



**JUNE 2025**

## **CAN THIS BE A BONHOEFFER MOMENT?**

Early this year, there was a flurry of interest in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with the likelihood of a president to take office as a fascist. A film suggested that his life and story had been incompletely described. There were some who suggested that we might go and see it. It would give us an opportunity to debate the elements of his life, perhaps, like everything else that we challenge in this new world. Was he a fraud? Or was his story an exaggeration, or simply untrue...

His 1,048-page biography, produced by Fortress Press suggests otherwise. That film was trashed by virtually all those who knew of his life and legacy. In the January Issue of Christian Century, an article by Victoria Barnett, said, "Bonhoeffer didn't choose to be a martyr. He simply tried, as many others did, to be decent in the face of evil."

At the Synod Assembly of the NE Synod, this past week, we spoke of evil, of injustice, and hardship. We feared for the dangers refugees and immigrants faced, we spoke of how our universities known as the finest in the world attracted students from all over the world. The serious and real facts are that students flocking from other countries for years, are now thinking twice.

People who are different are seen as less than others. Only white Maga people are acceptable. The only refugees to be accepted into this country are now white South Africans. Yes, you heard that right. Only WHITE South Africans. Those impoverished, or poor, should they be black, would be barred from entering the United States. Refugees and immigrants face danger everywhere they go in the U.S. Trump sees himself as a King, he has often represented himself as a Nazi, looking favorably at the actions Hitler took, ritualistic lying, threatening and consistent demands and hate in all forms.

Even Trump's Supreme Court has become more and more uneasy about his plans and intentions. He is battering the news media that fails to kneel at his feet. For his birthday, he plans to spend \$12 million damaging Washington, DC as tanks and artillery parade, essentially marching for injustice, lying, and stealing, Trump will further damage and use the Capitol again to spread fear and hate.

As Victoria Barrett made clear, **THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A BONHOEFFER MOMENT.**

The history of Nazism, Christianity, and the Holocaust is a complex story in which there are few heroes. Ignoring that difficult truth obscures who Bonhoeffer really was, soon after the Allies defeat of Nazi Germany.

The heroic narrative about Dietrich Bonhoeffer emerged soon after that defeat. It was tied to the early hagiography about the German Protestant and Catholic churches, which were the only major German institutions to retain some form of independence.

Barrett talked and interviewed others who knew Bonhoeffer. "They all gave me some variation of the same... that he was a decent man, a good person, a kind person. He was one of many (though not

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enough) German men and women who valiantly tried to be decent people during a 12-year period of incredible evil and brutality that pitted them against their compatriots, their church and their country.

What does it mean to be a good person at such a time as this? Like a very doubtful Jacob, he confronts what stands in the path and wonders if he will come out of the struggle at all.”

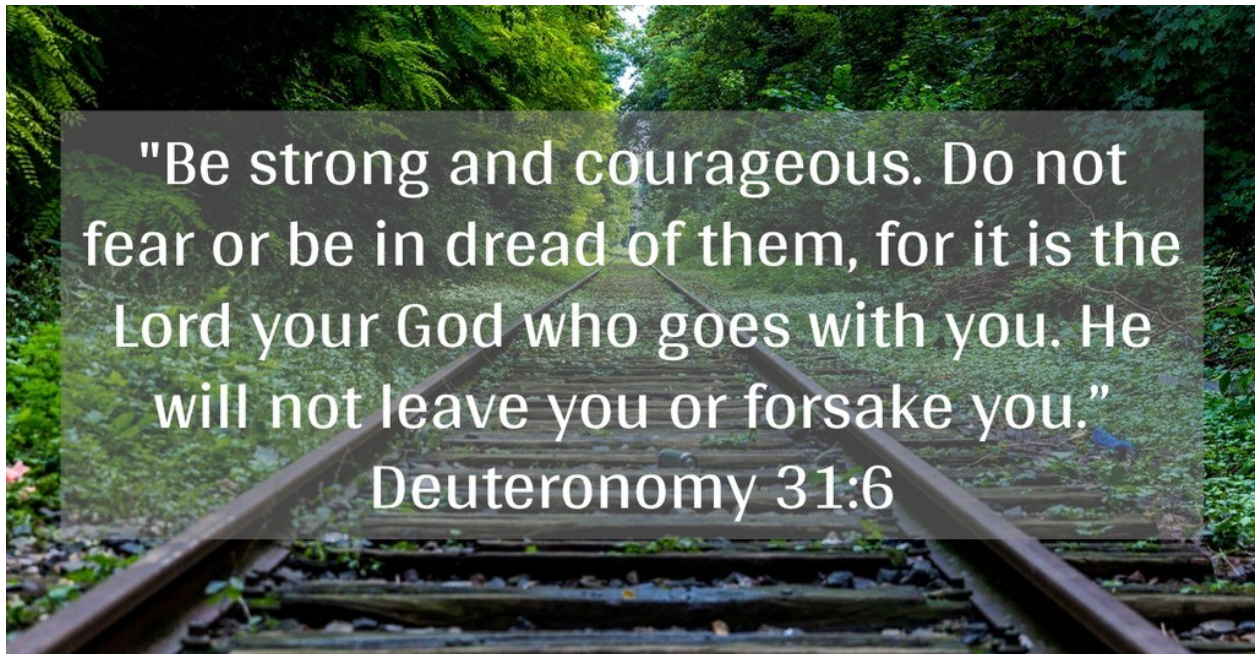
He confronted the reality of the evil around him and failures of so many Germans (and their church). That image fits many passages throughout Bonhoeffer’s writings from 1933 until our final images in 1945.

In such moments we shouldn’t read Bonhoeffer for superficial sound bites or empty reassurances of larger-than-life heroism. We should read him because his story of one decent human being who understood better that in evil times, we must remain faithful – if only for the sake of future generations, because we are creating for them the foundation from which they can do good in this fallen world.

Amen.

## **“THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS A BONHOEFFER MOMENT!**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer didn’t choose to be a martyr.  
**He simply tried, as many others did,  
to be decent in the face of evil.”**



## UNANIMITY AND MUTUAL CONCERN – PASTOR’S MESSAGE

This past Friday and Saturday, we gathered in Worcester for the New England Synod’s Annual Assembly. Some 400 – 500 Lutherans with partners, speakers, staff and attendees gathered to worship, to learn, to hear reports, share stories and attend a good number of workshops. The impact of all these interactions was to create a strong sense of comradery, concern and hope, and our shared love for our Triune God.

I have attended many such meetings over my time in ministry and I can say that I always felt the joy of our faith coming together, with stories of our joys in ministry, the awareness of our presence as Lutherans in New England and simply the joys of coming together.

With a new Bishop with exceptional insights, open to Christ’s love and open to experiment in many ways, it was simply terrific. There were some very serious things to do, and lots to learn and share. All speakers were well prepared, and discussions grew deeper and deeper.

