

# Trump names Paula White-Cain to lead faith office

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—President Donald Trump issued an executive order reinstating his version of the White House Faith Office and once again placing Florida pastor and longtime supporter Paula White-Cain in charge of the initiative.

Trump already announced both moves during a speech related to the National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 6 but issued a formal executive order on Friday evening, Feb. 7.

“The executive branch wants faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to compete on a level playing field for grants, contracts, programs, and other Federal funding opportunities,” the executive order read.

“The efforts of faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship are essential to strengthening families and revitalizing communities, and the Federal Government welcomes opportunities to partner with such organizations through innovative, measurable, and outcome-driven initiatives.”

The order appeared to acknowledge that the Trump administration is essentially replacing the existing White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, which was created by former President George W. Bush’s administration and used by former presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

Trump left that office vacant for most of his first term before creating the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative in 2018 and appointing

White-Cain to lead it in late 2019.

The new office, according to the order, is tasked with various projects, such as making recommendations to the president, advising various federal agencies and consulting with faith leaders who hold expertise in a broad range of areas, such as “strengthening marriage and family,” “lifting up individuals through work and self-sufficiency,” and “defending religious liberty.”

The order also mentioned prioritizing faith leaders with expertise in “combatting anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and additional forms of anti-religious bias.” It stated the Faith Office would work with the attorney general to “identify concerns raised by faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship about any failures of the executive branch to enforce constitutional and Federal statutory protections for religious liberty.”

The lines may be references to two other recent announcements from Trump—the creation of a task force on “anti-Christian bias,” which he mentioned on the campaign trail, as well as a new presidential task force dedicated to religious freedom.

In addition, the order encouraged the office to promote grant opportunities for religious organizations, “especially those inexperienced with public funding but that operate effective programs.”

In a separate statement, the White House announced White-Cain will resume leadership, and Jennifer S. Korn will serve as deputy assistant to the president and faith director of the office. White-Cain and Korn have spent the past few years working with the National Faith Advisory Board, a group founded as an attempt to continue work done by the faith office during Trump’s first term.

# Mixed reaction to announcement

Several of Trump's evangelical supporters celebrated the reestablishment of the office and the appointment of White-Cain, with Georgia megapastor Jentezen Franklin congratulating her in a post on social media site X.

Others, however, were quick to criticize the move. Americans United for Separation of Church and State condemned White-Cain's appointment, saying she "was unfit to serve in the White House when Trump first appointed her in 2019 and she's still unfit today—particularly in a position that could focus on combatting discrimination and advancing religious freedom for all."

Americans United also accused White-Cain of being a "Christian Nationalist powerbroker" who's spent much of her career operating in the shadows to influence public policies that discriminate against women, LGBTQ people and religious minorities, and the nomination of partisan judges who will support those policies.

The White House also announced Jackson Lane, who worked on Trump's faith outreach team during the campaign, will serve as special assistant to the president and deputy director of faith engagement.



Photo courtesy of Johnnie Moore via RNS.

On social media, the White House promoted the new office alongside a photo of Trump surrounded by religious supporters as they prayed over the president. It was not immediately clear when the photograph was taken, but some in the picture were evangelical leaders who, like White, served as advisers during his first term, such as Franklin and Johnnie Moore, who is credited with organizing the informal but influential group of evangelical leaders who advised Trump during his first term.

Moore, a close confidante of White-Cain who was involved in Trump's 2016 campaign, told Religion News Service via email in August 2023 he was focusing on projects trying to reduce polarization in the U.S. and had no plans to participate in Trump's 2024 White House bid, saying he was "trying to avoid partisanship."

However, during a faith-focused Trump campaign event just a week before Election Day, Moore appeared onstage alongside White-Cain, Korn and several other religious leaders as they prayed over Trump.

Reached by email after the announcement of the re-instated White House Faith Office, Moore did not immediately respond to questions about whether he plans to be involved with the second Trump administration.

The Faith Office announcement came as the Trump administration has spent its first three weeks publicly feuding with some religious groups that have criticized his early executive orders, which have included freezing the U.S. refugee program and cutting off international aid funds used by numerous religious organizations that do humanitarian work abroad.

Additionally, a group of Quakers and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are suing the Trump administration. They assert, among other things, the administration violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act when it rescinded an internal government policy developed in 2011 that discouraged immigration raids on "sensitive locations" such as hospitals,

schools and churches.

Meanwhile, Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic, has been locked in a war of words with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. After the prelates issued statements expressing concern about Trump's executive orders, the vice president falsely accused the bishops of resettling "illegal immigrants" and of being more concerned about their "bottom line" than humanitarian work.

Similarly, billionaire Elon Musk, who runs the Department of Government Efficiency that has rapidly winnowed the federal government and all but shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development, recently described federal funds for Lutheran aid groups as "illegal," sparking a fiery rebuttal from the head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America debunking his claim.