

The Chicago Invitation

Diverse Evangelicals Continue the Journey

We invite you to join us in the journey of following Jesus, who calls us to proclaim and live the gospel, committed to love and justice.

In 1973, a broad group of evangelical leaders released the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, calling for a greater commitment to biblical justice that was missing in American evangelicalism. Forty-five years later, a diverse group of especially younger followers of Jesus, who emerged from and remain within the evangelical tradition, met in Chicago to continue to take up this biblical mandate. We reflected on and affirmed the 1973 statement which, in its time, was groundbreaking for addressing and combating materialism, militarism, systemic racism, and sexism—and which inspired future generations. We also discerned together how to respond to the current crises in evangelicalism, which jeopardizes the reputation and witness of the Christian church.

Sadly, in 2018, several false narratives around the identity of evangelicals in the United States undermine Christian witness and distort American politics. Often, evangelicals are identified in the media and by the public as being predominantly white, right wing, and unconcerned about the poor and oppressed. For example, the story that became nationally and globally dominant after the 2016 election was that 81 percent of “evangelicals” voted for Donald Trump,¹ when, in fact, this group only represented the votes of white evangelicals. When evangelicals of color and younger evangelicals are accurately accounted for, the picture changes significantly. For example, evangelicals of color voted overwhelmingly otherwise.²

In contrast to these false narratives, evangelicals compose an ethnically diverse group whose movement reflects a historical and ongoing commitment to Jesus, the authority of scripture, evangelism, and God’s biblical call to justice.

As diverse evangelicals, our faith moves us to confess and lament that we have often fallen short of the biblical values and commitments proclaimed in the gospel and affirmed in the 1973 Declaration. In addition to the 1973 Declaration, many diverse evangelicals, including women, African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific Islander, and Indigenous leaders, have put out strong statements that have often been ignored. Millions of people, especially younger believers, have left the faith during a time in which evangelicalism has become increasingly partisan and politicized. People on both sides of the political aisle have demonized those who disagree with us and failed to love both our

neighbors and our “enemies,” as Jesus instructs us to do. We should not be captive to any political party, because our allegiance belongs to Christ. Like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we believe the church is “called to be the conscience of the state, not the master or the servant of the state.”

- Affirming the 1973 Declaration, as well as other historic statements from diverse evangelicals, we recommit to an evangelical faith that follows Jesus’ example of living and sharing a gospel that always proclaims good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed. (Luke 4: 18-19)
- We recommit to a biblical justice that demonstrates the reign of God as we strive for abundant life for all God’s children, which must include combating economic inequality and exploitation.
- We recommit to more faithfully and courageously follow Jesus, who affirmed the sacredness and dignity of all human life.

Building on the 1973 Declaration as well as other historic statements from diverse evangelicals, we also commit to love and protect all people—including life at every stage, people of color, women, Indigenous people, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ people, people who are living with disabilities or mental health issues, poor and impoverished people, and each one who is marginalized, hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, or imprisoned. (Matthew 25:31-46)

- We commit to care for and protect the earth as God’s creation.
- We commit to resisting all manifestations of racism, white nationalism, and any forms of bigotry—all of which are sins against God.
- We commit to resisting patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and any form of sexism and to always affirm the dignity, voices, and leadership of women.
- We commit to defend the dignity and rights of all people, particularly as we celebrate and embrace the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in our nation and churches.

We hope and pray that this statement, and the positive actions it inspires, will help to counteract and transform false narratives and stories into liberating ones. We invite you to join us in the journey of following Jesus, who calls us to proclaim and live the gospel, committed to love and justice. ■

¹ <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/religion-vote-presidential-election-2004-2016/>

² <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/GDF6Z0/RK0ONG&version=4.0>

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Signatories

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APPENDIX I: The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern (1973)

AS EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the full authority of the Word of God, we affirm that God lays total claim upon the lives of his people. We cannot, therefore, separate our lives from the situation in which God has placed us in the United States and the world.

We confess that we have not acknowledged the complete claim of God on our lives.

We acknowledge that God requires love. But we have not demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses.

We acknowledge that God requires justice. But we have not proclaimed or demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society. Although the Lord calls us to defend the social and economic rights of the poor and oppressed, we have mostly remained silent. We deplore the historic involvement of the church in America with racism and the conspicuous responsibility of the evangelical community for perpetuating the personal attitudes and institutional structures that have divided the body of Christ along color lines. Further, we have failed to condemn the exploitation of racism at home and abroad by our economic system.

We affirm that God abounds in mercy and that he forgives all who repent and turn from their sins. So we call our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance in a Christian discipleship that confronts the social and political injustice of our nation.

We must attack the materialism of our culture and

the maldistribution of the nation's wealth and services. We recognize that as a nation we play a crucial role in the imbalance and injustice of international trade and development. Before God and a billion hungry neighbors, we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote a more just acquisition and distribution of the world's resources.

We acknowledge our Christian responsibilities of citizenship. Therefore, we must challenge the misplaced trust of the nation in economic and military might—a proud trust that promotes a national pathology of war and violence which victimizes our neighbors at home and abroad. We must resist the temptation to make the nation and its institutions objects of near-religious loyalty.

We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.

We proclaim no new gospel, but the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, frees people from sin so that they might praise God through works of righteousness.

By this declaration, we endorse no political ideology or party, but call our nation's leaders and people to that righteousness which exalts a nation.

We make this declaration in the Biblical hope that Christ is coming to consummate the Kingdom and we accept his claim on our total discipleship until he comes.

—Nov. 25, 1973, Chicago