

EDITORIAL: Wanted: More compelling Christians

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How—and with whom—should Christians cooperate?

This issue surfaced again in the past few days, when [some fundamentalist Christians demanded](#) California pastor Rick Warren remove [Sen. Barack Obama \(D.-Ill.\)](#) from the program of his global AIDS summit because Obama does not oppose abortion.

Warren's ministry innovation spans almost three decades, since he started Saddleback Church in his California apartment in the late 1970s. The church engages about 20,000 worshippers each week. It has started scores of congregations, and his training conferences have helped thousands of pastors. [Purpose Driven Ministries](#)—based on his books *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*—has impacted millions of people. The AIDS summit is a key ingredient in Warren's latest initiative, the P.E.A.C.E. plan, which ministers to the people Jesus called "the least of these." P.E.A.C.E. plans to plant churches, equip servant leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick and educate the next generation.



The AIDS summit took aim at two of the P.E.A.C.E. initiatives, assisting the poor and caring for the sick. The [P.E.A.C.E. website](#) reports more than 40 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS. [Compassion International](#) notes more than 25 million people have died of AIDS, nine out of 10 children with AIDS live in Africa, and 25 million children will lose both parents to AIDS in the next four years. Warren's efforts embody the gospel. One can only wonder what might happen if all those pastors who looked to Warren to help build up their congregations would follow his lead in P.E.A.C.E. Our planet would be a vastly better place.

A brilliant marketer and inspired networker, Warren recruited renowned religious leaders to participate in the AIDS summit. They included Richard Stearns, president of World Vision; Franklin Graham, founder of Samaritan's Purse; Emmanuel Kolini, archbishop of the Anglican Church of Rwanda; and Wess Stafford, president of Compassion International. He also tapped leaders from other fields, including rock singer Bono, Bill and Melinda Gates, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) and Obama.

Still, the conservative activists criticized Warren and Obama because the Illinois senator is pro-choice. Interestingly, they overlooked flaws in other participants. Bono's conscience-driven music positively stirs millions of listeners, but he has used the F-word on television. Bill Gates is an agnostic who once responded to a question about God's existence by saying: "I don't have any evidence of that. ... Religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning." So, Obama, a Christian

brother who testifies to the role Christ plays in his life and supports his words with deeds of compassion and mercy, should be ineligible to help eradicate AIDS because of his views on abortion? Go figure.

This incident parallels the decision of Florida pastor Joel Hunter to resign as president-elect of the Christian Coalition because he could not convince other leaders of the staunchly pro-life organization to broaden its focus to include such issues as poverty and the environment. And just when you hoped evangelicals were poised to provide positive leadership for our country.

Don't get lost in the woods: This is not an abortion endorsement. I stand with the Baptist General Convention of Texas' repeated denunciations of abortion except for cases of rape, incest and when the mother's life is in danger. I concur with the BGCT's condemnation of the heinous partial-birth abortion, as well as its call for parental consent before a minor can receive an abortion. Abortion is a blight on our society, and we should seek to eliminate it—particularly, as Obama has supported—by channeling our efforts to eliminate its causes through myriad means, including reducing poverty, promoting abstinence and improving the adoption process.

The activists' action is appalling, not because of their view of abortion, but because of their view of Christian cooperation. We should not be required to agree on every issue or pass a litmus test in order to work together to achieve a common good or eradicate a pandemic evil.

Where are the Christians whose faith is strong and resilient enough to labor alongside others who may be very much unlike them but who share a common concern? We need more Christians who possess generous spirits, thick skins, soft hearts, keen minds and entrepreneurial spirits. Christians who don't worry about being accused of associating with the wrong crowd as long as they're working on the right causes. We need them to help eradicate AIDS and eliminate abortions. We need them to mediate peaceful

relationships between adversarial enemies. We need them to live winsome, reconciling lives in their communities.

They will do more to win the world to Christ and overcome the world's evils than all the anti-oriented Christians will accomplish in 490 lifetimes.

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