

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



U.S. President Donald Trump signs documents in the Oval Office at the White House on Inauguration Day in Washington Jan. 20, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)



Thomas Reese

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@thomasreeseSJ](#)

Religion News Service

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

January 28, 2025

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States, has returned to Washington as the 47th president. As such, he needs our prayers.

A slight plurality of voters chose him, with just under half voting against him. Our country is divided between those who think he is God's gift to the nation and those who think he is the devil incarnate.

All should pray for him and the country, even those who hate him.

Praying for the president does not mean that you endorse everything he says and does. Prayer means that you are asking God to direct him to paths of justice and peace, to give him the wisdom necessary to do his job. You are asking God to help him fulfill his oath of office and seek the common good.

While many of the prayers at the inauguration sounded like partisan endorsements, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan simply prayed, "Send wisdom from the heavens that she may be with him, that he may know your designs."

And even though he has serious disagreements with the president, Pope Francis assured Trump of his prayers. "I ask God to guide your efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation among peoples," said Francis.

But he did not hide his hopes for America. In a statement on Inauguration Day, [Francis said](#), "Inspired by your nation's ideals of being a land of opportunity and welcome for all, it is my hope that under your leadership the American people will prosper and always strive to build a more just society, where there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion."

Advertisement

No president's program is purely good or purely evil. They are always a mix of good and evil, with political compromises and pandering to special interests alongside good programs. When we pray, we pray that the good predominates over the bad. We pray that the good not be lost because of partisan opposition for opposition's sake.

Every president needs our prayers. They are all limited human beings with both gifts and flaws. During their presidencies, they meet challenges and crises that no one could predict. For Lyndon Johnson, it was the Vietnam War. For Jimmy Carter, it was the oil embargo and the hostage crisis. For Trump and Joe Biden, it was COVID-19 and the economic disruption it caused.

During the next four years, there will be more crises that will surprise the Trump administration and the nation. We pray that the administration deals with them well.

We also need to remember that presidents can always surprise us by being unpredictable. Dwight Eisenhower, the war hero, ended the fighting in Korea and warned of the military industrial complex. Johnson and Carter, both Southerners, embraced civil rights for Black citizens. Richard Nixon started the Environmental Protection Agency, ended the Vietnam War and established relations with China. Ronald Reagan signed nuclear weapons agreements with the Soviet Union.

Trump could also surprise us. He has already helped the Biden administration get a ceasefire in Gaza. Although Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, could ignore Biden and use congressional Republicans against him, he cannot ignore Trump because Republicans will not support him against Trump.

[Related: Five larger trends to make sense of the 2024 election](#)

Trump's willingness to let his team work with the Biden administration was an unexpected instance of bipartisan statesmanship. We pray that this continues, because the country is strong only if there is a bipartisan foreign policy.

Candidate Trump had a gift for dramatic rhetoric that gave simplistic answers to complex problems. He was master of the sound bite. Now that he is president, those problems remain.

The last time the federal budget was not in deficit was during the presidency of Bill Clinton. Too many people continue to die from guns and addictions. Health care and

higher education costs are out of control. In too many parts of the country, there is a housing shortage, causing high prices and high rents. Government paperwork stifles innovation.

The rollout of new websites for Obamacare and student aid were disastrous. Drones and artificial intelligence have revolutionized military combat in ways that make many of our current weapon systems antiquated. The electrical grid needs upgrading. Natural disasters from fires, earthquakes, hurricanes and floods will continue to happen. Home insurance rates are going up, if you can get insurance. Global warming is a fact, even though Trump denies it.

Inflation is down but prices are still high. The United States continues to attract people fleeing gang violence, civil wars and economic disasters.

[Related: How will the Catholic bishops deal with the new Trump administration?](#)

Trump's desire to blow up the bureaucracy is shared by many who have been frustrated by government red tape, but we pray that he learns to use a scalpel, not an ax, so the patient can be saved, not killed. Much of the red tape comes not from bureaucrats but from Congress, which mandates multiple requirements and conditions on government programs. Government fails when it spends more on administration than on solving problems.

We also pray for the Congress, the courts and state and local officials. All need guidance and courage to do the right thing. Judges are deciding things legislators refuse to deal with. And some problems, such as education and housing, can only be solved at the local level.

Ultimately in all these prayers, we are also praying for ourselves. We are unrealistic in what we want government to do. We want generous programs with low taxes. The cry of "Not In My Backyard" — NIMBY — is sacrificing the common good to a limited number of complainers, whether it is to stop solar panels and wind turbines or multifamily dwellings in single-family neighborhoods. We are all part of the problem and need to be part of the solution.

We need to pray for one another. We all need conversion so we can respect each other and work together for the common good.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)