



America's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for **reflection, dialogue and civic renewal**. Our faith communities have an opportunity to counter division and bitterness and to flood the zone with hope around July 4, 2026.

**faith250** offers congregations a path and tools to help people connect with others and re-center around intrinsic American values. Here is an opportunity to listen to one another about what America means to us, confront historical and contemporary failings, and reflect on our future. Together we can build a way of taking up our roles as faith leaders in renewing our nation's civic health.

**Church World Service and the Fort Collins Area Interfaith Council** are spearheading an impactful program for members of your congregation called **faith250**. Read more about this national initiative at [faith250.org](http://faith250.org).

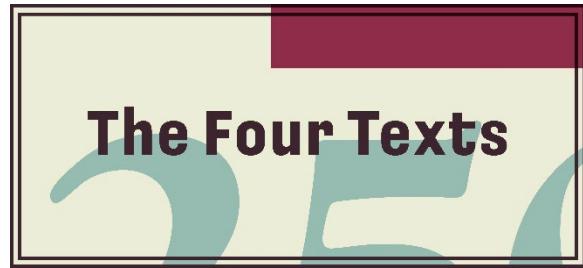


The idea is simple: relationships, gatherings, and a public civic ritual focused on **foundational texts of American democracy** as the basis for engaged discussion to **clarify shared values** we hold as communities and as a nation, culminating with a public celebration of America's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Planning is underway for events in Fort Collins and Loveland, bringing multi-faith communities together to share in song, spoken word, and meaningful conversations around four cornerstone texts. Together we will explore and live out our shared core civic values from a faith informed perspective.

#### Will you join the conversation?

To learn more about getting your congregation or group involved, reach out to Jason Morgan, CWS Community & Volunteer Engagement Program Officer and President of the Fort Collins Area Interfaith Council:  
[JMorgan@cwsglobal.org](mailto:JMorgan@cwsglobal.org) or 720-813-7841.



**THE NEW  
COLOSSUS**  
EMMA LAZARUS  
1883

When Emma Lazarus was asked to write a poem to help raise funds for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, the original intent of this massive civic symbol was to celebrate the triumph of liberty in the American Civil War. Lazarus, a Sephardic Jew, who worked with immigrants streaming through New York's Ellis Island and who

opposed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, subverted that purpose with merely 14 lines of text. Thus her words turned one of the nation's most recognized monuments, in the harbor of our largest city, into a symbol of worldwide welcome.

**THE DECLARATION  
OF INDEPENDENCE**  
THOMAS JEFFERSON  
1776

No words capture the American imagination as powerfully as Jefferson's assertions in the opening paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. The document is a revolution not only against the powers of King George in England, but also against old ideas that stratified humans in a social hierarchy. The idea of a nation

founded upon radical equality and dignity, rooted in the absolute power of the Creator, was a message to all of humanity. Yet, Jefferson's own participation and benefits from the brutal American system of chattel slavery, and his own words later in the Declaration reflect his limitations and faults. Thus, the Declaration simultaneously asks us to explore who we intend to be, and the resistance to achieving those aims.

**AMERICA  
THE BEAUTIFUL**  
KATHARINE LEE BATES  
1895, 1911

Katharine Lee Bates' anthem emerged out of her travels across the country, and the inspirational music of religious composer Samuel A. Ward. Her repeated prayer that God "Crown Thy good with brotherhood" asks us to consider the role of unity, fellowship, solidarity, community, and other forms of social cohesion in our

understanding of the national good. In addition, while the first and fourth verses are widely known and sung, the second and third verses raise harder and richer questions about what we consider beautiful. Especially in the context of congregational conversations, spiritual ideas about atonement resonate with Bates' words about "mend thine every flaw."

**WHAT TO THE SLAVE  
IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?**  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS  
1852

On July 5, 1852, when Frederick Douglass approached the podium in Rochester, New York, he addressed Independence Day. To Douglass, our national rituals that are untrue to their intended meaning corrode the country's shared identity. They mock who we want to be. In contrast to a celebration of freedom in the midst of

slavery, Douglass praises the Constitution as a "GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT." Instead of turning away from America, Douglass sets the pattern of demanding that America live up to its purpose. As we prepare for our nation's 250th celebration in July 2026, his words serve as a reminder of our integrity and ask us to consider what these days mean in our souls.