

United States of America

Challenges for Prayer:

The 21st Century sees a different role for a different America. The end of the Cold War, the aftermath of 9/11 and subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the emergence (or re-emergence) of other nations spell the end of the USA as the world's only superpower. The moral authority of the USA was undermined by its response to 9/11, its economic primacy is increasingly questionable and its diplomatic authority, while still immense, is now one of several global leaders. There is much to pray for:

a) *Domestic politics saw a definitive change* as President Obama replaced President Bush. Both claim to be Christian believers; each has been highly divisive in his own way; these illustrate the intractable nature and interminable polarity of US politics more than anything else. Pray that politicians and the populace might overcome some fundamental differences and work together to see justice, fairness and righteousness exalted in the nation.

b) *The world's perception of America* plummeted as it exerted its military and economic powers unilaterally in questionable ways. Yet the USA still has a vital, even God-ordained, 864 United States Operation World

part to play in the theatre of nations – provider of stability and aid, peacekeeper, proponent of democracy, military/economic superpower and still a world leader in almost every area that matters. Pray that this solemn role might be fulfilled from a platform of selflessness and service to humanity.

America's massive cultural and social influence makes it the world's greatest force for good and its greatest purveyor of sin. The generosity of aid and development, the defence of human rights and opposition to tyranny, the many breakthroughs in technology and media, the great levellers of education, information and capitalism have all made the world a better place. These are in contrast to the insensitive cultural imperialism, selfish individualism, unbridled corporate greed and exportation of immorality (such as pornography, casual violence and shallow materialism) that are foisted upon the world. America's appetite for illicit drugs and massive consumption of fossil fuels cause wars abroad, prop up corrupt regimes and inflict suffering on indigenous peoples of other lands. Pray that God might shape this nation to be a greater force for good and destroy the structures of sin that pollute much of the world.

America's Christian legacy is undeniable and foundational to its identity. The Pilgrim Fathers were determined to establish a land in which they were free to exercise their Christian faith. On that foundation developed one of the largest and most dynamic Christian movements in history. In the USA are 17.6% of the Protestants in the world, 16.8% of the evangelicals and still a significant proportion of all the world's foreign missionaries. Christian values incubated in American society shaped modern democracy, human rights and economic development. Furthermore, generosity, evangelistic vitality and ability to dream big are major factors in the surge of gospel progress. Pray that these may be maintained.

The spiritual heritage of the USA is being attacked by an unholy alliance of humanist, atheist, New Age and homosexual agendas. They exploit their influence in the

media to disparage Christians and dismantle all they can of anything Christian in public life.

They

exploit constitutionally-provided free speech while denying the same right to the Christian viewpoint. Freedom of religion is becoming freedom from religion. The concept of “tolerance” is abused to silence truth and promote anti-Christian values. Pray that Christians in America – still a sizeable majority – would be able to speak the truth in love and retain both their Christian legacy and the free speech enabled by it. While this will involve many battles, legal and ideological,

pray that these would be conducted with Christlike attitudes and conduct.

The religious canvas of American life is being repainted before our eyes. This happens both in the wider framework and within the Church.

a) *The introduction and growth of world religions* accelerate through immigration.

Postmodernity

and permissiveness encourage every expression of spirituality imaginable, healthy and unhealthy. Since 1990, there has been a pronounced decline in the overt affiliation to organized Christianity. This loss is not to other religions or new religious movements so much as a rejection of all organized religion – the non-religious bloc nearly doubled from 9% in 1990 to 16.5% in 2010. Almost all of the largest Protestant denominations declined as a proportion to the total population from 2000 to 2010.

b) *Shifts within Christianity itself* have transformed the landscape. While most denominations struggle to even maintain their numbers, post-denominational movements thrive. These are expressed mostly through megachurches and their networks and satellite churches, and through the burgeoning house church/simple church movement, both of which account for millions of believers. Pray that the Church might recognize these shifts and call out to God to revitalize and revive, equipping the Church to once more transmit the truth and power of the gospel to the entire nation.

