

Obama and Jesus Equal as Teen Role Models

Whether you have a teenager in your home or just see them in the malls, it's clear that the likes and dislikes of this age group are making an impact on America's cultural identity. But where do role models come into play? That's the subject of a new Barna study.

Barna reports that the role models are important because they influence the shape and substance of the next generation of churchgoers, consumers and citizens. The research group set out to determine who 13- to 17-year-olds admire most, other than their parents.

Despite excluding parents, Barna reveals that 37 percent of teens named other family members. Meanwhile, 11 percent mentioned teachers and coaches, 9 percent named friends, and a mere 6 percent named pastors or other religious leaders they know personally.

Moving beyond personal connections, Barna found that entertainers (including musicians and actors) were named by 6% of teens, followed by sports heroes (5%), political leaders (4%), faith leaders (4%), business leaders (1%), authors (1%), science and medical professionals (1%), other artists (1%), and members of the military (1%).

The high-profile leaders most commonly named were President Obama (3%) and Jesus Christ (3%). Tyra Banks, Rob Dyrdek, Lady Gaga, Demi Lovato, Paul McCartney, Taylor Swift, Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey were among the celebrities named. The only athletes who earned multiple mentions were LeBron James, Peyton Manning, Michael Phelps, Mike Tyson and David Wright. Others mentioned were Mahatma Gandhi, the Pope, Walt Disney, Bill Gates, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The reasons for admiring these folks? It boiled down to personality and inspiration. Barna reports that the most common reasons teens admired President Obama were his hard work and self-confidence. Jesus connects with teens because of his concern for others and being an example to follow.

“For better and worse, teens are emulating the people they know best. More than two out of three teens identify people they know personally as their primary role model. Many parents and youth workers fret about the role models of the next generation,” says David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group.

“Yet, one reason to remain hopeful about the development of young people is their reliance upon the people they know best: friends, relatives, teachers, pastors, and coaches. At the same time, that reality underscores the insistence of many parents that they influence the people with whom their child associates, in order to be sure that their kids are surrounded by people modeling positive values and life choices.”

Who is your role model?