Christian on death row

July 8, 2012, marked 1,000 days that Iranian Christian pastor Youseph Nardarkhani had spent in an Iranian prison. His crime: converting from Islam to Christianity. He was initially arrested in December 2006 but was released two weeks later. However, on October 12, 2009, he was arrested again, this time on a charge of protesting that his children were forced to study the Qur’an in school. The charge was later changed to apostasy, and he was sentenced to be executed by hanging. He has been given several opportunities to convert to Islam, but he has always refused. Nardarkhani says that he converted to Christianity as a child and never practiced Islam. Government officials later claimed that Nardarkhani was facing the death sentence for rape and extortion, not apostasy.—Baptist Press

Club can be Christian

The University of North Carolina-Greensboro has a nondiscrimination policy that requires campus student organizations to open their membership to all comers. However, it provides an exception that allows religious and political student groups to accept only members and appoint only officers who adhere to the club’s statement of beliefs. The Make Up Your Own Mind club claimed that it was a religious organization because it has a clear religious mission and requires its members to agree with its statement of beliefs. At first the university disagreed and said the Make Up Your Mind club had to allow students of all beliefs or no beliefs to join their organization. However, the Alliance Defense Fund took the university to court last February, and in a settlement the university agreed to recognize the club and clarify its policy.—CharismaNews

Circumcision ruled illegal

A German court has ruled that circumcising young boys, even for religious reasons, amounts to grievous bodily harm, even when it is done with parental consent. The reason: a child’s “fundamental right to bodily integrity” is more important than parental rights. The ruling came about when the circumcision of a four-year-old Muslim boy resulted in medical complications. The court stated that a male child’s religious freedom “would not be unduly impaired” because he could decide for himself as an adult whether to have the circumcision. The response of Jews and Muslims to the ruling was immediate and furious. One Jewish leader called it “outrageous and insensitive,” pointing out that all countries in the world respect the religious rite of circumcision.—The New York Times

Canadians help Afghans

For every 70 Afghan women who give birth, one will die, partly because the country has so few midwives. Afghan
babies are often bathed in ice cold water immediately after birth, causing many to contract pneumonia. And most Afghan mothers refuse to breast feed their babies for several days after they’re born because they think doing so is dirty.

Enter World Vision Canada (WVC), which has helped nearly 300,000 women obtain access to prenatal care and/or secure the services of a midwife. WVC is training native women to be midwives, and it's providing nutrition programs for expectant mothers and newborns. Dave Troycen, president of WVC, said, “That’s something that will not go backwards, because the women themselves are seeing more of their babies living.”—ChristianWeek

Muslims guard churches

On Sunday, July 1, radical Muslims stormed two churches in the Kenyan town of Garissa, killing 17 people and wounding more than 100. Garissa is near Kenya’s border with Somalia, and the Somali Islamist militant group Al Shabab is suspected of carrying out the attacks. In response, the following Sunday, Muslim youths and their leaders patrolled with the police during church services to help protect their Christian neighbors. Sheik Abdullahi Salat, the chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims in Garissa, condemned the attacks as contrary to the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. “We are united,” he said. “Anything that will happen to our Christian brothers will also affect us.”—The Christian Science Monitor

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“Saying that a Christian club isn’t religious is not only absurd, it also means the government is playing theologian, which it is not constitutionally permitted to do.”

Jeremy Tedesco, legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, commenting on the initial refusal by the University of North Carolina to recognize a campus Christian club as religious.

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