

Huckabee Ties Giuliani in National Poll

In a Zogby poll released Wednesday, Mike Huckabee, was just one percentage point behind Rudy Giuliani's 23 percent—well within the polls 4.8 percentage point margin of error.



Former Arkansas-based Baptist preacher Mike Huckabee, who only two months ago was garnering a meager 4 percent of the national vote for the Republican nomination for president, is now running neck and neck with former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, reported Reuters.

Drawing a substantial amount of his support from conservative and evangelical voters, Huckabee erased an 18-point deficit and in a Reuters/Zogby poll released Wednesday pulled to within one point of Giuliani, 23 percent to 22 percent—well within the polls 4.8 percentage point margin of error.

Giuliani has led the field of Republican candidates in national polls for most of 2007. Just last month, he was on top with 33 percent of the vote.

“Huckabee is on a roll, he has gotten an enormous amount of publicity and he is doing very well with conservatives, who at least for now appear to have found a candidate,” pollster John Zogby told Reuters.

Among Democrats, Hillary Clinton saw her lead over challenger Barack Obama shrink from an 11-point advantage to eight percentage points in the same poll.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney dropped among Republicans to 16 percent, Fred Thompson won 13 percent and John McCain took 12 percent. [12-20-07]

German Government Says Scientology Not a Real Religion

German officials recently announced that they will seek to ban the Los Angeles-based religion in their country.



Scientology has attracted many Hollywood elites such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta. But at least one group isn't impressed by the burgeoning religion: German officials.

According to the Associated Press (AP) earlier this year the countries officials initially refused to allow Cruise's movie to film at a site in Germany.

Recently they went a step further, announcing that they will seek to ban the Los Angeles-based religion in their country.

The German government considers Scientology as a commercial enterprise that preys on gullible citizens and not as a legitimate religion the AP reports.

Sabine Weber, president of the Church of Scientology in Berlin, has a different take on the decision.

"It is very, very clear that the true picture of Scientology is about pushing its way through," she said. "The interior ministers are clearly reacting to that."

270 Christian Leaders Were Arrested in China for Reading the Bible

The leaders were blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to a local police station under charges of conducting an “illegal religious gathering.”



Recently Chinese police raided a gathering of house-church pastors in the Hedeng district, arresting at least 270 for conducting an “illegal religious gathering.”

According to *Asianews* the Christian leaders were blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to a local police station after officers from a dozen towns converged upon the Bible study.

Although many pastors were eventually released upon paying an “interrogation tax” equivalent to U.S. \$40, about 150 remain imprisoned.

In September, China’s ruling Communist Party officially acknowledged the ballooning house-church movement, adding that “religious believers should be mobilized to make a positive contribution to society.”

And last week the government celebrated the only authorized Christian publisher’s printing of the 50 millionth Bible, with a government official remarking that China “respects and protects religious freedom.”

However, international religious freedom groups continue to criticize the government’s inconsistencies after businessman Shi Weihai, owner of Beijing’s Holy Spirit Bookstore, was arrested for not registering his house church.

A party document was leaked in November describing a nationwide campaign to “normalize” underground Protestant churches by giving them two options: join the government-sanctioned religious organizations or face suppression. [Usa Today]

Study: Majority of Americans Take the Bible Literally

The majority of American adults believe five out six biblical stories as literally true. A recent study found that an overwhelming 75 percent believe that Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary.



The majority of American adults believe five out six biblical stories as literally true. Even though some Americans believe the bible is merely allegorical, according to a recent Barna Group study, an overwhelming 75 percent believe that Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary.

The study also showed that at least 68 percent of Americans believed that Jesus turned water in to wine and that He performed the miraculous feat of feeding 5,000 with fish and bread.

“Many people seem to divide the Bible into two separate and unequal portions: the Old Testament, with what they perceive to be allegorical stories, and the New Testament, with what they believe to be factual history,” said George Barna, founder of the Barna Group and the project’s researcher and author.

Americans surveyed had mixed beliefs about the Old Testament’s literal validity.

Episcopal Church Schism Widening

Recently a central California diocese became the first in the nation to break from the Episcopal Church over interpretational disputes regarding Scripture and homosexuality.



Central California's Diocese of San Joaquin became the first in the nation to leave the Episcopal Church over the issue of the Bible and homosexuality reports the Associated Press (AP).

Clergy and lay members voted 173 to 22 at the diocese's annual convention recently to eliminate all references to the national church from the diocese's constitution.

According to the AP the diocese plans to align itself with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, based in South America.

Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, who supports the ordination of gays and lesbians, had warned the diocese against secession.

"We deeply regret their unwillingness or inability to live within the historical Anglican understanding of comprehensiveness," Schori said in a statement after the vote.

