muslims appealed the case to the Indonesian Supreme Court, which also ruled in favor of the Christians. The nonprofit Barnabas Fund assisted the Christians with their legal costs and has helped them to rebuild 150 homes and three churches, and it has provided other resources, including rice and electricity.—ASSIST News Service

Plan B vs. pharmacists’ consciences

In 2007 the Washington State Pharmacy Board recommended that the state require all pharmacies and pharmacists to dispense Plan B, a powerful contraceptive that can prevent conception if it is taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. The state complied. However, Judge Ronald B. Leighton blocked the state’s requirement, because it would violate the consciences of pharmacists who objected to dispensing the drug for religious reasons. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals overruled Leighton’s decision on the grounds that he had applied the wrong legal standard. The judge held an 11-day trial, and on February 22, 2012, issued his revised ruling. He pointed out that pharmacies can refuse to carry or dispense drugs for secular reasons such as an increased risk of theft and excessive paperwork, and therefore refusal for religious reasons must also be granted. However, pharmacists who refuse must refer patients to pharmacies that will dispense Plan B.—USA Today

Religion classes mandatory

Since 2008, public school students in Quebec have been required to attend the class “Ethics and Religious Culture Program.” Some Catholic parents sought to have their children exempted from the class because it would teach their children concepts that are contrary to their religious values. When the local school board turned down their request, they sued, and the issue eventually reached the Supreme Court of Canada. The court ruled against the parents. It stated that “an infringement of this right [religious freedom] cannot be established without objective proof of an interference with the observance of that practice.” The court also said that “early exposure of children to realities that differ from those of their immediate family environment is a fact of life in society,” and it “does not in itself constitute an infringement.”—Jurist
War on Christians

Boko Haram, a terrorist group with ties to Al Qaeda, has declared war on Christians in Nigeria. The group attacks the homes, churches, and businesses of Christians. On Christmas day, 2011, a suicide bomber killed 26 people who were attending services at St. Theresa’s Catholic Church in Madallah. Eighteen others died in similar attacks across the country. Father Isaac Achi from St. Theresa’s Church said, “I have personally forgiven them.”—CNN.com

Churches can meet in schools

For many years, several dozen churches in New York City have held Sunday services in space they rented from the city’s public schools. Recently, however, the city’s school board voted to stop renting space to churches for worship services. The ensuing lawsuit has seesawed its way through the courts. U.S. District Court Judge Loretta Preska ruled that churches could continue meeting in the city’s public schools, but a day later an appeals court limited her ruling to the Bronx Household of Faith, the primary church named in the lawsuit. However, on February 24, 2012, Preska ruled that as the case makes its way through the courts all churches can continue meeting in public schools unless a higher court overrules her.—New American

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Statement by a spokesperson for the Nigerian extremist group Boco Haram, which has ties to Al Qaeda, that is trying to eradicate Christians and Christianity from the northern part of the country.

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