A PLEDGE FOR MORAL DEFIANCE

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Multi-Faith Leaders Representing 10 Million People Launch National Anti-Authoritarian Initiative

Faith leaders pledge to build a national movement of moral resistance and act against weaponized religion

Washington D.C. [Oct. 26, 2026]—Today, in the first-of-its-kind religious movement, more than 30 faith leaders representing over 10 million people launched A Pledge for Moral Defiance, a multi-faith anti-authoritarian initiative. Before a pulpit in the middle of H St and 16th streets NW, within view of the White House, religious leaders vowed to turn the tide on the nation's democratic erosion. Leaders across faiths and denominations, including Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Christian Church, AME Zion, Latino Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims called on others to join and take action in their states and to the U.S. Capitol.

Rooted in "An American Encyclical on Our Authoritarian Crisis," the initiative calls on all religious leaders to actively reject authoritarianism and the weaponization of religion. Law firms and higher education institutions each banded together to defend themselves against direct attacks. Multi-faith religious leaders are now doing the same through prayer, protest, mobilization and accountability. They pledge to refuse allegiance to any political leader or ideology, name voter mobilization and protection as priorities and stand in solidarity to actively defend freedom of conscience.

Bishop William J. Barber II, civil rights and social justice leader and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call For Moral Revival, noted the agreement across this movement of religious leaders that complicity to authoritarianism betrays all faiths.

"As people of faith, our ultimate allegiance belongs to a higher power, and our sacred text commands us to defend the vulnerable, and love our neighbors, and stand as a witness to truth," Barber said. "We repent that sometimes we've been scared of the people in our pews rather than scared of the judgment of God, we repent, but we also recommit ourselves to the exhausting holy work of building a just society. It's hard work when authoritarianism threatens to overwrite human rights, and silence conscience. The religious community cannot remain silent because if we do, we are accessories to the crime of everything authoritarianism is doing."

The initiative emerged from a multi-faith convening of leaders to counter authoritarianism, hosted by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, a group focused on fostering inclusive democracies. Movement leaders are organizing to grow the initiative, mobilizing communities for strong voter turnout and organizing to meet with elected officials.

Corey Saylor, Council on American-Islamic Relations research and advocacy director, declared authoritarianism a threat to all people and faiths. “Authoritarianism arrives in stages, almost always testing itself first on communities that they think others will not defend,” Saylor said. “...This same playbook is used against immigrants, against Black and Brown voters, against journalists, against any faith community whose conscience refuses to submit and do what they're told. That playbook is putting corrupt wealth and your freedom into their pocket. Today, you must look authoritarianism in the eye and say no. The pledge of allegiance … ends with the words ‘with liberty and justice for all.’ It is time to prove that we meant it.”

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, president of Sojourner, asserted we would not idly stand by in the face of voter suppression. “We are in the midst or on the eve of a midterm election that is an inflection moment in our commitment and our cause of preventing the continued slide into authoritarianism,” Taylor said. “Authoritarian leaders are known to try to put their thumbs on elections, to make desperate moves to stay in power and consolidate power. We have our moral defiance playbook that is committed to fighting every form of voter suppression, because every voter is made in the image and likeness of God. We have a commitment to winning, not in a partisan way, but in a way that ensures massive voter turnout…We have a commitment to prove beyond a doubt the election results, and ultimately to ensure those results are enforced, all the way through the seating of a new Congress on January 3rd.”

Rev. Dr. Russell Meyer, executive director for Florida Council of Churches, proclaimed it was time to lift up what a just government should be doing for its people. “We gather today not just to point a finger,” Meyer. “Finger pointing does no good unless it leads to repentance and amendment to life and change. We look across the land, whether in the house behind us or the house in Tallahassee for our state governor, and they are oppressing the poor and enriching those who steal their labor as a means of living. It's time for us to understand that we are not just defying a bad government, we're lifting up a vision of what government really should be doing.”

Prominent religious leaders at the launch included:

- The **Rev. Phillip C. Hirsch** is the bishop at the Metropolitan Washington D.C. Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Hirsch has spoken out about threats to American democracy and the recent danger facing immigrant communities across the country.
- **Rev. Dr. Hanna Broome**, director of religious affairs for Repairers of the Breach and ordained elder in the A.M.E. Zion Church. She’s led congregations and coalitions across the Carolinas to confront poverty, racism and the death penalty.
- **Rev. Dr. Alvin O'Neal Jackson**, retired pastor and former moderator of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who has led marches against Immigration and Customs Enforcement and joined other faith leaders in calling for voting rights.
- **Rev. Adam Russell Taylor**, president of Sojourners who has called on religious leaders to resist anti-democratic threats and defend democracy, including voting protections.

Learn more about A Pledge for Moral Defiance and see the full list of signatories at www.moraldefiance.org.
Media can access assets from today’s event: video clips.

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