

Black Ministers Arrested on National Day of Prayer

✖ **May 7, 2009** – Although President Obama did not host a National Day of Prayer observance, two African-American ministers prayed outside the White House today, even though it led to their arrest.

The Rev. Johnny Hunter and the Rev. Stephen Broden, both longtime pro-life activists, were taken into custody briefly after holding a “prayer picket” outside the White House to publicly oppose the president’s decision not to participate in the National Day of Prayer (NDOP). They were released after just a few hours.

“[It’s] the National Day of Prayer, and the president refuses to participate in it?” said Hunter, who leads the Life Education and Resource Networks (LEARN) in Fayetteville, N.C. “Before at least presidents were nice enough to open their doors and let some Christians come in and pray. ... Not this one. So since he wouldn’t do it, we took the prayer to him.”

The ministers said they knew they were risking arrest but held signs saying: “Jesus Christ Is Our Lord and Savior. BHO is not” to protest what they see as a dangerous trend toward broader abortion access and acceptance of homosexuality that has occurred under the Obama administration.

“We believe this republic is under great duress right now and stress, and we believe prayer is the means by which we can change things here in America and in this government,” said Broden, pastor of Fair Park Bible Fellowship Church in Dallas.

“We prayed that God would either stay the hand of judgment or quicken the hearts of men and women of faith for them to recognize that they need to come to the streets, they need to come to the public square and make it clear that we are not in

favor of same-sex marriage, we are not in favor of this scourge ... [of abortion], we are not in favor of the kind of trickery and gamesmanships that are being played in the house of Congress and the house of the Senate. We are fed up, and we are tired of what this nation is doing and what our leaders are doing relative to their role and responsibility for protecting our freedoms.”

The ministers joined some 2 million Christians, who met in at least 40,000 venues nationwide to pray for the U.S. A national service was held this morning in Washington, D.C., led by NDOP Task Force Chairman Shirley Dobson, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson and Bible teacher Beth Moore.

The event was broadcast live on GOD TV, Sky Angel and at the NDOP Task Force Web site. It will re-air at 7:30 p.m. PDT during another prayer event in Los Angeles.

“The fact that up to 50,000 communities will have public observances of prayer is strategically very important because it points to the awakening of the believing body of Christ that is going on,” said Gary Bergel, president emeritus/editor of Intercessors for America in Washington, D.C.

“That’s what we know we’re laboring for, the restoration of the church as the ongoing daily house of prayer for all people. ... Not only for all men and women to come to know freedom and redemption through Jesus Christ but all in authority, all heads of state, that we could live quiet, peaceable, worshipful, enterprising, free lives here”

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said President Obama would pray privately on the NDOP. The president also issued a proclamation recognizing the day and calling on Americans to “to pray in thanksgiving” for the nation’s freedoms and blessings and “to ask for God’s continued guidance, grace, and protection for this land that we love.” (Read President Obama’s proclamation.)

Christian leaders widely decried Obama's decision to break from President George W. Bush tradition of holding an official observance.

"We are disappointed in the lack of participation by the Obama administration," Shirley Dobson said. "At this time in our country's history, we would hope our president would recognize more fully the importance of prayer."

In addition to praying for the nation, faith leaders and members of Congress were to hold a bipartisan press conference today to affirm America's Christian heritage.

"America was birthed in a prayer meeting led by our Founding Fathers," said Mathew D. Staver, founder of the law firm Liberty Counsel and dean of the Liberty University School of Law.

"After dissention arose among the Revolutionary leaders about the proper form of government, and when all hope seemed lost, Benjamin Franklin arose and said: 'Have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance?' The Founders convened a three-day prayer meeting and America was born."

Twenty-four members of Congress were to join Staver at the press briefing, including Rep. J. Randy Forbes, R-Va., who on Monday introduced the America's Spiritual Heritage Resolution to recognize the role prayer played in the nation's history. The measure also calls on Congress to designate the first week in May as "American Religious History Week."

The legislation and the press conference are aimed at countering Obama's recent statement that Americans "do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation. We consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values."

"The United States Supreme Court has acknowledged that America

is a 'Christian nation,' that we are a 'religious people,' and that our 'institutions presuppose a Supreme Being,'" Staver said in a statement. "Yes, Mr. President, America was born on a Christian and Judeo foundation. At critical times like these, we ought to heed the words of Benjamin Franklin and humbly ask almighty God to bless America."

Last week, prayer leaders Cindy Jacobs and Dutch Sheets called on Christians to help "turn the nation back to God" by praying on April 30. On that day in 1863, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation calling the nation to humble itself "before the offended Power," to confess its national sins and to pray for "clemency and forgiveness."

The prayer effort was to continue through the NDOP, when intercessors were asked to intensify their prayers for national healing and renewal.

"Let's come into agreement with what President Lincoln said and let's make a statement to this nation, to the spiritual powers that are trying to steal from us our Christian heritage, and let's say: 'The war isn't over. We are not going to give this nation away, and the culture war isn't over,'" said Sheets, pastor of Springs Harvest Fellowship in Colorado Springs, Colo. "God is going to help us reform this nation. We are going to get it done."

This year is the 58th annual NDOP, which President Harry Truman signed into law in 1952 after the Rev. Billy Graham led a crusade in Washington, D.C. In 1988 President Ronald Reagan set the observances on the first Thursday in May.

In March, the Obama administration asked that a lawsuit claiming the NDOP violated church-state separation be dismissed, the Associated Press reported. The administration argued that the tradition dates back to 1775 and that most presidents have invoked faith in a higher power.