

Pastors poll: Graham is 'most influential' Rick Warren and George W. Bush runners-up

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Although illness and age have slowed him, evangelist Billy Graham is considered by Protestant senior pastors to be the most influential Christian figure and most trusted spokesperson for the faith, reports the Barna Group pollsters.

Pastor-author Rick Warren (*The Purpose-Driven Life*) was runner-up (26 percent) to Graham (34 percent) when a random national sample of 614 pastors was asked to name up to three people who have the greatest influence on churches and church leaders. President George W. Bush was third at 14 percent.

When the question changed to “most trusted,” Graham was named by six out of ten pastors (58 percent). Finishing a distant second at 20 percent was Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, followed by Warren.

Mainline Protestant pastors in the survey also ranked Graham, Warren, Bush and Dobson highest on the “influential” scale, followed by Pope John Paul II and Pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church. The Barna survey identified mainline churches as American Baptist, Episcopal, United Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The only two mainline Protestant clergy cited by mainline pastors among the top ten “most influential” were historian-author Martin Marty (seventh) and newly elected United Methodist Bishop William Willimon (ninth). Both men are associated with the Century, Marty as a longtime columnist and staff member, and Willimon as an editor at large.

Pastors of mainline churches, when asked about the “most trusted spokesperson,” put Robert H. Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral fourth on their list, followed by Hybels, Marty and Willimon. The survey results were posted last month at www.barna.org.

Among the top ten “most influential,” according to all survey respondents, was (sixth) best-selling author T. D. Jakes, a Pentecostal megachurch pastor in Dallas, and (eighth) the Barna Group founder, George Barna of Ventura, California, whose ministry focuses on evangelical beliefs and church growth. Pastors polled named 300 people of influence, but only ten of them garnered as much as 4 percent.