

Occupiers Pray Against National Prayer Breakfast

As President Obama and much of official Washington, D.C., gather on Thursday for the 59th National Prayer Breakfast, religious voices aligned with "Occupy DC" are hosting their own rival "People's Prayer Breakfast."

At issue: the sponsor. According to Occupy Faith DC, the Fellowship Foundation is a "secretive conservative group" that "explicitly cultivates the wealthy and the powerful for political influence."

"While the 1 percent attend the National Prayer Breakfast, the 99 percent will '... reflect, pray and draw attention to the suffering and marginalization of millions of U.S. citizens languishing in economic distress, uncertainty and poverty,'" one organizer of the People's Prayer Breakfast said in the *Huffington Post*.

Beyond their own breakfast at a United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation near Dupont Circle, the rival group will also convene a "Silent Witness" outside the upscale National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton.

"Who is going to be represented in the other event are the representatives of the one percent," complained the UCC pastor of Church of the Pilgrims, who called for religious people to "be the revolutionaries that our spiritual traditions call us to be."

As Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy, sees it, the rival event mostly appears to be older religious left clergy who are parasitically attempting to harness the dissipating energy of the occupiers.

A Muslim representative, Ibrahim Abdil-Mu'id Ramey of the

Muslim American Society, was more aggressive: "As Jesus said in the temple, sometimes righteousness requires a little butt kicking."

"The National Prayer Breakfast is primarily about schmoozing, not 'butt kicking.' Exposés like Jeff Sharlet's 2008 book, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*, have imagined The Fellowship as a high-octane push for Christian theocracy," Tooley says. "Whatever the fanciful theories about its organizer, the National Prayer Breakfast is a mostly admirable tradition that provokes politicians into at least momentarily expressing high minded religious principles."