NOVEMBER 2013

• Religion in the News

An atheist church?
A group of atheists in London, England, started an atheist church last January called the “Sunday Assembly.” Labeling themselves “a godless congregation,” they’re sending out “missionaries” to start 30 new assemblies in Ireland, Scotland, Canada, the United States, and Australia by the end of 2013. And it’s working. Organizers boast that in the year since they started up they’ve experienced a 3,000 percent growth rate. Atheists, who have long derided organized religion, are starting up “organized nonreligion”—or, as the Salon news Web site asked, “Is It a Religion Now?”—Salon

Government baptismal permit required?
For almost 50 years, members of the Gladden Baptist Church in Salem, Missouri, baptized new members at a sandbar on Sinking Creek in Missouri’s Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR). However, recently the park started enforcing a policy that any church wishing to conduct a baptismal service had to obtain a special use permit at least two business days ahead of time. Dennis Purcell, a Sunday School teacher at the church, commented that “if the Holy Spirit is working on Sunday morning, you’re going to baptize Sunday afternoon. You may not know ahead of time.” Purcell also contacted Congressman Jason Smith, who intervened with the ONSR. ONSR superintendent William Black responded, “We have reviewed our past practice of issuing special-use
permits and determined that I have the flexibility within agency policy to allow the baptisms without a permit,” which he did. So the church can baptize new members after all!—World Net Daily

**Digital Bible reading**

A recent survey of 2,083 Americans found that 88 percent of the homes in the U.S. have at least one print version of the Bible. However, many are also accessing the Bible digitally. Forty-one percent of respondents said they read the Bible on the Internet; 29 percent search Bible verses on a cell phone; and 17 percent read an electronic version of the Bible on a Kindle or iPad. —Washington Examiner

**Sectarian prayers at council meetings**

For at least 15 years, city council meetings in Greece, New York, began with a prayer. However, two women complained that most of the prayers were offered by Christians, and the majority of them included very sectarian language. The city replied that anyone could volunteer to pray; but the women were not impressed, so they sued. The district court rejected the women’s claims and dismissed the case, but an appeals court sided with them. The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which has agreed to hear it. Supporters of the prayers argued that “neither federal courts nor legislative bodies are well suited to police the content of such prayers.” Opponents argued that “legislative bodies should focus on serving the community and stay out of the business of promoting religion.”—Fox News

**No religious headgear**

A firestorm is brewing in Quebec over a proposed Charter of Quebec Values that would ban public employees from wearing religious headgear such as Muslim scarves, Sikh turbans, and Jewish yarmulke. The proposal is sponsored by the very secular Parti Québécois, which is the current ruling party. Critics have called the charter “divisive, draconian, and even reminiscent of Vladimir Putin’s Russia.” Should it become law, the ban on religious headgear could apply to hospital employees, child-care workers, and from elementary to university school teachers. The province’s health-care establishment has registered strong opposition to the proposal, saying it would request an exemption if it should become law. Quebec’s Association of Health and Social Services polled 125 institutions across the province about the measure, and of those responding, 100 percent said the wearing of religious symbols on the job is not a problem.—Globe and Mail
**New Books**

Karl Haffner and his daughter Claire - a fifth-grader at the time - teamed up to repackage Elder Venden's simple but classic message of righteousness by faith, based on a Week of Prayer at Andrews University in 1975. In each chapter, you'll be guided through your "class work" as you learn more of what it means to be connected to God with bonds that cannot be broken.

*Are You More Spiritual Than a 5th Grader?* is a journey that is as relevant today as it was thirty-eight years ago. Some of the details have been updated and several chapters have been added, but, in essence, this book preserves the precious message that is Morris Venden's legacy: that a daily, living connection to Christ brings with it the gifts of righteousness and salvation.

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• As Quoted

“To be forced by law to forbid the wearing of religious symbols could cause problems where there aren’t any.”

—Diane Lavallée, head of Quebec’s Association of Health and Social Services, commenting on proposed legislation that would ban public employees from wearing religious scarves, turbans, and hijabs.—Globe and Mail

• Signs Special Issue

This NEW addition to the Signs of the Times® Life Matters series is just in time to meet the surging interest in healthy living.

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