

New York mosque named top religion story of 2010

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The protracted and contentious debate over plans to build an Islamic community center near Ground Zero in New York was the top religion story of 2010, according to a survey of religion journalists.

The imam piloting the project, Feisal Abdul Rauf, was voted the Religion Newswriters Association's top newsmaker of 2010, besting Pope Benedict XVI, Sarah Palin and aid workers in earthquake-ravaged Haiti.

Although the mosque project, known as Park51, is far from completion, the story dominated headlines for weeks, especially as the anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 approached. President Obama weighed in, saying Muslims have a right to build houses of worship, but other political leaders called the proposal insensitive to Americans still grieving over the loss of friends and family.

The response of faith-based charities to Haiti's devastating earthquake last January— including child-smuggling accusations against Idaho evangelicals—was voted the No. 2 religion story of 2010.

Allegations that Benedict and other Catholic leaders responded inadequately to the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy; the rise of the Tea Party; and the various faith groups' responses to Obama's health-care bill rounded out the top five stories of 2010, according to the survey.

The remaining stories in the top 10 are:

6. Debates over homosexuality among mainline Protestants, particularly the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

and the Episcopal Church.

7. The economic recession's effect on churches and ministries, including the bankruptcy of the landmark Crystal Cathedral in southern California.

8. The suicide of several gay teens prompted soul searching among some American Christians about whether religion contributes to anti-gay attitudes.

9. A survey by the Pew Forum yielded some surprising results, including that atheists scored better than many Christians on a test of religious knowledge.

10. The Supreme Court began its session in October without a Protestant justice on the bench for the first time in history. Six Catholics and three Jews sit on the high court.