

# Praying In Secret?

By Vera Glaser

## Washington

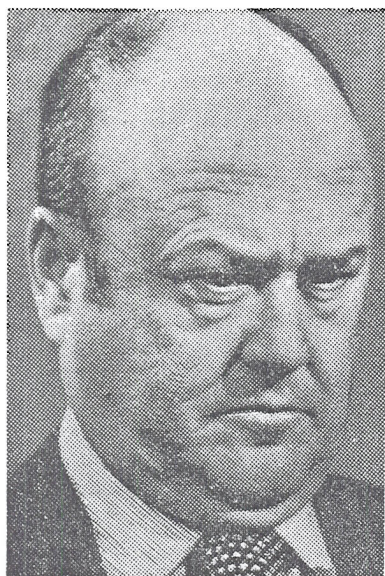
The most private and personal moments in the White House oval office come on Wednesdays, when Gerald Ford prays with three old friends from Congress.

Mr. Ford's inner strength has helped him, as an unelected president now nearing the end of a year in office, to take hold of the man-killing job, build his political popularity and completely alter the presidential "image" inherited from Richard Nixon.

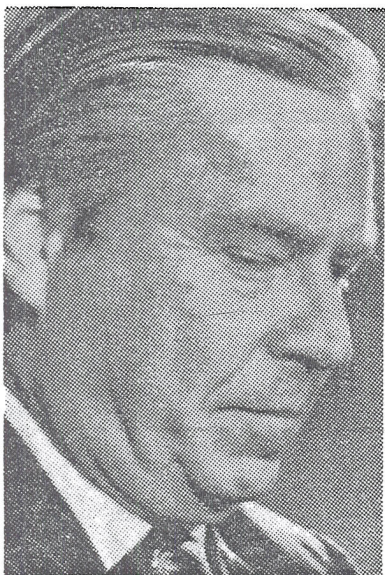
The prayer sessions, which have been top secret since Rep.



PRESIDENT FORD  
**Inner strength**



MELVIN LAIRD  
**It's personal**



REP. JOHN RHODES  
**His wife didn't know**

Al Quie (Rep-Minn.) started them in the late '60s, have contributed to Mr. Ford's inner security.

So closely held are the meetings that the wife of House Minority Leader John Rhodes, a participant, said she learned of them only last year. They are never listed on the President's public calendar and most White House staffers are unaware of them.

President Ford is an Episcopalian, Quie a Lutheran, Rhodes a Methodist. The fourth member, former Congressman and Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, is Presbyterian. Laird, now with Reader's Digest Magazine, is a political advisor to Mr. Ford.

The men clearly prefer that the sessions not be publicized.

"I don't feel comfortable talking about it, they're so personal," Laird said. Any publicity "might be misunderstood," according to Quie.

Such intimate communings are a contrast to former President Nixon's splashy Sunday morning religious services in the East Room.

President Ford's three friends gather at the White House shortly before noon on Wednesday unless he has an important conflict on his schedule.

After a brief small talk, each is said to pray separately for about a minute, giving thanks, seeking guidance on his individual concerns, for the President and the nation. The session rarely lasts more than ten minutes closing with the Lord's Prayer recited in unison.