

Obama picks new round of faith-based advisers

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [March 8, 2011](#) issue

President Obama has named some top U.S. church leaders to an advisory council on faith-based programs, but the list of appointments is drawing questions about a lack of representatives from minority faiths.

The

12 names released late on February 4 include top officials of prominent organizations—from the Episcopal Church to the National Association of Evangelicals to the United Way. The list includes no prominent Muslim or Hindu leaders; the White House says the list will be expanded later with 13 additional names.

Welton Gaddy, a Baptist minister who is president of the Washington-based Interfaith Alliance, said he was "shocked" that the initial names for the panel did not include leaders known outside the Christian and Jewish faiths. "I would think that it would have been a priority to have had a Muslim leader on there and at least one representative from the non-Abrahamic traditions," he said.

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White House would not comment on the diversity of the panel but said more names are to come. "We look forward to announcing the additional members at a later date, at which point the 25 members will begin the process of producing recommendations to improve the government's partnerships with faith-based and other nonprofit organizations," said White House spokesman Shin Inouye.

The new panel members include

the heads of four denominations—Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Greek Orthodox Archbishop

Demetrios and Nancy Wilson, moderator of the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Churches.

Evangelical leaders include Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Lynne Hybels, cofounder with her husband, Bill, of Willow Creek Community Church, a suburban Chicago megachurch.

Jewish officials include Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative rabbis, and Susan Stern, special adviser on government affairs to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The other appointees are Andrea Bazán, president of Triangle Community Foundation in North Carolina; Angela Glover Blackwell, founder of PolicyLink, a California-based nonprofit that seeks economic equity; Brian Gallagher, president of the United Way Worldwide; and Sister Marlene Weisenbeck, an officer of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The first panel of 25 members completed its work last March. Vetting of the next group has taken longer than expected. Obama signed an executive order in November that reflects some of the first group's recommendations for reforming the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.