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Last Updated: 10/3/2023



National Day of Prayer, 1987

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In 1952 the Congress of the United States, resuming a tradition observed by the Continental Congress from 1776 to 1783 and followed intermittently thereafter, adopted a resolution calling on the President to set aside and proclaim a suitable day each year as a National Day of Prayer. At the time the resolution was adopted, Americans were dying on the battlefield in Korea. More than 125,000 of our young men had been killed or wounded in that conflict, the third major war in which our troops were involved in a century barely half over.

Members of Congress who spoke for the resolution made clear that they felt the Nation continued to face the very same challenges that preoccupied our Founders: the survival of freedom in a world frequently hostile to human ideals and the struggle for faith in an age that openly doubted or vehemently denied the existence of the Almighty. One Senator remarked that "it would be timely and appropriate for the people of our Nation to join in this service of prayer in the spirit of the founding fathers who believed that God governs in the affairs of men and who based their Declaration of Independence upon a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence."

Human nature is such that times of distress, grief, and war—or their recent memory—impel us to acknowledge our limitations. We are often too proud to make, or too prone to forget, in periods of peace and prosperity. During the Civil War Lincoln said that he was driven to his knees in prayer because he was convinced that he had nowhere else to go. During World War II, an unknown soldier in a trench in Tunisia left behind a scrap of paper with the verses:

Stay with me, God. The night is dark,
The night is cold: my little spark
Of courage dies. The night is long;
Be with me, God, and make me strong.

America has lived through many a cold, dark night, when the cupped hands of prayer were our only shield against the extinction of courage. Though that flame has flickered from time to time, it burns brightest when we are willing, as we ought to be now, to turn our faces and our hearts to God not only at moments of personal danger and civil strife, but in the full flower of the liberty, peace, and abundance that He has showered upon us.

Indeed, the true meaning of our entire history as a Nation can scarcely be glimpsed without some notion of the importance of prayer, our Declaration of Dependence on God's favor on this unfinished enterprise we call America. Our land today is more diverse than ever, our citizens come from nearly every nation on Earth, and the variety of religious traditions that have found welcome here has never been greater. On our National Day of Prayer, then, we join together as people of many faiths to petition God to show us His mercy and His love, to heal our weariness and uphold our hope, that we might live ever mindful of His justice and thankful for His blessing.

By joint resolution of the Congress approved April 17, 1952, the recognition of a particular day set aside each year as a National Day of Prayer has become a cherished national tradition.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 7, 1987, as a National Day of Prayer. I call upon the citizens of this great Nation to gather together on that day in homes and places of worship to pray, each after his or her own manner, for unity of the hearts of all mankind.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eleventh.

Ronald Reagan