

I don't really care who, if anyone, prays at the inauguration

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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It turns out [Louie Giglio won't be giving the benediction](#) at Obama's second inauguration. Who will?

[Jack Jenkins is right](#): Minerva Carcaño, Otis Moss, Gary Hall and Brian McLaren are all fine options. [Joanna Brooks is right, too](#): so are Pratima Dharm, Sharon Braus, Sanaa Nadim, Anapesi Kali and Valarie Kaur. [Ed Kilgore suggests his own pastor](#), who's related to Ron and Rand Paul. Sounds okay, too.

Actually, [I also agree with Fred Clark](#): there really shouldn't be an official prayer on the program at all. [Like the National Prayer Breakfast](#), these carefully orchestrated inaugural invocations and benedictions both muddle the government's official nonsectarianism and—more importantly, at least to me—cheapen the idea of prayer.

But really, only a little. I was at the 2009 inauguration, and Rick Warren and Joseph Lowery's prayers seemed out of place to me, but also pretty harmless. The people around me were hardly listening. Sure, the symbolism matters. But does it matter very much?

Do you remember who prayed at the last several inaugurations? Clinton called on Billy Graham both times. At Bush's second inaugural, both prayers were given by nonwhite pastors from mainline denominations. You could make a lot out of either of these things. Or you could, you know, not. Especially if (like me) you had to look up the information because it wasn't important enough to remember.

I'm no fan of Warren or many of his views, but [I wasn't appalled](#) that Obama selected one of America's most influential pastors to give one of two prayers at the 2009 event, even though he's a white evangelical who's opposed to same-sex marriage. It's political window-dressing, not a seat at the policymaking table.

Despite the outcry, Warren gave the invocation. It was weird, and then it was over, and then Obama served a generally LGBT-friendly first term.

So, another choice I'd be fine with this time around: Louie Giglio. Not that I share an iota of [Timothy Dalrymple's disdain for those who protested his invitation](#):

A wry congratulations to the LGBT community. You just chased an evangelical pastor widely known and celebrated for his anti-trafficking efforts out of the President's inaugural for the thought-crime of believing (or once believing) that homosexual sex is sinful, and homosexual desires can be controlled or cultivated in other ways. In so doing, however, you proved not only that you (unlike most oppressed minorities) wield immense political power, but you also proved that the oppressed can also be oppressors, the bullied bullies, and you proved too that evangelicals are right to have concerns that their religious conscience freedoms are in danger.

Sure, if being excluded from churches and other social institutions, subject to ridicule and verbal abuse and violence, and generally treated as less than human were equivalent to *not giving the benediction at a presidential inauguration*. I can understand why gays and lesbians don't want to see Obama honor Giglio with an official role, and I get that his past statements are harder for them to ignore than they are for me.

Still, I can't get very worked up about this particular controversy. Obama's people will consider the politics and then choose someone else to give the prayer. Then (s)he will get up at the inauguration and read a few words that are sectarian enough to bug some people and pluralistic enough to bug others. Then, unless this person chooses to [pronounce the first daughters' names weirdly](#) or [riff on the lyrics of an old blues song a lot of white people don't know](#), we'll soon forget most of it.

But I hope we'll keep praying for our nation and our leaders in our homes and churches—in places where prayer is appropriate and crucial, not just a goofy bit of civil religion and political opportunity.