

MORMON MEMBERSHIP CONTINUES TO RISE

According to recent statistics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worldwide membership is approaching 13 million. The report containing the figures, which was announced at the church's general conference last April, also indicated "steady growth" of "about a million new members being added every three years or less."

In 2006, there were more than a quarter-million "convert baptisms" to the Mormon faith. An increase of nearly 100,000 "children of record" also was posted during the same time. "Children of record" are those from Mormon families who, upon reaching the age of nine, are baptized into the LDS church.

The report also acknowledged an issue faced in citing statistics of any religious denomination — growth numbers are not always interpreted accurately. The LDS report recognized that the published figures "represent the number of Church members, but they do *not* represent activity rates — that is, the number of members attending their local chapels every Sunday."

Despite that disclaimer, in the United States alone, more than 250 LDS congregations were started in 2006.

—MKG

TAMPA NEWSPAPER SPOTLIGHTS WHITES' EXCESSES

In May, an article in *The Tampa Tribune*, the hometown newspaper of Paula and Randy White, targeted the extravagant lifestyle and perks of the couple. The Whites are the founders and pastors of the Without Walls International Church, which now claims 23,500 members.

The report disclosed, "They travel in a \$1.9 million business jet. They own a home they purchased for \$2.1 million on Bayshore Boulevard and a \$3.5 million Trump Tower condo in New York. Randy rents a waterfront villa in Malibu, Calif." The article also stated that most of "the couple's personal income comes from private businesses, including a real estate company, sales of nutritional supplements, and speaking engagements."

Yet not all is "positive" for the pastoral couple deeply ingrained in the positive confession movement. "In the

past 18 months, more than 60 church associates, some on staff and some unpaid, have left or been 'released' from their jobs," the *Tribune* reported. Also mentioned in the article were several of the legal wranglings the Whites have encountered during the past several years as they "renege on deals and didn't pay their bills."

And the "health" component of their health and wealth gospel was also subject to a realistic investigation. "Both the Whites have undergone cosmetic surgery, seeming to grow younger over the past five years," the newspaper said. And in a more serious concern, last December Randy's eldest daughter from a previous marriage was diagnosed with "an advanced brain tumor."

All of this seems to be taking its toll on both Paula, who hails herself as a "life coach," and Randy. The newspaper indicated that the Whites have "acknowledged rumors have been flying for a long time about their relationship. Randy said the two are best friends and will always remain so. Asked whether they're contemplating divorce, he said, 'No one can predict the future.'"

For more information on the doctrine and practice of the Whites, see "White Lies" in the April-June 2007 issue of *The Quarterly Journal*.

—MKG

CREATION MUSEUM OPENS

What was a dream for more than a dozen years — and six years after ground was broken — became a reality for creationist Ken Ham on Memorial Day as his Creation Museum opened its doors to a capacity crowd of more than 4,000 visitors from over 30 states. The \$27 million, 60,000 square-foot facility is located on a 49-acre parcel just south of Cincinnati in Petersburg, Ky.

Ham heads up the Answers in Genesis ministry, an organization dedicated to using the sciences including biology, geology, anthropology, and astronomy to confirm the biblical account of creation and to challenge evolutionary thought.

The museum contends for creationism in a high-tech, state-of-the-art way. Throughout the tour, visitors will encounter 55 animatronic and static figures (of humans and dinosaurs), see a 30-foot-tall model of Noah's Ark, and embark into a 200-seat, cutting-edge special effects

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On the broadcast, Hinn related how Manning had come to visit him during his May 2006 crusade in Trinidad. Manning told Hinn, "I have a gift for you," and brought to Hinn a woman who claimed to be a "prophetess" and who supposedly had a "word" for the American faith healer. Manning told Hinn, "God speaks to me through her. She has been a great blessing to the Government." As Manning told Hinn these things, Hinn told his audience he was thinking, "You foolish man."