The Rev. Van McCalister, a spokesman for the diocese, said they felt they had no choice. "We have a leadership in the Episcopal Church that has drastically and radically changed directions," McCalister said. "They have pulled the rug out from under us. They've started teaching something very

different ... and it's impossible for us to follow."

The San Joaquin diocese serves 8,500 parishioners in 47 congregations throughout central California.

Fox Entertainment Takes Over Beliefnet

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Fox Entertainment Group (FEG) purchased the popular spirituality site Beliefnet earlier this month. FEG is a part of News Corp., the media powerhouse that owns MySpace, 20th Century Fox and *The Wall Street Journal*.

The acquisition will build and enhance Beliefnet's already popular brand by using News Corp.'s vast resources and media library, according to a statement released by FEG.

The statement also underscored the online platform Beliefnet will offer FEG for distributing and expanding its faith-based businesses, which include HarperCollins' Zondervan and HarperOne brands, Fox Faith films, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment's faith-based programming initiative and the often religiously themed National Geographic Channel. Beliefnet is not affiliated with any religion and attracts approximately 3 million unique visitors each month.

Casting Crowns receives three GRAMMY nominations

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Nominations for the 50th Annual GRAMMY Awards were recently announced in Hollywood with Casting Crowns receiving three nods. The band's song "East to West" was recognized for Best Gospel Performance and Best Gospel Song, and the group's album, *The Altar and The Door* (Beach Street Records, Provident-Integrity), was nominated for Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel Album. The Clark Sisters also garnered three GRAMMY nominations.

In the Best Gospel Performance category, nominees—besides "East to West"—were "Blessed & Highly Favored" by The Clark Sisters, "Never Gonna Break My Faith" by Aretha Franklin and Mary J. Blige, "With Long Life" by Israel and New Breed and "He Set My Life to Music" by CeCe Winans.

For Best Gospel Song songwriters, nominees—in addition to Mark Hall and Bernie Herms for "East to West"—were "Blessed & Highly Favored" by Karen Clark-Sheard, "Encourage Yourself" by Donald Lawrence, "Made to Love" by Cary Barlowe, Toby McKeehan, Jamie Moore and Aaron Rice, and "Praise on the Inside" by James Moss.

In the Rock or Rap Gospel Album category, nominees were *Before the Daylight's Shot* (204 Records) by Ashley Cleveland, *HIStory: Our Place in His Story* (Cross Movement Records) by The Cross Movement, *Open Book* (Cross Movement Records) by Da' ., *The Reckoning* (Flicker Records) by Pillar and *Comatose* (Atlantic/Lava/Ardent/INO) by Skillet.

For Best Pop/Contemporary Gospel Album, nominees—besides *The Altar and The Door*—were *A Deeper Level* (Integrity Music) by Israel and New Breed, *True Beauty* (Sparrow Records) by Mandisa, *Stand* (Reunion Records) by Michael W. Smith and *Portable Sounds* (ForeFront Records) by Toby Mac.

Nominees for Best Southern, Country or Bluegrass Gospel Album were *Amazing Grace* (Gaither Music Group) by Bill & Gloria Gaither and The Homecoming Friends, *Journey of Joy* (Daywind Records) by Karen Peck and New River, *Everybody's Brother* (Compadre Records) by Billy Joe Shaver, *Salt of the Earth* (Skaggs Family Records) by Ricky Skaggs & The Whites, *Tell Someone* (Rebel Records) by Kenny & Amanda Smith Band and *I'll Fly Away: Country Hymns & Songs of Faith* (Sparrow Records) by various artists.

Nominees for the Best Traditional Gospel Album were *Live: One Last Time* (EMI Gospel) by The Clark Sisters, *The Grand Finale: Encourage Yourself* (EMI Gospel) by Donald Lawrence & The Tri-City Singers, *Life Changing* (EMI Gospel) by Smokie Norful, *Thirsty* (Verity) by Marvin Sapp and *Cherch* (Koch Records) by Bebe Winans.

In the Best Contemporary R&B Gospel Album category, nominees were

Grateful (Light Records) by Coko, *Free to Worship* (Verity) by Fred Hammond, *V2* (Gospo Centric/Zomba Gospel) by James Moss, *T57* (Spirit Rising Music/Music World Entertainment) by Trin-I-Tee 5:7 and *Alone But Not Alone* (Pure Springs Gospel) by Marvin Winans.

The 50th Annual GRAMMY Awards will be held Feb. 10 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles and will be broadcast live at 8 p.m. EST on CBS. The full list of nominees is online at .

Alabama Outreach Helps Young Adults Discover Purpose

Rap music, hip-hop dancers and strobe lights set the atmosphere for The Basement, an outreach that draws thousands of youth to Birmingham, Ala.



