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In this Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, a man holds a Bible as supporters of Donald Trump gather outside the Capitol in Washington. The Christian imagery and rhetoric on view during the Capitol insurrection sparked renewed debate about the societal effects of melding Christian faith with an exclusionary breed of nationalism. (AP/John Minchillo)

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A diverse group of influential Christian leaders is calling on their fellow faithful to protect democracy, arguing that American Christians are compelled to defend voting freedoms as a "test of faith."

"We write in a moment of fierce urgency, as the people of God animated by faith, hope, and love," said the [statement](#), which was provided to RNS ahead of its formal release on Thursday (Sept. 19). "It is in this spirit that we reaffirm Christian support for democracy and invite all Christians and people of moral conscience to do the same."

About 200 leaders and writers from mainline Christian denominations, the Catholic and Greek Orthodox church, as well as Black Protestant and evangelical Christianity, signed the letter, which describes democracy as a "moral affirmation" and urges Christians to repudiate "anti-democratic sentiment" â?? namely, ideologies such as Christian nationalism and racism. The statement pointed to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol as one of several recent anti-democratic acts, noting some insurrectionists who participated in the violence that day "[did so in the name of Jesus Christ](#)."

"In recent years, in the United States and around the world, the Christian faith has been distorted and leveraged in defense of authoritarian leaders who seek to erode freedoms essential to a thriving democracy," the letter reads. "Some Christians enthusiastically praise dictatorial leaders and regimes. Some have willingly accepted or even participated in political violence." As a counter to these threats, the statement outlines a framework for Christian support of a democratic society, citing principles such as the belief that all people are made in the image of God, the biblical mandate to love the stranger and oneâ??s enemy, Jesus Christâ??s call to be peacemakers, and even democracy as a counterbalance to sin.

"The mechanisms of democracy, the balances of power, and the protections of a Constitutional framework rein in human tendencies to dominate, demean, and exploit," the statement reads.

The statement was chiefly organized by Jim Wallis, head of Georgetown Universityâ??s Center on Faith and Justice, which is hosting a two-day summit tied to the

statement in Washington, D.C., this week. Other signers include the Rev. Galen Carey, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals; the Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church; Michele Dunne, head of the Franciscan Action Network; Kristin Kobes Du Mez, author and professor at Calvin University; the Rev. Leslie Copeland-Tune, a top official at the National Council of Churches; Washington Post columnist E. J. Dionne; Yolanda Pierce, dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School; and Colin Watson, former executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Wallis said he felt the letter was needed because of unique threats facing U.S. democracy this year, calling it a "testing time for our nation" both politically and religiously. "It's a national test of who we are as a people, right to the heart of our faith," he said.

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But even setting aside the ongoing presidential election, Wallis said he hopes the broader principles mentioned in the statement outlive the current political moment.

"It's a theological tool to deal with this election and beyond," Wallis said.

He was echoed by Bishop W. Darin Moore of the AME Zion Church, who said his denomination — which has been called the "Freedom Church" and boasts Frederick Douglass as one of its historic members — has a long tradition of fighting for values outlined in the statement.

"It's in our spiritual DNA that we have never bifurcated between our ecclesiology and our struggle for justice," said Moore, who was among those who signed the statement.

He also celebrated those who have become active in "courageous conversations" around what it means "to live in a nation that claims to affirm religious pluralism and inclusive democracy, and yet retain our values, be they Christian, Muslim, Jews or no traditional religion."

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington, highlighted the statement's call for Christians to "repudiate the tenets of Christian Nationalism and the idea that Christians or Christianity should hold a place of privilege and power in our nation's governance." She told RNS the text was not meant to rehash long-standing criticisms of Christian nationalism, but rather to make a

"positive statement of Christian engagement in the public realm" in particular in a democratic society." Asked how the statement relates to her experience as the bishop of Washington which, in addition to duties typical of any bishop, also includes engagement with high-ranking elected officials who attend various Episcopal churches in the region Budde said values that inform her public engagement include those which "as Christians, we can rightfully uphold, maybe even have a responsibility to uphold." Among them: addressing "disparities between wealth and poverty, protecting religious pluralism and being peacemakers."

The letter notes its signers do not agree on all issues, citing long-standing differences on foreign policy, abortion, gender and sexuality. Even so, signers say they remain "committed to preserving a democratic space within which we can collectively discern the way forward with respect to these vital issues," and that their fellow Christians should be too.

"In keeping with these principles, we, the undersigned, commit to advancing a multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-generational democracy, where every voice is valued and every person afforded the opportunity to participate fully and freely in the life of the community," the statement concludes.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. [View the full series.](#)