There was no blocking expressions and an openness to candor; this meeting was to address issues in New England, yet also, issues going on in our country and the world. Guests from other countries co-mingled with us. Our church, Grace Lutheran in Hartford, CT, had 11 attendees.

I invited Bishop Piphon to visit Grace so that he might come to see our ministries at work and the volunteers and staff that participate. He said he would love to do so, but his Sundays are well filled up. (I thought Thursday or Friday might be best.).

Our new Bishop showed his willingness and openness to make clear his positions on the most difficult topics and some of the most troublesome issues in the world and our country during this terrible time of trial. Bishop Piphon was very candid about the ways he saw what we were facing and his willingness to act with courage and without fear.

We had very candid discussions featuring our Bishop and others who have grave concerns about what is happening in our world. We also learned that the ELCA Presiding Bishop would step down from her role in July. While we applauded her leadership and her courage, we all felt a sense of loss in her leaving.

It was an exceptional meeting – I re-connected with many of my friends of many years, and I expect to visit with them and perhaps collaborate with them on the work in front of us.

May the Lord guide us and lead us, and may we come together to continue his work in this world.

Amen.



**New England Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.





### FRIDAY GATHERING

- **Entertainment** - if you would be interested in/willing to entertain at a Friday Gathering Dinner, please let Judy Butterworth-Kremer know at [judyvbk@aol.com](mailto:judyvbk@aol.com).
- 200 guests were served at Friday Gathering dinners in the month of April.

### THURSDAY GROCERY DISTRIBUTION

- 410 people were served in the month of April.

### JANET'S CLOSET

- Volunteers are still needed for Wednesdays and Saturdays 11 to 1.
- We need gently used seasonal clothing, blankets and shoes. Clothing racks are needed.
- 30 people were served during the month of April.

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- 1230 people were reached during the month of April - (CRT, Mutual Housing, Ester's Home and New Life Church, the immigrant community - Islamic and Hispanic, and the International Mission Church)

### SPECIAL UPCOMING DATES OF NOTE

**JUNE 15, 2025 - FATHER'S DAY**

**JUNE 19, 2025 - JUNETEENTH**

**JULY 13, 2025 - GHIAA CORE GROUP MEETING - URBAN'S - 2 TO 4 P.M.**



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### JUSTINE AND DEREJE, GRACE HIU INTERNS, GRADUATE!



Advice for overwhelmed Christians from Jarvis Williams, a pastor turned pro-democracy organizer.

JUNE 2025

by Betsy Shirley

WE KNEW THIS would be hard. But as the litany of harms rolling out of the White House grows, so has the creeping sense that our efforts to help are inadequate. Sure, we may know the drill to counter these assaults on people and our civic norms: Contact elected officials, offer support to those most impacted, donate, pray, take breaks, and jump back in. But in the face of an administration increasingly comfortable with authoritarian tactics — spreading disinformation, expanding executive power, silencing critics, scapegoating minority communities, detaining and deporting immigrants with no due process, and hamstringing independent institutions — is any of it really enough?



In early April, *Sojourners* editor in chief Betsy Shirley took these questions to Jarvis Williams, a pastor-turned-pro-democracy-organizer who shifted careers after recognizing that many of the prayer requests his congregants whispered to him were rooted in pain stemming from public policy decisions. His desire to respond eventually led him to join the Horizons Project, a non-profit that aims to strengthen the ecosystem of different groups working for social change, including veterans, Indigenous organizations, faith communities, racial justice activists, union members, and business leaders. In their conversation, Williams shared his strategies to avoid feeling overwhelmed, insight about where Christians can make the most impact, and some pastoral tough love for those of us prone to forget that America's problems didn't start with a particular politician or election cycle. — *The Editors*

**Betsy Shirley, *Sojourners*: As a pro-democracy organizer, how would you describe what's happened in the U.S. in the past few months?**

**Jarvis Williams:** If I'm talking with Christians, I would talk about the inability of us as a political community to demonstrate equal concern for all people. We have forgotten how powerful sharing is. We have created a political demonstration of the refusal to keep striving to share what we have.

**I notice you're not using political words like "constitutional crisis," "executive overreach," "authoritarianism," or "fascism." Why?**

I say this as someone who has taken my licks of failures in this regard: Being smart isn't using the buzzwords — it's communicating what's at stake in people's lives when they don't have an opportunity to share in the decision making, but they share in the consequences when these things go awry. Everyone understands that. Sometimes in our effort to be rigorous, we forget that the most powerful ideas are usually simple.



I know people want the term that they can research, right? If I said, "We're in a racial authoritarian moment," you could see who wrote about that and how they describe it. There's some value there. Yet I don't think those terms get at the human element of a crisis that is playing out in real time with how people think they have to make certain kinds of choices, be in relationship to each other, [or] organize their efforts.

Louis Brandeis wrote that the most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen. We

have failed to treat it as such. The consequences of people being in office and being ill-equipped to do the duties of that office are evident in terms of how we are acting as a political community.

### **What does the movement to fix this failure look like? Is it marching in the streets?**

Let me try to get at it this way: Before there was a national conversation [about] health care for all, there were people who went to medical school ... and set up offices in areas in the South where health care was not being given to all people.

Similarly, before we had civil rights law, there were lawyers — Black, white, Jewish, etc. — who started thinking about why certain populations aren't able to get certain rights and what it would take to fix that.

The same could be said of clergy: You had [some clergy] fighting to make sure segregation is the law of the land in the South, and then you get a cascade of [other] voices who say, "God is calling us to demonstrate what the faith requires of us, and here is what it looks like." There were countless pastors who were white who fought with their churches regularly and lost their jobs. They demonstrated in real time what it meant to walk by faith.

There are always people nudging against the conditions and the confinements of the day. [Today] there are pastors actively trying to make their church board diverse. They're not calling it DEI — they're trying to express their faith commitments. There are churches trying to give care to people who live alone, to make sure that the grass is cut and they have groceries. There are wonderful people giving expressions of love and care all the time.

If you forget them, then you disrespect the day-to-day care people give, the day-to-day fight to make democracy and justice real, and the day-to-day fight to help every kid get educated. I'm not saying you shouldn't protest. But this is what I think the church brings to this moment: Twelve people can change a world. We're not overwhelmed by the scenery, but we are constantly trying to do the next best thing.

You walk by faith in light of the grand events that may be happening around you. Because those snowball effects of your day-to-day activities may become the next grand event. Then you can find ways to do more and better actions. I try to push against the assumption that if you don't follow [a certain] playbook that somehow you're not fighting for democracy. I find that offensive to people who do good work all the time.

