

Mainline leaders congratulate Bush: "We pledge to work with President Bush to build bridges of understanding"

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Leaders of mainline Protestant churches, who have been at odds with President Bush over the war in Iraq and other issues, urged national unity in congratulatory statements sent after he won reelection.

Bush and his wife, Laura, both United Methodists, received Bibles signed by the 130 members of the Methodist Conference of Bishops at their meeting in St. Simon's Island, Georgia. The signed Bibles are a 200-year tradition for the bishops.

"We pledge to work with President Bush to build bridges of understanding that we pray will lead to overcoming the gulfs that divide the nation and the world," said Bishop Peter Weaver of Boston, president of the bishops conference.

The bishops vehemently opposed Bush's decision to invade Iraq and had complained that they had little access during Bush's first term. John Schol, the new bishop of Washington, said he hoped to mend those fences. "I know the Council of Bishops wants to have an open line of communication with President Bush," he said. "As the bishop of Washington, D.C., I too want to establish a good working relationship."

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who criticized both Bush and Senator John Kerry in September for the negative tone of their campaigns, promised to pray for the president and his family.

"The American electorate has spoken in this election about its deep concern for personal moral values and faith," Hanson said. "It is my hope that we will not separate personal morality from public responsibility for the complex moral issues of hunger and poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, civil war and social

inequities.”

When in Washington, Bush occasionally attends services at St. John’s Episcopal Church, located one block from the White House across Lafayette Square. Episcopal Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold prayed for healing for the nation after a “vitriolic and divisive” campaign. “What is needed now is a unifying vision, clearly articulated, of our great nation as a servant of all the world’s peoples in their yearning after justice and peace,” he said. *-Religion News Service*