News



Democratic Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz speaks at a news conference at the Minnesota state Capitol in St. Paul, Aug. 16, 2023. (AP/Steve Karnowski, File)

Jack Jenkins

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Frenzied speculation over who Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris would tap as her vice presidential running mate came to an end Tuesday (Aug. 6), with the current vice president reportedly choosing Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to be her successor should they win in November.

Walz's profile has risen in the weeks since President Joe Biden announced he was bowing out of the presidential race. The Midwesterner has appeared regularly on national television programs to make the case for Democrats, coining the now widely adopted "MAGA is weird" line of attack, and winning fans as he advocates for liberal policies with the same folksy charm that's made him popular in his home state.

Some are calling his persona "Midwestern Dad" energy, citing his background as a high school teacher and football coach. But Minnesotans know Walz as something even more specific: a "Minnesota Lutheran" Dad.

Here are five faith facts about Walz:

Walz, like many Minnesotans, is Lutheran

Walz is Lutheran, as is more than 20% of the Minnesota population according to Pew Research Center, making it one of if not the most Lutheran state in the U.S. thanks to a wave of Scandinavian Lutherans who settled in the region in the 19th century.

He does not often discuss his faith publicly but has posted about attending worship during Christmas and other services at various Lutheran churches. Walz refers to Pilgrim Lutheran Church in St. Paul — a congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a mainline denomination — as "my parish."

Walz, who was sworn in as Minnesota's governor in January 2019, sometimes describes himself as a "Minnesota Lutheran," an identity he frames as a sort of Midwestern cultural subtype. He has referenced the idea during speeches, such as

when he addressed the North America's Building Trade Unions legislative conference in April.

"Because we're good Minnesota Lutherans, we have a rule: If you do something good and talk about it, it no longer counts," Walz said after he was introduced. "So what you have to do is to get someone else to talk about you."

He made a similar joke while speaking at a conference hosted by the Center for American Progress last year, suggesting that, like Minnesota Lutherans, Democrats don't talk enough about their accomplishments. When moderator and Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne asked aloud if that made Democrats political Lutherans, Walz responded, "I don't know — maybe."

In 2019, Walz appointed Jodi Harpstead, the former head of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and a self-described "Lutheran girl" herself, to run the state's Department of Human Services.

If elected, he would be the second (and maybe first) Lutheran vice president

If elected, Walz would become only the second Lutheran vice president, depending on how you count it.

There are multiple Lutheran denominations in the U.S., all of which trace their lineage back to Martin Luther, the famed German priest who is credited with ushering in the Protestant Reformation that begat all of Protestantism. Some Lutheran groups are affiliated with American evangelicalism, but the largest — and the one associated with Walz's own church — is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a mainline denomination on the more liberal end of the spectrum.



Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz speaks during a news conference for the Biden-Harris campaign discussing the Project 2025 plan, July 17, 2024, in Milwaukee. The news conference was held near Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum, where Republicans were holding their 2024 Republican National Convention. (AP/Joe Lamberti)

The only previous vice president connected to the tradition was another Minnesotan, Hubert Humphrey, who was raised Lutheran but ended up attending a Methodist church after his family moved to a city where there wasn't a Lutheran one available.

Were Walz to follow Harris' lead and run for president one day, he would become — if elected — the first Lutheran president.

He faced blowback from religious communities — including conservative Lutherans — during the pandemic

Walz was one of many governors who imposed restrictions on worship in his state during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was also one of many governors who faced pushback from religious communities, especially conservative ones: On May 22, 2020, leaders of Minnesota Catholic communities and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, a conservative Lutheran denomination, both announced they would return to in-person worship that weekend in direct defiance of Walz's restrictions, arguing it was hypocritical to bar people from worship while opening the Mall of America.

Two days later, Walz announced he would ease restrictions on houses of worship, allowing churches and other religious communities to open at 25% capacity so long as they adhered to social distancing. He cited new guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention but also voiced his own discomfort with the restrictions.

"I certainly want to acknowledge those Minnesotans who find the contradictions maddening: So do I," he said.

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He rallied with faith leaders after the death of George Floyd

As protests erupted in Minnesota after the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer, Walz huddled with faith leaders from the state, hoping to stem violent clashes between demonstrators and police. Within days of Floyd's killing, Walz hosted a news conference featuring community leaders; elected officials such as Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Attorney General Keith Ellison; and faith leaders, including the Rev. Alfred Babington-Johnson, Imam Asad Zaman and Rabbi Aaron Weininger.

Many of the speakers condemned violence, but also urged Minnesotans to join nonviolent protests, call for police reform and voice outrage at Floyd's murder.

"For those watching, this is our Minnesota," Walz said at the end of the conference, his arms outstretched. "This is who we are. This is the decency, this is the compassion, and this is the community of who we are. You hear the passion — no one up here is going to leave justice unserved."

He has advocated for the Minnesota Muslim population

Minnesota is home to a significant and influential Muslim population that Walz has interacted with on numerous occasions. Somalis, more of whom live in Minnesota than any other state, are primarily Muslim — including Rep. Ilhan Omar, one of only three Muslim members of the current U.S. Congress. The first-ever Muslim to serve in Congress is also a Minnesotan: Ellison was a U.S. representative before becoming Minnesota's attorney general.

Walz, for his part, has regularly attended iftar dinners and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, welcomed a Muslim delegation with a speech during a Muslim Day at the Capitol in 2019, visited Muslim communities that have been victimized by vandalism and spoken at events hosted by local chapters of the Council on American-Islamic Relations and others geared toward pushing back against Islamophobia.

Read this next: Kamala Harris makes a fine choice with Gov. Tim Walz as running mate

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