

DOES GOVERNMENT HAVE A PRAYER?

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Few people have greater impact on our daily lives, and on shaping our villages, towns, cities, rural areas, even the nation itself, than do politicians. Whether elected at the municipal, regional, provincial, or federal level, whether in power or in opposition, each one individually, and all collectively, influence to lesser or greater degree nearly every aspect of our lives.

Their job is challenging, difficult, controversial, and often lonely. Their lives are constantly open to public scrutiny and they are frequently the targets of rumours, innuendo, and, sometimes, outright lies. On top of that, to paraphrase the comedian Rodney Dangerfield, they don't get much respect. Polls that ask people to rank their level of trust in, and respect for, a long list of professions, consistently show politicians around the 15% mark. Contrast that with one such poll which rated firefighters at 97%!

To say that politicians need prayer is something of an understatement!

In the past few years a number of prayer initiatives have arisen, with elected representatives as their primary focus. In 2003, when Susan was called to found Nation At Prayer, various parts of Canada were experiencing tremendous turmoil. Nationally, the definition of marriage was being debated in the House of Commons, with emotions running high on both sides of the issue. The Northeast Blackout, described at the time by CBC as "the most widespread electrical blackout in history," left an estimated 10 million Ontarians and 45 million Americans without power for prolonged periods of time. The SARS epidemic killed 44 people in Toronto. A single case of mad cow disease in Alberta resulted in the US, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other countries closing their borders to Canadian cattle. 620,000 cattle were slaughtered. An infestation of flea beetles in Manitoba, and of grasshoppers in Saskatchewan, combined with drought to

further threaten the livelihood of people on the Prairies. British Columbia was ravaged by almost 2,500 forest fires, the costliest natural disaster in the history of the province. On the east coast, Hurricane Juan made landfall in Nova Scotia as one of the most powerful and damaging hurricanes to ever affect Canada, then went on to cause further damage in Prince Edward Island.

In the face of all of that, people wondered whether politicians could deal effectively with the challenges. A renewed interest in, and commitment to, prayer developed.

It was in this setting that Nation At Prayer was born, stemming from a very clear vision rooted in Scripture and with a very specific mission: to transform the nation through prayer with and for elected representatives..

From the outset, it has been non-partisan, not favouring any party over another; non-issue focused, despite the issue-charged atmosphere in which it came into existence; and trans-denominational in the broadest sense of the term, encompassing the full range of Christians, from Orthodox and Roman Catholic, through Anglican and main line, to evangelical and charismatic.

Imagine the transformational impact when every elected representative at every level of government everywhere in Canada is prayed for every day of the year!

One person recently captured the importance of such prayer this way:

Just got back from Ottawa last night from our Canada Day holiday frivolity and thought much of you and your ministry. As I sat in the crowd on Parliament Hill watching our Prime Minister & Governor General and others represent this nation, it occurred to me that all of their combined power and influence do not hold a candle to the power & influence of prayer as engaged in by God's faithful ambassadors. As I listened to speeches, I had an overwhelming urge for someone to be on that stage praying over that throng and this nation. Then I realized that someone is, and I was thankful to God for Nation at Prayer...

Nation At Prayer is built on four pillars. The first is one-on-one prayer in the name of Jesus Christ *with* elected representatives at every level of government. Prayer is vitally important to many elected representatives, as reflected by these comments:

These times of prayer are so important to me with all the challenges and pressure here.

Your prayer with my wife and me brought us a great sense of peace in the midst of turmoil.

Thank you so much for your continued dedication to prayer and service to the Body of Christ. You are a real encouragement to me ...

Perhaps the comment we hear most often is, “You came at just the right time. You’ll never know how important this prayer time has been.” They often tell us of specific answers and of the refreshment that they have received as a result of timely prayers for them.

It is not uncommon for one politician to refer us to a colleague across party lines. Their rationale is always that we are non-issue, respect strict confidentiality, and are non-partisan, in that order. It is critically important to them that we are able to listen to their concerns and challenges and meet them at the personal level, rather than attempting to influence party policy or their voting behavior.

But it is not just the effect of prayer on the individual; the physical presence of Nation At Prayer is important as well. One particular day in Ottawa, Susan met individually with six different Members of Parliament. Three of them, from different parties, used identical wording in describing the impact: *Your presence is a reminder that we are here for a higher purpose.*

But physical presence and prayer with elected representatives is only one pillar of Nation At Prayer. The second pillar is calling Christians to pray *for* elected representatives at every level of government, without regard to party affiliation, policies, personal stands on issues, or other considerations. As one individual has said, “When we pray for our government, we are praying for people, not politics.”

People in every province and all of the Territories are regularly engaged in prayer for their elected representatives, much of it carried on quietly and without recognition except by those engaged in it.

The most visible expression of prayer, of course, is in public gatherings. So Nation At Prayer has as its third pillar, encouraging the development of prayer gatherings that include prayer for elected representatives, where they do not currently exist

We are witnessing not only increased prayer activity in churches; there is also an explosion of interest in initiating community prayer gatherings, where Christians get together over breakfast or on other occasions, for specific times of prayer for politicians and other community leaders. Imagine the impact as community after community gathers to invite the Holy Spirit to infuse the hearts and minds of those who govern!

The fourth pillar of Nation At Prayer is resourcing and equipping individuals, churches, and other Christian groups to pray more effectively for elected representatives. Resources include personal consultation, workshops, and printed materials such as prayer guides and articles. Each year people in every part of the country request thousands of the prayer guides.

Praying with and for elected representatives, encouraging prayer gatherings, and developing resources requires more than a physical presence at the national level; it also requires a presence at the provincial and local levels. There are currently three Provincial Directors, with immediate plans for an additional two, and longer term plans to cover the entire nation, including working with First Nations leaders, as the Lord raises up financial resources and individuals with the appropriate combination of skills, experience, and personal qualities.

The Lord is also raising up Local Champions in communities across Canada who spark, encourage and assist Christians to be actively engaged in prayer for elected representatives.

A number of very effective prayer initiatives have been developed over the past few years. We value the broad range of cooperative working relationships we currently have, and are actively promoting additional ones encompassing the full spectrum of the Christian community. At the same time, we are careful to respect our own boundaries in terms of remaining non-issue focused and non-partisan.

In the past six years we have seen first-hand the impact of prayer in the lives of elected representatives, the explosion of prayer gatherings across the country, and the effect on communities as people gather to uphold leaders in prayer. We do not believe that any one ministry can take credit for this, but we are privileged to be among those God has called to provide leadership.

Of course, we recognize that prayer is not the only activity that Christians need to engage in in the political arena. There is an important place for attempting to influence public policy as well. That requires all the wisdom and discernment one can bring to bear, in order to do it in a way that is both effective and honours the Lord. As John Bunyan has said, “You can do more than pray, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

The real question is not, “Does government have a prayer”, but “Do our governments have your prayers?”