

Youth Organize Payer and Fast

Neil Salonen
December 7, 1973



Neil Salonen explains purpose of the rally

As thousands of letters poured in from all across the United States the National Prayer and Fast for the Watergate Crisis Committee organized programs throughout the country. In 50 states young men and women began vigils, rallies, letter-writing and leafleting to publicize the theme, "Forgive, love, and unite," and obtain signatures of people promising to pray and fast for the Watergate crisis.

In Washington, D. C., the local committee began morning prayer services near the White House for the duration of the 40 day period, beginning December 1. For the first few days, meetings were on the Ellipse, and later in Lafayette Square. From 7:30 to 8: 15 each morning, Monday through Friday, they gathered, first about 40 people and soon increasing to about 80. Passersby joined the prayer for a few minutes while on their way to work.

The first major event in Washington was a noon-time rally on December 7, on the sidewalk in front of the White House. In introducing the proclamation, Freedom Leadership Foundation secretary-general Gary Jarmin announced, "Reverend Moon is issuing this proclamation in order to call all Americans to unite in a Christian spirit of love. We must remain united, regardless of the outcome of whatever takes place during the weeks and months to come."

Unification Church president Neil Salonen followed with an explanation of the 40-day program: "We ask you to join with us at this time so together we can bring back the greatness of America and the presence of God in the conduct of our national life. Pray that together we can build a world in which all people can stand together as one family under God."

Mr. Salonen emphasized that neither the statement nor the rally was intended to be a partisan political stance. Nor were they trying to cover up any errors or political shortcomings. "Rather," he said, "Reverend Moon's heartfelt concern is for America. He feels that the conflict generated by the Watergate is tearing this nation apart.... We must seriously consider how long our nation can endure in an environment of anger and malice. We as individuals must examine our hearts."

"Truly, if America is to fulfill God's expectations, as well as our own dreams for true national greatness, someone must lead the way out of the present turmoil and confusion," Mr. Salonen affirmed.

"Someone must come forward who so deeply loves God and man that he can clearly see a vision for a new bond of heart between them." Because no American spiritual leader spoke out, Reverend Moon felt the mission to speak.

And people have been listening and writing. Sydelle Block, who was handing out leaflets to passersby, thinks that people in Washington "really want to know the answers, but they aren't sure what to believe. The people away from Washington, D. C. are really praying for Nixon, but those who are close are taking their time; they think more and pray less."

David Byer, another leafleter, discussed the response he received. "The people are very much in agreement with what we are doing, but it is very hard to get them to sign the statement."

Committees were organized in Washington to solicit support from many groups. Among the earliest to sign statements of support were eight Congressmen, both Democratic and Republican, and three Senators.

Pastors called members of their congregation to pray and fast in various churches, including Baptist, Episcopal, Catholic, AME Zion, African Methodist, Church of Christ and United Methodist.

The Washington *Star-News* devoted an article to the December 7 rally, which was also mentioned in the Washington *Post* and television news. The mayor of Baltimore proclaimed a day of prayer for unity in the city. In Washington, D. C. a seven-day vigil on the East steps of the Capitol publicized a local day of fasting and prayer on December 19.