

OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



ABOVE: REVEREND JACOB DUCHÉ OFFERS THE FIRST PRAYER BEFORE THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1774, IN PHILADELPHIA. PAINTED BY TOMPKINS HARRISON MATTESON, 1848.

FRONT COVER: THE STAINED GLASS WINDOW IN THE CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER ROOM DEPICTS GEORGE WASHINGTON IN PRAYER, SURROUNDED BY THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE NAMES OF ALL 50 STATES.



ABOVE: CLIQ, THE MUSE OF HISTORY, STANDS IN HER CHARIOT RECORDING THE PROCEEDINGS IN THE OLD HALL OF THE HOUSE (1807-1857) NOW CALLED NATIONAL STATUARY HALL.

HISTORY

In 1774, the Continental Congress chose Episcopal Rector Jacob Duché to open its legislative sessions with prayer. In 1789, the First Congress chose Reverend William Lynn, a Presbyterian from Philadelphia, as the official chaplain of the House of Representatives. Each succeeding Congress has named a Chaplain, except between the years 1855–1861, when local clergy served as volunteer chaplains. In the 20th century, the average tenure of House Chaplains was 21 years. In recent Supreme Court decisions, the constitutionality of the Chaplain’s role has been upheld based on precedent and tradition.

“I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that ‘except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel . . . I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that Service.”

Benjamin Franklin, June 28, 1787



Embarkation of the Pilgrims HAS HUNG IN THE ROTUNDA OF THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL SINCE 1844. IT SHOWS THE PILGRIMS IN DEEP PRAYER AS THEY DEPART FOR THE NEW WORLD IN 1620.

MINISTRIES OF PRAYER

The Opening Prayer

Each session of Congress opens with prayer. It is a great honor and responsibility for the Chaplain to keep the tradition of prayer alive in Congress. Each opening prayer asks God's blessing on the nation and the work of the House of Representatives. The invitation to pray is extended beyond those gathered in the House Chamber to people everywhere over C-SPAN. Hopefully, new life is given to the words engraved above the Speaker's chair: "In God We Trust," and people no matter what their faith persuasion can respond, "Amen."

Prayer for Special Events

Prayer is often part of Congressional events which occur on Capitol Hill. These formal or informal ceremonies can mark historical commemorations, special congressional award ceremonies, and dedications of memorials. Prayer adds a solemnity and dignity to such secular celebrations.

Intercessory Prayer

The Chaplain welcomes requests from Members of Congress and staff to offer their personal intentions in prayer. He also welcomes and appreciates the prayers of the general public for Members and their families and for all those who work on Capitol Hill.

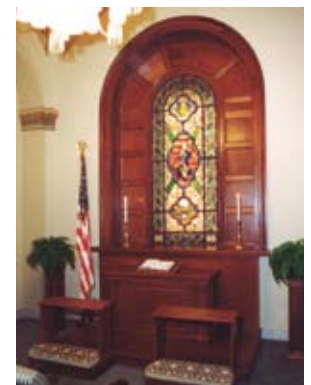
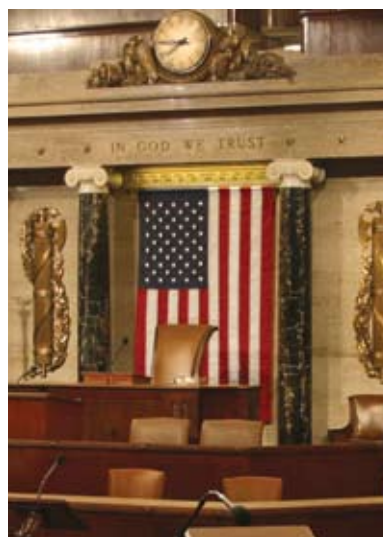
Prayer Groups

Small groups of Members of Congress, spouses, and staff gather for Bible study, prayerful reflection, or spiritual discernment. When the House is in session, Members are invited to attend a non-denominational prayer breakfast. Particular staff associations for Muslims, Jewish, and Christians have formed to call one another together for holy days and for regular times of prayer and fellowship.