### **One challenge with day-to-day activities is that it can be hard for many people to feel like they're part of a broader movement. How do we fix that?**

We have to do better at sharing the good news: Look at what this church, this community, these people did. There are pastors who live in extreme Christian nationalist environments who are committed to articulating messages of peace. Some people would say, "Oh, that's not a big deal. It's not really changing anything." Yet the ability to articulate what the expression of faith should be, even if it seems like it's not being heard — that's a tremendous amount of courage. There are people trying to intimidate migrant workers, to make it scary for people who "look" like they don't belong — and then there are people of faith who have vigilance, prayer, and watch practices. They are trying to ensure that the terror doesn't happen. There isn't an impact report, but they are trying to fight in real time.

### **How would you advise Christians to think about where to invest their time and efforts?**

Faith leaders can offer those they lead a more expansive view of how Christian stories can

help them see the moment they're in.

A friend was trying to think about the threat of violence in his community. Their church was more invested in "We've got to give God our gifts, our time." I told the story of Cain and Abel because it's the first time in the biblical story where you get the idea of somebody giving an offering to God. Interestingly enough, the character who gives it [later goes and kills] his brother. It's a story that helps us struggle with how Christians have a habit of hurting our brother in private and trying to make gestures to God in public.

What does that mean for us? Well, do you think you can come to church and give your tithes if you're not paying attention to what happens to deportation and immigration in your [area]? Do you think you can do that when your community has a police force that's preying on poor people?

My friend experimented with this story, and it created a watershed moment for some of his people. They started raising money to support a local group who was trying to make sure that their sanctuary cities and community had more resources to make sure that people were not harmed. That's what happens when the story that people have confidence in gives them a [new] window into the world.

**I like how you expand what counts as activism and being part of a "movement." How else can people get involved, especially if they're feeling anxious to help?**

First, the fact that you care is already expressing activism. So you're already on the right train; it's not as if you need to become a new person. Now, are things happening in your zip code that you think are not the best expression of treating humans the way God wants?

When you ask that question, you'll get "Well, yeah, they don't pay the sanitary workers" or "We need more men in the school system because our young boys are getting bad outcomes." You'll hear people talk about what they care about. Then the question becomes: How do you respond within the system? What could you do? Could you write a letter to the superintendent? [Could you] get other people who care to go to the school board meeting and raise this concern? Do you know people on the city council?

The question [can then] become: If the U.S. Department of Education is cutting resources, what do you think that's going to do for those kids that you're saying need extra support? What can you do with the teachers to resist cutting funds? Well, here are some organizations who are trying to do what you care about. Why don't you check that out?



You're just walking people into actions that they already want to do [and] care about. It's already their value structure.

**Some people might struggle to see how those efforts connect to big-picture national concerns that are dominating news headlines.**

It's a hard question. Plugging into national organizations is always an option. My reservation is that I've noticed that people who are trying to do the big thing sometimes are not even doing the [things in their] backyard — and they are overwhelmed because they assume the big thing fixes the backyard. The problem is the backyard left unattended becomes a jungle. There wasn't a national movement for white Christian nationalism; there were pastors giving voice to those ideas over decades, writing books and on talk radio. Those practices then [coalesced



and were] expressed in national politics.

I would argue particularly for Christians, the agency of one person in their [neighborhood or town] can have ripple effects that you could never quantify. It does no good for you to be talking about justice at the national level while you allow authoritarians to rule your community or allow the police in your community to consistently profile different people.

If you cared about education in your own backyard — and if everybody were doing that work — it's a lot harder to cut the Education Department by 50%.

Take care of your backyard. Give your best expression to the things you're directly connected to, and when there's leftover room, do the next larger thing. If you do it that way, the likelihood that you're overwhelmed is a lot different because you're actively watching your impact, your failures, successes. You're actively moving people who you have influence over. You can't move the secretary of education, but you can move your school board, your pastor, and your community.

### **Any other advice you'd offer the anxious and overwhelmed in this moment?**

Let me put on my pastor hat for a second: The conflicts visible in the world are conflicts we already have warring within us. If you make the world out to be the monster and you somehow are the angel of light that's going to save the world and resist, [then] you're telling yourself a story that's not even authentic to the Christian faith. The problem we see is a human problem: our capacity to be evil, to be cruel, our capacity to hoard, to steal — our capacity to think there's security in hoarding rather than sharing. Humanity didn't just start having these problems with the election cycle.

Christian faith gives you tools to deal with human problems at scale. You are human. You know what seduces you, you know what moves you, you know why you let things go. You know why you are more inclined to not care about [this group] versus that group and [can] challenge yourself to be the light you have to be.

That message feels so small in moments where the problem seems so big, yet it's imperative for those who profess Christian faith to recognize that human fragility is the condition of the human community. We have responses to that. And the responses you have are enough to give light to a dark world.

America is not special. It's not immune to the problems of collective living. To make yourself sick because you have problems that every collective community of people has makes me think you're more guilty of hubris than you ought to be. I hope that the challenges we confront help us to be more human — and sober ourselves from the notion that we are so special and so divine that the challenges of evil, greed, and corruption are not things we have to work on every day.

That's not popular, but I am a Black man, I represent a group of people who are killed by police more than any other demographic. Who have been targeted for mob violence from church leaders. I still get stopped by police regularly and harassed regularly. I don't need anyone to tell me about fear and violence and disrespect and talking about your problems that nobody wants to hear. Because I'm coming from that place, that's why I would say your pain is not special. Calm down. Do the work of building a better world for everybody.

### **Betsy Shirley**

Betsy Shirley is the editor in chief of *Sojourners*.





George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis five years ago on May 25, 2020.

The American people rose up in protest — to an inspiring and unprecedented degree. We demanded reforms to policing. We examined questions of race in our communities, in our businesses and organizations, in our civic structures. We talked seriously about systemic racism and undertook genuine efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **But then came the (seemingly inevitable) backlash.**

People who knew better went back to denying the obvious reality that law enforcement gets too much of our tax dollars to do too many things that it is ill-suited to do, if not downright hostile to doing.

Donald Trump won re-election largely on a campaign against “woke” and “DEI” — concepts he could not accurately define even if you offered to give him a superyacht (to go with the used jumbo jet the Qatari royal family is trying to unload on him) if he got them right.

So, where are we now? Here are just a few indicators:

1. The number of people killed by police in America has gone up — yes, *up* — every year since Derek Chauvin took George Floyd’s life in broad daylight on that Minneapolis street.
2. In 2024, police killed Black people at three times the rate they killed white people — a telling statistic essentially unchanged from before George Floyd was murdered.
3. In 2015, just 18 police officers were charged with murder or manslaughter after shooting someone while on duty. In 2024 — despite the supposed reckoning in the wake of George Floyd’s killing — that number went *down* to 16.
4. Violence directed at Black and Brown people, women, immigrants, LGBTQ people, Muslims, Jews — anyone perceived as “other” in a culture forged through centuries of white male Christian dominance — makes the news day in and day out.

