

Pray With Me

I want to see charismatic and non-charismatic evangelicals work together better.

On May 1 millions of Americans will come together to observe the "National Day of Prayer." Prayer is particularly important now, when our nation is at war with Iraq. But even when that conflict is resolved, we face an ongoing war against terrorism.

Thankfully, our president is aware of the necessity of prayer. Recently a high-level Washington official related a story about a friend who met President Bush and told him his 93-year-old mother was praying for him daily. The president grabbed the man's arm and said: "Tell your mother two things: First, don't quit praying; and second, it's working!"

At a press conference before the beginning of the war in Iraq, a reporter asked the president a cynical question about how his faith helps direct him in leading the country. The president didn't flinch. He said it means a lot to him to know that millions of people are praying for him daily and that he welcomes the prayers.

I am writing this month to encourage the readers of Charisma to observe the National Day of Prayer by attending interdenominational events in which Christians of various churches come together for prayer. Or perhaps you can hold special prayer meetings at your own church or workplace with those who wish to get together to pray.

Don't be like the charismatics a concerned reader wrote me about. Allan Buckingham of Bedford, Texas, noted a trend I too

had noticed—that when it comes to events such as the National Day of Prayer, the charismatic community doesn't get as involved as "mainline" evangelical groups.

"It is a concern of mine that this event may increasingly be becoming the domain of traditional evangelicals with less and less participation and awareness by charismatics," Allan wrote. "While evangelical ... institutions build up to the [National Day of Prayer] ... the charismatic community is often unaware of the event or fail[s] to arrange for an observance."

Why is this? It's not because prayer isn't a priority in the charismatic community. Many churches and ministries do focus on prayer. But I think it shows a couple of things about charismatics:

Many ministries are so focused on what they themselves are doing that they fail to cooperate with others. It's as if the success of their own ministry is paramount regardless of what is happening in the body of Christ or the nation at large.

There is a gulf in perceptions between charismatics and non-charismatics. Each group seems to have its own set of leaders and priorities and seems to operate in a separate world—even though the two groups have so much in common.

This is beginning to change. Ted Haggard, the dynamic pastor of 9,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, has just been elected president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)—a group dominated for decades by conservative white evangelicals, even though several prominent Pentecostal denominations were instrumental in starting it.

World Relief, the now independent relief arm of NAE, has recently elected several charismatic leaders to its board, including Bishop Keith Butler, pastor of Word of Faith International Christian Center near Detroit, and me.

Because World Relief chairman Gordon MacDonald is aware of the gulf in understanding that exists between the two groups, he invited me to address the World Relief board later this month on the subject "Charismatics: Who Are They, What Are They, How Important Are They, Where Do Non-Charismatic Evangelicals and Charismatic Evangelicals Work Together, and Can It Happen in America?" To me, just the fact that MacDonald is asking these questions is a major breakthrough.

I desperately want to see charismatic evangelicals and non-charismatic evangelicals work together better not only in NAE and World Relief but also in the Christian publishing industry and on political issues that affect the family and the church. But first we must pray that the walls of prejudice, misunderstanding and apathy come down.

So this year on the National Day of Prayer, I pray: "Lord, bring Your body together, and begin by causing charismatics and non-charismatics to work more closely together." I encourage those who share my vision for unity to join me in this prayer.

Stephen Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma.