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Top newsmaker, news story of 2011 announced

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | Dec. 14, 2011

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Pope Benedict XVI (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

WASHINGTON -- The introduction of the English translation of the Roman Missal topped the religious news stories of 2011, and Pope Benedict XVI was again the top newsmaker, according to the annual poll conducted by Catholic News Service.

The continued effect of the global economic downturn was second among the 30 news stories on the ballot, the democracy movement in the Middle East dubbed the Arab spring took third place.

Among the 24 newsmakers on the ballot, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was second and U.S. President Barack Obama was third.

The poll was the 50th annual survey conducted by CNS. This year's ballots were distributed Dec. 2 and the deadline for returns was Dec. 8.

When the editors' poll was first conducted in 1962, the overwhelming choice for top story was the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Last year, editors chose the recovery and rebuilding effort that followed the devastating January earthquake in Haiti as the top religious story of the year and Pope Benedict as the top newsmaker.

Editors were asked to vote for the top 10 news stories from a list of 30, and the top five newsmakers from a list of 24. Votes were weighted by the rankings editors gave -- 10 points for a first-place vote, nine points for second, etc., and five points for top newsmaker, four for second, etc.

With 29 editors and CNS staff members submitting ballots, the maximum points a story could have received was 290. The most a newsmaker could receive on the five-point scale was 145.

Rounding out the top five for religious news stories were the Irish church's sex abuse scandal and the issue of religious freedom.

Pope Benedict, who has been the top religious newsmaker in the CNS poll every year since 2006, took first place this year for his travels to Croatia, Benin, Germany and Spain; his declaration of the upcoming Year of Faith; and his meetings with U.S. bishops, which were to continue into 2012.

Among newsmakers, Blessed John Paul II, who was beatified in May, and Fordham University theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson, whose 2007 book "Quest for the Living God" was declared "seriously inadequate as a presentation of the Catholic understanding of God" by the bishops' Committee on Doctrine, were fourth and fifth, respectively.

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