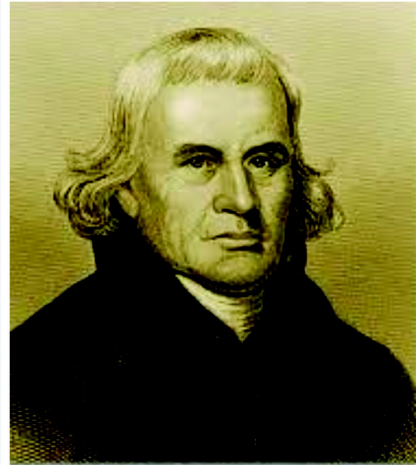
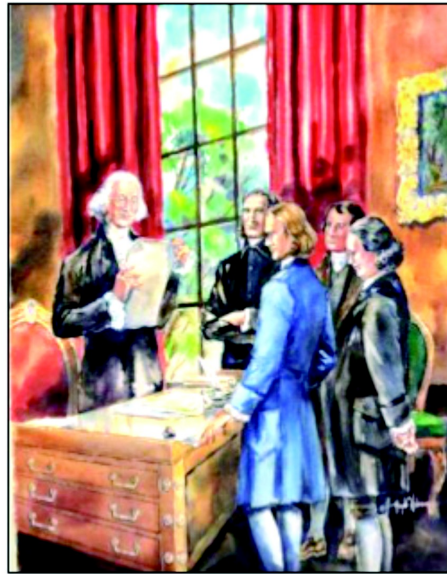




# The 2021 Presidential Inaugural Prayer

## Fact Sheet

**General** Traditionally, the Presidential Inaugural Prayer is delivered at Historic Old St. George's, America's first and world's oldest Methodist Church in Philadelphia PA. A Honor Guard, led by the nation's oldest military unit, First City Troop (Troop A, 104th Calvary, 28th Infantry Division of the PA Army National Guard) in full regalia, hand delivers the Inaugural Prayer.



The First Inaugural Prayer between President George Washington and Bishop Francis Asbury on May 29, 1789 in New York City

**History** The Presidential Inaugural Prayer was first exchanged May 29, 1789 between President George Washington and Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury (who was to America in the 18th century to what Billy Graham was in the 20th century), accompanied by St. George's pastor John Dickens and Major Thomas Morrell, formerly one of Washington's assistants. The "congratulatory address" was approved by the Methodist Conference.

**Importance** The Inaugural Prayer was the first time any religious denomination acknowledged the infant Republic. All other denominations refused to participate in the first Inauguration, as it was still uncertain that the newly established form of government would survive. "Riding the circuits," Asbury was not aware of the churches' boycott until he returned home to St. George's. Asbury immediately assembled his colleagues, including Dr. Thomas Coke, to prepare the Inaugural Prayer and then embarked from St. George's to New York City.

The Methodist's singular willingness to acknowledge the new government coupled with Washington's pointed acknowledgment, "I trust the people of every denomination, who demean themselves as good citizens, will have occasion to be convinced that I shall always strive to prove a faithful and impartial patron of genuine, vital religion," has long been regarded as the initial recognition of America's Separation of Church and State.



Old St. George's in the 18th century, as it appears today after the 1926 erection of the Benj. Franklin Bridge requiring evacuation of 4th Street. The Sanctuary, as required by Federal law, is as Washington, Adams, and other Founding Fathers would have remembered it.

**Church** Within Independence National Historical Park, Old St. George's is America's first and World's oldest Methodist Church. The sanctuary appears today as it did in colonial times. Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush and Robert Morris worshiped here. Betsy Ross was a member. Responsible for several "firsts" in American Methodism, St. George's started the first Methodist bookstore and Methodist Home Missionary Society and was also the first to appoint a woman to the role of class leader and to license African Americans as Lay Preachers of Methodism (Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, 1785). Sunday school instructor Anna Jarvis established Mother's Day here. The last President believed to have visit St. George's was Calvin Coolidge on July 5, 1926. President Dwight Eisenhower was instrumental in saving Old St. George's signing into law on June 23, 1959, H.R. 2154. President Ronald Reagan resurrected the Inaugural Prayer custom on January 20, 1985. Being a Sunday, the exchange of the Inaugural Prayer was the only official observation, Reagan being privately sworn. President George H.W. Bush incorporated the Inaugural Prayer into his address. President George W. Bush's Inaugural Prayer was exchanged on January 21, 2001. Neither Presidents William Clinton or Barack Obama White House officials resolved logistics to deliver their prayers.



Presidents Washington, Adams, Madison, Lincoln, Coolidge, Eisenhower, Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush are associated with Old St. George's. Washington, Adams and Madison worshiped regularly, Lincoln and Grant visited while in Philadelphia, both Coolidge and Eisenhower were instrumental in saving the Church. Reagan resumed the Inaugural Prayer, followed by George H.W. Bush and his son.

**Ceremony** First City Troop (the precursor to the U.S. Secret Service, who protected Washington while both General and President) delivers the President's Inaugural Prayer to the current pastor of Old St. George's. Announcing "Greetings from the President of the United States" the commanding officer, in full dress regalia hand-delivers the Inaugural Prayer, which is read by the Pastor along with his own prayer for the President. Depending on the President's preference, First City Troop proceeds to Washington to hand-deliver the Pastor's Inaugural prayer, which eventually becomes part of the presidential library. By official order of the George H.W. Bush administration, this ceremony is the only time that the Presidential Flag appears without the President himself. The 2020-21 Pandemic will alter the traditional procedure.

