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REPORT from the Capital

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Religious Liberty Essay Contest open to students in 2009, 2010 graduating classes

The Baptist Joint Committee has released details of its 4th annual religious liberty essay contest, which is open this year to all high school students in the 2009 and 2010 graduating classes.

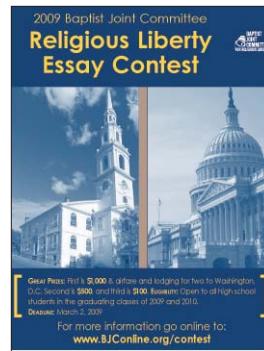
The contest offers a grand prize of \$1,000 and airfare and lodging for two to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$500, and third prize is \$100.

The topic for 2009 is: In 1804, Colonial Evangelist John Leland said that experience "has informed us that the fondness of magistrates [the government] to foster Christianity has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did." Explain Leland's statement and, drawing from historical and contemporary examples, assess his claim.

All of the requirements and necessary forms are available from the BJC Web site, www.BJConline.org/contest. All entries must be postmarked by March 2, 2009.

Completed essays and required forms should be mailed to: Baptist Joint

Committee Essay Contest, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C., 20002.

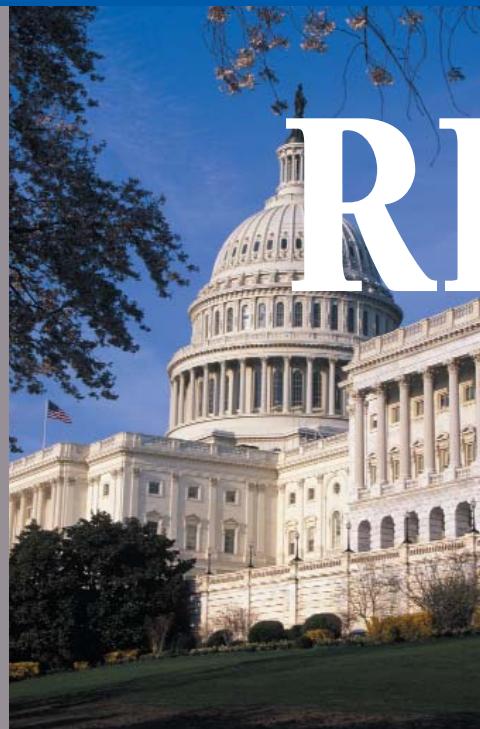


Winners will be announced in the summer of 2009 and will be featured in the BJC's flagship publication, *Report from the Capital*. The grand prize winner will also be recognized at the BJC board meeting in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 5, 2009.

Essays will be judged on the depth of their content and the skill with which they are written. Students should demonstrate a sound knowledge of the subject matter, support their assertions and provide bibliographical references. Essays that do not meet the minimum qualifications will not be judged. Judges reserve the right to present no awards or to reduce the number of awards if an insufficient number of deserving entries is received.

Visit www.BJConline.org/contest for more information. If you have questions, contact Jeff Huett at 202-544-4226 or by e-mail at jhuett@BJConline.org.

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REPORT from the Capital

New Congress features variety of Baptists, other faiths

WASHINGTON — Baptists, they say, multiply by dividing. And the various Baptist churches and denominational groups represented in the incoming 111th Congress are emblematic of America's broad array of Baptists — and of religious life in general. While precise figures and specific answers on some lawmakers' church membership are hard to come by, there are 66 self-identified Baptists in the new Congress, according to a study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Baptists make up a slightly smaller percentage of the new Congress (12.4 percent) than they do of the United States' adult population at large (17.2 percent), according to the Pew study. It was based on biographical data that Congress members' offices provided to *Congressional Quarterly*. The nation-at-large statistics come from the results of a survey that Pew released last year.

An analysis of the new Baptist Congress members by Baptist blogger Aaron Weaver reveals that congressional Baptists are diverse in terms of denomination, race and political party.

