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National Day of Prayer, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans in every generation have turned to their Maker in prayer. In adoration and in thanksgiving, in contrition and in supplication, we have acknowledged both our dependence on Almighty God and the help He offers us as individuals and as a Nation. In every circumstance, whether peril or plenty, whether war or peace, whether gladness or mourning, we have searched for and sought God's presence and His power, His blessings and His protection, His freedom and His peace, for ourselves, for our children, and for our beloved land.

That was surely so at the very beginning of our Nation, in the earliest days of our quest for independence and liberty. It could only be thus, for a people who recognized God as the Author of freedom; who cherished the ancient but ever new words of Leviticus, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" and who cast those words where they would ring out forever, on the Liberty Bell; who affirmed along with Thomas Jefferson that the God Who gave us life gave us liberty as well.

So did they believe, those who gathered in Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia in 1774, the members of the First Continental Congress. They had come together, in times that tried men's souls, to deliberate in the united interests of America and for our "civil and religious liberties." John Adams later wrote his wife Abigail about what followed: "When Congress first met, Mr. Cushing made a motion that it should be opened with prayer." Some delegates opposed the motion, citing differences in belief among the members; but Sam Adams, that bold lover of liberty and our country, arose to utter words of healing and unity.

"I can hear the prayer," he said, of anyone "of piety and virtue who is . . . a friend to his country." He went on to suggest that a clergyman of a persuasion other than his own open the First Continental Congress with prayer.

And so it happened. Because Sam Adams gave voice to all the goodness, the genius, and the generosity that make up the American spirit, the First Continental Congress made its first act a prayer—the beginning of a great tradition.

We have, then, a lesson from the Founders of our land, those giants of soul and intellect whose courageous pledge of life and fortune and sacred honor, and whose "firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," have ever guided and inspired Americans and all who would fan freedom's mighty flames and live in "freedom's holy light." That lesson is clear—that in the winning of freedom and in the living of life, the first step is prayer.

Let us join together, Americans all, throughout our land. Let us join together, in factories and farms, in homes and offices, in places of governance and places of worship, and in outposts everywhere that service men and women defend us. Let us, young and old, join together, as did the First Continental Congress, in the first step—humble, heartfelt prayer. Let us do so for the love of God and His great goodness, in search of His guidance and the grace of repentance, in seeking His blessings, His peace, and the resting of His kind and holy hands on ourselves, our Nation, our friends in the defense of freedom, and all mankind, now and always.

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 beloved national tradition.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 5, 1988, as a National Day of Prayer. I call upon the citizens of our 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 in the hearts of all mankind.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this third day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan