

Dear

We are writing to request your endorsement and proclamation of our call for an Inclusive National Day of Prayer and Reflection on May 7th. We are requesting a declaration that explicitly opens this day, established by President Truman, to clergy and believers of all religions, as well as those who profess no religion. We are compelled to make this request because several years ago, the National Day of Prayer was taken over by a group of religious extremists led by Shirley Dobson of Focus on the Family. Dobson's group calls itself the "official" National Day of Prayer Task Force and it systematically excludes Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Buddhists and even mainline Christians from National Prayer Day events it conducts around the United States.

We are respectfully asking as well that you decline to issue a separate proclamation for May 7th to the National Day of Prayer Task Force, because the group has a record of using proclamations from elected officials to raise the status of events in which it discriminates against and excludes clergy who represent faith traditions other than fundamentalist evangelical Christianity.

Our request to you is given urgency because of the Task Force's policy of making its events appear to be government endorsed and official, thus crossing the First Amendment lines separating government and religion. In one of its documents the Task Force explicitly instructed coordinators to "make a public statement to the state government officials by being physically at the Capitol building and/or having them participate in the observance."

The National Day of Prayer Task Force requires volunteer coordinators to sign a pledge stating: "I commit that NDP activities I serve with will be conducted solely by Christians while those with differing beliefs are welcome to attend." The coordinators must also sign a statement of faith which includes the following language: "I believe that the Holy Bible is the inerrant Word of The Living God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only One by which I can obtain salvation and have an ongoing relationship with God." This clearly aligns a government-sponsored event with a particular Christian denomination, in violation of the basic provisions of the First Amendment to the Constitution, establishing the separation of church and state.

Please use your power of proclamation to restore the annual day of prayer to what President Harry Truman intended in 1952 when he established the National Day of Prayer and Meditation to bring together Americans of every religion, to express their faith in whatever way was appropriate for them. We urge you to issue a single proclamation for the day that calls for an inclusive National Day of Prayer that reflects our nation's best values by explicitly inviting clergy from diverse faith traditions to participate equally and fully -- especially in events held on government property

Sincerely yours,

"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute ... and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him."
- John F. Kennedy, September 12, 1960