News



Audience members stand and pray before Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump arrives to deliver remarks on the tax code, and manufacturing at the Johnny Mercer Theatre Civic Center Sept. 24, 2024, in Savannah, Ga. (AP/Evan Vucci)



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Two Catholic bishops will participate in an all-day prayer festival Sunday (May 17) on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., that organizers hope will spark a "movement of renewal" but critics are calling a Christian nationalist rally.

Officially titled "Rededicate 250: National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving," the event will feature mostly conservative evangelical Protestant leaders and members of the Trump administration, as well as musical performances from military brass bands and Christian performing artists.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, retired archbishop of New York, and Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, will speak at the event, as will Orthodox Rabbi Meir Soloveichik of New York City. All three serve on President Donald Trump's religious liberty commission.

The actor Jonathan Roumie, a Catholic convert who portrays Jesus in "The Chosen" television series, is also listed as a speaker.

While organizers portray the event as an opportunity for fellowship and prayer to thank God for the country's blessings, critics point to the overwhelmingly conservative Christian makeup of the speaker lineup.

"This is Christian nationalism in action working through the federal government," Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, said in a prepared statement.

In a video he posted on social media, Barron, the founder of the Catholic media organization Word on Fire, said the event is intended to honor the 250th anniversary of the United States, with a special emphasis "upon the role that religion has played in the American experiment."

"The idea is to celebrate how religion and America have really come together in a beautiful way," Barron said.

> '[The speakers] are political lieutenants of an administration that has waged war on immigrants, gutted Catholic Charities contracts, and treated the Holy Father as an adversary.'
> —Msgr. Arthur Holquin
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The prayer rally is organized by Freedom 250, a public-private partnership the White House launched in December. On the event website, organizers say the jubilee has the aim of "solemnly rededicating our country as One Nation under God."

"In speech, song, and storytelling, we will bear witness to the extraordinary story of how God has powerfully and wondrously shaped the United States of America—remembering the people, sacrifices, and defining moments in which God has powerfully manifested Himself in our history."

The event will have a distinctly conservative Christian flavor. Of the nearly three dozen speakers listed on the website, about a quarter are evangelical Protestants. Participants include the Rev. Franklin Graham; Robert Jeffress, a Baptist pastor and Fox News contributor; and Paula White-Cain, the senior adviser to the White House Faith Office.

Paula White-Cain, senior adviser to the White House Faith Office, stands with faith leaders as

Paula White-Cain, senior adviser to the White House Faith Office, stands with faith leaders as U.S. President Donald Trump signs an executive order on the "Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission" at the White House in Washington May 1, 2025. White-Cain will speak at the May 17 prayer rally "Rededicate 250." (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

During a webinar last month, first reported by The Washington Post, White-Cain said the event "is about the history and the foundations of our nation, which was built on Christian values, on the Bible." She also said that the jubilee would not include religious leaders "praying to all these different Gods."

"For America to rededicate herself to Christ means I must rededicate myself to Christ. And that's the angle that I'm going to take in my talk on the National Mall on

May 17," Jeffress told The Christian Post.

Jeffress, an ardent Trump supporter who recently suggested that the president has shown a greater understanding of the Bible than Pope Leo XIV, also said that Trump believes it's time "for America to rededicate herself to God."

Trump, who is not expected to appear in person, will send a recorded video message.

Several top U.S. officials will also speak, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, House Speaker Mike Johnson and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is Catholic and like others in the administration often speaks in positive terms about Christianity's contributions to the United States.

"The Catholic faith has always been part of the American story. The first Christian service on our soil was a Catholic Mass," Rubio said during a virtual address on April 9 to a symposium organized by Catholic universities.

"To look upon the history of this golden land is to see the face of God," Rubio said.

Not everyone puts it that way.

Faithful America, a network of progressive Christians, is circulating a petition that describes the Rededicate event as the "Trump regime's attempt to rewrite a nationalistic pseudohistory and homogenize the country's religious identity for its own purposes."

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Msgr. Arthur Holquin, a retired Catholic priest of the Diocese of Orange, California, wrote on his Substack that what Rededicate 250 "actually is, stripped of its anniversary bunting, is a Christian nationalist rally organized around the proposition that America must be reconsecrated to God under the presidency of Donald Trump."

"The political roster tells the story," said Holquin, who added that the U.S. officials who will speak at the rally "are political lieutenants of an administration that has waged war on immigrants, gutted Catholic Charities contracts, and treated the Holy Father as an adversary."

The all-day event is organized around three "pillars" that the website lists as celebrating the "miracles" of God's providence over the nation, "personal testimonies of God's healing," and "a unified moment of rededication." Dolan, who offered an opening prayer at Trump's inauguration and has maintained a friendly relationship with the president, will speak during the rededication part of the event.

The event is scheduled for 10:45 a.m. to 6 p.m. May 17 and can be livestreamed through partner churches and organizations

This story appears in the **USA 250** feature series. View the full series.