**Just this past week, the United States Department of Justice — which has been weaponized under the direction of MAGA extremist and Trump sycophant Pam Bondi — abandoned federal investigations or oversight of nearly two dozen police departments with records of egregious misconduct.**

That’s part of an overall pattern at the DOJ and throughout the Trump regime.

- As president, Trump has done more than spout hateful rhetoric. He has deployed government agencies to work actively against upholding civil rights.
- The Trump/Bondi DOJ is turning civil rights law upside down — not just refusing to enforce the law but deploying law enforcement tools against organizations that advance civil rights.
- Hundreds of lawyers and staff have left the storied Civil Rights Division within the DOJ — unwilling to actively work *against* the cause of civil rights.
- The DOJ dropped litigation against a voter suppression law in Georgia.
- DOJ civil rights lawyers are now deployed to investigate and prosecute schools for upholding transgender rights.
- Meanwhile, corporate and “white collar” crime goes unpunished — an absurd dereliction of duty on the part of law enforcement that the Trump regime is actively worsening.

- And the serial criminal known as Donald J. Trump — along with members of his family and administration — are engaging in flagrant graft and corruption right out in the open for all to see.

She may not listen, but let's make sure Pam Bondi — who, as Attorney General of the United States, oversees the Department of Justice and law enforcement agencies all across America — hears us anyway.

To Attorney General Pam Bondi:

Do your job. Reinstate Department of Justice investigations and oversight of police departments with records of racism, brutality, and corruption. Uphold the nation's civil rights laws. Launch investigations and prosecutions to address the outlandish and embarrassing corporate crime wave that is getting even worse under your watch. And use the power of your office to hold Donald Trump and his confederates accountable for any and all crimes they have committed, are committing, or will undoubtedly commit.

Thanks for taking action.

For justice,

- Robert Weissman & Lisa Gilbert, Co-Presidents of Public Citizen

## TRUMP'S 'BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL' INVERTS BIBLICAL VALUES

by Adam Russell Taylor

**SOJOURNERS**



The more we hear about President Donald Trump's so-called "**big, beautiful bill**" — his name for the massive budget reconciliation bill that would enshrine into law many of his top priorities — the harder it is to escape the conclusion that there's something deeply wrong with our nation's spiritual health. This bill, which **passed** the Republican-controlled House of Representatives on a party-line vote, serves as a thermometer — and the reading we're getting back is telling us that the United States of America is suffering from a dangerous fever.

Sojourners has made the case many times that **a budget is a moral document**. Legislation like Trump's reconciliation bill is much the same, in that its choices about where the government should spend money and where it should cut spending say a great deal about our nation's moral values. Just as families make spending choices by balancing their needs and wants, our federal budget reflects who and what we value. It has significant consequences for who goes hungry, who has access to medical care, and who can travel safely, not to mention how many bombs there are for drone strikes or how much rebar for border walls. Viewed in these moral terms, the "big, beautiful bill" is a big, ugly bill that inverts biblical values.

One consistent theme throughout the Bible is God's concern for those who are marginalized or vulnerable in their society. In the Bible, this was often the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor. The Bible is replete with rebukes of those who ignore their needs and the spiritual peril of greed: Proverbs 14:31 teaches that "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." The prophet Isaiah warns us: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless" (10:1-2). Jesus makes it clear that "no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Paul goes further, writing that the

“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6:10).

In every generation we must ask: Who are our present-day equivalents of the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor? Who are those we consider to be beyond our circle of concern? As we review this budget and think about our current moment, we should remember people living in the quicksand of poverty; migrants seeking shelter from persecution, violence, and economic crisis; children and families facing hunger and food insecurity; and people without a home.

If we take seriously the Bible's call to consider the economic welfare of these and other vulnerable folks, we must ask whether their needs are being prioritized in our federal budget. After all, the government's spending decisions are made with our money and are nothing less than a reflection of our collective values as a society. That means we're on the hook for what our government does and does not do. These decisions are being made in our name, generally as Americans and particularly as Christians.

In the past week or so, Republican lawmakers have fleshed out the broad framework of the reconciliation bill with more specific numbers and policies. Some of the most alarming details include **around \$260 billion** in cuts to SNAP (formerly called food stamps), at least **\$800 billion** in cuts to Medicaid and affordable healthcare, and stripping away the Child Tax Credit from **many immigrant families**. Overall, the changes to health care programs in the bill are estimated to mean **roughly 15 million people** will lose health coverage and become uninsured by 2034. The bill would also impose more stringent and harmful work requirements on Medicaid and SNAP beneficiaries, despite the fact that most current recipients who can work already have jobs and ample evidence showing that more **work requirements** will only push people off these programs.

As you take in these numbers, I encourage you to look beyond the statistics and think instead of the people with real and often dire needs. Imagine how cuts to the programs they depend on will impact their lives. Sharon Parrot, president of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan organization that seeks to advance economic justice, **noted** that the bill “will drive up hunger and deepen poverty, including among children, and take access to life-saving health care away from millions of people,” imposing a particular burden on low-income and immigrant families.

As devastating as these cuts would be to some of society's most vulnerable people, they are dwarfed by tax cuts disproportionately benefiting the richest Americans, cuts that would blow an even larger hole in our already massive budget deficit. According to the independent and nonpartisan organization Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the bill as currently written would increase the national debt by at least \$3.3 *trillion* over the next decade — and the true number **could easily rise to \$4.8 trillion by 2038**. All told, the reconciliation bill **includes** \$1.1 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent of households.

Skyrocketing our national deficit makes a mockery of fiscal responsibility, something many Republicans in Congress **have championed**; instead, the new bill gives wealthy individuals and corporations **tax breaks**. Coupled with DOGE-cuts to the IRS, which weaken the IRS's ability to collect revenue and prevent tax evasion, these measures **grow** — not shrink — our national deficit. To highlight just how regressive this package has become, Parrot pointed out that the **\$1.1 trillion** in tax cuts that wealthy households will receive would pay for the combined cuts that will be made to Medicaid and SNAP.

These aren't the only provisions in the bill that reflect a badly misaligned set of moral values and priorities. The bill also **includes** \$46.5 billion to resume construction of Trump's border

wall and billions more to hire thousands of new Border Patrol agents and Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to implement Trump's mass-deportation agenda. It also would **institute** a \$1,000 fee on migrants seeking asylum for the **first time** in U.S. history, imposing a tax on people seeking shelter from harm. The bill would **increase** defense spending by **roughly \$150 billion**, which combined with annual defense spending would push this year's military spending above **\$1 trillion** for the first time ever. Last but not least, the bill makes significant cuts to tax credits passed during Joe Biden's presidency for **climate-friendly energy sources** such as electric vehicles and wind and solar energy — threatening much of the progress on climate change that Biden's Inflation Reduction Act **was meant to achieve**.

