

Christians Gather in Nation's Capital To Pray for 'Healing' in America

Organizer Bishop John Gimenez says the call to champion righteousness did not end with the presidential election

Thousands gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., days before the November election to fast and pray that righteousness would prevail in the United States. But in the wake of President Bush's re-election, Bishop John Gimenez said the task is still far from over.

Quoting an old Spanish proverb—"Tell me who you walk with, and I'll tell you who you are"—Gimenez, organizer of the Oct. 22 America for Jesus (AFJ) rally in Washington, D.C., said he hopes Christians will continue to walk together as "watchmen" in prayer, and then work together to reclaim American culture.

He says in order for the nation to be healthy, prayer needs to be returned to schools, a marriage amendment must be passed and Christians must gain more influence in such secular strongholds as the media. At the AFJ rally, Gimenez gathered evangelical and charismatic leaders from across the country, as well as nationally known musicians, including pastor Donnie McClurkin, entertainer Pat Boone and the worship band Starfield.

AFJ leaders reported some 25,000 attendees, but said thousands more in the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Australia joined in prayer while watching satellite broadcasts.

"We were few, but we were committed," Gimenez told Charisma. "We prayed in dozens of languages and we prayed: 'Lord, save our nation. Bring righteousness back to the forefront.'"

Gimenez said the focus of the event was not on promoting a particular candidate but on encouraging Christians to seek righteousness and to pray that God would "exalt [His] name and the one [He] wants to rule." He's already looking toward the 2008 presidential election, when he may organize another rally urging Christians to cross denominational and racial lines to support the candidate who promotes righteousness.

"We have a problem in the church, and that is division, but little by little we are coming together," said Gimenez, who founded The Rock Church in Virginia Beach, Va., with his wife, Anne, and organized three previous prayer rallies. The couple's 1988 Washington for Jesus rally is said to have drawn more than 1 million participants.

"If we can be one, we can bring healing to the nation, we can turn things around, we can have a bright future for our children," he added.

It is a point that was echoed by nearly everyone in attendance. Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals and a speaker at the AFJ rally, said the church is more united than it has been in several years.

"Evangelicals are more united than ever before," he said. "We fragmented with the Protestant Reformation and continue to fragment ... which gives us different flavors in the body. Now there is a high degree of relational camaraderie between the leaders of evangelicalism, and so you look at the platform

here at America for Jesus you see every ethnic group imaginable here praying together, and that's a wonderful thing."

Emphasizing the importance of unity, McClurkin gave a stirring rendition of songwriter Rich Mullins' classic "Awesome God," singing its popular chorus in German and Russian.

"Our nation was built on godly principles, godly intention—that's how our founders structured the framework of this country," McClurkin said.

"My prayer for this nation is that [we] would go back to God, the true and living God, and that we would come to grips with the fact that you cannot extract God from the very fabric of the society that He built. Stop running from the very one that calls us into being as a nation. Turn back to God and allow Him to bring about change."

Chris Pettit in Washington, D.C.