

United States Turns 250 and Half of Churches Celebrate

The Wired Word for the Week of July 12, 2026

In the News

According to a Lifeway Research study, 50% of Protestant pastors in the United States believe that their church should do something special to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding. 47% of pastors disagree with this approach, and 3% are not sure.

Older pastors are more likely to see the importance of patriotic elements in the worship service than their younger colleagues, according to the study. Pastors in the South (51%) and West (50%) are more likely than those in the Midwest (39%) and Northeast (37%) to say that patriotic elements are important.

Celebrating America during worship is more likely in rural churches than in urban churches, and more likely in congregations led by evangelical pastors than in those led by mainline pastors. In terms of denominational affiliation, the churches more likely to include patriotic elements are Pentecostals (64%), Baptists (53%), Methodists (49%), and those at nondenominational congregations (47%). Less likely to include such

aspects in the service are churches that are Lutheran (32%) or Presbyterian/Reformed (29%).

When specifically considering a special commemoration of the country's 250th birthday, Pentecostals (65%), Methodists (56%) and Baptists (55%) are more likely than Lutheran (39%) and Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (31%) to agree that such a celebration is important.

"For churches with something special for July Fourth during their worship service," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, "more focus is on people within the congregation who have helped our country rather than a focus on the country itself." Around three in five Protestant pastors say they recognize living veterans (62%) or those with family currently serving in the armed forces (59%). Most say they include special music honoring America (55%) or recognize families who have lost loved ones in service to our country (51%).

Congregations are challenged to figure out what, if anything, should be celebrated in worship on the 250th anniversary of independence. In previous celebrations, the Bible has been lifted up by national leaders as an "anchor of liberty" and a guide for life. The Center Square reports that on the 100th anniversary in 1876, President Ulysses S. Grant urged American youth to "hold fast to the Bible as the sheet-anchor of your liberties; write its precepts in your

hearts and practice them in your lives." On the 200th anniversary in 1976, President Gerald Ford said that settlers brought "the Bible and Blackstone's Commentary across the Atlantic among their few cherished possessions and established their own governments on a strange and hostile coast."

Both of these anniversaries occurred in contentious times, with the centennial coming soon after the Civil War and the bicentennial occurring on the heels of the Vietnam War and Watergate. National greatness "does not exist without a simultaneous reckoning with national failure," asserts The New Yorker. In the Declaration of Independence, "Jefferson's first draft contained a hundred-and-sixty-eight-word denunciation of the transatlantic slave trade, which was excised from the final text. A seed of conflict was sown in that moment."

This conflict led to the Civil War and then decades of struggle for civil rights. In the year 1900, two African American brothers, James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, wrote a song that has come to be known as the Black National Anthem. It captures both the glory and the struggle of Black life in America. Called "Lift Every Voice and Sing," it includes the lament, "We have come over a way that with tears has been watered / We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered." But then it ends with words directed to God, "Shadowed beneath Thy hand / May we forever

stand / True to our God / True to our native land."

A new documentary called "God and America's 250th" reports on the history of church-state relations, including conflicts that have occurred. According to filmmaker Jack Thomas Smith, freedom of religion in America was not intended to push religion onto government but to prevent government from imposing itself on religion. "Those who want to bring down Christianity," he said to Newsmax, "need to remember that the abolitionist movement, child labor laws, the women's suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement all emerged from the church."

The Lifeway Research study revealed that 30% of pastors say that their congregation's love for America sometimes seems greater than their love for God. Pastors who are less likely to include patriotic elements in their services are often among those most likely to worry about the levels of national love among their congregants. Younger pastors are more likely than older pastors to say that their church's love for America sometimes seems to rival their love for God.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Half of U.S. Churches to Honor America's 250th Anniversary. Lifeway Research](#)

[America 250: Founding Fathers, Presidents Point to the Bible as the](#)

[Anchor of Liberty. The Center Square](#)

[Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Complicated Commemorations. The New Yorker](#)

[Lift Every Voice and Sing. Poetry Foundation](#)

['God and America's 250th' Premieres Sunday on Newsmax. Newsmax](#)

Applying the News Story

Discuss your congregation's approach to celebrating the 250th anniversary of American independence, our nation's greatness as well as its failures, and the proper balance of love of country and love of God.