For instance, congressional Baptists belong to churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the three major African-American Baptist denominational groups, American Baptist Churches USA and the Baptist General Conference.

Each party claims 29 Baptist representatives. African-Americans make up 33 percent of House Baptists.

Several of the most prominent members of Congress on both sides of the aisle identify as Baptists. Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., the Senate's president pro tempore and the lone Baptist Democrat in that chamber, is a member of Crab Orchard Missionary Baptist Church, an ABC USA congregation in Crab Orchard, W.Va.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, the 2008 GOP presidential nominee, identifies North Phoenix Baptist Church as his home congregation. North Phoenix Baptist has the distinction of being the church home to two members of Congress — McCain and Arizona Rep. Trent Franks.



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Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., still lists his denominational affiliation as Baptist, although he reportedly now attends Southeast Christian Church in Louisville. He was a longtime member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, but church officials said Jan. 5 he is no longer on their membership roll. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., also is a Baptist.

Baptists are the second largest religious group in Congress after Catholics, who make up 30 percent of lawmakers. The next four largest groups — Methodists, Jews, Presbyterians and Episcopalians — are represented in Congress in greater percentages than they are in the population at large.

The "religious group" most underrepresented relative to its share of the overall population is the religiously unaffiliated. Only five members of the 111th Congress failed to list any religious affiliation, according to *Congressional Quarterly*. But the Pew survey found that the religiously unaffiliated make up just over 16 percent of the U.S. adult population.

The 111th Congress is also home to Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims, Buddhists, Unitarians, Christian Scientists and a Quaker. — ABP and staff

Report: Religious abuse continues in Iraq

Iraq should be designated as a “country of particular concern” because its government tolerates the abuse of religious communities, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The federal commission said many Iraqi religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis and Sabean Mandaeans have fled, threatening their faiths’ existence within the country.

“The lack of effective government action to protect these communities from abuses has established Iraq among the most dangerous places on earth for religious minorities,” said Felice D. Gaer, chair of the commission, at a Washington news conference.

Only five of the nine commissioners agreed with the “country of particular concern” designation, the report noted. That designation is used when a government has engaged in “systemic” and “ongoing” religious freedom violations. But the report said all of the commissioners agreed that the Iraqi government needs to take more action to address the plight of religious minorities.

Commissioners encouraged President-elect Barack Obama’s incoming administration to make prevention of



abuse a high priority and to seek safety for all Iraqis and fair elections.

They also asked the U.S. government to appoint a special envoy for human rights in Iraq and Iraqi officials to establish police units for vulnerable minority communities. They also seek changes in Iraq’s constitution, which currently gives Islam a preferred status, to strengthen human rights guarantees.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., co-chair of a congressional caucus addressing human rights, said that religious pluralism in Iraq is “rapidly diminishing.” He said about 500,000 Christians, or 50 percent of the population of that faith in Iraq in 2003, have fled the country.

The U.S. State Department designated Iraq as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act from 1999 to 2002. It dropped the designation in 2003 after the U.S. war in Iraq began and Saddam Hussein’s government collapsed.

In May 2007, the commission placed Iraq on its watch list due to escalating sectarian violence and the conditions affecting religious minorities.

— RNS

Pentagon tightens policy on distributing religious literature to recruits

The Pentagon recently reversed its policy of granting religious groups like the Gideons International preferential access to provide literature to new recruits.

A new regulation distributed in November says non-federal entities can continue to receive permission to place secular or religious literature at 65 Military Entrance Processing Stations around the country, but faith-based and secular organizations must be treated alike.

The policy change followed an investigation by the American Civil Liberties Union into a complaint by a recruit in Louisville, Ky., about being approached by a representative of the Gideons, a 100-year-old organization best known for placing Bibles in hotel rooms.

The ACLU said it found evangelizing activities at up to 10 other processing centers, such as handing out religious tracts during their processing as if it were part of official military procedure and distributing New Testaments with khaki covers that suggested it was a military publication.