The American Church needs revival – not the slick mass evangelism and theatrics associated with the word, but true revival with conviction of sin, repentance and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. More often than not, the public face of Christianity turns people away from Jesus rather than drawing them to Him. The gospel is often little more than a self-help philosophy. Thank God for the pockets where revival is happening; pray that it may spread. These are some of the prayer challenges for the 21st Century Church:

a) *Notional Christianity* illustrates a failure of discipleship. If all of the US’s self-proclaimed believers were to actually practice their faith, the transformation in society would be incredible. Instead, a pick-and-choose spirituality and inconsistent application of Jesus’ teachings yield a disconnect between how Christians live and what the Bible instructs.

b) *Syncretism is as common in America as anywhere.* In the US’s version, biblical Christianity is mixed with hyper-individualism, consumeristic materialism, moral relativism and national pride, creating a dangerous strain of faith that justifies selfishness, immorality and hubris. Pray for the ability to distinguish between what is scriptural and what is cultural.

c) *The need for biblical holiness* in a time when Christians display little difference from non-Christians in values and lifestyle – this applies to divorce, sexual morality and attitudes toward finance. Image supersedes character in appraising giftedness. The succession of high-profile failures of Christian leaders in the Church and in politics undermines the gospel. Spiritual

outpourings in Florida have blessed millions, but left just as many hurt, confused and disillusioned due to lack of holiness and discernment by Christian leaders. Pray that Christians may recapture the sense of being set apart, and then repent of carnality and change their ways of thinking and living.

d) *Spiritual unity.* The Church in the USA is conditioned to accept divisions and schisms. Churches split and split again on issues both weighty and petty. Homosexuality, gender roles, universalism, Bible versions, spiritual gifts, eschatology, prosperity theology, creation/evolution and countless other issues serve to divide believers – while issues of world evangelization are sidelined. Pray for an earnest seeking after God’s priorities, and pray that, through love and grace, a sensitive and balanced handling of difficult areas might be found.

e) *Church life, worship and leadership* demand, in many instances, a revolutionary shift toward organic expressions of fellowship and away from showy spirituality. Pastors are often required to function as CEOs more than as shepherds. Worship and preaching can become performances rather than fellowship. Many disillusioned Christians opt for emerging church expressions or for house church movements or they simply practice their faith alone. Pray for the development of both the laity and the ordained such that those so gifted might serve God’s people effectively; pray that church culture might become a pathway rather than an obstacle to seeing the body of Christ built up to full maturity.

f) *Leadership training possibilities abound.* The variety and number of theological training possibilities defies full analysis! In the USA and Canada, there are over 2,000 recognized institutions that award theological degrees. These institutions graduate 30,000-50,000 students each year, most of whom desire to impact the nation or the world with a Christcentric worldview. The Association for Bible Higher Education includes 200 accredited evangelical colleges; the Association of Theological Schools, 250. Pray that training would shape biblically-minded leaders who include the Great Commission and prayer as core elements of their ministry. Pray also for flexibility and innovation in leadership training, fitted for the times in which we live.

Christian interaction with society must be re-examined; believers are not making the impact they should. God is birthing many collaborative citywide movements that seek to make a Kingdom impact through unity, prayer and ministry. Issues to cover in prayer are these:

a) *Christians must engage even more deeply with public life.* The American Church has a rich history of biblical activism; withdrawal today from wider society to form a Christian subculture is not the solution. The school system, the prison system, the health care system, the welfare system, the entire political system – all of these need committed believers striving for the best for the nation and its neediest people. A spectrum of evangelical groups work for social change, including the National Association of Evangelicals, Mission America Coalition, Sojourners, WVI, Prison Fellowship, Christian Community Development Association, Evangelicals for Social Action and many others. Pray for balance, wisdom and long-term involvement of Christians as salt and light in society.

b) *Evangelical Christianity’s image* is associated – wrongly – with white, middle-class, rightwing sensibilities, and evangelicals are caught up in strident, resource-sapping “culture wars” over justifiably important issues. Yet, the evangelical community does not adequately demonstrate God’s compassion for the poor, the homeless, for widows and orphans, for immigrants and for society’s most vulnerable. Praise God that emerging ministries are

redressing the balance – addressing very real human needs as Scripture clearly commands while affirming biblical views on sexuality and the sanctity of life.

