

Top 10 Religion Stories of 2011

Faith response to Osama bin Laden's death voted top religion story of the year

The death of Osama bin Laden—which spurred discussions among people of faith on issues of forgiveness, peace, justice and retribution was voted the No. 1 Religion Story of 2011 by the nation's leading religion journalists.

The 2011 survey of Religion Newswriters Association (RNA) members marks the 30th year the professional organization of religion beat specialists has conducted the poll.

Faith-based groups reacted to the terrorist leader's death with renewed sympathy for victims' families, scriptural citations justifying the demise of evil, and hopeful prayers for peace among the nations.

Earlier in the year, New York U.S. Rep. Peter King, (R-N.Y), chaired a series of controversial hearings in the House alleging radicalization among U.S. Muslims. Meanwhile, U.S. Senate hearings centered on crimes against Muslims. The hearings were voted the No. 2 religion story of 2011.

The complete Top 10 Religion Stories of 2011, in order from first to tenth are:

1. The death of Osama bin Laden spurs discussions among people of faith on issues of forgiveness, peace, justice and retribution.
2. Lively congressional hearings are held on the civil rights of American Muslims. In the House hearings focus on alleged radicalism and in the Senate on crimes reported against Muslims.
3. Catholic Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City, Mo. is charged with failure to report the suspected abuse of a child, becoming the first active bishop in the country to face criminal prosecution in such a case.
4. The Catholic Church introduces a new translation of the Roman Missal throughout the English-speaking world, making the first significant change to a liturgy since 1973.
5. Presbyterian Church (USA) allows local option on ordination of partnered gay people. Church defections over the issue continue among mainline Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians.
6. Pope John Paul II is beatified—the last step before sainthood—in a May

ceremony attended by more than million people in Rome.

7. California evangelist Harold Camping attracts attention with his predictions that the world would end in May and again in October.

8. A book by Michigan megachurch pastor Rob Bell, "Love Wins," presenting a much less harsh picture of hell than is traditional, stirs discussion in evangelical circles. Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention rebut it.

9. The Personhood Initiative, designed to outlaw abortion by declaring a fetus a person, fails on Election Day in Mississippi, but advocates plan to try in other states. Meanwhile, reports show the number of restrictions adopted throughout the country against abortion during the year are far more than in any previous year.

10. Bible translations make news, with celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the King James Version; criticism, notably by Southern Baptists, about gender usage in the newest New International Version; and completion of the Common English Bible.

In recent years, RNA has named a Religion Newsmaker of the year. In the 2011 vote, however, three of the people on the five-person ballot comprised a virtual three-way tie, with less than one vote separating each of them.

Harold Camping, a radio evangelist whose end-of-world predictions won followers and scoffers, had the most votes for newsmaker, with Pope Benedict XVI just one point behind. The Pope was cited for his efforts to improve Jewish relations, beatify John Paul II, and his triumphal return to his German homeland.

Less than one vote behind the pope was Texas Gov. Rick Perry, whose prayer service, and advertisements raised religious issues to the forefront during the pre-primary season of the presidential race.

Because no one individual stood out in the voting, RNA is not naming a 2011 Religion Newsmaker of the Year.

The Top 10 results are based on an online survey of more than 300 journalists with a response rate near 30 percent. Voting was conducted online from Dec. 10-13, 2011.