

Obama prays over phone with handful of pastors: Otis Moss Jr., Jim Wallis and others

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President Obama, still without a church home, keeps in touch with as many as a half-dozen clergy for private prayer by telephone—all of them evangelicals.

Five of the men—three black and two white—were identified in a news story published March 15 by the *New York Times*.

California pastor Rick Warren, who prayed with Obama during the campaign and was chosen to open his inauguration with prayer, was not mentioned in the *Times* story. A Warren spokesperson told the Century March 24 that the two men “still connect.”

The newspaper confirmed five praying partners. They are Otis Moss Jr., recently retired pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland; Bishop T. D. Jakes, pastor of the Potter’s House megachurch in Dallas; Kirbyjohn H. Caldwell, senior pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston; Joel C. Hunter, pastor of Northland Church, a megachurch in Longwood, Florida; and Jim Wallis, who heads the Sojourners magazine and activist movement.

Caldwell and Jakes, black pastors who were spiritual counselors to former president George W. Bush, said they had been impressed by Obama’s candidacy, and Caldwell endorsed the Democratic nominee.

Moss, the third African-American pastor in Obama’s pastoral circle, is a civil rights veteran. While evangelical in theology, Hunter has adopted moderate positions on some issues, and Wallis is mostly liberal on issues of war, environment and other public matters. “These are all centrist, social justice guys,” Eugene F. Rivers, a politically active pastor in Boston, said to the *Times*.

As for Warren, the megachurch pastor and best-selling author who hosted the first public forum for the two major-party presidential candidates in August,

spokesperson Kristin U. Cole of Dallas-based A. Larry Ross Communications said, "Because Pastor Warren does keep many of the details of his relationships with high-profile people confidential, all I can tell you is that they do still connect, but never on political or policy stuff."

Warren's ongoing prayer relationship with the president was questioned by a source familiar with the pastor's activities and interviewed on the condition of anonymity. "If Rick was one of Obama's prayer counselors, I think he would have a hard time keeping that fact to himself," he said.