

# At prayer breakfast, Obama discusses personal faith

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—President Obama spoke at length Feb. 3 about the daily contours of his Christian faith, brushing off the skeptics who question the authenticity of his beliefs.

“My Christian faith ... has been a sustaining force for me over these last few years, all the more so when Michelle and I hear our faith questioned from time to time,” Obama told thousands of political leaders, diplomats and religious officials at the National Prayer Breakfast.

“We are reminded that ultimately what matters is not what other people say about us but whether we are being true to our conscience and true to our God.”

The president’s remarks come in the wake of polls that showed Americans harbor persistent questions about Obama’s faith, with one in four thinking he is a Muslim, and 43 percent unable to say which faith he follows.

Thursday’s speech reflects a renewed emphasis on faith in the president’s public remarks, as when he spoke at Christmas of the birth of Christ being “a story that’s dear to Michelle and me as Christians,” and said the Christmas story “guides my Christian faith.”

As the son of parents who largely shunned organized religion, Obama said, he was influenced by clergy of the civil rights movement, including the late Martin Luther King Jr. and leaders of the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths.

As a community organizer working with churches on Chicago’s South Side, Obama said, “I came to know Jesus Christ for myself and embrace him as

my Lord and Savior.”

Obama said he is supported by the prayers of well-known religious leaders and countless unknown grass-roots supporters. He has prayed in the Oval Office with “pastor friends” like megachurch leaders Joel Hunter of Florida and Bishop T.D. Jakes of Dallas, and enjoys “consistent respite and fellowship” in the chapel at the Camp David presidential retreat.

He said his children’s godmother has organized prayer circles across the nation to pray for him.

“Once I started running for president and she heard what they were saying about me on cable, she felt the need to pray harder,” he said.

“By the time I was elected president, she says, ‘I just couldn’t keep up on my own. I was having to pray eight, nine times a day just for you.’ So she enlisted help from around the country.”

Obama said he prays in the morning for “strength to do right” and at bedtime, “I wait on the Lord and I ask him to forgive me my sins.”

He also joked that his prayers have shaped his life as a father and husband.

“Lord, give me patience as I watch Malia go to her first dance, where there will be boys,” he said of his older daughter. “Lord, have that skirt get longer as she travels to that dance.”

Obama was greeted outside the Washington Hilton by a small group of protesters who claim that some members of the evangelical organization that sponsors the annual breakfast support harsh anti-gay laws in Uganda.

Obama did not mention the controversy, as he did at last year’s breakfast when he condemned as “odious” proposed legislation in Uganda to impose the death penalty on HIV-positive gays and lesbians.

The bill, which has not been voted on, was drafted by a Ugandan lawmaker

with ties to The Family, the evangelical organization that sponsors the breakfast. On Jan. 26, prominent gay-rights activist David Kato was murdered in his Kampala home after he and other “known homos” were displayed on the front pages of a Ugandan newspaper.

“It is an absolute affront to my faith to say they stand for Christianity and then to stand for hate and bigotry as well,” said one of the protesters, Joey Heath, a second-year student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington.

[Watch a video of Obama's remarks here.](#)

*Richard Yeakley contributed to this report.*