Hinn also identified the "prophetess" as a "foolish woman" and described to his audience, "This woman, who reaches out to touch me, and I grabbed her hand in mid-air, 'Don't touch me!,' I said." He instructed his viewers that, "I didn't care if it was the prime minister or the president. Nobody lays hands on me. I didn't know what spirit is in her," a practice he said he learned from the late faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman.

For many of Hinn's followers, the fact that will be sadly missed is that Hinn claims for himself a spiritual elitism and a walk in the supernatural in a way few others have experienced. Yet he is unable to employ the spiritual gift of discerning of spirits.

In July, Hinn moved from an on-stage performance to playing to the media — and perhaps bidding for a Nobel Peace Prize. Hinn gathered what one news report called "Top U.S. evangelical Christian leaders" to meet with a variety of Arab ambassadors. Several on Hinn's roster of "evangelicals" at the meeting were the progeny of more well-known fathers. They included Paul Crouch Jr., son of Trinity Broadcasting Network president Paul Crouch; the Rev. Jonathan Falwell, son of the late Jerry Falwell; Gordon Robertson, son of Pat Robertson; and the Rev. Joshua Youssef, son of Michael Youssef. Other notables were Christian lobbyist Ralph E. Reed Jr., faith healer Reinhardt Bonnke, and Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals. Those attending on behalf of the Arab countries included representatives from Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and several other countries. The meeting took place at the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

In a press release, Hinn's organization touted the gathering as "the beginning of productive and positive dialogue between Arab and Christian leaders" and said the assembly "will represent the beginning meeting of other private, confidential meetings to be hosted by Pastor Hinn and Arab ambassadors."

Falwell hailed the two-hour event as an "historic meeting," and took the opportunity to promote Liberty University by marketing its Distance Learning Program. "Any student in their countries could receive a fully accredited American university degree online," Falwell said. However, not everyone shares Falwell's enthusiasm. Ingrid Schlueter of Slice of Laodicea ministry wrote:

"With the powerful political overtones of such a meeting, I am wondering what the State Department thinks of this kind of diplomacy by private citizens. Richard Cizik from the National Association of Evangelicals and long a bridge-builder to those who despise the Gospel, claims that the Muslims are sizing up the 'next generation'. I'm sure they liked what they saw: publicity happy, pandering, compromising evangelicals who are eager to be thought of as movers and shakers on the international scene."

Amidst the fanfare from Hinn and his entourage, what many Christians will fail to grasp is that those who truly take the uncompromised and unadulterated Gospel to the lost within Arab nations must do so in secrecy. It should also be questioned as to whether the "Christian leaders" may be unwittingly used by radical Arabs to make Islam appear benign. Hinn, being an Arab himself, ought to know better, but as he has demonstrated time and again, it is press and image that he is after. His "historic meeting" in July is yet another example of the attention-seeking facades employed by the controversial faith healer.

—MKG

NEWS UPDATES

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theater. Patrick Marsh, the scenic designer for Universal Studio's Jaws and King Kong rides, joined the project in 2001 and helped to design the museum.

The \$27 million construction cost was a mere fraction of the museum's actual value. "If you were to build it just by contracting everything out, it probably would have cost you around \$100 million," Ham told the Baptist Press. "People wanted to be part of this. Someone would sell us equipment that would have cost us \$2 million for \$1.5," he added. In addition, hundreds of volunteers provided labor and some companies donated materials.

Less than 10 percent of the funding to build the museum came from single donors; three families donated \$1 million each. About three-quarters of the donations averaged around \$100.

The museum is not without its critics, who call it "anti-science." "Everything science has taught us over the course of the last 200 years teaches us that this [museum's] kind of literal, biblical, creationist notion is misguided at best, and just plain false at worst," Alan Leshner, chief executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, told *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. During the opening day, the Campaign to Defend the Constitution group hired a plane to circle overhead with a banner that read, "DEFCON Says Thou Shalt Not Lie." Atheists and some scientific groups have signed and circulated a petition

stating the museum cultivates “superstition” and confusion among schoolchildren. A spokesman from DEFCON argued the museum “is part of a campaign to deceive children and undermine scientific understanding in our country.”

