

Interfaith coalition launches bus tour against Christian nationalism

by [Jeff Brumley](#)

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Nicolas O'Rourke, pastor of Living Water United Church of Christ in Philadelphia, speaks during the Freedom Express bus tour. (Photo from Facebook)

A coalition of Pennsylvania faith leaders and activists have launched a multi-faith and multi-racial bus tour to oppose Christian nationalism and defeat its proponents in the upcoming midterm elections.

The Freedom Express Bus Tour began with an October 18 rally in Philadelphia to kick off a planned three-week journey to canvass the state with messages challenging White supremacy and urging pro-democracy voters to make their voices heard on Election Day.

“The perilous rise of White Christian nationalism in our country requires leaders of conscience to raise the call to live by our faith principles by actively resisting the tide of bigotry and hate,” said Dwayne Royster, a United Church of Christ pastor and executive director of Power Interfaith, the state’s largest faith-based organizing movement and the architect of the bus tour.

There’s something powerful about Muslims, Jews, Christians, Unitarian Universalists, and humanists presenting a unified front against politicians and policies dangerous to race, gender, and LGBTQ equality, Royster said during the livestreamed press conference and rally.

“Faith leaders are uniquely able to guide our people toward a vision of democracy that protects our shared human dignity,” he said. “We need to call attention to bad actors, inspire people of faith to denounce white Christian nationalism, defend democracy and get out the vote.”

Royster and other speakers identified the “bad actors” by name, but one who is repeatedly singled out is Doug Mastriano, the firebrand, far-right Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate who has described his campaign as a [holy war](#) to deport Dreamers, ban gay marriage, and label women who get abortions as murderers. He also has spoken out against Muslims and climate change.

Mark Kelly Tyler, senior pastor of the historic Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, acknowledged the symbolic importance of staging the rally in front of his church, which was built in 1793 by Richard Allen, the founder of the AME denomination.

A former slave who purchased his freedom, Allen struggled against racism and Christian nationalism in his time but never gave up the fight—even though he never had the right to vote.

“We’ve been trying to heal our faith in democracy for a very, very long time, and yet Richard Allen also understood that democracy was the best hope for our people,” Tyler said.

“The things we’re going through today are not new, it’s just 2.0, 3.0, 4.0. But as our ancestors refused in those days to give up, we’ve come too far to turn back now,” he said. “And though the wound is still open, though the illness is still present, we will not stop, we will not retreat, and we will not give up until we have brought an end to

it.”

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, Royster’s senior adviser and a veteran social activist, connected the present threat of Christian nationalism to some of its previous manifestations.

“Both of my parents were Holocaust survivors. Each one was the sole survivor in their family,” he said. “Many extended family members were all murdered by white nationalists who went by the name of Nazis.”

Liebling said he personally witnessed modern versions of those same Nazis march on Charlottesville, Virginia., in 2017, where they killed an anti-fascist demonstrator and shouted, “Jews will not replace us.”

White nationalism erupted again in 2018 with the shooting deaths of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. And now it’s infused in the American political process, Liebling said.

“Antisemitism has already been injected into this election. . . . Antisemitism is a part of the machinery of division and fear those politicians rely on for power. It is the same machinery those politicians use to blame Black and Brown people who are immigrants, who are Muslim, LGBTQ people, and more.”

Christian nationalism represents a small but vocal group of people who want control and power all to themselves, said Nicolas O’Rourke, pastor of Living Water United Church of Christ in Philadelphia.

“Our faith leads us to include. Our faith leads us to serve all people without exception, not strive for dominion. Christian nationalism has toxified faith, hijacked Christianity, and tried to make you believe that God’s love is scarce—that God’s love is for only a few special people and particularly for the right wing, and we all know that that’s not true. . . . You can’t be Christian and White nationalist at the same time.”

William Scott, senior pastor at House of Faith Baptist Church-UCC in Philadelphia, said he has no intention of losing ground to Christian nationalists.

“I got one thing to tell you: I’m not going back. I’m not going back to slavery. If we’re claiming to have liberty and justice for all, then we should practice liberty, we should practice freedom. To try to take away someone’s rights and freedom is evil,” he

said.

Scott urged Pennsylvanians to join the movement. “It’s time for us to stand together across the lines of race, faith, gender, and class as a united body against the powers of White Christian nationalism.” —Baptist News Global