JANUARY 2014

Online Communion?

What with online books, online dating, online airport check-in, and online just about everything else, why not online Communion? So thought Andy Langford, the senior pastor of Central United Methodist Church in Concord, North Carolina. His church already had streaming worship services, a webcam Bible study, and live chat counseling with a pastor. So Langford began making plans for people viewing a Communion service online to use their own crackers and grape juice as he blessed the emblems during the church service, and they could participate with the congregation in taking Communion. However, the Methodist denomination’s Council of Bishops has called for a moratorium while it studies the issue of online sacraments. After all, the word Communion itself suggests a community of people participating in each others’ presence. So if the bishops do approve online Communion, is online baptism coming next? —Wall Street Journal

Quebec court muzzles Catholic school

Loyola High School in Montreal is taking its case to the Supreme Court of Canada. The reason? The school wants to teach its world religions class from a Catholic and Jesuit point of view, and Quebec’s attorney general says it can’t. The Quebec Ministry of Education developed a secular course as part of an effort to present world religions in a cultural rather than a religious context. Loyola asked for permission to teach the course
from a Catholic perspective, but the request was denied. Thus, when teaching this particular course, teachers at Loyola or any other private religious school cannot express their religion’s views to the students in contrast to those of other religions. A lower court sided with the school, but an appeals court sided with the government. Part of the appeals court’s reasoning is that freedom of religion is a right that is accorded to individuals under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, not to corporations. That's why Loyola High School is taking its case to the Supreme Court of Canada.—Catholic Register

Canadians who identify with a religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Churches going broke

The Celebration of Praise Church in Claremont, Florida, has a membership of 1,200, a 47-acre campus, the largest auditorium in the county, and an Olympic-size swimming pool. It also has a $7 million payment that's past due—and no money to pay it. And Celebration of Praise is typical of more than 500 churches in the U.S. that filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy between 2006 and 2011. The church bond market used to be a favorite of cautious investors, but the recession turned it into what one Christian investment manager called “a black hole.” Fortunately, there’s light at the end of the tunnel. Ziegler Investment Group, which has a religion finance division, said that requests for new church construction loans at their company were up 50 percent in 2013 over 2012, and the Evangelical Christian Credit Union said their delinquencies are down.—Christian Century

Jesus statue

Bishara Shlayan, a Christian Arab living in Nazareth, wants to build a huge statue of Jesus near the traditional site (Mount Precipice) where Jesus escaped being thrown over a cliff by an angry mob (Luke 4:14–30). The proposed statue would be similar to but larger than
the Christ the Redeemer statue (pictured) that sits atop Corcovado Mountain overlooking the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Shlayan is getting encouragement for his project from both Arab Christians and some Jews, though some Jews and Muslims are displeased with the idea of a statue, because they consider it a form of idolatry. Shlayan has begun raising the funds for the statue, and he’s seeking support from both Christian churches and the Israeli government. In a chance meeting with Uzi Landau, the country’s minister of Tourism, Shlayan mentioned his project, and Landau said, “Start it, we will bless it.”—Jerusalem Post

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"This is no ordinary story. Paul Ratsara is no ordinary man."

--Mark A. Finley, assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

"I said, "'Get in the car!'" repeated the young man as he pulled his shirt away from a large gun tucked under his belt.

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• As Quoted

"Teachers are not being asked to “refute the teachings of the Catholic religion, but to refrain from expressing their opinion or belief.”

—Statement by a Quebec Court of Appeal in requiring that the province’s Ethics and Religious Culture instructional program must be taught from a secular point of view, even in private religious schools.—See Quebec court muzzles Catholic school above
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