

## Update: Obama has no event for national prayer day

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | May. 5, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration says it will issue a proclamation marking the National Day of Prayer on Thursday (May 7), but appears to be moving away from the White House ceremonies hosted by former President George W. Bush.

"President Obama is a committed Christian and believes that we should be engaging Americans of faith in efforts to renew our country," a White House official said.

"He is following the tradition of Presidents Reagan, George H.W. Bush and others by signing a proclamation honoring the National Day of Prayer, while continuing to work with communities of faith to improve our country."

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During Bush's eight years in office, prominent evangelicals, including National Day of Prayer Task Force chairman Shirley Dobson, and her husband, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, gathered each year for an East Room ceremony on the first Thursday in May.

"We are disappointed in the lack of participation by the Obama administration," Shirley Dobson said in a statement issued by the task force on Monday. "At this time in our country's history, we would hope our president would recognize more fully the importance of prayer."

This year, task force organizers went ahead with their own plans and scheduled their traditional morning ceremonies on Capitol Hill for the morning, the same time of day when past White House events had been held. They asked for a White House representative to attend but had not received a response as of Monday.

At his press briefing on Friday, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said the president's upcoming plans included signing a proclamation to recognize the prayer day.

The National Day of Prayer was signed into law in 1952 by President Truman. President Reagan amended the law in 1988 to state that the observances would be held the first Thursday in May.

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