As chaos hits Capitol, people of faith respond

by [Jack Jenkins](#)

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Trump supporters participate in a rally on January 6. (AP Photo / John Minchillo)

On the morning of January 6, a small, interfaith prayer circle surrounded a Black Lives Matter sign, created to replace similar banners repeatedly stolen and destroyed by the far-right Proud Boys in December.

Then, near the end of the service, a gaggle of men adorned in patriotic clothing and "Make America Great Again" hats approached. One walked into the middle of the circle, pretended to fall, and laid on the ground while another man knelt on his neck—an apparent attempt to mock the 2020 killing of George Floyd at the hands of police.

The group then walked across the street—where National City Christian Church had just unfurled a 16-foot Black Lives Matter banner—and repeated the performance in front of cameras.

It was an unsettling beginning to a harrowing day that would culminate with a massive mob of Trump supporters storming the US Capitol as lawmakers attempted to approve the presidential election results, forcing Vice President Mike Pence to flee and members of Congress into hiding.

Churches were some of the first to offer pushback to the presence of Trump supporters, partly because they were some of the first to face their attacks. When protests broke in the city in December, members of the Proud Boys, which is classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, tore down liberal-leaning banners at four area churches—targeting especially Black Lives Matter signs, one of which they set on fire.

Among those in attendance at the morning vigil was Leila Ortiz, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Washington synod. She condemned the notion that Christianity could somehow give license to the kind of violence perpetrated against houses of worship in DC.

"My hope and my mission is to highlight the humanity and the belovedness of all of God's creation, and this particular violence—this particular permission to be violent—is profoundly disturbing and antichrist," she said. "To proclaim that we are a Christian nation—to proclaim and to support a leader that claims to be Christian while also being so violent and willing to destroy people's communities, lives, and bodies—is more than reason to come and protest, and to use prayer as protest."

Christopher Lee Zacharias, pastor of Washington's John Wesley AME Zion Church, also had strong words for those who might invoke faith while perpetuating violence.

"The premise for which they stand is false," said Zacharias, who also attended the vigil.

He argued Christianity "in no way, shape or form" supports the "immorality" preached by religious supporters of Proud Boys and others who were amassing a few blocks away to listen to President Donald Trump speak.

But those who gathered to support Trump and repeat disproven claims of election fraud appeared undeterred by such theological critiques. As Proud Boys arrived near the US Capitol after Trump's speech, people in attendance reportedly referred to them as "God's warriors."

When the mob eventually breached the Capitol and violently stormed into the Senate chamber in the afternoon—sending the Capitol region into lockdown—one insurrectionist could be seen carrying a white flag with a cross in the corner: the "Christian flag."

And after the anarchists took over the Capitol, some demonstrators unfurled a massive banner outside. It read: "Jesus 2020."

But Jesus was already invoked in Congress that day—albeit with a very different message. As the mob broke into the House chamber, lawmakers crouched in the balcony, desperate to shield themselves from impending attack.

As what sounded like gunshots rang out, a CBS News video caught what appeared to be Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester offering her own response to the harrowing situation: She led her fellow lawmakers in prayer.

The Delaware Democrat called on Jesus to protect members of Congress and to bring "peace in the land, peace in this country, peace in this world!" —*Religion News Service*