This generation of young people is both the most privileged and the most damaged. Humanistic and New Age philosophies, spiritual confusion, moral relativism, broken families, sexual permissiveness, drug and alcohol abuse, mindless violence, widespread acceptance

of the occult and callous self-absorption combine to reap a bitter harvest. Most young people, even Christian ones, do not understand the meaning of following Christ. Two-thirds believe that all religions ultimately pray to the same God. Organizations such as **OM, YWAM, CCCI**, Teen Challenge and others instill the truth into teens and make a great impact on the world. God is also raising a new generation of movements for this century – pray for YouthQuake Live, Teen Mania, The Call, International House of Prayer and others. Without a decisive work of God's Spirit, this generation could be America's most broken.

Student ministries continue to play a vital role. Movements such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (**IFES**), Navigators, **CCCI**, Campus Outreach, Chi Alpha, Campus America, Campus Church Net, SVM2 and others combine to generate effective outreach, discipleship and prayer on campuses. The large Urbana conferences of InterVarsity, The Traveling Team and other ministries challenge many students with the needs of a lost world. The ministries of Navigators and **CCCI** have diversified into a wide range of activities in the USA and around the world. The Passion conferences profoundly impact the lives of many thousands of students every year. It is in their college years that the largest percentage of Christians fall away; yet, student movements have been at the heart of almost every revival and missions movement in America's history.

The 38-million-strong African-American community suffered immensely due to its origins in slavery and to subsequent racial discrimination. The civil rights movement and the election of the first black president have achieved great change in attitudes and awareness, but for many the cycle of unemployment, poverty, family instability and crime is unbroken. Pray for:

a) *Young people at risk.* Over half of inner-city black males fail to complete secondary school. Many are in prison or in gangs. Poverty, drugs and violence are rampant. Murder is the major cause of death for inner-city, African-American males ages 15 to 34. Pray for an expression of Christian faith that enables these men to leave their shackles and find meaning, belonging and fulfilment in Christ.

b) *African-American Muslims,* whose numbers have rapidly grown up to two million – most of these from a Christian background. Sunnis account for the largest proportion; some small but vocal minorities belong to Black nationalist groups and to the Nation of Islam organization. Most were drawn to Islam as a result of failings in the Church. Pray for effective and loving outreach to them.

c) *Black churches.* More than any other race in the USA, African-Americans are likely to be Christian. Many of the largest and most vigorous evangelical churches are Black, but they are often isolated from mainstream evangelical Christianity and from meaningful involvement in missions. Pray for a unity of believers that transcends ethnicity. Pray for a new move of the

Spirit of God in these churches.

d) Community impact. African-American churches have always had a strong redemptive influence in their communities. This is increasing as congregations now join to effect deliberate and strategic transformation in the neediest areas.

Hispanics are now the US's largest minority. Predominantly from Mexico, they have immigrated in huge numbers, not always legally. Around 68% are Catholic, but 23% of Hispanics are Protestant or Independent, and this number is growing rapidly. Fully 40% of Hispanic evangelicals in the USA converted from Catholicism, largely due to evangelical services

being oriented toward their language, culture and personal needs. Nearly half of Hispanic Catholics identify with the charismatic movement. All these factors combine to make Hispanics a powerful religious bloc with a living, dynamic faith. As immigrants, many struggle with poverty

and the breakup of traditional family structures – 50% of Hispanic children are born out of wedlock. Pray for the effective discipleship of the nearly 50 million Hispanics in the USA; many of them eventually return to their homelands as highly effective missionaries.

