

250 years ago, religion played a pivotal role in the American Revolution. Today, clergy are resuming the fight.

By **Emily Spatz** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 30, 2025, 4:15 p.m.



Rev. Steve Watson (left) and dozens of Mass. religious leaders walked from the Lexington Green to Boston Common in protest of the Trump administration. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Ominous clouds gathered over Cambridge Common at midday Friday as about 70 interfaith clergy members stood praying near the end of a 12-mile march protesting President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

The threatening weather didn't deter the faithful group, some of whom had been walking for nine miles. They stretched, drank water, and chatted as they prepared to trek the final three miles to Boston Common.

The march started at 7:30 a.m. on Lexington Green, and its participants called for a renewed commitment to democracy and due process. Standing up for what they see as American ideals, they traced [Paul Revere's historic midnight ride](#) — now 250 years old — backward.

“All of us are deeply concerned about the preservation of democracy, because without democracy, faith cannot flourish,” said Reverend Fred Small, a community minister at Arlington Street Church in Boston. “Christian nationalism is not a future that any of us embrace, although there are many — the majority of us — are Christians.”



Dozens of Mass. religious leaders stopped to pray at the Cambridge Common during their protest of the Trump administration. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The group was specifically protesting the Trump administration's [detainment and deportation](#) of migrants and [international students](#) without, they say, due process. Clergy also condemned the Department of Homeland Security for its [Jan. 20 directive](#) allowing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement into what were once considered protected spaces, [including hospitals, schools, and places of worship](#).

Among all Christians, 51 percent disapproved of Trump's job as president in an April [Pew Research Center poll](#). But white evangelical Protestants continue to be among Trump's biggest support groups, and 51 percent of white Catholics approved of Trump in the poll.

The march drew inspiration from religious leaders' prominent involvement in the American Revolution and the Civil Rights movement, Rabbi David Lerner said. Specifically, the group called for legislative protections for vulnerable communities as the Trump administration intensifies its [attacks on international students](#) and [ramps up deportation efforts](#).

“In our country, having people taken off the streets and no opportunity to defend themselves — that is not an America we have been working on for thousands of years,” Lerner said.

In the American Revolution, parishioners across religious sects used scripture to [morally defend America's fight for independence](#). From [delivering sermons](#) to playing crucial roles in [Committees of Correspondence and taking up arms](#), clergy turned “colonial resistance into a righteous cause,” according to the Library of Congress.

“Clergymen were using their churches to talk about how this struggle against Britain was not just a political battle over taxes and tariffs,” Lerner said. “It was one they saw through a moral lens, a religious lens, a spiritual lens.”

Churches in the South also played a [prominent role in the Civil Rights movement](#), which was led by Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr.

Clergy drew [upon principles of equality found in religious texts](#) to encourage action.

On Friday, the group of clergy stopped several times along the 12-mile route, drawing more than 300 people throughout its march, said Rabbi David Lerner, senior rabbi at Temple Emunah. Some joined for a few miles while others committed to the long walk.

While resting in Cambridge, Small, who walked all 12-miles, said he was feeling the exhaustion. He has arthritis in one knee and was wearing a knee brace under his black clerical suit.

“It is a trivial sacrifice that I’m making compared to people who are presently incarcerated in an ICE facility, or worse yet, a Gulag in El Salvador,” he said.



The group walked along their journey in Cambridge. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Speakers at the march cited scripture in their speeches and said Trump’s actions are antithetical to their religions. Small held a sign reading “Welcome the stranger,” referencing Matthew 25:35.

“The reason we have separation of church and state is not that they should live in separate spheres, but we can do our thing — worship, have integrity — and have a moral voice and stand up for justice,” said Willie Barnett, a pastor at Great Road Church in Acton. Barnett said his participation in the march doesn’t indicate partisanship, but having “a moral voice for liberty.”

Small said it was important to him to not only confine his religion to a place of worship but practice it in the world.

“Universally, all faith traditions call for justice — visiting the prisoner, comforting and uplifting those who are suffering,” he said. “The current administration seems to preach and live a gospel of cruelty.”

As the group walked toward the Longfellow Bridge to enter Boston, cars honked and people rolled down their windows, cheering.

As the group approached Boston Common, rain started to drizzle. It gave way to the sun as about 100 people gathered in front of the Embrace statue, praying and listening to speeches.

Mariama White Hammond, the founding pastor of New Roots AME Church in Dorchester and former chief of energy, environment, and open space under Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, led the protesters in several songs.

Barnett said the walk was encouraging.

“A lot of us as ministers right now can be discouraged about the state of the world and also what it means to lead our congregations in these times,” he said. “There’s a great community coming together, sharing experiences as we walk, and finding hope.”

Emily Spatz can be reached at emily.spatz@globe.com. Follow her on X [@emilymspatz](https://twitter.com/emilymspatz).



Show 66 comments

©2025 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC