

Church hosts alternative to Perry prayer rally

by [Ken Camp](#)

August 4, 2011

HOUSTON (ABP) — A Baptist church will serve as host site to an ecumenical event formed in response to “The Response”—the prayer rally Gov. Rick Perry initiated at Houston's Reliant Stadium.

Americans United for Separation of Church & State and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas are sponsoring the “Family, Faith and Freedom” celebration from 7 to 9 p.m. on Aug. 5 at Mount Ararat Baptist Church, 5801 W. Montgomery Rd., in Houston.

“This event unites us in our conviction that government should have no favorite theology and that it must always strive to ensure that all citizens -- Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists and others -- are full and equal partners in the public square,” said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United and a featured speaker at the gathering.

William Lawson, founding pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, also will speak at the event.

“Family, Faith and Freedom” is scheduled on the eve of the high-profile prayer rally at Reliant Stadium to provide an alternative expression of faith, to call citizens to action for the common good and to reaffirm the importance of church-state separation, organizers insist.

According to its website, theresponseusa.com, the Aug. 6 Reliant Stadium event is “a nondenominational, apolitical Christian prayer meeting” that adopted the statement of faith of the American Family Association, a sponsoring organization.

“As a nation, we must come together and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank him for the blessings of freedom we so richly enjoy,” Perry states on the website in an invitation to the rally.

While organizers of the stadium rally insist their event is nonpolitical, Perry -- who has not announced his candidacy but has been exploring the possibility of running for president -- initiated it and invited other governors to join in the distinctively Christian prayer meeting.

“Americans of many faiths, and of no faith, love their country and want to see it prosper. Government promotion of an exclusive Christian event implies that certain types of people care more about the well-being of our country than others, and also implies that Christianity is the only way to approach the challenges that our society faces,” said Terri Burke, executive director of the Texas ACLU. “We don’t see it that way and thought somebody ought to host an event that welcomes all faiths and traditions.”