Native Americans, also called American Indians, have suffered intensely through centuries of encounters with white people. Before European contact, Native Americans numbered at least 20 million; by 1890, only 250,000 remained – most perished through diseases brought by Europeans. Through ruthless colonization and a long string of treaties and promises made and broken by whites, the natives lost almost all their lands, identity, heritage, culture and self-respect. Forced resettlement onto arid, fruitless lands helped create a dependency on the federal government. Today, hopelessness, poverty, disease, alcoholism, suicide, abuse and

unemployment are common. Indigenous culture is being revived and demands for reparation are meeting with success. Pray for these:

a) The flourishing of Christianity among Native Americans. The failure by missions to enculturate the gospel, the imposition of European religious forms, the paternalistic and often cruel treatment of natives by the missions and the collusion of missionaries with the federal government all undermined the potential impact of the gospel. Today, perhaps only 5% of Native Americans are born again. Culturally appropriate ministry, development of indigenous forms of Christian worship and attention to the important processes of healing and deliverance are yielding fruit. Native Americans are realizing that they can be both Christian and Native American.

b) The full reconciliation of native and immigrant peoples. This goes far beyond apologies and financial reparations for wrongs done generations ago. True repentance by white Americans and true forgiveness by American Indians, when genuine, are usually precursors to great spiritual breakthrough.

c) Bible translation has regained importance as local languages are revived. Over 50 languages (and many more dialects) are in common use, and SIL and others have teams working in 27.

d) An indigenous movement of the gospel that will complete the evangelization of all 550 recognized tribes. God is raising up native American ministries to reach their own; Wiconi International, Eagles' Wings Ministry, Indian Life Ministries and The Native American Resource Network are just a few. First Nations Monday is a multifaceted prayer network for and by the US's indigenous peoples.

e) The indigenous peoples of Alaska have retained their identity, but their subsistence lifestyle places them at odds with the modern world and with the degradation of their environment. Today, many evangelical missions – such as **SEND**, Interact Ministries, Avant, Evangelical Covenant Church and Arctic Barnabas – work effectively in partnership, a sharp contrast to the demarcations of a century ago. The rigours of wilderness isolation, marked by vast distances accessible only by aircraft, and a harsh Arctic environment complicate the effective engagement of the unreached. No decisive people movement to Christ has yet occurred among the aboriginal peoples of Alaska.

Ethnic minority churches are the growing edge of US evangelicalism today. This is predominantly an urban phenomenon, but 10% of US counties now have racial and ethnic minorities as the majority. Points for prayer:

a) Asian Church growth is pronounced. Dynamic networks of congregations are springing up among the 7,000-plus Asian churches. Korean churches number 4,000. Chinese in the USA have over 1,000 churches and are experiencing rapid church growth. There are even more Filipino congregations (America's second-largest immigrant nationality after Mexico). There has also been church growth among Arabs, South Asians, Vietnamese and Iranians. Pray that such growth might continue – of any ethnicity, Asians in the USA retain the lowest rate of Christian affiliation.

b) The cultural balance of these churches. The greatest challenge is finding a way to integrate first-generation immigrants with second- and third-generation younger people. The integrity of the original culture and the appeal of mainstream US culture often conflict, even in church life. Pray for the provision of wise and forward-looking leaders. Pray for the calling of many to Kingdom service; cultural pressures often make the choice for full-time ministry a very difficult one.

c) Effective strategies and cooperation between Anglo-American and ethnic-minority churches and agencies to ensure these minorities are disciplined in what is a highly fragmented ministry. In 2005, nearly 60% of **IMB** church plants were among ethnic minorities; 35% of all **AoG** churches are among ethnic minorities; **CMA**, **CoG** (Cleveland) and many others, especially Pentecostal and charismatic groups, focus on reaching minority communities.

d) Growth of missions vision is occurring most dramatically among Asian-American churches, Koreans in particular. Korean-Americans have the highest proportional sending rates of any ethnicity in the USA. The beginnings of similar mission movements are now seen among Chinese-Americans, Hispanics and African-Americans. One development with massive implications is mobilizing immigrant Christians as missionaries to their country and people of origin

