

Who Should Step in to Pray at Obama's Inauguration?

Atlanta Pastor **Louie Giglio's** short-lived stint as one of two people chosen to pray at President Obama's upcoming inauguration has opened debate about who could step in and offer the benediction.

Various groups have offered their suggestions, from GLAAD to Huffington Post to ThinkProgress, which unearthed the damning mid-1990s sermon against homosexuality that prompted Giglio to withdraw.

Here's is part of Religion News Service's of possibilities, along with the service's views on the pros and cons of each possibility. Ideas for your pray-er picks? Let us know in the comments section below.

California megachurch pastor Rick Warren

Pro: He's done it before, offering the benediction at Obama's first inauguration, in 2009. And he's a household name.

Con: His choice was widely criticized by gay-rights groups after Warren fought for Proposition 8, which ended gay marriages in California. A Warren pick would do little to calm the controversy Giglio stirred.

Jesuit priest James Martin

Pro: He's the chaplain for Colbert Nation and a popular Catholic author, and there's a small but determined group of fans already petitioning the White House to sub him in.

Con: While Martin's popular in the press and Catholic circles, his national profile doesn't quite reach Rick Warren-levels.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan

Pro: The back-slapping archbishop prayed at both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions last year, and as the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, he's arguably the most powerful Catholic prelate in the country. Picking Dolan would also mend fences with Catholic bishops.

Con: Relations between the hierarchy and 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. have been, well, rocky—mostly over the administration's contraception mandate. Dolan already got grilled for inviting Obama to the annual Al Smith Dinner last fall, and he's said he felt personally betrayed by Obama's failure to craft a contraception compromise that could work for the bishops.

AME Bishop Vashti McKenzie

Pro: She's a friend of the president and served on his faith-based advisory panel. She's also a trailblazer, becoming the first female bishop in the historically black AME Church.

Con: Yes, it's unfair, but there's already a black woman on the program—civil rights widow Myrlie Evers-Williams, who is scheduled to deliver the opening prayer.

Rabbi David Saperstein

Pro: The head of the D.C. office of Reform Judaism is arguably the city's most connected Jewish powerbroker, and he has close ties to the White House.

Con: There's no real reason why Saperstein wouldn't get it, but also no real reason why he would. Saperstein also likes to keep his distance, not wanting to get too cozy with the powers-that-be in order to prevent him from having to repay too many favors.

Disciples of Christ president Rev. Sharon Watkins

Pro: The president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a close ally of the White House and has Obama's

ear. Plus, she's one of the few female possibilities that are known quantities to the White House.

Con: Despite her close ties to the White House, she cuts a relatively small national figure and could be seen by some as, well, uninspired.

Franklin Graham

Pro: Offering a high-profile slot to the scion of the Graham dynasty would be seen as an olive branch to evangelicals who have resisted Obama at nearly every turn (and voted overwhelmingly for Mitt Romney). The Grahams have a long history of praying at presidential inaugurations.

Con: Not gonna happen, simple as that. Graham got into hot water last year for refusing to say if Obama is a Christian, and his views on homosexuality (not to mention Islam) are even more strident than Giglio's. A . (Friend of Barack) he's not.

Florida megachurch pastor Joel Hunter

Pro: The Florida **megachurch** pastor is a moderate evangelical, more concerned with climate change than homosexuality. He's been a spiritual confidant and policy adviser to the president, and has the trust (if not occasional suspicion) of mainstream evangelicals.

Con: There's no real argument against him other than that he's sometimes seen as too cozy with the White House by some evangelicals. But that's not an automatic disqualifier. In many ways, he might emerge as the most obvious choice—he's mostly noncontroversial, he has the president's ear and a wide following. Even if he did defend the initial choice of Giglio.

Senate Chaplain Barry Black or House Chaplain Patrick Conroy

Pro: Black and Conroy are as conventional as they come—part of their job is to remain out of the headlines, so there'd be little to worry about. Plus, the Capitol steps where the

inauguration will take place is just steps from their offices.

Con: Unexciting and predictable. Again, perhaps unfair, there's already an African-American pray-er on the program for the nation's first black president on Martin Luther King Jr. Day—Black, too, in African-American. Conroy, who's held his post for less than two years, is a relative unknown.

Rev. Luis Leon

Pro: As rector of St. John's Episcopal Church near the White House, Leon is arguably the preacher Obama hears most often, since its where he most often goes on Sunday mornings (which isn't that often). The Cuban-born Leon could also be a nod to the president's Hispanic supporters. An inaugural prayer partially delivered *en espanol* would be a milestone.

Con: Like Hunter, there's no reason to think Leon couldn't get the gig, but no compelling reason why he should. Plus, presumably he'll already have the president's ear at the traditional morning-of inaugural prayer service at St. John's.

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