

FORD AND FRIENDS MEET FOR PRAYER

Weekly Session Held Amid
Reports of Succession

By BOB G. SLOSSER

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 —

While reports of his imminent succession to the Presidency swirled about the capital, Vice President Ford met in a Congressman's office just before noon today to pray with close friends, as he has most Wednesdays for three or four months.

With him were Representatives John J. Rhodes of Arizona in whose office in the Rayburn House Office Building they met, and Albert H. Quie of Minnesota, two of several political figures Mr. Ford has been meeting with regularly.

Mr. Rhodes, the House minority leader, announced yesterday that he would vote for the impeachment of President Nixon, and today he was among those meeting with Mr. Nixon.

In a telephone interview about the prayer meetings, Mr. Quie said, "We meet for fellowship, and we pray together."

Ford an Episcopalian

Although there has been little public discussion of Mr. Ford's specific religious beliefs, it has been widely assumed that they embraced the evangelical Christian faith centering on a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son-of-God and on the forgiveness of sins through faith in His Crucifixion. Mr. Ford is an Episcopalian.

Mr. Ford, asked if he found himself praying more than ever, replied: "That's for sure. But this is a very quiet, much off-the-record group."

According to Mr. Quie, whose Christian beliefs are well-known, Mr. Ford and the others have, for the last three or four months, met at about 11:30 every Wednesday. He said that the prayer meetings began about seven years ago but when one of the members, former Senator Charles E. Goodell of New York left in 1972, "it sort of drifted off."

After Mr. Ford became Vice President, Mr. Quie suggested that the meetings resume. "We

don't talk about it," Mr. Quie said.

Those close to the Vice President say that he "doesn't like to wear his religion on his sleeve" because "many people get the idea that if you say you have religious beliefs, you somehow think you're perfect."

Mr. Ford's Michael, is a student at the theologically conservative Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts.

Son Is Theological Student

The Vice President has been a golfing companion of the Rev. Billy Graham, the evangelist, and recently spoke at the Southern Baptist convention in Dallas.

Prayer meetings such as the one attended by Mr. Ford today have sprung up in many official quarters of Washington. They are held regularly by members of Congress, the judicial branch and the State Department.

Prime movers in the establishment of the little-publicized meetings have been Senator Harold E. Hughes of Iowa, who is leaving the Senate at the end of the year to devote himself to Christian work, and Douglas Coe of the Fellowship Foundation, an interdenominational Christian group based here.

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