

In new book, Mark Meadows confirms Trump Bible photo op was Ivanka's idea
by [Jack Jenkins](#) in the [January 12, 2022](#) issue



Donald Trump holds a Bible outside St. John's Church in Washington, DC, on June 1, 2020. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

A new book by Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows offers a detailed account of the former president's infamous Bible photo op at St. John's Church in Washington, DC, on June 1, 2020, during the height of that summer's racial justice protests.

Meadows said it was Trump's daughter, Ivanka, who came up with the idea to "send a message to people of faith."

But the book largely avoids mention of the religious outcry at the stunt, and it fails to note the forced removal of a priest and a seminarian from the patio of the church when the area was cleared of racial justice demonstrators, which occurred right be-

fore the event.

Meadows, a onetime North Carolina congressman who describes himself as a committed Christian, details the lead-up to the photo op in his new book, *The Chief's Chief*, published in December. Meadows notes his concern upon observing the growing crowd of demonstrators outside the White House in the days before the photo op, writing: “[I] noticed that the crowds were getting a little too close to [the church] for my liking.”

“I knew that these protesters had done massive amounts of damage to buildings over the past few nights, and I shuddered at the thought of the same thing happening to a sacred place like St. John’s,” he writes. “In the Oval Office, President Trump expressed similar concerns.”

The church was, in fact, damaged on the evening of May 31, when a window was smashed and a fire was set in the basement nursery of the historic Episcopal church. St. John’s is often referred to as “the church of the presidents” because of its close proximity to the White House and because every president since James Madison has attended a service there.

Mariann Budde, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, expressed dismay at the destruction of property at the time but did not condemn the larger goal of the racial justice protests, noting she had been outside the church earlier in the day to participate in the demonstrations.

Meadows, however, in his book frames the church damage as an inevitable consequence of the protests.

“It didn’t surprise me that of all the historic buildings standing around Lafayette Square, these rioters would go after a sacred house of worship,” Meadows writes. “It all seemed terribly on brand for them.”

After news of the fire got out, Meadows writes, he and other prominent Republicans were inundated with calls from outraged conservatives across the country. “To them, the sight of a church being burned in the United States of America—just a few hundred yards from the White House, no less—was simply too much to take.”

Ivanka Trump also received calls about the fire, according to Meadows. In response, she hatched a plan: she suggested the president “give his address in the Rose

Garden as planned, and then lead a group of his closest aides and advisors over to St. John's Church, where he would deliver a short message to the American people."

Ivanka's goal, Meadows said, was to signal that "law and order would prevail."

"As I watched President Trump listening to his daughter, I could tell he loved the idea," Meadows writes.

Meadows also writes that Trump's aides scrambled to find a Bible for the president to use, pulling options from their offices and stacking them on a desk outside the Oval Office. Trump, he says, ultimately chose one of the Bibles less because of its appearance and more for "the way it felt in his hands."

On June 1, Trump gave a speech in the Rose Garden denouncing mob violence and the burning of St. John's. The president then began his walk across Lafayette Square.

The book does not linger on the reaction to the Bible photo op, aside from mentioning later that it garnered negative press. Although lauded by several of Trump's evangelical faith advisers, it evoked fierce criticism in other religious circles—especially among leaders of the Episcopal Church.

"The symbolism of [Trump] holding a Bible . . . as a prop and standing in front of our church as a backdrop when everything that he has said is antithetical to the teachings of our traditions and what we stand for as a church—I was horrified," Budde said at the time.

Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, also accused Trump of using "a church building and the Holy Bible for partisan political purposes."
—Religion News Service