The museum is open Monday through Saturday and takes a full day to thoroughly visit at a unhurried pace.

—MKG

STELLAR CELLAR

Plans to remodel basements normally do not make the news, but one recently did. In 2004, the Boulder, Colo., house where JonBenet Ramsey was murdered was purchased by the daughter and son-in-law of televangelist Robert Schuller. Carol and Tim Milner paid slightly more than \$1 million for the home where one of the most notorious unsolved murders of recent times occurred. In December 1996, the 6-year-old’s body was found in the basement, strangled and bludgeoned to death.

Recently, plans were submitted by the Milners to the City of Boulder to renovate the basement. According to the Associated Press, the refurbishment will include, “a bar, wine cellar, flat-screen television and gas fireplace.” The utility room where the child’s body was found is not part of the renovation.

Tim is employed by Schuller at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif. County records indicate the current value of the home to be \$1.6 million.

—MKG

BYU CHANGES HONOR CODE ON HOMOSEXUAL STUDENTS

In a move that is being praised by pro-homosexual advocates, Brigham Young University has modified its honor code and will no longer classify homosexual behavior or advocacy as a violation. Kevin Dion, a leader of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons, was cited on his organization’s web site, says the revision “deserves our strongest applause and recognition.” Members of the homosexual-rights group, Soulforce Equality Ride, welcomed the change as a “significant victory.”

Despite such accolades, the Mormon university is calling the move a “clarification,” rather than a “change.” “Our Honor Code has not changed, but there has been a clarification,” according to Carri Jenkins, a spokeswoman for the university.

The former Honor Code stated, “Advocacy of a homosexual lifestyle (whether implied or explicit) or any behaviors that indicate homosexual conduct, including

those not sexual in nature, are inappropriate and violate Honor Code.” The revised text now reads, “One’s sexual orientation is not an Honor Code issue. However, the Honor Code requires all members of the university community to manifest a strict commitment to the law of chastity. Homosexual behavior or advocacy of homosexual behavior are inappropriate and violate the Honor Code.”

The change means that “the university will respond to a student’s behavior, not their sexual orientation,” Jenkins said.

Prior to — and perhaps helping to precipitate — the change, BYU’s Honor Code Office disciplined five of its students for their part in a Soulforce demonstration last year. The protest was in violation of BYU’s rules regarding on-campus demonstrations.

Other “clarifications” may be forthcoming as the university is reviewing its policies regarding alcohol, living a chaste and virtuous life, and respecting others.

—MKG

NO MORE LIMBO

For nearly 800 years, The Roman Catholic Church has taught that Limbo is a permanent and intermediate place between heaven and hell occupied by babies and infants who have died without being baptized. Those in Limbo do not suffer the pains of hell. Yet, while they enjoy happiness, they are kept from the “beatific vision” of the Creator. However, the belief in Limbo is now being renounced following a three-year study by the Vatican’s Theological Commission. A 41-page report released by the 30-member committee in April, said that Limbo reflected an “unduly restrictive view of salvation.”

The doctrine was originally established as a way to harmonize the concept of a merciful God with the belief that baptism and the church were necessary for salvation. Yet Limbo has been repeatedly questioned — even more so during the past several decades. The abundance of abortions was just one factor in rethinking the position.

A hint that change was on the way may have been in that Limbo is not addressed in the Roman Catholic Catechism’s current edition.

Pope Benedict XVI has sanctioned the report. Casting aside Limbo by the current pontiff is not surprising — and perhaps was even expected. According to a Religious News Service report, “‘Limbo was never a defined truth of faith,’ then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger told Italian journalist Vittorio Messori in 1985. ‘Personally ... I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis.’”

Despite removing Limbo, the report encourages parents to have their babies baptized as the normal means of salvation.

—MKG