In response to the current reconciliation package, I imagine Isaiah directing some prophetic words to Congress and Trump, perhaps: "Woe to those who make unjust laws." As much as Trump campaigned on some of these misguided priorities, such as mass deportations, other parts of this ugly bill were nowhere in his speeches or rallies. For instance, Trump didn't say, "Vote for me, and I promise I'll cut \$800 billion from Medicaid." But I also think Isaiah and other biblical prophets would have some words of woe for all of us. After all, if the budget troubles us, what are we going to do about it?

Now is the time to pressure Congress to repent from this immoral bill and instead support a budget that reflects our core civic and religious values of economic opportunity and justice, and dignity for all. We can appeal to the conscience of members of Congress and, in many cases, appeal to our shared faith.

For those of us with legislators who voted for the bill, it's up to us to flood representatives' phone lines and inboxes with our righteous anger at the priorities they're claiming to pursue on behalf of their constituents; we must demand that they stop rewarding the wealthy at the expense of struggling and vulnerable people. On June 10, alongside over 20 denominations and faith-based organizations, we will take that **call directly to Congress** with a vigil and advocacy day at the U.S. Capitol. And as we near Pentecost Sunday, we can pray we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to advocate relentlessly and fearlessly to defeat this immoral budget and replace it with one that reflects our moral values and priorities.

### Adam Russell Taylor

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners and author of *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community*.



### WALMART RESPONDS TO TRUMP'S DIRECTIVE TO 'EAT THE TARIFFS'

by Kathryn Palmer, USA TODAY



President Donald Trump and American retail giant Walmart are trading stern words this week over the impact of the administration's tariffs, after the company's announcement of impending price hikes drew ire from the Republican leader.

Trump blasted the company on social media last weekend, accusing Walmart of unfairly blaming his tariffs for their expected price increases and ordering the world's largest retailer to "eat the tariffs" and not pass the import costs on to consumers.





"I'll be watching, and so will your customers!!!" Trump said on May 17 in a Truth Social post.

The company responded to the president's words in a statement to USA TODAY on Tuesday, May 20.

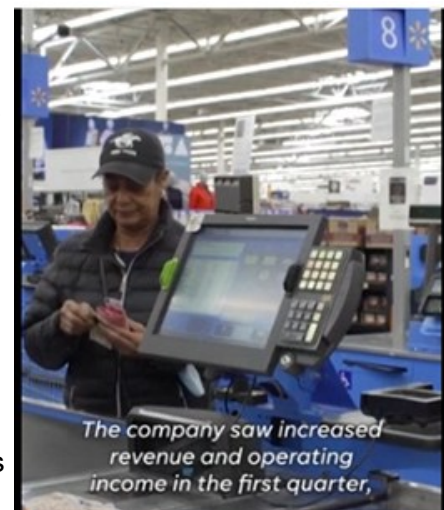
"We have always worked to keep our prices as low as possible and we won't stop," Walmart spokesperson Joe Pennington said. "We'll keep prices as low as we can for as long as we can given the reality of small retail margins."

Despite exceeding sales expectations in the first quarter, Walmart may soon have to increase prices for shoppers due to higher tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, according to earnings calls.

Walmart is the latest U.S. company to avoid giving second-quarter profit guidance due to the uncertainty around Trump's tariffs, as it joins a growing cadre of retailers warning of likely price hikes.

Tariffs against China, the United States' chief economic rival on the world stage, at one point reached a staggering 145% as rates ratcheted up in a trade war. But the two countries agreed on May 12 to slash tariffs for 90 days while they work out a long-term agreement.

Trump has long insisted that other countries pay the cost of tariffs, despite many economists saying American businesses importing foreign goods pay for tariffs and usually pass that cost on to customers to retain their profits.



"The level of tariffs that have been proposed is pretty challenging for all retailers, for suppliers, and certainly our concern is that consumers are going to feel some of that," Walmart's chief financial officer and executive vice president John David Rainey said in an interview with CNBC on May 15.



Rainey told CNBC prices will likely rise toward the tail end of this month and into June, with products like electronics, toys and food specifically mentioned in the company's May 15 first quarter earnings call with management and investors.

Walmart President Douglas McMillon said in the call that they want to keep food and consumable prices as low as possible, but said tariffs on countries like Costa Rica, Peru, and Colombia are "pressuring imported items like bananas, avocados, coffee, and roses."

Trump's tariffs have upended global trade since early April, when he announced 10% tariffs on imports from all countries and higher nation-specific tariffs on 60 countries. He has since paused those additional fees and pursued negotiations to reach a deal on so-called "reciprocal" rates.

by Dean Dettloff



APR 28, 2025

Pope Francis will be remembered as a champion for the vulnerable. The outpouring of praise from global leaders shows a near universal appreciation for his voice for justice.

Former President Joe Biden **marked** Francis' death in a statement, saying the pope "commanded us to fight for peace and protect our planet from a climate crisis. He advocated for the voiceless and powerless." President

Donald Trump ordered **flags** to be flown at half-staff in the pope's honor. Several other leaders **in the U.S.** and **around the world** also took time to honor Francis.

But you can't have a voice for justice without boldly denouncing injustice, and Francis was brave enough to do so. Recalling Francis' simplicity and humility, we must avoid the risk of erasing his courage and audacity, letting the powerful — all too keen to praise a pope whose advice they routinely ignored — off the hook in the process.

Ever the prophet and pastor, Francis did not communicate his radicalism in academic writings or arcane theology but lived it publicly and clearly. Through encyclicals, homilies, and addresses, Francis had no problem railing against direct targets like the arms trade, telecommunications companies, and the extractive industry. In a **speech** to a meeting of social movements, Francis reflected on several "structures of sin." "Thinking about these situations," he said, "I make a pest of myself with my questions. And I go on asking. And I ask everyone in the name of God."

Francis was not vague with asking these questions. In that same speech, in the name of God, he calls directly on people in power, from pharmaceutical companies to food monopolies, to end their injustices. Elsewhere, like in his apostolic exhortation ***Laudate Deum***, he chastised world leaders for their failures to courageously confront the climate crisis. Yet despite his many pointed criticisms and his structural analysis, his words have been largely ignored by those in political power.

Now that the pope is about to be buried, it falls to the rest of us to ensure his prophetic words are not buried with him. Like Francis, we, too, need to become pests. We can start by recalling some of Francis' most radical positions.

## On the environment

No papal encyclical has caught global and public attention like ***Laudato Si'***, published in 2015. In the last decade, Francis' words prompted dioceses to **divest from fossil fuels**, **inspired climate activists**, and sparked a **global movement**.

Most readers of ***Laudato Si'*** note that Francis calls us to hear both "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," but his entreaties to respond to those cries have so far proven to be too much for world leaders. Explicitly criticizing market-led solutions as well as "green" rhetoric that treats the poor as "collateral damage," the pope's message on the environment is as plain and simple as his white cassock: people and planet over profit.

