

Current Issues Monitoring Report For the week ending January 11, 2008

Church / State Issues

There was more in the news this week about the Senate Finance Committee's probe into the finances of several high-profile, "prosperity gospel" ministries. The coverage focused on the fact that the ministers' lavish spending may be in violation of the law, but questions whether or not the government has the right to investigate. Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptists says that although he believes the teachings of the "prosperity gospel" are not found in the New Testament, he believes it's even worse to allow the government to tell churches what to do with their money. Jonathan Walton, a professor of religious studies, believes that the heads of the churches being investigated align themselves with the excesses of corporate America, saying, in effect, "If it's OK for the Donald, as CEO, to live in first class, why is it not OK for the bishop?" He says that the churches appear to want the benefits of commerce, which the government regulates, but without the oversight.

<http://www.ajc.com/opinion/content/printedition/2008/01/06/preachers0106.html>

Domestic Partner Benefits

The **California** State Supreme Court turned down an appeal and let an October ruling stand which allows registered domestic partners - same sex couples, or unmarried heterosexual couples in which one partner is at least 62 - to inherit real estate from one another without new tax assessments.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/01/04/BAR4U97BO.DTL>

Human Trafficking

FYI - Friday, January 11 is the first annual Human Trafficking Awareness day. The US Senate passed a resolution this past June to make January 11 the day when we bring awareness to victims and the fight to end the trafficking of persons.

<http://www.earnedmedia.org/shio108.htm>

Sex Offenders

On Monday, January 14, a public hearing will be held in **San Francisco** by the California Sex Offender Management Board to solicit comments from the public on sex offender management issues. The hearing will focus on the challenges the city and county of San Francisco face in providing compliant housing for offenders who are returning from prison. Proposition 83 - Jessica's Law - requires offenders to return to their home county and bans them from living within 2,000 feet of a school or park.

http://www.kfty.com/news/local/story.aspx?content_id=efb123c4-9117-44df-9487-2a4615936b64

In Other News...

A new survey of adults who don't regularly attend church found that 72% believe in God or a "higher power." But the same percentage also believes that the church is full of hypocrites. A large percentage of those surveyed, 86%, believe they can have a good relationship with God without belonging to a church and 79% say they believe "Christianity today is more about organized religion than loving God and loving people." The survey was conducted by LifeWay, the research arm of the Southern Baptist Church. A spokesperson for LifeWay said, "These outsiders are making a clear comment that churches are not getting through on the two greatest commandments;" to love God and to love your neighbor.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-01-09-unchurched-survey_N.htm