

Faith leader tells Bush to establish nonpartisan panel: Gaddy demands investigation of federal disaster response

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Baptist pastor C. Welton Gaddy is known mostly as president of the Washington-based Interfaith Alliance, a liberal group addressing religious-ethical issues central to debates within the Beltway.

But writing to President Bush on September 27 as the pastor of North Minster Baptist Church in Monroe, Louisiana, Gaddy joined two Democratic congressmen from Louisiana and Mississippi to call for the White House to form an independent, nonpartisan commission to investigate federal failures during and after Hurricane Katrina.

“When the government was nowhere to be found, houses of worship were there,” he wrote. “We were there because the work we do is a part of the fabric of our being, our identity and our ‘calling.’ It’s ironic because I thought this was the same motivation for government relief efforts.”

Gaddy also expressed concern on behalf of the Interfaith Alliance, which comprises 150,000 members from some 75 traditions, about what he called “the potential manipulation of this American tragedy to garner support for and advance your long-proposed faith-based initiative.”

The alliance, a strong critic of the White House initiative, and Gaddy’s congregation are “people who value the independence of religion in the nation [and] do not want federal money to do our own ministries.”