

Christians to Pray as White House Observes Ramadan

✖ As President Obama marks the month of Ramadan with a special dinner tonight at the White House, Christians nationwide will be praying for Muslims in the U.S. and abroad.

Saying the need to pray for the nation is critical, the Presidential Prayer Team will host a live, interactive prayer service at the group's Web site that coincides with the 8 p.m. dinner in the State Dining Room.

"As a ministry that prays to the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of America's president, our nation's leadership and our troops on a daily basis, we have asked our constituency to specifically pray for the president during this time," said Presidential Prayer Team President Scott Fehrenbacher.

During Ramadan, which began Aug. 22, Muslims fast during the day and pray at night, commemorating the month during which Muslims believe Mohammed divinely received the Quran.

Although the practice of marking Ramadan with a White House dinner began during President George W. Bush's administration, some Christians have been critical of Obama's White House observance because he did not host an official event marking the National Day of Prayer last May. He instead issued a presidential proclamation and said he planned to pray privately.

"Since assuming office in January, President Obama has not only regularly passed up opportunities to affirm and celebrate America's Judeo Christian heritage, but at times, he's appeared to go out of his way to suggest the opposite is true," said Shirley Dobson, chairman of the National Day of

Prayer Task Force.

"In light of these recent events, the president's decision to carry on the tradition of hosting a White House dinner to celebrate the Muslim holy season of Ramadan is curious. Our disappointment, however, is not with the President's decision to host such a celebration. Quite the contrary. It's simply unfortunate that he didn't choose to extend the same level of courtesy and recognition this past May to the millions of supporters and organizers of the National Day of Prayer."

The Rev. Johnny Hunter, an African-American pro-life leader who was arrested on the National Day of Prayer while praying outside the White House, said that by hosting the Ramadan observance President Obama "is distinctly placing Islam above Christianity."

"He's stated before the entire world that we're not a Christian nation," added the founder of . Inc. "By him turning his back on Christians on a day when we're to pray to God, then turn around and make such a flamboyant move toward Islam, it tells me that it's not America that's not Christian, it's the president that's not Christian."

Pastor Brian McLaren believes it's possible to be both Christian and pray with Muslims during Ramadan. This year, the popular author of *A Different Kind of Christian* and leader in the emergent church movement is participating in the fast with some of his Christian friends.

"We are not doing so in order to become Muslims: we are deeply committed Christians," he wrote in a blog posting last month. "But as Christians, we want to come close to our Muslim neighbors and to share this important part of life with them. Just as Jesus, a devout Jew, overcame religious prejudice and learned from a Syrophonecian woman and was inspired by her faith two thousand years ago (Matthew 15:21 ff, Mark 7:24 ff),

we seek to learn from our Muslim sisters and brothers today.”

Other Christians have been marking Ramadan with a 30-day prayer focus for the Muslim world. Millions of Christians are believed to support the 30-Days Muslim Prayer Focus, which Youth With a Mission launched in 1993.

In addition to daily prayer points, a special prayer booklet includes articles to educate Christians about Islam and mobilize believers to reach out to Muslim people groups. The prayer campaign can also be followed online.

It’s “expanding our ability to love,” said Paul Filidis, North American coordinator of the 30-Days Muslim Prayer Focus. “As you pray for people, you get God’s perspective, God’s heart, and it’s hard not to have a certain love for them that transcends the headlines.”

International evangelist Sammy Tippit believes praying for Muslims could help bring a revival in the Islamic world. He said he’s heard numerous testimonies of Muslims, particularly in Iran, who have come to Christ after having dreams and visions of Jesus.

“I believe that during this time where there’s prayer, religious rituals, fasting that’s taking place, there’s some kind of seeking in their hearts,” he said. “And if we will pray, I believe God will come and reveal Himself to them in a mighty way. I believe we can actually through our prayers see many, many people come to Christ in the Islamic world.”

He says that though there is an extremist element of Islam that opposes Christianity, most Muslims are just people with the same needs as anyone else.

“There is an aggressive element of Islam that is very strongly trying to destroy the church,” he said. “But I find in the New Testament [that] the church’s response was to love, proclaim the gospel and stand firm rather than to become angry with

[those who opposed] them.”

“It doesn’t matter to me what happens in the White House,” he added. “What matters to me is what happens in the church house. And if the church will get down and begin to pray and seek the face of God, God will move in the midst of this in a mighty way, and I think we could see a great revival in the Islamic world.”