

# Daily Breeze

HUNDREDS UNITE AT A TORRANCE BREAKFAST AS A BOW TO THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

## AN AMEN TO ALL FAITHS

By Melissa Evans, Staff Writer

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Hundreds gathered locally Thursday to bow their heads during the nation's designated day for prayer, with this year's breakfast event paying particular attention to interfaith inclusion.

"We may come from different backgrounds and traditions, yet we are united in our basic core beliefs," Brent Tufeld, deputy public defender, told about 500 guests at the Torrance Marriott.

The hour-long event included remarks by city officials and community and business leaders, with the keynote address by Larry Rosen, president of the YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles. Organizers intentionally excluded clergy on the speakers' list so as to downplay religious affiliation or denomination.



About 500 guests reflect during closing prayer at the South Bay National Day of Prayer breakfast at the Torrance Marriott Hotel (Robert Casillas / Staff Photographer)

"With any event like this, if it's too tied to one particular congregation, people are hesitant," said the Rev. Clayton Cobb of St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, one of the organizers. "We want to see the community claim the gift of this event for itself."

In the weeks leading up to the National Day of Prayer, interfaith groups and some Jewish and Muslim leaders accused Christian evangelicals of hijacking the event.

Volunteers involved in the National Day of Prayer Task Force, headed by Shirley Dobson of Focus on the Family, were asked to sign a statement of faith pledging their belief that the "Holy Bible is the inerrant word of the living God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the only one by which I can obtain salvation and have an ongoing relationship with God."

National groups such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations and Jews On First criticized the selection process for volunteers, who helped coordinate the estimated 35,000 prayer gatherings around the country.

Locally, an interfaith group called Dawn Unity, also a sponsor of the Torrance breakfast, circulated an e-mail asking people to voice their support for the inclusion of other traditions by contacting politicians and speaking out.



Established in 1952 by President Harry Truman, the day of prayer was intended as a way for Americans to pause and pray for the work and guidance of city, state and national leaders in particular.

Charles Dickerson directs the South Bay Ecumenical Choir during the event, which strove to include all religious denominations. (Robert Casillas / Staff Photographer)

Torrance Mayor Frank Scotto, one of the speakers on Thursday, said the National Day of Prayer should be a time of "looking beyond our differences" in our universal desire for peace, security and a brighter future.

Rosen, who is Jewish, spoke about his role over the years working with children, who "are short on philosophy, but long on truth."

"Kids see so clearly what we are," he said. "They know we're faking before we do."

He advised those in attendance to pay attention to their works, not the words, and to assess the character of others the way a child might do.

"What matters most is how we translate the lessons of our lives, informed by our religious faith, into how we live our lives," he said.

[melissa.evans@dailybreeze.com](mailto:melissa.evans@dailybreeze.com)