



President Trump's "America first" policy is "a theological heresy for followers of Christ"

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The Presiding Bishop of the US-based Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, will join a march on the White House by Christian leaders this month as part of an ecumenical movement to "reclaim Jesus". The march, on Thursday 24 May, will mark the launch of **the Reclaiming Jesus Declaration**, which begins with a stark warning: "We are living through perilous and polarising times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake."

It continues: "It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else – nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography – our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. We pray that our nation will see Jesus' words in us. 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35)."

The declaration sets out a number of concerns, including of President Donald Trump's "America first" policy. The declaration describes it as "a theological heresy for followers of Christ," and goes on to say: "while we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal."

"We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth's resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God's children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these."

The declaration says: "Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with 'For God so loved the world' (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives."

The strongly-worded statement also hits out at gender-based violence and misogyny, saying: "we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world – to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ."

“Therefore, we reject misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognise these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.”

It also hits out at lies and falsehoods, saying: “truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. . .

“Therefore, we reject the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined.

“The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation’s highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behaviour of families and children. The normalisation of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.”

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has co-signed the declaration, alongside 22 other Christian leaders, including Dr Peter Borgdorff from the Christian Reformed Church in North America; Dr Amos Brown of the National Baptist Convention; Dr Tony Campolo, co-Founder, Red Letter Christians; Dr James Forbes from Union Theological Seminary; Bishop Vashti McKenzie of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Dr Ron Sider from Evangelicals for Social Action; Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners; and Bishop Will Willimon, from the United Methodist Church.

They conclude their declaration saying that “we are deeply concerned for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper – deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk. . .

“Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ – to whom be all authority, honour, and glory.

“It is time for a fresh confession of faith. Jesus is Lord. He is the light in our darkness. ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ (John 8:12).”

At 7 pm (EDT, 11 pm GMT) on Thursday 24 May, Church leaders and other Christians will gather at the National City Christian Church in Washington DC for a time of prayer and preaching. At 8.30 pm they will process to the White House where they will hold a silent candlelit vigil until 10 pm. More than 1,000 people are expected to take part.

“The church service, the procession to the White House, and silent candlelight vigil is planned in response to the moral and political crises at the highest levels of political leadership that are putting both the soul of the nation and the integrity of Christian faith at stake,” the Revd Jim Wallis said. “The elders call upon all Christians to remember that our identity in Jesus precedes every other identity.”