Francis also directly critiques the idea of infinite economic growth on a finite planet. In a

passage echoing **degrowth economists**, Francis suggests that “the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.” Easier said than done, but not impossible.

Francis’ prophetic words on the climate only began in *Laudato Si’*. Over the course of his papacy, he suggested “**ecocide**” ought to be considered a legitimate crime committed by corporations, demanded greater urgency at **U.N. Conference of the Parties meetings** on climate change, and called for **multilateral climate processes** to “be drastic, intense and count on the commitment of all.”

### On economics

“The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith,” wrote Francis in his second encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. “Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of ‘spillover’ or ‘trickle’ – without using the name – as the only solution to societal problems.” “Neoliberalism” is a term often restricted to the academy or the occasional pundit. Generally speaking, it names an ideology that assumes the market and private interests are the most efficient means of organizing society. At its most extreme, the job of the state is to facilitate a smooth environment for businesses and consumption, privatizing goods and services as much as possible. By addressing neoliberalism directly, Francis called out the prevailing economic ideology of our time. For Francis, unlocking and unleashing private capital is clearly not the solution to our global problems.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis offers sketches of an alternative economy, saying it should be one based on solidarity, including a “popular economy” and “community production.” But Francis has also referenced heterodox economists by name, making it more difficult to dismiss his calls for economic justice, pointing toward more detailed analysis than an encyclical can offer. In his 2020 book *Let Us Dream*, Francis recommends the work of Mariana Mazzucato and Kate Raworth, who have been involved in Vatican efforts to rethink the economy. Both emphasize the importance of public investment and the need to create much stronger regulations on the market, making an economy that works for people rather than the other way around.

### On peace

Already in **2014**, Francis began suggesting that we were living through a third world war, but one fought “piecemeal.” Whereas World War I and World War II were fought with huge armies between great powers on discrete battlefields, today our violence is dispersed, complex, and increasing. As war in Ukraine and Gaza escalated, and as violence proliferated in Haiti, Sudan and South Sudan, Myanmar, and so many other places, Francis found himself constantly making appeals for peace. In his final blessing for the world, known as the “**Urbi et Orbi**,” Francis named these crises and more, again highlighting the ubiquity of violence in today’s world.

Peace has been a constant priority for Francis. In 2015, he accused Christians who make money off manufacturing weapons of being **hypocrites**. The arms industry was a usual culprit for the pope. In one address, he held up a 25-year-old engineer who refused to take a job that involved making weapons as a “**hero**.”

Francis also called for resisting the idea that peace is the result of greater military and police forces. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes that:

“Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility.”

Peace is not about restraining the marginalized but building structures of participation and equality.

Francis’ proximity to the Palestinians has been especially evident. He called Gaza’s only Catholic church, Holy Family, **every night by phone**. In a recent **book**, Francis pointed out that some experts have referred to the situation in Gaza as a genocide, and he called for further investigating “whether it fits into the technical definition formulated by jurists and international bodies.” He has routinely called for a ceasefire.

### Making pests of ourselves

On these and other issues — like migration, hunger, and technology — Francis has desperately and bluntly challenged the powerful, including politicians, bankers, and his own clerics, to attune themselves to the voice of the oppressed. The cascade of compliments from those in power might give the impression that his words found listening ears, but any honest look at the world around us shows this is not true.

To take only one example, Francis’ papacy overlapped three U.S. presidents — Obama, Biden, and Trump — all of whom have offered kind words in light of his death. While Pope Francis pushed for deep climate reforms during each of their administrations, the U.S. remains far and away the worst offender for carbon emissions per capita. Other examples, like the pope’s constant demand to end the violence in Gaza, prove the point more graphically. The fact is, while those offering praises for Francis, in the U.S. and elsewhere, may be sincere in their personal appreciation, when it comes to making real, ambitious, material changes, they refused to hear him speak.

While Francis’ words may not be gaining traction among the powerful, he never put his confidence in the powerful. Instead, Francis believed in the networks of solidarity among grassroots communities and movements around the world.

In *Laudate Deum*, confronted with the failures of multilateral efforts to stop climate change, he reminds us that “the demands that rise up from below throughout the world, where activists from very different countries help and support one another, can end up pressuring the sources of power.” Here, too, Francis gave us more than vague impressions.

Since 2014, the Vatican has contributed to this process by hosting encounters between the church and grassroots organizations around the world in a series of **World Meetings of Popular Movements**, addressing issues related to land, work, and housing. Movements as diverse as Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (or Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra), the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India, and Faith in Action (formerly PICO) in the United States have all participated. It is here, in the fertile soil of encounter and organizing among the people, that Francis sees the seeds of an alternative society. The pope provided the right suggestion, that by linking our struggles across the globe, we can create the pressure we need to make real change. It is up to us to show up.



The problems Francis confronted are huge and daunting, but he reminds us that hope is created in organized movements of people who are willing to amplify the voices of the oppressed. As he puts it in *Laudate Deum*: "To say that there is nothing to hope for would be suicidal, for it would mean exposing all humanity, especially the poorest, to the worst impacts of climate change." We owe it to ourselves and to one another to create that hope.

In his **final testament**, Francis stated that his "tomb should be in the ground; simple, without particular ornamentation, bearing only the inscription: Franciscus."

May he continue to pester us, and may we become pests ourselves in his memory.

### Dean Dettloff

Dean Dettloff is a lecturer at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario.

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## POPE LEO CONDEMNS MORAL CRISIS OF TRUMP'S AMERICA

by Ivy Vega • May 15, 2025

## The National Circus

He's the first American Pope in history — and his first week on the job has already blown a hole through the MAGA movement. Pope Leo XIV, formerly Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, isn't just a surprise pick from the Vatican — he's quickly becoming a thorn in the side of Trump-era loyalists, with a social media trail that reads more like an immigration advocacy feed than the Vatican's usual restrained tone.

Now, the man hailed by conservatives just days ago is under fire from the very crowd that once claimed him as their own.

### American Pride Meets Political Whiplash

The MAGA base cheered when a Chicago-born Catholic was chosen to lead the world's 1.4 billion Catholics. Donald Trump called it a "great honor for our country," and Vice President J.D. Vance offered his well wishes for Pope Leo's leadership saying, "I'm sure millions of American Catholics and other Christians will pray for his successful work leading the Church. May God bless him!" as reported by the New York Post.



But beneath the diplomatic smiles, a culture clash was brewing. Because Pope Leo XIV isn't looking to follow Trump's wishes to Make America Great Again — and he never was. His record shows a long history of challenging Trump-era policies, especially on immigration. And that has Trump allies and conservative Catholics accusing him of betraying their movement just as it ascends to global prominence.

### The Pope's Paper Trail: Immigration, Guns, and Justice

Before heading into the conclave, Cardinal Prevost — now Pope Leo XIV — reportedly spent his final moments on social media retweeting criticism of Trump's appearance with Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, where they laughed about a deportation that bypassed legal norms. The post asked, "Is your conscience not disturbed?" and accused Trump of using suffering as a punchline, as reported by The New York Post.