The new rule recognizes the importance of accommodating the religious beliefs of military personnel but says the government must avoid any appearance of establishing religion.

Literature at processing centers must not “create the

reasonable impression that the government is sponsoring, endorsing or inhibiting religion generally, or favoring or disfavoring a particular religion.”

“Under no circumstances” is a member of any non-federal entity “permitted to proselytize, preach, or provide spiritual counseling to, or otherwise communicate information of a religious nature” to applicants or federal personnel while on an MEPS site.

The centers run by the United States Military Entrance Processing Command are the last stop for armed forces recruits on their way to basic training. They receive a battery of tests and examinations, including a physical, to ensure they are fit to serve. If they are found to be qualified, they sign their entrance contract and swear an entrance oath.

The ACLU hailed the policy change. “We applaud the Military Entrance Processing Command for recognizing that the religious freedom of all individuals joining the armed forces must be protected, including those who do not subscribe to the beliefs of the Gideons,” said Jeremy Gunn, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. “The new rule strikes the right constitutional balance by preserving religious liberty without showing governmental favoritism for one religion or belief over another.”

— ABP

REFLECTIONS

Top 10 religious freedom stories of 2008

It's a common year-end exercise to reflect on the year's top 10 events or stories on a given subject. Here's my best shot at outlining the top 10 stories on the domestic religious liberty front. As one would expect in an election year, most of them center on the connection between religion and politics more than on constitutional/legal issues surrounding the relationship between the institutions of church and state.

1. Colin Powell embraces the no religious test principle. In addition to endorsing Barack Obama for president, General Powell dispelled unfounded rumors that then-Sen. Obama was a Muslim. However, he went on to say, "What if he were?" According to Powell (and the Constitution!), there should be no religious litmus test for seeking public office in this country, including the presidency.

2. The Saddleback Civil Forum explores the presidential candidates' religion. Both presidential candidates were given the opportunity to talk about their faith and how it would impact their leadership competence and policy initiatives as president. Along with CNN's Compassion Forum, the Saddleback Forum was nationally televised, exposing the candidates' faith and positions on the issues to a wider audience than ever before.

3. Pastors brazenly endorse candidates during "Pulpit Freedom Sunday." The Alliance Defense Fund encouraged conservative church pastors to flout IRS rules disallowing electioneering activities by nonprofits. Fewer than three dozen apparently participated. Some other pastors took this opportunity to preach about the importance of church-state separation. For the first time in a decade, a majority of Americans believe there is too cozy a relationship between the pulpit and politics.

4. Governor Mitt Romney defends his Mormonism. Governor Romney, in his Dec. 2007 speech on religion and politics, sought to ingratiate himself to the evangelical base of the Republican Party. He did so by both embracing the relevance of religion to politics and holding up Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of his religion, while calling for toleration on theological disagreements between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity. (Compare this speech with the one JFK gave to the Houston Ministerial Association in 1960 defending his Catholicism and calling for an "absolute" separation of church and state.)

5. Candidates' religious mentors and endorsers called into question. Candidates should not be blamed for isolated, out-of-context statements of their spiritual advisers and endorsers, especially when those statements are repudiated by the candidates.

John McCain should be congratulated for refusing to elevate the Jeremiah Wright controversy to the fore in the waning days of the campaign.

6. Democrats get religion and court evangelical voters. Contrary to recent experience, this year the Democratic candidate for president was more comfortable talking about his religion in public than the Republican. This trend was seen among other candidates down ballot. However, polls show that evangelical voters stayed with the GOP, although by smaller margins than in 2004.

7. Commission attempts to amend Florida's constitution to permit vouchers. The Florida Supreme Court threw out a ballot initiative to repeal its longstanding constitutional ban on funding religion and religious education. This will continue to be an issue in Florida and in the other 36 states with similar provisions.

