

Leaders Say Pray for Obama

Church leaders congratulated Barack Obama on his historic victory and urged believers to intercede for the 44th U.S. president.



[] Church leaders are encouraging Christians to pray in the wake of a historic election that gave the U.S. its first African-American president.

Despite strong objections from conservative Christian leaders and 74 percent of the white evangelical vote going to Republican Sen. John McCain, Democratic candidate Barack Obama sailed to victory Tuesday night, winning 349 electoral votes compared with 163 for McCain.

In a statement released Wednesday, Bishop T.D. Jakes congratulated "President-elect Barack Hussein Obama" with "sincere thanks," saying the former Illinois senator's historic campaign "encouraged, validated and gave inspiration to not only the people of the United States of America, but to the people of our world."

The Dallas megachurch pastor also thanked McCain for fighting "the good fight until the very end." He said, "The world needs Sen. McCain and I am hopeful that he will stay vigilant and active in public service."

After the election results were announced, church leaders began issuing calls to pray for the president-elect. "The Bible clearly states that the leaders should pray for persons who are in authority, so whether we voted for president-elect Obama or not, we must pray for him," said the Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, a longtime friend of President Bush's who threw his support behind Obama earlier this year. "Our disagreement with the leaders in charge does not give us a license to not pray for them."

Saying no president can govern without God's guidance, Bishop

Harry Jackson, co-author of *Personal Faith, Public Policy* and a McCain supporter, encouraged Christians to work with Obama. "I choose to believe that in 2009 we will take a step closer to fulfilling Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream and seeing a great spiritual awakening in our land," said Jackson, who leads a charismatic congregation in Maryland. "I will personally commit myself to making Barack Obama the most successful president in history by backing him with my prayers, support and service to our nation. I pray that every believer will do the same."

Aglow International President Jane Hansen Hoyt echoed that sentiment, congratulating Obama and committing to pray for him and his family. "As a worldwide women's ministry with thousands of members across the U.S., we are praying for two crucial issues he will face that, we believe, will have an effect on our nation for generations: support for the nation of Israel, and the appointment of U.S. Supreme Court justices," Hansen Hoyt said in a statement Wednesday. "May he make those decisions with wisdom and a desire to seek righteousness."

Colorado pastor Dutch Sheets agreed that Christians should intercede for government leaders, but said they should pray that "God will turn their heart and ... keep us moving as a nation toward reformation and awakening."

Before the election, Sheets urged Christians to pray that the pro-life candidate would win, and he believes McCain would have prevailed had there been enough prayer. He said Obama's win would set the pro-life agenda back and could lead to "huge" judgment on America. "There's no way to get around it. It's just going to happen," Sheets said. "You don't invite 20 or 30 more years of abortion, you don't invite that in without judgment. But at the same time, we have to regroup, figure out what God's strategy is and move forward with that."

Several Christian leaders called Obama's election a wake-up call for conservatives, who had lost the faith of the American people. "I think it's very clear that the economy drove this election," said Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research

Council. "I think Barack Obama does have a mandate from the majority of Americans to address the economy and even our international standing. What he does not have a mandate for, which I think is quite clear, is to implement radical social policies."

He noted that marriage amendments passed in all three states where it was on the ballot, which he said is proof that Americans are still largely social conservatives. "These marriage amendments on the ballots passed; I think they should be a warning to President-elect Obama and the expanded Democratic majority in Congress that if they try to overreach and take this as a mandate for their radical social policies, the American public is going to push back," Perkins said.

Exit polls showed that black and Hispanic voters, who supported Obama by significant majorities, were critical in passing marriage amendments in Arizona, Florida and California. The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Leadership Conference, said that support for traditional marriage proves that minority voters are socially conservative and that white evangelicals cannot win elections or preserve a biblical worldview on their own.

"Unless you form a coalition that looks like the kingdom of God where blacks and Latinos and Asians are at the table and not in a token position but in co-leadership positions, we will never win again in respect to our social conservative biblical values," said Rodriguez, whose organization represents 15 million Hispanic evangelicals.

"The success of [California's marriage amendment] speaks accolades," he continued. "We worked across the table—all the different colors and tribes saying there's no way [gay marriage will be tolerated]. I think the microcosm of the model forged in California should be emulated throughout the country. So we need to reach out and we're doing that."

Both Caldwell and the Rev. Joel Hunter, a Florida pastor who prayed during the Democratic National Convention, said Obama has become more conservative in his views on abortion in

recent months, and they believe evangelicals will have access to the White House in an Obama administration.

“He absolutely will include us in the conversations,” Hunter said. “President-elect Obama is someone who governs with an orientation toward consensus. He likes to hear different voices. He likes to have a different perspectives and viewpoints. So we have reasonable assurance that the evangelical community would have a place in those conversations. He’s initiated outreach toward many evangelical leaders during his campaign so I think he’ll stay consistently open after his inauguration.”

Although he’s not sure how it may happen, Sheets believes Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin may yet become president one day, as he declared publicly before the election.

“Time will tell, but I still believe she has a huge destiny on her for this nation,” Sheets said. “I’m a little taken back by the way this has happened. It obviously causes me to back up a little bit, but if someone backed me in a corner right now and said, ‘Do you still think she will be president?’ I’d say yes.” – **Adrienne S. Gaines with reporting by Felicia Mann and Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**