The less-reached. The sheer scale of outreach and the saturation of Christian media mean that very few are without ready access to the gospel, but many groups do need further specific attention for witness and intercession. Although the annual number of immigrants and refugees are fewer since 9/11, minority communities are still large in size and diversity.

a) Immigrants are more numerous and diverse in the USA than anywhere else on earth. In the USA, 31 ethnicities have populations of over one million. Mexico, China, Philippines, India, Colombia, Haiti, Cuba and Vietnam top the list of US immigrants. Millions come from countries where missionary access is very limited and where the majority are unreached. Their presence in the USA is the perfect opportunity to impact these less-reached peoples with the

love and power of Christ – pray that churches will wake up to and seize this opportunity.

b) *International students* number nearly 700,000 and come from nearly every country in the world; well over half are from Asia. The largest numbers are from India (103,000), China (99,000), South Korea (75,000), Canada (30,000), Japan (30,000) and Taiwan (28,000). For many, this is their first opportunity to encounter the gospel. Most will return to leadership positions in their home nations after study. Their responsiveness to loving Christian ministry is remarkable, and is increasing with time. The Association of Christian Ministries to Internationals is an umbrella body linking ministries such as **ISI** (with 163 staff), InterVarsity(**IFES**), **CCCI**, Navigators and others. Pray for conversions and for discipling ministries that will enable these students to be effective witnesses when they return home.

c) *The 5.2 million Jews* are an influential minority, although proportionately in decline. Outside of Israel itself, the USA has the largest concentration of Jews in the world. In both Miami and New York, 9-10% of the population is estimated to be Jewish. Their growing receptivity and response to the gospel have been evident since 1970, and more Jews are being won to Christ in the USA than anywhere else since New Testament times. There are estimated to be up to 250,000 Messianic Jews. Many have integrated into Christian churches, but there are over 300 Messianic synagogues in the USA where Jewish customs and culture are preserved under Yeshua the Messiah. Nearly 50 agencies focus on reaching Jews with the good news; Jews for Jesus is one of the most dynamic of these.

d) *Muslim numbers have steadily increased* through immigration and conversion of African-Americans (especially in large urban areas). Still, two-thirds of Muslims in the USA are foreign-born. Estimated populations range from 1.3-7 million, meeting in more than 1,200 mosques. Although many more integrate into mainstream US life than their co-religionists in Europe, Muslims in America are also vulnerable to indoctrination by Wahhabist and other extremist interpretations that tend to control and fund many of the mosques and Islamic centres.

i Arabs. Many are Muslim, but two-thirds are Christian. The small minority of Islamists among them have gained notoriety for the community.

ii Iranians may now number up to 1.5 million. Around 5-10% are Christian, a large proportion of them by conversion. Disillusionment with Islam and with Iranian politics causes many to be open to Jesus. There are now around 40 Iranian Christian fellowships.

iii Somalis, Afghans, Bosnians and others all have significant refugee communities.

iv The prison population, especially among African-Americans, sees a rapid growth of Islam among

prisoners. Up to 20% of the US prison population are now Muslim, and 80% of men who “find faith” are converts to Islam.

e) *South Asians* are one of the more affluent and well-educated ethnic communities in the USA. Most migrate for opportunities in business, technology, medicine or education. Nearly all are Muslim, Hindu or Sikh and come from sections of Indian society least exposed to the gospel; few are Christian. They number 5.5 million. Christian outreach to them is increasing.

f) *The cults* pose a challenge. Most function under the guise of Christianity but are full of

false and extra-biblical teaching. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are the most aggressive proselytizers of these, and the fastest growing. Scientology does not even purport to be Christian but wields great influence, especially among celebrities. The popularization of the occult and the supernatural among youth culture and the media leads many astray as well. In all of these cases, well-informed and specific engagement must occur in order to draw them to Jesus – who is the way, the truth and the life.

g) *The US prison population* is very large, with 2.3 million in jail. It is the world's largest prison population and nearly the highest incarceration rate. One-third of the prison population are African-American. There are over 2 million drug-related arrests annually, with 500,000 in prison and another 1.5 million on probation or parole due to drug-related offences. Pray for ministries such as Prison Fellowship International that seek to minister to them, win them to Christ, care for their families and rehabilitate them back into society.