8. A new chapter in faith-based initiatives under the Obama Administration? President-elect Obama says he will not dismantle the faith-based bureaucracy created by the Bush Administration. However, he has promised to be more careful about constitutional restrictions and has repudiated discrimination on the basis of religion in hiring and the delivery of services in federally funded programs.

9. Texas authorities raid FLDS compound amid allegations of polygamy and child abuse. This disaster continues to unfold even after the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the state acted improperly in removing the children from the families. This incident provided the classic example of the need to balance claimed religious freedom of adults and autonomy rights of religious organizations with the well-being and welfare of minors.

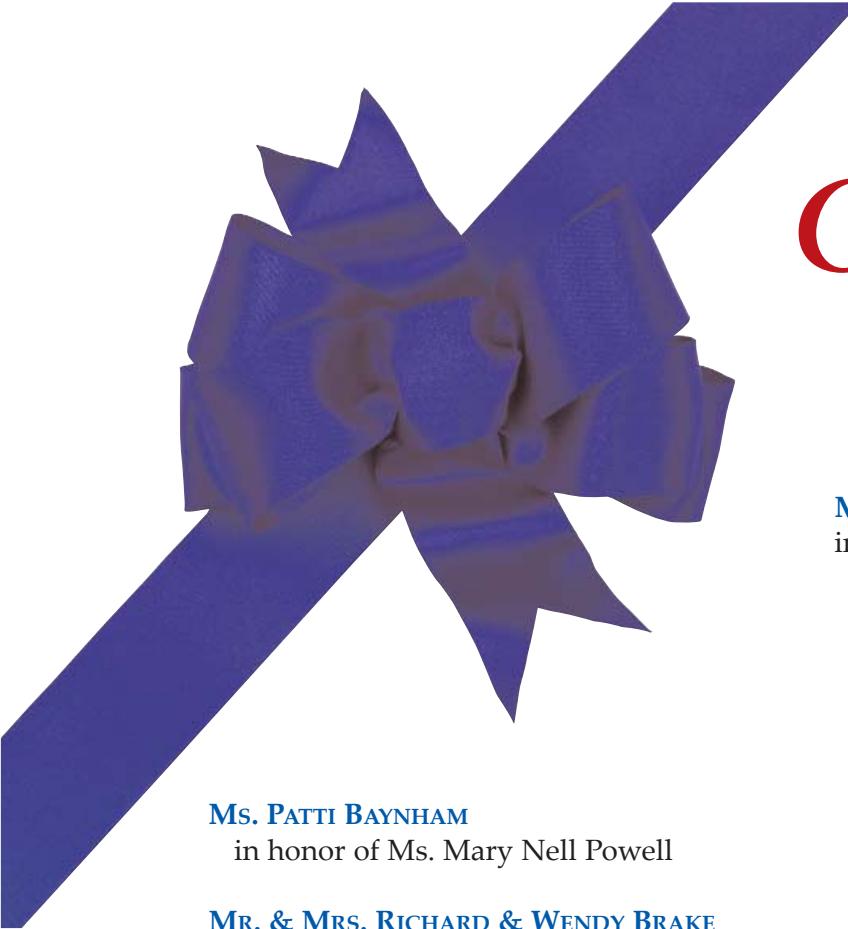
10. Workplace discrimination on the rise and the need to pass the Workplace Religious Freedom Act. Claims of workplace discrimination, particularly based on denied religious accommodation, has shot up in recent years. The Workplace Religious Freedom Act is needed to strengthen the protection supported by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Well, these are my 10. You probably can think of others. Please visit the BJC web blog at www.BJConline.org/blog where Don Byrd, our blogger, has come up with his 10. They're similar to mine, but he also mentions a couple I didn't, including a court's decision defining the Religious Freedom Restoration Act's elements in the Arizona Snowbowl case and attempts by Sen. Charles Grassley to investigate the finances of television ministries.

