



# CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

March 23, 2020

Via U.S. Mail and Email ([mcelveen@sumtersc.gov](mailto:mcelveen@sumtersc.gov))

Hon. Joseph T. McElveen, Jr.  
Mayor, City of Sumter  
PO Box 1449  
21 N. Main Street  
Sumter, SC 29150

Re: Mayoral Proclamation for Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer

Dear Mayor McElveen:

I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation. The Foundation serves nearly 100 members of Congress who are part of the Congressional Prayer Caucus (the names of those members of Congress who serve on the Congressional Prayer Advisory Team are listed on the left).

In addition, the Foundation serves a network of Legislative Prayer Caucuses in over 40 states, including South Carolina, which has over 1,000 state senators and state representatives as members. These leaders are working together to preserve the integrity of our founding principles and to protect First Amendment rights for all.

We learned recently from a website news article (<https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2020/03/19/sumter-sc-issues-day-of-thanksgiving-and-prayer-proclamation-against-covid-19/>) that you asked the citizens of Sumter to pray on March 19 “thanking God for his many mercies and blessings, and to ask for deliverance from the threat of Covid-19 and the consequences that can arise from mass infection.” Not surprisingly, the Friendly Atheist article was not very flattering of your mayoral proclamation, while we think it superb and directly within the history and tradition of our nation.

A government official asking people to pray is certainly not new. George Washington issued the first presidential call to prayer on October

## CONGRESSIONAL ADVISORY MEMBERS

Senator James Lankford  
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Congressman Jody Hice  
Congressman Richard Hudson  
Congressman Bill Huizenga  
Congressman Doug Lamborn  
Congressman Chris Smith  
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Congressman Joe Wilson  
Congressman Robert Wittman

3, 1789. He wrote, "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor." In the proclamation, President Washington further asked all Americans to devote themselves "to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be," to "unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation," and "to pardon our national and other transgressions . . . ."

During the depths of the greatest crisis our nation experienced, President Lincoln implored American citizens to confess their sins and seek God's mercy through prayer:

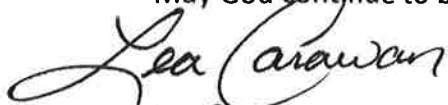
[I]t is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

[Presidential Proclamations for Thanksgiving and Prayer can be found at <http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/thanksgiving-day-proclamations-1789-present>]

As the Supreme Court stated in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, 313-314 (1952), "We find no constitutional requirement which makes it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and to throw its weight against efforts to widen the effective scope of religious influence." Nothing in the history of this nation has ever required elected public officials to separate their religious viewpoint from their public persona and official communications.

We applaud you for continuing the time-honored tradition of asking citizens to give thanks and pray to God. If we can be of any service to you on this issue, feel free to contact us. We have First Amendment lawyers on staff who will work with you, without charge, if you need their services. To protect our freedom, we must exercise that freedom, and it is encouraging to see your leadership in our First Amendment freedoms.

May God continue to bless you and the citizens of Sumter.



Lea Carawan

Executive Director

Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation

National Strategic Center