

Who Prays for Bill Ford?

We pray for politicians, but what about our business leaders?

Blaine McCormick and David Miller (*Leadership Journal*, April 22, 2003)

In keeping with tradition, George W. Bush will soon issue a presidential proclamation declaring the first Thursday in May 2003 as the National Day of Prayer. This tradition dates back to George Washington and was formalized in modern times by President Reagan.

As a nation, we are quick to pray for our government and military leaders. This year is unlikely to be any different, particularly in light of the war in Iraq. We wonder, however, aren't we missing something?

The business pages remind us that the economy is still sluggish and that America's spate of corporate scandals did not end with the collapse of Enron. Shouldn't we give the same prayerful support to our nation's business leaders as they face challenges of moral and economic significance, as perhaps never before?

The Christian tradition of praying for leaders is rooted in the teachings of the apostle Paul who wrote to the first century Christian church, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives" (I Timothy 2:1-2). One is struck by the specificity in how many Christians pray for "kings and all those in authority." Not only do we pray for the president, the vice president, and the entire cabinet by name, our prayers often extend to legislators, governors, judges, even county and city officials. But who is praying for our economic leaders?

In addition to those who oversee the \$2 trillion U.S. federal budget, we should also seek a Divine blessing upon all leaders involved in the \$10 trillion national economy. They oversee a vast resource base and affect our well being as much, if not more than, government leaders. Business can be a positive force for opportunity, justice, and the common good in the nation, other social institutions like government, religion, and education.

And for what should we pray?

First, give thanks to God for these business leaders and that we have benefited so very much from the goods, services, and jobs that they help provide.

Pray that they might **receive divine inspiration** as they go about their work creating products, services, experiences, and jobs.

Pray that they might **choose the right path** among the many possibilities competing for their attention and resources.

Pray that they might **administer justice** in their companies just as surely as the courts administer justice in the society.

Pray that they might **be peacemakers** as they seek to forge mutually beneficial relationships with foreign peoples and countries and as they seek to honor diversity and create healthy company cultures.

And pray that they might **be delivered from evil**, especially when the temptation comes to hide, distort, or deviate from truth and honorable business actions.

And pray for them by name, just like you would pray by name for the president. As a start, here's a list of the CEOs of the ten largest employers in America, according to the 2003 Fortune 500:

- **Lee Scott** (Wal-Mart; 1,300,000 employees)
- **Jim Cantalupo** (McDonalds; 413,000)
- **Mike Eskew** (United Parcel Service; 360,000)
- **Bill Ford** (Ford; 350,321)
- **Rick Wagoner** (General Motors; 350,000)
- **Sam Palmisano** (IBM; 315, 889)
- **Jeff Immelt** (General Electric; 315,000)
- **Bob Ulrich** (Target; 306,000)
- **Bob Nardelli** (Home Depot; 300,000)
- **Joe Pichler** (Kroger; 289,000)

Added together, these ten executives oversee a population of employees roughly equal to the population of South Carolina or the country of Scotland. Wal-Mart alone has a payroll as large as the combined populations of Delaware and Wyoming. They, like government officials, have the power to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and help create jobs for the poor.

In addition to these large corporations, remember to pray for the thousands of smaller entrepreneurs and family businesses that provide the bulk of the goods and services produced in the country. Pray for business leaders in your city. Pray for your company's top executive. And pray for your own boss, too.

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