US Christians have pioneered and generously supported missions on a massive scale for more than a century. The number, variety and commitment of US missionaries and agencies have impacted every nation on earth. Major umbrella bodies for evangelical mission agencies are The Mission Exchange and CrossGlobal Link. The US Center for World Mission remains hugely influential through its publications, including the "Perspectives" course, *Mission Frontiers* magazine and the William Carey Library. Caleb Resources and APMC (Advancing Churches in Missions Commitment), both now part of Pioneers, have acted as catalysts for missions mobilization since 1975. The largest denominational agencies: **IMB, AoG, ABWE, BIM, CC/CC, BMM**. The largest interdenominational agencies: **YWAM, WBT, CCCI, Pioneers, NTM, SIM**. Pray for:

a) *Local churches* to make the Great Commission central to their church life. Only a decreasing fraction do so – a small minority of evangelical churches were carrying the great bulk of the task of supporting 43,500 foreign missionaries in 2010.

b) *Effective partnerships between local churches and mission agencies*. For this, churches need to recognize the experience and knowledge of mission agencies, and agencies need to adapt their way of operating. Many churches send missionaries directly to the field – not always a strategic success.

c) *Viable long-term strategies* that impact the least-evangelized peoples and places. The large majority – possibly 80% – of US missionaries work among majority-Christian peoples, while many unevangelized peoples still languish without the good news. The huge growth in short-term missions, while positive in some respects, can also be to the detriment of long-term impact and fruit. Pray that the fervour and enthusiasm of those who go on mission trips would be channelled into long-term commitment.

Christian media ministries. In the media-conscious, media-savvy USA, the right usage of such tools can be highly effective, but poor or irresponsible application can alienate. With such a profusion, only a brief mention for prayer is made here; pray for:

a) *Christian literature*. It remains a huge industry not just for US readership but for the global readership as well. Large numbers of Christian bookshops have disappeared, replaced by online sales and the religion sections of secular bookstores. This in turn has spurred the creation of church bookshops, serving a specific congregation. Pray that Christian literature produced and read would be of the highest quality, offering solid teaching and compelling

stories for believers and non-believers alike.

b) Radio and TV ministries have developed dramatically since 1961. The National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) represents the interests of more than 1,400 Christian radio, TV and Internet broadcasters and associated ministries, which produce 75% of all religious programmes in the United States. There are about 2,400 Christian radio stations (more than double the number in 2001) and over 100 full-power Christian TV stations in the USA. Pray for:

i Wise and sensitive use of these powerful media. The distorted teaching and fraudulent, immoral lifestyles of certain televangelists give a bad name to those who minister authentically and with accountability to the body of Christ. Sadly, some high-profile figures continue to preach a distorted gospel and maintain questionable lifestyles and consumption patterns. In doing so, they inoculate many against the real truth.

ii Wise stewardship in the use of funds and for God's provision; such ministries are very expensive to maintain.

iii Programming that uplifts the Lord Jesus and includes strong biblical truth and culturally relevant, effective communication – rather than a focus on personalities, products or organizations.

iv Unity among Christian broadcasters and communicators and an “open door” from the Lord to extend the message of Jesus Christ into the entire world, especially to nations that have traditionally been closed to the gospel.

c) Use of the Internet and digital media. The past generation is remarkably transformed by the advent of the Internet, the Web and the ubiquitous availability of digital content. Sadly, these advances are often driven by wicked agendas such as pornography, gambling, pirating and callow celebrity worship. But the Internet is also a powerful tool for the gospel, penetrating into otherwise inaccessible places, connecting believers remotely and providing myriad resources for evangelism, discipleship, apologetics, fellowship, worship and Bible study. Pray for churches, missions and parachurch ministries to make full and wise use of new media for maximum impact on the media-hungry generations of today and tomorrow.