I hope you visit our Web site and read our blog daily. That's a good resolution for 2009.



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director



Christmas Gifts

Drs. Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden
Mr. & Mrs. Baxter and Paula Wynn

Ms. REBA COBB

in honor of

Mr. & Mrs. Jean & Bob Breneman
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Lucille Brown
Mr. & Mrs. Tom & Tina Burress
Mr. & Mrs. James & Patricia Cox
Mr. & Mrs. Wayne & Debby Griffin
Mr. & Mrs. Paul & Alice Herrington
Mr. & Mrs. Frank & Heidi Hillard
Mr. & Mrs. Kevin & Mary Jackson
Dr. & Mrs. Walter Jones
Ms. Jenny Snyder

MR. JOHN COTHRAN

in honor of

Mrs. Jeanette Cothran, his wife
Dr. & Mrs. Hardy & Ardelle Clemons
Mr. & Mrs. Glen & Clista Adkins
Drs. Walter B. & Kay W. Shurden

DR. & MRS. KENNETH & SALLY DODGSON

in honor of Mrs. Jean Bartlett

REV. HEATHER ENTREKIN

in honor & memory of Mr. Roy Gunter

MR. & MRS. ROBERT K. & ANNE H. FOWLER

in honor of Mrs. Babs Baugh

MR. DAVID GARRARD

in honor of the Rev. Bill Wilson

**REBECCA, MICHAEL, DONALD & VIRGINIA
GLANDER**

in loving memory of the Rev. Dr. Donald Jordan
Dunlap

MR. MARSHALL HARGRAVE

in honor of 67 years of marriage to Roberta
Hargrave

to the Baptist Joint Committee

MR. & MRS. MARSHALL & ROBERTA HARGRAVE
in honor of

Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Lauree Dixon, Anna
Grace & Ansley
Mr. & Mrs. Barron & Carolyn Lee
Mr. B. Whitney Lee

MR. BOO & MARY HEFLIN
in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Marc & Billie
Heflin

MS. KATHY HOWELL
in memory of Mr. W. Barry Garrett

MR. & MRS. ROBERT HUDSON
in honor of the Rev. & Mrs. Gayle L. Clifton
in honor of the Rev. & Mrs. Ronald S. James

DR. & MRS. DAVID & MARY SUE LOCKARD
in honor of Sue & Jimmy Edwards

MS. MARGARET MONROE-CASSEL
in honor of Dr. James M. Dunn

MR. & MRS. CLIFF & SANDY PERRIN
in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Lin & Claudia
Peacock

in honor of the Rev. Nancy Walker

DR. ARTHUR M. SHERWOOD
in honor of Dr. & Mrs. L. Hugh Litchfield

REV. NANCY WALKER
in honor of the Rev. J. Brent Walker

MR. & MRS. EARL M. & PATTY H. WIGGS
in honor of Mr. Mark Wiggs

MRS. CAROL ANNE WILSON
in memory of her husband, Mr. Glenn S.
Wilson
in honor of the Rev. J. Brent Walker

MR. & MRS. JERRY & PATTYE WILSON
in honor of Drs. Walter B. & Kay W.
Shurden

MR. & MRS. JOHN & KAREN WOOD
in honor of Rep. Chet Edwards
in memory of Dr. Herbert H. Reynolds

Supporters give memorial gifts to the Baptist Joint Committee

IN MEMORY OF DR. ROBERT R. SOILEAU, PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

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K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Hollman REPORT

Bush makes his mark on religious freedom

Many experts are reviewing and evaluating the Bush Administration, speculating about its place in history. Most focus on economic and foreign policy. While religious liberty is rarely mentioned, President George W. Bush has definitely made his mark on our first freedom.

