

Mainline churches pledge support for Obama: "I am filled with hope"

News in the [December 2, 2008](#) issue

Mainline churches, mostly out of the D.C. loop during the eight years of the Bush administration, were quick to embrace the winner of the long race to the White House.

"Only rarely in our history has a president-elect faced immediate challenges of such fierce magnitude," said an open letter to Barack Obama from National Council of Churches leaders who pledged their "unstinting support."

The NCC's 35 member denominations "stand ready to work with you" on issues that reflect guiding principles of equal opportunities for justice, shelter, education and health care, said the November 5 letter signed by general secretary Michael Kinnamon.

The NCC principles also include, he said, the idea "that war, even when it is necessary to defend ourselves or the weak or the oppressed, is never the will of God."

With the election won by Obama, a longtime opponent of the Iraq war, "I am filled with hope," wrote Mary Ellen McNish, general secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, on the group's Web site. "We hope for diplomacy to begin between the U.S. and Iran, and for our troops to come home from Iraq and Afghanistan."

The United Methodist Council of Bishops, meeting on St. Simons Island, Georgia, sent a congratulatory letter to Obama, saying they pray that God will grant him "wisdom, courage and protection" during his presidency.

"We celebrate the fact that a person of color has been elected to the highest office in the U.S. and the progress that has been made toward overcoming racial division," said council president Gregory V. Palmer, a bishop heading the Methodists' Illinois area.

Another bishop based in Illinois, Mark S. Hanson, who leads the Chicago-based Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, appealed in a public statement for Obama to set priorities in his administration that will include a “special focus on low-income people” in the current economic crisis, robust diplomatic efforts to restore U.S. credibility abroad, “fair and humane immigration reform” and support for alternative energy research.

Continued pastoral support to the Obama family was offered by the top executive of the United Church of Christ, a denomination that the Illinois senator was aligned with until he broke with Chicago’s Trinity UCC over inflammatory remarks by his former pastor, Jeremiah Wright. UCC president John Thomas said that Obama’s departure on May 31 was “a difficult, painful decision” that was also sad news for members of the UCC.

Outside of mainline circles, some famous figures offered best wishes. Evangelist Billy Graham, who turned 90 on November 7, said, “President-elect Barack Obama faces many challenges, and I urge everyone to join me in pledging our support and prayers as he begins the difficult task ahead.”

While Obama’s support of abortion rights did not endear him to Catholic bishops, the president-elect did receive plaudits from the Vatican the day after his election victory.

Pope Benedict XVI congratulated Obama on the “historic occasion” of the election. A front-page editorial in the official Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, rhapsodized: “America is truly the country of the new frontier, . . . able to overcome fractures and divisions that until only recently could seem incurable.”