

'Episcopalian' McCain says he's Baptist: Asserts Constitution made U.S. Christian nation

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GOP presidential candidate John McCain has raised questions about his religious affiliation with a comment he made last month at a campaign stop in heavily Baptist South Carolina.

The Arizona senator, answering a question from the Associated Press on September 16 about how his Episcopal faith affects his decision making, said, "It plays a role in my life. By the way, I'm not Episcopalian. I'm Baptist." He continued: "Do I advertise my faith? Do I talk about it all the time? No."

Before September was over, however, McCain was interviewed by Beliefnet.com on religious issues. McCain suggested that the primary issue in the campaign is whether a presidential candidate will carry on the "Judeo-Christian principled tradition." He said he agreed with the 55 percent of Americans in a recent poll who said the Constitution established the U.S. as a Christian nation, though he said non-Christians are welcome as citizens.

Asked about a potential Muslim presidential candidate, he said he'd prefer someone "who has a solid grounding in my faith." He later contacted Beliefnet to clarify his remarks, saying: "I would vote for a Muslim if he or she was the candidate best able to lead the country and defend our political values."

McCain also reasserted his identity as a Baptist. As late as last June in a newspaper interview, McClain described himself as an Episcopalian. He was raised in the denomination and attended the prestigious Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia.

Biographical sketches in several congressional directories—information provided by members of Congress or their staff—list McCain's faith as Episcopal. But last month

he acknowledged that for years he and his family have attended North Phoenix Baptist Church, one of the largest congregations in the Phoenix area.

While his wife and children have been baptized as Baptists, he has not been baptized by immersion. "I didn't find it necessary to do so for my spiritual needs," he said. He told Beliefnet he is in conversation with Dan Yearly, the North Phoenix pastor, but said he does not expect to be baptized during the campaign.