First, this Administration has fundamentally altered policies regarding government funding of social services provided by religious entities, even changing how we talk about it. While presidents are often remembered by inspiring speeches or phrases that symbolize key contributions,

no such slogan seems likely to stick to President Bush. His embrace of "compassionate conservatism" failed to take hold as an apt description of his philosophy. The Administration's advancement of the "faith-based initiative," however, has had a major impact on church-state relations. The initiative sought to increase partnerships with religious organizations, changing rules and expanding financial opportunities for a broader range of religious entities, all lumped under the same umbrella term. The tireless use of the term "faith-based" to describe initiatives, organizations, and offices has become embedded in our culture.

This is no empty addition to the vernacular. The pervasive use of the term "faith-based" has obscured differences between

houses of worship and religiously affiliated entities, differences that have constitutional consequences in the context of government funding. The Bush Administration focused on removing safeguards (called "barriers" by the Administration) that protect the constitutional boundaries between church and state. While pursuing the initiative, the Administration undermined longstanding and widely accepted constitutional values, such as preventing direct funding of religious activities, protecting religious freedom rights of beneficiaries, avoiding government-funded discrimination in employment and maintaining the autonomy and integrity of religious entities.

Second, perhaps as noteworthy as the policy changes, is the way the Administration pursued its agenda.

Through its seven-plus decades, the BJC has worked on dozens of legislative efforts, consensus statements, projects and publications promoting a shared vision of religious freedom. That vision affirms the rights of individuals and faith communities, while protecting against government establishment of religion. Our efforts have drawn on the wide-ranging experience and expertise of religious groups from across the theological and political spectrum.

The Bush Administration, by contrast, rarely offered opportunities for input beyond a tight circle. Even those who have long supported cooperation between religious entities and the government were dismissed as "fearing faith" or being "secular extremists" if they criticized aspects of the initiative. It was thus not surprising that the faith-based initiative failed to gain majority support in a Republican Congress. Even some Administration insiders came to see the initiative as more of a partisan tool than a means for helping those in need. Undeterred, the Administration pushed its policy through six executive orders that established a dozen offices and changed regulations to ensure a wide-reaching impact throughout federal agencies, while also encouraging similar efforts at the state and local levels. As it did in the area of national security, the White House asserted novel interpretations of laws to advance its agenda. For example, an Office of Legal Counsel memorandum took the position that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act provided an exemption from statutes that prohibit discrimination in federally funded job positions.

The Bush Administration's insular approach to church-state matters was also evident in its Department of Education guidelines on religious expression in the public schools, which focused only on the "free exercise" half of the twin guarantees that protect religious freedom. Previous guidelines were based on a joint statement of a diverse group of religious organizations and religious liberty advocates that also protected "no establishment" values. This action, along with the Administration's support for publicly funded vouchers for religious education, demonstrated a consistent undervaluing of the way "no establishment" values protect religious freedom.

Lastly, while executive orders may be withdrawn, revised or rewritten, federal judges serve for life. As many friends noted when I came on board the BJC at the beginning of the Bush Administration, one of the biggest opportunities for any new president comes in nominating federal judges. Indeed, with two additions to the Supreme Court and hundreds of lower court appointees, the Bush administration will certainly affect the interpretation of the First Amendment's promise to protect religious freedom for many years. So far, the Court has shown a willingness to uphold statutory protections, but has also restricted rules for taxpayer standing that will limit enforcement of the Establishment Clause.

Historians will continue to debate the long-term legacy of the Bush Administration as a whole. But even today, it is clear from the religious freedom front that the Bush Administration's impact will be felt for a very long time.

"Historians will continue to debate the long-term legacy of the Bush Administration as a whole. But even today, it is clear from the religious freedom front that the Bush Administration's impact will be felt for a very long time."

Spring interns begin work at the Baptist Joint Committee

This spring the Baptist Joint Committee welcomed two new interns.

Molly Brummett of Jefferson City, Tenn., is a junior religion and political science major at Carson Newman College.

She is the daughter of Ross and Lea Ann Brummett.