That wasn't an isolated moment. As early as 2015, he was reportedly criticizing Trump's

rhetoric as anti-immigration. In 2017, he amplified posts slamming Trump's refugee bans and condemned language like "bad hombres" for fueling "racism and nativism," as reported by the New York Post. He also supported gun control measures and expressed support for bishops who called Trump's policies a "dark hour of US history."

It's not just Trump who drew scrutiny. In February 2025, Leo shared an article by the National Catholic Reporter titled "JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others" — the article criticized Vance's Fox News remarks about prioritizing compassion for American citizens over immigrants, noting that such a ranking didn't reflect Catholic values, according to the New York Post.

### **MAGA's Sudden Turn: From Congratulations to Condemnation**

Trump might be praising Leo in public, but the MAGA base isn't having it. Right wing figures like Laura Loomer have accused Leo of being a "Marxist puppet," and social media erupted with attacks branding him as "woke," as reported by TIME.

Leo's stance on social issues is actually more conservative than his predecessor, Pope Francis. He opposes abortion, same-sex marriage, and what he has described as gender ideology in schools. But for many on the right, that isn't enough to offset his open rebuke of Trump's immigration policies and his alignment with global social justice priorities.

### **Where Pope Leo Stands on Key Issues**

- **Immigration:** Leo has consistently opposed border crackdowns and family separation policies. He's used his platform to amplify voices of migrants and clergy challenging deportations.
- **Gun Control:** He reportedly shared support for legislation after the Las Vegas massacre and has criticized lawmakers for inaction, backing the Church's call for stronger restrictions.
- **Abortion and LGBTQ+ Rights:** He aligns with traditional Catholic doctrine, opposing abortion and same-sex marriage, and resisting progressive education policies on gender.
- **Capital Punishment:** Like Francis, Leo opposes the death penalty and has promoted restorative justice approaches.

### **Who's Cheering the Pope?**

Progressive Catholics, immigrant advocates, and clergy in Latin America have embraced Leo's leadership. They view him as a continuation of Pope Francis's social mission, especially given Leo's decades of missionary work in Peru.

His election also sent a clear signal that Vatican leadership isn't beholden to US political pressures. Despite a reported campaign by wealthy American donors to install a more Trump-friendly pope, the cardinals chose Leo — suggesting an institutional desire to push back against nationalism.

Meanwhile, Catholics outside the United States have responded positively to his message of inclusion. His first blessing, delivered in Spanish and Latin, emphasized the Church's global character and its openness to all people.

### **And Where's J.D. Vance Now?**

Officially, the Vice President is keeping it cordial. His congratulatory post to Leo was measured

and respectful, emphasizing prayer and unity. But Leo's direct criticisms of Vance's immigration framing — especially calling it a misuse of Christian teachings — put the two men on uncertain footing moving forward.

Vance is likely walking a tightrope. As a relatively new Catholic convert and rising star in Trump's orbit, his religious credibility could be challenged if tensions with Leo escalate. So far, the VP is avoiding major conflict.

### **A Historic Papacy With Political Consequences**

Leo XIV's election is a point of pride for American Catholics. But it's also a test. Can a pope who criticizes American policies still unify the faithful? Or will he become another flashpoint in a deeply divided country?



The next few years will offer an answer. But one thing is already clear: Pope Leo XIV didn't come to Rome to keep quiet. And MAGA's dream of a pro-Trump pope just became a holy war they didn't see coming.

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### **ON THE ATTACK IN WASHINGTON, DC**

by Jonathan Kuttab



The violent attack which killed two Israeli diplomats in Washington on Wednesday has been roundly condemned by all, including pro-Palestinian activists. Full details about and the true motivation of the attacker remain unknown, though it is reported that he yelled “Free Palestine.”



Many pundits quickly labelled the attack as being antisemitic in nature, using the opportunity to score political points by labelling all anti-Israel activism as a “manifestation of antisemitism” and by attempting to connect all pro-Palestinian activism with “support for terrorism.” Some have even blamed anti-Israeli protests for leading up to the attack.

We still do not know enough to determine the actual views and motivations of the perpetrator, though a reported manifesto signed by him emphasizes Gaza as the reason for his action. Regardless of his motivation, we at FOSNA wholeheartedly denounce this attack on unarmed civilians. I use this opportunity to reemphasize our rejection of violence, of all assassinations and killings, and to reaffirm our rejection of all anti-Jewish bigotry, discrimination, and hatred (known as antisemitism) regardless of political motivations or excuses. The Palestinian cause must never be allowed to be hijacked to justify anti-Jewish bigotry (though it does appear at least one of the victims was actually Christian or Messianic) or to provide cover for racism, discrimination, and bigotry against any group.

Such hatred and violence runs directly counter to the vision of a just, liberated, and peaceful future towards which we strive. Along with anti-Jewish hate we condemn violence against Muslim, Arab, Black and other oppressed peoples and communities. Even though it appears the killer's actions were politically rather than racially motivated, it is clear that it also does not in any way contribute to the Palestinian cause. Rather than highlight the ongoing genocide, it provides a platform for Zionists to distract from the state of Israel's ongoing crimes against Palestinians, including the forced

starvation, displacement, and murder of thousands of innocent civilians.

I wish to clarify further our own views on violence. While international law protects the right of Palestinians to use armed resistance in fighting for their rights in Palestine (provided it is aimed solely at armed combatants and not civilians), we at FOSNA have always stood for principled and practical nonviolence, a position favored by the vast majority of Palestinian Christians of all denominations.

Although we believe in the theology of nonviolence, it is also our assertion that nonviolence is both the more strategic and effective path for Palestinians to follow. We should point out, however, that for those who do not share our pacifist convictions, it is hypocritical to constantly harp about Israel's right to defend itself while denying Palestinians such a right. Away from the Middle East, in this country and internationally, however, there can be no justification for violence, even though Israelis have often assassinated their political enemies abroad, including politicians, scientists, writers, and diplomats. Also attacks on diplomats, whether in the West Bank or in Washington, are contrary to international law.

We call on those who are anguished by the ongoing genocide in Gaza and who feel the need to act, not just speak, about the deliberate starvation of Palestinians to follow principled nonviolence to demand accountability and pressure others to end their complicity in Israel's crimes. BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) are effective, nonviolent tools for exacting a political price and calling for accountability. Assassinations, bombing, and killing are not.

***Looking for a nonviolent option to join?*** Consider joining us in our 40-day fast for Gaza, organized with Veterans For Peace and others, as we demand the immediate lifting of all restrictions on food, water, medicine, and humanitarian supplies to the 2.1 million residents of Gaza, as well as the cessation of arms shipments to Israel. Many of those participating in this action are limiting their intake to 250 calories a day, highlighting the average number of calories most Palestinians currently have to survive on. Already, we have **40** co-sponsoring organizations and almost **475** people nationwide who have joined us in this grassroots campaign of nonviolent resistance, through fasting. We urge all of you to participate.