The Big Questions

- 1. What is your congregation doing, if anything, to celebrate America's 250th birthday? What do you find appropriate or inappropriate about these commemorations, and why?**
- 2. Where do you see connections between the Bible and the founding of our country? How is it an "anchor of liberty," source of inspiration, and guide for a moral life? What is your reaction to it being referenced by political leaders?**
- 3. What is the value of acknowledging both national greatness and national failures? Where could this be done in a service of worship, if anywhere? Be specific.**
- 4. When have you heard love of nation being expressed more strongly than love of God? What concerns, if any, do you have about**

this?

5. Where do you find value in freedom of religion? What positive developments in American history have been inspired by Christian faith, and how do you think this history will shape your actions in the future?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

[Deuteronomy 6:5](#)

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (For context, read [Deuteronomy 6:1-9](#).)

At the beginning of Deuteronomy 6, Moses speaks of the commandments that the people are to observe in the Promised Land: "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you" (v. 3). This begins a section in which Moses reviews God's goodness and urges the people to behave like God's chosen people, fearing God and keeping all of God's commandments so that their "days may be long" (v. 2).

Early Puritan leaders such as John Cotton framed the voyage to New England as a divinely guided journey to a Promised Land. Later, in the 19th century, the idea was secularized into "Manifest Destiny," the belief that American settlers were divinely ordained to expand across the North American continent.

In Deuteronomy, Moses says that if the people observe the

commandments diligently, it will "go well" with them and they will multiply greatly in the land that has been promised to them (v. 3). Clearly, God desires to work for good in the lives of God's people. Commandments are given for our benefit, to structure our lives in life-giving ways. Just as the game of tennis would be meaningless without lines or a net, our lives would become chaotic without God's laws.

Then Moses says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (v. 4). Particularly important are the verses in Chapter 6 which begin with the verb "hear," in Hebrew shema'. Hearing is critical to the life of faith, even more important than seeing, as the apostle Paul noted when he said, "faith comes from what is heard" (Romans 10:17).

Next comes the commandment to love, introduced here for the first time. The commandment to "love the LORD your God" is a bold new approach, one that goes on to become central to both Judaism and Christianity. Jesus later referenced this verse as part of his Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-30). With this commandment comes the challenge of giving priority to God, much in the way that we give priority to the people we love: spouses, children, relatives, friends, close neighbors. Love is a much stronger bond and obligation than respect, duty or affection.

The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy commands us to make God the

highest priority in our lives, and to love this God with all of our heart, soul and might. It also challenges us to observe the commandments diligently, so that it will "go well" with us.

Questions: How do you love the Lord and make him the highest priority in your life? When, if ever, have you found that God's commandments bring order to your life? What happens when you love something else -- such as the United States -- more than God? How has the idea of America as a Promised Land been used in positive and in negative ways?

Matthew 22:21

Then [Jesus] said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (For context, read [Matthew 22:15-22](#).)

The first national coin was minted in 1776, authorized by the Continental Congress. Benjamin Franklin provided the design for this pewter dollar, inscribed with the word fugio - - Latin for "I fly." The typical American coin today contains the words E Pluribus Unum, Latin for "From many, one," describing the unity of our 50 diverse states. And when Jesus looks at a denarius, he asks the disciples of the Pharisees, "Whose head is this and whose title?" They answer, "Caesar's" (vv. 20-21). There is a message in the money.

The Pharisees are trying to catch Jesus in a trap when they send their

disciples to him. Jesus is aware of their malice, and is on guard when they say, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (v. 17). Jesus knows that they are asking about a particular tax, one that can be paid only in Roman coin. Problem is, the coin contains an image and an inscription -- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest" -- one that is considered blasphemous by devout Jews. If Jesus says "yes, it is lawful to pay," he alienates the Jewish nation; if he says "no," he risks arrest by the Romans. It's a lose-lose proposition.

But Jesus spots a way out, and asks the disciples of the Pharisees to tell him about the head and the title on the blasphemous coin. When they say, "Caesar's," he says, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" -- in other words, yes, pay the tax. But then Jesus goes beyond the question and says that what is God's must be given to God. Loyalty to God is on a different and higher level of importance than simple earthly loyalty to the emperor. Our master is God, so our use of money and other resources should advance God's interests in the world.

Questions: Where do you find value, if anywhere, in paying taxes to the government? What do you do to give to God the things that are God's? How do you advance God's interests in the world, as a citizen and as a Christian?

John 18:36

Jesus answered [Pilate], "My

kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." (For context, read [John 18:33-38](#).)

"What is truth?" (v. 38). That's the question that Pontius Pilate asks Jesus before sentencing him to death. Jesus has been brought to Pilate, the Roman governor, because only the Roman Empire can perform an execution. The Jewish priests want Jesus to die, but they don't have the authority to kill him -- so they drag him to Pilate. The governor asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews. This is the only thing that Pilate cares about, because a Jewish king would be a threat to Roman authority. If Jesus says "yes," then he will be convicted of treason against the Roman emperor, and given an instant death sentence.

But Jesus is too smart to respond with a simple yeah or nay. Like an experienced trial lawyer, Jesus says, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" (v. 34). Seeing this as a Jewish problem, Pilate asks him, "What have you done?" (v. 35). Once again, Jesus refuses to give a straight answer. "My kingdom does not belong to this world." Jesus hints that he may be a king, since he speaks of his kingdom, but he does not describe a kingdom that would fit any Roman understanding. There are no soldiers, armies or lawyers fighting for his freedom, which would certainly be

the case if he were the head of an earthly kingdom.

"For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth," Jesus goes on to say.

"Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (v. 37). Jesus has not come to take the world by force. Instead, he has come to invite people to enter into a relationship with him, by listening to his voice and belonging to the truth. All of which leads to the obvious question from Pilate, "What is truth?" (v. 38).

And what does Jesus say? Nothing. He just stands there. His silence is his answer to the question. He is saying to Pilate, "Look at me. I am the way, the truth and the life. Follow me, and I'll show you the path to abundant life." But Pilate doesn't get it. The wheels of Roman justice continue to turn, and Jesus is flogged, mocked, and put to death on a cross.

Questions: How is Jesus different from any other earthly leader, American or otherwise? What does it mean to be a citizen of his kingdom? How do you listen to his voice and follow him in the United States today?

Romans 13:1

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (For context, read [Romans 13:1-7](#).)

Paul encourages followers of Christ

in Rome to engage in godly behavior toward Roman rulers. He says that they should keep Rome's peace since "rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad" (v. 3). When Paul speaks of Roman authorities as God's "agent" (v. 4), he unexpectedly uses the term diakonos, translated "minister" in other places. Not wanting to stir up trouble in Rome, Paul advises the followers of Christ to pay "to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (v. 7).

Questions: Why should a follower of Christ submit to the rule of a secular authority, or resist such authority? In contrast to life in Rome, what additional or different responsibilities do we have as Christians in a democracy today? When should a follower of Christ be disobedient to authorities, if ever?

For Further Discussion

1. Reflecting on the Declaration of Independence, TWW Team Member Ako Cromwell says that "the framers clearly were not intending to include women who later had success through the suffragist movement, nor the enslaved whom they brought to serve them as they wrote the documents of freedom and independence." What message does the Declaration of Independence send to women and to African Americans today? What messages of the Bible, if any, have changed over time? Be specific.

2. "What do we choose to record and remember?" asks TWW Team Member Joanna Loucky-Ramsey, looking back on American history. "What do we choose to erase and forget? What factors contribute to the choices we make regarding how we tell our nation's story? Is it more important to weave a myth that we hope will unite our people, or to tell the truth, warts and all? Are those two things necessarily irreconcilable?" Respond.

3. A time capsule has been sealed and will be buried at Independence National Historical Park on July 4, 2026, to be reopened in 2276, after another 250 years. [Inside the capsule](#) are contributions from all three branches of the federal government, all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and five United States territories. Contributions include a diamond, a whale bone and many letters. What would you like to include in this time capsule, and why?

4. TWW Team Member Mark Rouleau is a lawyer who has handled court cases involving state-religion issues. He notes that the Declaration of Independence contains four key references to God, each based on the belief that rights are granted by a Creator rather than by government. He concludes, "These references collectively underscore the Founding Fathers' view that the legitimacy of their actions and the rights of individuals are rooted in a higher power." How do you understand God to be involved in the founding of the United States, if at all? What

difference does this make to your attitudes and actions as a citizen and a church member?

Responding to the News

As you gather for worship, note your congregation's approach to celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States. Use the day as an opportunity to acknowledge our country's successes and its failures. Reflect on your own love for country and for God, and make an effort to strike a faithful balance between the two.

Prayer

God our Creator, we thank you for making us equals and for endowing us with certain unalienable rights -- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As we reflect on American history, may we celebrate our nation's greatness and also admit its failures. Inspire us to use our religious freedom to advance the common good, and to work to create a more perfect union. Amen.