Partnering for health in Canada

Health Partners International Canada (HPIC) is dedicated to increasing access to health care in undeveloped countries. Quebec-based HPIC partners with other health agencies to help communities transform themselves. Among them are the Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association, Consumer Health Products Canada, and the Canadian Christian Relief and Development Association. These agencies provide funding and medical products for use in undeveloped countries. HPIC has developed a 50-pound Physician Travel Pack that doctors can carry as a backpack into the most remote locations. Each travel pack provides enough medicine and other health products to treat up to 600 people, which HPIC health workers used to provide almost 1.9 million treatments in 2014.—Christian Week

A victory for religious liberty

On January 20, the United States Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Abdul Muhammad, a Muslim prisoner in Arkansas, has the right to wear a half-inch beard
in accordance with his faith. The Arkansas Department of Corrections had a policy that refused prisoners the right to wear a beard except for diagnosed dermatological problems. Eric Rassbach, deputy general counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which represented Muhammad, said, “Where government can accommodate religion, it ought to.” A number of entities supported a favorable ruling on Muhammad’s request, including the United States government, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.—Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

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**Women’s rights in Israel**

A tempest is brewing in Israel’s conservative religious community over whether women should serve in the nation’s parliament. More than 20 percent of Israeli lawmakers are women, but none are from the ultra-Orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism parties. However, some women are demanding a change. A group called “No Voice, No Vote” is boycotting the parties until they include female lawmakers. A leading figure in the movement to include women in politics is Adina
Bar-Shalom, whose father was a prominent spiritual leader of the Shas party. The controversy over Adina’s efforts has prompted the Shas party to create a women’s advisory council with her as cochair.—Yahoo! News

Religious composition of the new U.S. House and Senate

57.2% Protestant (306)
30.7% Catholic (164)
5.2% Jewish (28)
3% Mormon (16)
0.4% Muslim (2)
0.4% Buddhist (2)
Obesity rates reach historic highs in more US States

“Based on Federal data, rates of adult obesity increased in six U.S. states and fell in none last year, and in more states than ever - 20 - at least 30% of adults are obese . . . these numbers suggest the problem may be worsening despite widespread publicity about the nation's obesity epidemic. . . “ - Reuters

To meet this growing crisis Signs of the Times® has prepared a special issue of Life Matters called Lose Weight, Feel Great. It offers advice and encouragement for people who need your help.

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Women’s rights in Saudi Arabia

Ahmed Aziz Al Ghamdi, a prominent Saudi Arabian religious scholar, is raising a firestorm over his stand supporting women showing their faces in public. When a Saudi woman tweeted to him about whether a woman could post a picture of her face on social media, he responded, Yes. Within hours, 10,000 people wrote back, with responses ranging from congratulations to death threats. Al Ghamdi also
appeared with his wife—her face showing but her hair covered—on Saudi Arabia’s most popular TV talk show. It was aired from Dubai, which has more liberal standards on women’s dress than Saudi Arabia. —National Public Radio

A McDonald’s church?
Paul Di Lucca is concerned that 3 million people leave the faith every year while 70 million people eat at McDonald’s restaurants every day. And he thinks he may have an answer to declining church attendance: build a church with a McDonald’s restaurant attached. He calls it the McMass Project. Di Lucca is a creative director at the church branding agency Lux Dei Design, which is raising $1 million to build the first McDonald’s church. The money will be used for construction and to pay for the franchise. “Christianity is unable to capture modern audiences,” Di Lucca says. “There’s a lack of innovation and lack of design thinking in church communities.” He thinks a McMass church could help churches break new ground, and he’s looking for a church to partner with.—Fox News

As Quoted

“Government doesn’t get to ride roughshod over religious practices.”

—Eric Rassbach, deputy general counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, whose organization represented Arkansas prisoner Abdul Muhammad before the United States Supreme Court in a lawsuit demanding that the Arkansas prison system allow him to wear a beard in accordance with his Muslim religious beliefs.