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## JOURNEY WITH THE POPE



**Saturday, May 24, 2025**

**"But how many other conflicts there are in the world! I entrust this heartfelt appeal to the Queen of Peace, so that she may present it to the Lord Jesus to obtain for us the miracle of peace."**

**| Pope Leo XIV**



## WALMART RESPONDS TO TRUMP'S DIRECTIVE TO 'EAT THE TARIFFS'

(continued from page 13)

Tariffs against China, the United States' chief economic rival on the world stage, at one point reached a staggering 145% as rates ratcheted up in a trade war. But the two countries agreed on May 12 to slash tariffs for 90 days while they work out a long-term agreement.

*Contributing: Riley Beggin, USA TODAY; Reuters.*

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*This article originally appeared on USA TODAY: Walmart responds to Trump's directive to 'eat the tariffs'*

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## TRUMP AND FRIENDS

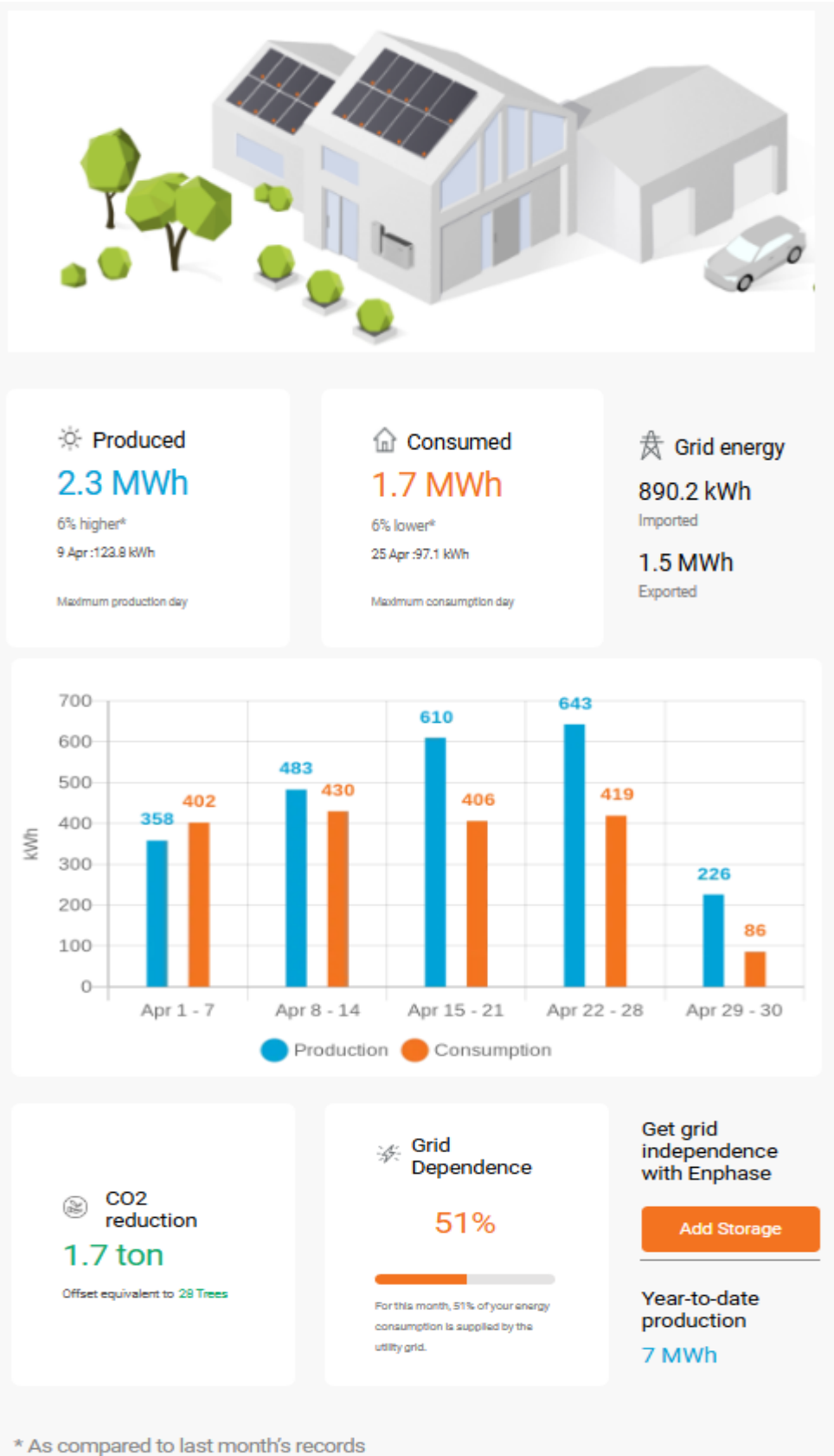
On the left, the guy who ordered his 15-man death squad to kill and dismember American journalist Kashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. They disposed of the body parts in acid.

On the right, the former leader of Al Qaeda in Syria with a \$10m US bounty on his head.

In the middle the most corrupt US President in history.



SOLAR REPORT - APRIL 2025



## JUNE 2025 BIRTHDAYS!



*May you all be blessed as you celebrate your special days!*

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary? Contact the office at 860-527-7792 or email [office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com](mailto:office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com) to update our records.

### **Grace Lutheran Church – Readers for June 2025**

***Note: If you are unable to read on your assigned Sunday, please switch with someone else.***

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading #</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Reader</b>
6/1	1 <sup>st</sup>	Acts 1: 1-11	Dale Eberhardt
	Psalm	Psalm 97	Read in unison
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21	Marty Holmeen
6/8	1st	Acts 2: 1-21	Rodney Carr
	Psalm	Psalm 104	Rodney Carr
	2nd	Romans 8: 14-17	Judy Butterworth-Kremer
6/15	1st	Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31	Deborah Hollens
	Psalm	Psalm 8	Read in unison
	2nd	Romans 5: 1-5	Dorothea Glatte
6/22	1st	Isaiah 65: 1-9	Barbara Ruhe
	Psalm	Psalm 22: 19-28	Pastor, then congregation
	2nd	Galatians 3: 23-29	Lou Oliver
6/29	1st	Acts 12: 1-11	Rebecca Lewis
	Psalm	Psalm 87: 1-7	Read in unison
	2nd	2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18	Sonia Wellington



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Dorothea Glatte, Lay Minister

Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister

Betsy DeRoma, President

Lou Oliver, Vice President

Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer

Judy Butterworth-Kremer, Secretary

Janice Potter, Financial Assistant

Dale Eberhardt, Organist

Emma Coleman-Carr, Altar Guild

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