

DEC. 13, 2006

Results: Top 10 religion stories of the year

The online poll of RNA members was conducted Dec. 8th to 12th. A total of 149 people voted for a response rate of 35 percent. RNA has conducted the poll since the 1970s.

This year's results appear below.

1. Muslims in a number of countries react violently to publication of Muhammad cartoons in Denmark and other European nations. Scores of both Christians and Muslims are killed in riots in Nigeria.
2. Pope Benedict XVI angers Muslims by including in a speech a centuries-old quote linking Islam and violence. He apologizes and later smooths the waters on a trip to Turkey. Earlier, he begins to downsize the curia and emphasizes God's love in his first encyclical.
3. The Episcopal Church riles conservatives when the General Convention elects a presiding bishop who supported the consecration of a U.S. gay bishop, which conservatives oppose as unbiblical. Seven Episcopal dioceses refuse to recognize the leadership of Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, who is also the first woman elected to the top post. Later, the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin becomes the first diocese to adopt measures that set the stage for it to secede from the denomination.
4. Charismatic leader Ted Haggard resigns as president of the National Association of Evangelicals and is dismissed as pastor of the huge New Life Church in Colorado Springs after allegations surface of gay sex and methamphetamine use.
5. Candidates backed by the Religious Right suffer a series of defeats in the fall elections, with many voters citing morality as one of the strongest motivators in the way they cast their ballot.
6. Religious voices grow louder for peace in Iraq, but by year's end experts fear the spread of sectarian tensions throughout the Middle East. Conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims increase, and the Israeli incursion in Lebanon aimed at curbing attacks by Hezbollah touches off major strife within Lebanon. Christian churches also reconsider efforts to pressure Israel on the Palestinian question.
7. The schoolhouse shooting deaths of five Amish girls in Bart Township, Pa., draws international attention on the Amish community's ethic of forgiveness after some Amish attend the killer's funeral.
8. (tie) The release of the film "The Da Vinci Code" adds to the previous buzz about Dan Brown's novel. Religious critics, who say the book portrays traditional Christianity as a fraud, are divided over whether to boycott the film or hold discussion groups. Controversial plot lines include Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene and conceiving a child.
8. (tie) Same sex marriage bans pass in seven of eight states that hold referendums on the issue during mid-term elections; Arizona becomes the first state in which voters defeat a same-sex marriage ban. Meanwhile, the New Jersey Supreme Court rules that same-sex couples are entitled to the same benefits as married couples.
10. President Bush casts his first veto to defeat a bill calling for expanded stem-cell research, to the delight of religious conservatives and the disappointment of more liberal ones. The issue is later

credited with playing a deciding role in the key Missouri Senate race. Meanwhile, progress is reported in efforts to create stem-cell lines without destroying embryos.

Missing the cut this year are these stories:

11. A group of evangelical leaders calls for a stronger response to environmental concerns, especially global warming. Another group of evangelicals downplays the threat.

12. The genocide in Darfur, which is based more on nationality than religion, draws increasing attention from religious groups, but a solution seems unattainable.

13. Samuel A. Alito Jr., a Roman Catholic, is confirmed as justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, giving the high court its first Catholic majority in history.

14. Hollywood makes major plays for religious audiences, some more successful than others. "The Nativity Story," a major studio release that retells the Christmas story, appears poised to do well as a December release. "One Night with the King" told the biblical story of the Jewish Queen Esther. Earlier in the year "Book of Daniel," a TV show about a dysfunctional clergy household, offended some Christian viewers and was cancelled.

15. Roman Catholic dioceses continue to make payouts in the sexual-abuse scandals, capped by Los Angeles' decision to settle 45 lawsuits for \$60 million, the fourth largest amount in the nation since the scandal erupted in 2002. Earlier, Davenport, Iowa, becomes the fourth U.S. diocese to seek bankruptcy protection.

16. Pentecostalism marks its 100th birthday, dating to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in April 1906, and celebrates its distinction as the fastest-growing Christian body.

17. Southern Baptists elect their first dark-horse president in decades, Frank Page of South Carolina, in what some see as discontent with the prevailing style of leadership. Earlier, two SBC mission boards work through internal conflict.

18. The Food and Drug Administration approves Plan B (the morning-after pill) for non-prescription sales, angering religious conservatives. Earlier, some pharmacists lose their jobs for refusing to fill Plan B prescriptions because of their religious convictions.

19. Warren S. Jeffs, leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a polygamist breakaway sect, is arrested in Nevada, after three months on the FBI's Most Wanted List, on sexual-misconduct charges stemming from allegedly arranging multiple marriages between underage girls and older men.

20. Election of conservative Christian Stephen Harper as prime minister of Canada leads to the expectation of an eventual larger role for faith-based social conservatism there.

Results: Top newsmaker of the year

The winner is: Amish folk who modeled forgiveness after the schoolhouse murders.

Those who did not win top newsmaker this year are:

- **Pope Benedict XVI**, who quieted Muslims after unintentionally angering them.
- **Dan Brown and Ron Howard**, author and director of the controversial "The Da Vinci Code."
- **Ted Haggard**, Evangelical leader who admitted to sexual immorality.
- **Frank Page**, surprise winner of the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention.
- **Katharine Jefferts Schori**, first woman presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

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