Jason Smith, of Fredericksburg, Va., is a May 2008 graduate of Ouachita Baptist University where he majored in political science, history and Spanish. He has plans to attend law school in Washington, D.C., in the fall and is engaged to be married this summer.

He is the son of Greg and Sue Smith.



Brummett



Smith

U.S.-Vatican relationship to shift under Obama White House

VATICAN CITY — In the 24 years since the U.S. and the Holy See established full diplomatic ties, relations have never been closer or warmer than during the administration of President George W. Bush.

The two sides broke over the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, but Bush's personal esteem for Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and his agreement with Catholic teaching on such controversial issues as abortion, embryonic stem cell research and same-sex marriage, have fostered a special rapport. Bush has met a total of six times with the leader of the Catholic Church, more often than any other American president.

That relationship is bound to change this month with the inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama, whose support for abortion rights and embryonic stem cell research has drawn denunciations from a number of church leaders. Yet informed observers agree that both the Vatican and the White House have strong incentives and opportunities to avoid conflict and build on the recent history of collaboration.

Relations got off to a cordial start the day after the Nov. 4 election, when Benedict sent a telegram to Obama, noting the "historic" nature of his victory and assuring him of his prayers that God would "sustain you and the beloved American people in your efforts ... to build a world of peace, solidarity and justice."

Obama, in turn, called the pope a week later to thank him for the telegram, although both sides declined to describe their conversation.

From the American hierarchy, however, congratulations have been mixed with criticism. Cardinal Francis George of

Chicago, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the church should "rejoice" in the election of the country's first African-American president, but insisted that it would confront Obama over abortion and stem cell research.

Even stronger were the words of Cardinal James Francis Stafford, former archbishop of Denver, who said that Obama's statements on abortion reflect "an agenda and vision that are aggressive, disruptive and apocalyptic." (Stafford, who as head of a Vatican court is one of the highest-ranking Americans at the Holy See, noted that he spoke only on his own behalf.)

The contrast in tone between American bishops and the Vatican reflects a deliberate "division of labor," said Massimo Franco, author of a forthcoming history of U.S.-Vatican relations, "Parallel Empires." In that way, Franco said, the Holy See can remain "above the fray" while local Catholic leaders apply public pressure to the incoming president.

Of most urgent concern to the church is clearly the Freedom of Choice Act, a proposed bill that would overturn a host of restrictions on abortion. Critics say FOCA would eliminate so-called conscience exemptions for publicly funded health-care facilities, thus forcing Catholic hospitals to provide abortions or shut their doors.

In an oft-cited speech to Planned Parenthood in 2007, Obama vowed to sign FOCA as "the first thing I'd do as president." Yet Obama's Catholic supporters cite his promises to find "common ground" with abortion opponents as reason to expect moderation.

"FOCA is not in the Democratic platform, and in the third debate he said that he favored restrictions on late-term abortions, which is contrary to FOCA," said Nicholas P. Cafardi, a member of Obama's National Catholic Advisory Board and an opponent of legalized abortion.

Another potential irritant in U.S.-Vatican relations emerged on Nov. 24, when a federal appeals court ruled that a lawsuit over alleged sex abuse by Catholic priests could proceed against the Holy See, despite its status as a sovereign state.

In spite of such problems, the Vatican will seek to work closely with the new administration in a number of areas, Franco said. Foremost on its agenda is the fate of Christian minorities in the Middle East — particularly in Iraq, where their status has grown increasingly precarious during the Bush Administration.

Christians in Muslim lands are of strategic interest to the U.S. as social and cultural intermediaries and "buffers," reducing geopolitical tensions in the region, Franco said.

The new president's priorities for relations for the Vatican are not yet clear, but Cafardi is sure that he will value the relationship.

As a community organizer in Chicago in the 1980s, Obama worked closely with Catholic parishes, Cafardi said, and thus "he knows how important the Catholic church is to the achievement of social justice."

—RNS