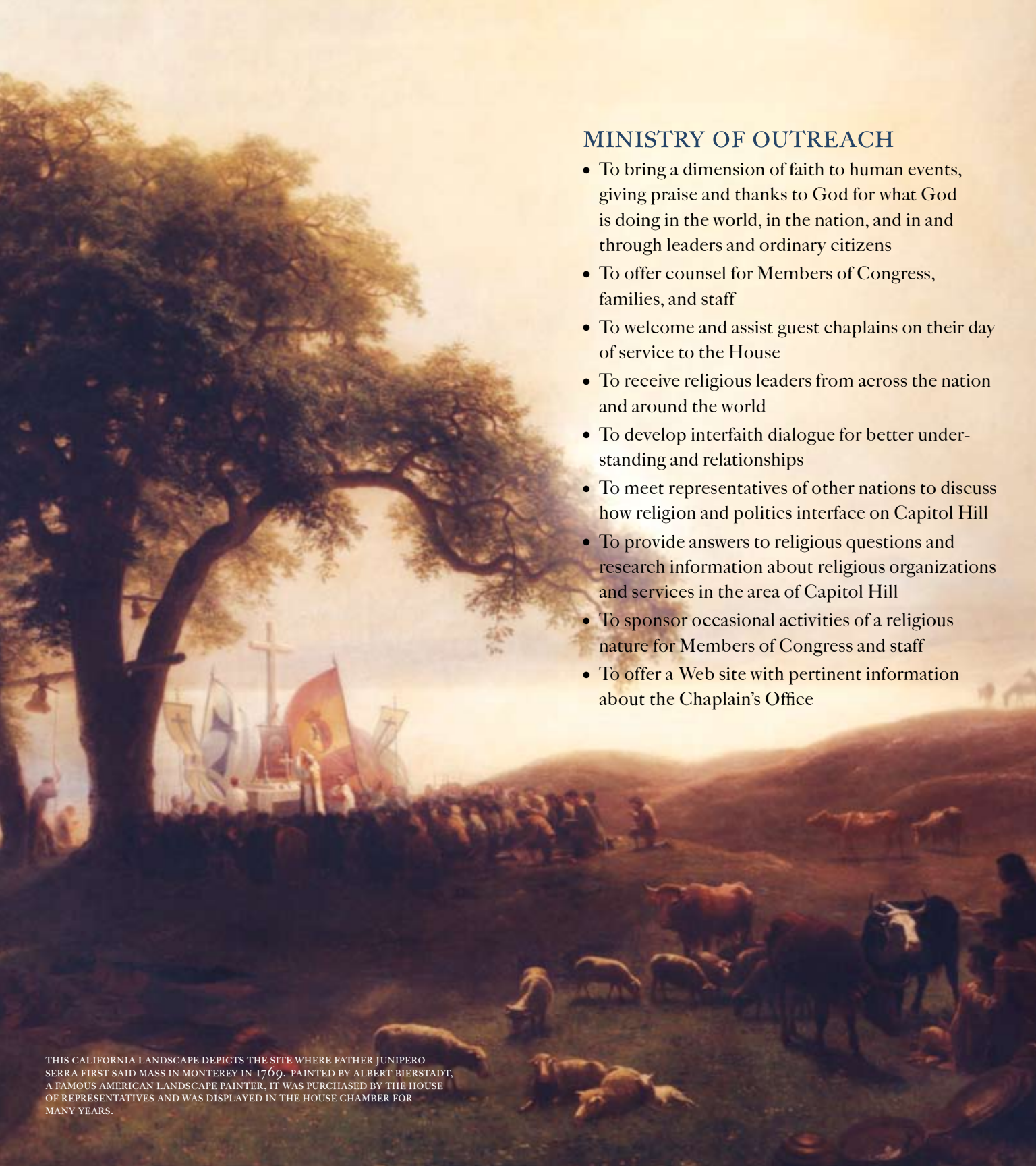
Congressional Prayer Room

Since 1955, a small room in the center of the Capitol just off the Rotunda has been set aside exclusively for Members of Congress to use for communal prayer and study or private prayerful reflection.

The room itself is a statement of the preeminence of prayer both in our history and in our ongoing life as a nation. Dominated by the figure of George Washington praying Psalm 16, surrounded by the names of the each State of the Union, the lighted stained glass window creates an atmosphere of peaceful serenity in the midst of a busy world of visitors and the work of government.



ABOVE RIGHT: THE CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER ROOM IS LOCATED IN THE U.S. CAPITOL AND WAS ESTABLISHED BY A JOINT RESOLUTION OF CONGRESS. LEFT: THE CHAMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WHERE THE CHAPLAIN OFFERS THE OPENING PRAYER EACH DAY.



MINISTRY OF OUTREACH

- To bring a dimension of faith to human events, giving praise and thanks to God for what God is doing in the world, in the nation, and in and through leaders and ordinary citizens
- To offer counsel for Members of Congress, families, and staff
- To welcome and assist guest chaplains on their day of service to the House
- To receive religious leaders from across the nation and around the world
- To develop interfaith dialogue for better understanding and relationships
- To meet representatives of other nations to discuss how religion and politics interface on Capitol Hill
- To provide answers to religious questions and research information about religious organizations and services in the area of Capitol Hill
- To sponsor occasional activities of a religious nature for Members of Congress and staff
- To offer a Web site with pertinent information about the Chaplain's Office

THIS CALIFORNIA LANDSCAPE DEPICTS THE SITE WHERE FATHER JUNIPERO SERRA FIRST SAID MASS IN MONTEREY IN 1769. PAINTED BY ALBERT BIERSTADT, A FAMOUS AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PAINTER, IT WAS PURCHASED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND WAS DISPLAYED IN THE HOUSE CHAMBER FOR MANY YEARS.

PASTORAL MINISTRY

The Chaplain makes himself available to all who work for or in the House of Representatives. Pastoral care is offered to anyone in need of encouragement, the inspiration of Scripture, helpful guidance, or personal counsel.

His pastoral care primarily focuses on current Members of the House, but can include their families and staff, former Members of Congress, teenage pages, Capitol Police, and other congressional employees. These encounters are held in strictest confidence.

As persons deal with the demands of a difficult job or face illness, at grieving moments of death or disappointment, in preparation for marriage or a major adjustment in family life, they often seek out the Chaplain.

The Chaplain believes people worship in their own way and usually at the times they decide, but God moves and acts in any of us as God wills. The Chaplain hopes to be present to facilitate such encounters and prays that he is a support but never an obstacle to anyone's search for faith.



THE CAPITOL BUILDING



THOMAS STARR KING OF CALIFORNIA WAS A PREACHER AND A LECTURER. HIS SPEECHES ON BEHALF OF THE UNION DURING THE CIVIL WAR HELPED KEEP CALIFORNIA IN THE UNION.