Rap music, hip-hop dancers and a rainbow of strobe lights set the atmosphere for The Basement, an outreach that draws thousands of youth to Cathedral of the Cross in Birmingham, Ala., every Tuesday night.

“People ask me all the time: ‘Is this revival?’” says Matt Pitt, the 23-year old founder of The Basement. “I can't say what it is. I can just say that God is alive, He's moving and He's up to something.”

The ministry has witnessed incredible growth since its inception just three years ago in the basement of Pitt's parents' home. It was there while on break from his studies at the University of Alabama that Pitt experienced a life-altering encounter with God.

Pitt says he was immediately delivered from drugs, recommitted his life to Christ and set out to introduce others to Christ. The next week Pitt began a Bible study with three friends.

Three years later, it has grown to number more than 5,000, and people travel from as far away as Florida, Georgia and Louisiana to attend. Pitt says he intentionally designed The Basement's look to compete with clubs and bars for the soul of his generation. And he says his message is simple.

“No matter who you are or where you are, God has a plan for your life,” Pitt says. “God is taking the nobodies and making them somebodies. God has something huge just for you, just stick it out and watch what happens.” It's a message thousands show up each week to hear. **—David Lamb in Birmingham, Ala.**

Study: Calvinism Growing in Baptist Churches

A recent study found that 30 percent of Southern Baptist seminary graduates identify themselves as Calvinists. Yet less than 10 percent of Southern Baptist pastors follow the teachings.



A new study from LifeWay Research reveals that almost 30 percent of recent Southern Baptist (SBC) seminary graduates who are now serving as pastors describe themselves as Calvinists.

That's compared to less than 10 percent of SBC pastors at large who affirm the five points of Calvinism.

Five Killed in YWAM, New Life Church

Two Youth With a Mission (YWAM) staff members and two New Life Church attendees were killed Sunday when a gunman opened fire at their facilities. The gunman was also killed.



Two Youth With a Mission (YWAM) staff members and two New Life Church attendees were killed Sunday when a gunman opened fire at their facilities in Denver and Colorado Springs, Colo.

The shootings began at 12:30 a.m. Sunday, when a man identified as a white male in his 20s opened fire in a YWAM dormitory housed on the campus of Faith Bible Chapel in the Denver suburb of Arvada, Colo. Four people were shot.

Tiffany Johnson, 26, from Minnesota, and Philip Crouse, 24, from Alaska were killed. Dan Griebenow, 24, and Charlie Blanch, 22, were taken to local hospitals with bullet wounds in their leg and neck, respectively.

Roughly 12 hours later, a gunman opened fire in the parking lot of New Life Church, where YWAM has an office.

Sisters Stephanie Works, 18, and Rachael Works, 16, were killed in the shooting, and their father, David Works, suffered two gunshot wounds to the abdomen and groin and is in fair condition, the *Denver Post* reported. "Please pray for that family this morning. They're going through a very difficult time," said New Life pastor Brady Boyd during a press conference at the church this morning.

Boyd said the gunman had no ties to the church and was carrying enough ammunition to do a lot of damage. "It was just absolutely random," Boyd said, the *Denver Post* reported. "A senseless random attack."

Nine people were shot before a security guard hired by New Life Church shot and killed the gunman, the Associated Press reported.

"[My wife and I] were hiding behind my car, no one knowing what was happening," said New Life member Steven Todd, who is executive director of the missions organization Africa Ministries Network. "My son, Erick ... wasn't around anywhere. Once we were safely away at a distance I called him, then his wife. She answered, whispering that they were barricaded in the sanctuary hiding from the gunman. It was a terrifying, surreal experience that will, no doubt, shake our whole church."

Authorities are still investigating the shootings, but believe they are linked, Reuters reported. YWAM Denver director Peter Warren said the staff had just finished a Christmas banquet when the shooting suspect arrived and asked a female staffer if he could be housed for the night. When she told him they could not house him, the man opened fire with an automatic handgun, Warren said in a statement. The 80 YWAM staff living at the Arvada campus were transported to another facility near Golden, Colo.

"We feel a deep sense of loss today and we grieve with the families and those who were very close friends of the victims," YWAM International Chairman Lynn Green said in a statement. "Those who lost their lives had dedicated themselves to serve and we feel the sorrow of their absence. Yet we take comfort from the assurance of everlasting life for those who follow Christ in loving service to others. It is a great tragedy that our culture seems to produce so many deeply troubled people who express their frustration in violence. We forgive the assailant and we rededicate ourselves to serving young people in the hope that we might bring healing to other needy youth."

New Life Church was founded by Ted Haggard, who stepped down in November 2006 amid a sex and drug scandal. Brady Boyd became pastor in August.