

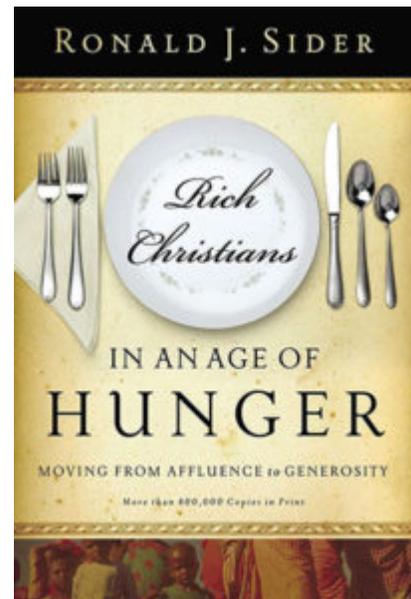
Evangelical activist and author Ron Sider dies at age 82

August 1, 2022

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Ron Sider, an author, seminary professor and evangelical social justice activist, died July 27. He was 82.

His son Ted announced his father's death in a post on Ron Sider's Substack newsletter website, saying he "died suddenly ... of a cardiac arrest."

Sider, a longtime professor at Palmer Theological Seminary, is best known for his 1977 book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, and for founding Christians for Social Action, which seeks to rally Christians to put their faith to work in support of the common good.



"The big lie of contemporary advertising is that we get love and joy and fulfillment through things," said Sider in 2004 as he was completing his fifth edition of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. "Every religion in the world knows and says we get joy and fulfillment through right relationships with God and neighbor."

Christians for Social Action was inspired by "The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern," a 1973 document that "specifically called for a rejection of racism, economic materialism, economic inequality,

militarism, and sexism,” according to a history posted on the organization’s website. Originally founded as Evangelicals for Social Action, the group changed its name in September 2020 to Christians for Social Action.

The group’s current executive director, Nikki Toyama-Szeto, mourned Sider’s passing in a statement, calling him a “gentle, humble man who lived both simply but also prophetically.”

“I’m deeply grateful for him,” Toyama-Szeto said via email. “He was a man of profound insight and deep conviction. But through it all, I deeply appreciated his humble posture—he also asked questions, he was always seeking to understand and learn more, and he never took himself too seriously.”

A native of Fort Erie, Ontario, Sider was raised among Anabaptists in the Brethren in Christ Church. After earning a doctorate in history at Yale, he began teaching at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, then moved in 1977 to Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, which later was renamed Palmer Theological Seminary.

“Over the years, Ron has challenged the followers of Jesus to embrace and live out the twin biblical mandates of evangelism and social action in his teaching, writing, and speaking,” according to his seminary biography. “His effective ministry has borne fruit in the seminary classroom, the local and global church, and further afield in the public sphere, both in the United States and abroad.”

‘Tireless proponent of peace and justice’

Adam Russell Taylor, president of Sojourners, called Sider “a prolific author and tireless proponent of peace and justice.”

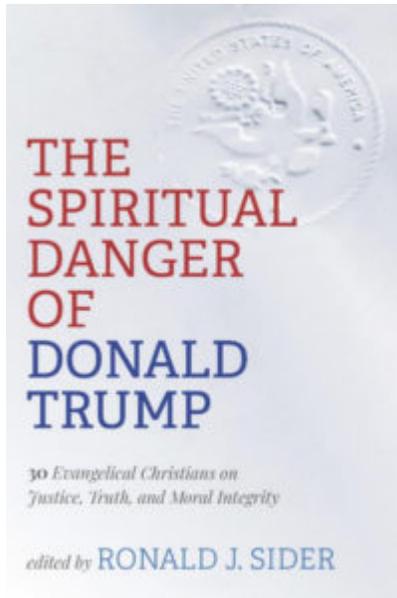
“His book *Rich Christians In An Age of Hunger* had a profound impact on me and so many others,” Taylor posted on Twitter. “May he rest in peace and love.”

Author and Christian activist Shane Claiborne said Sider “has been a dear friend for so many years... such a faithful voice for Jesus and justice. He will be missed,” in a [Twitter post](#).

Sider, who previously had health issues, described to Religion News Service in a November 2021 interview how he had a brush with death early that year.

“I almost died,” he said, recalling how he was leaving a hospital after bladder cancer surgery when he suffered “a massive blood clot” that affected his heart and lungs. He said his wife, who was allowed to enter the room with doctors when he was rushed back into the facility, described the situation to him.

“She started singing and praying and then she said, ‘Ron come back. We need you’ and I blinked an eyelash. She said, ‘Ron, if you hear me, blink your eyes and I did,’” recalled Sider, who said a friend joked that the medical crisis occurred on the day before the Jan. 6 insurrection, preventing him from having to immediately watch footage of it. “So I’m alive and the cancer is gone, and I’m very grateful.”



In 2020, Sider edited [*The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity*](#). The book compiled theological critiques of then-President Trump, lamenting, among other things, his personal behavior and approach to climate change.

“We’re all saying that if you start with a biblical set of norms, then there are huge problems with both the character and the policies of Donald Trump,” Sider told RNS at the time. “I hope a significant number of white evangelicals will, in fact, take that seriously in this election year.”

Sider often included his name and his presence with groups known for their anti-abortion stance but also took an expansive view of what “pro-life” meant.

“We continue to be very concerned with abortion and we’re opposed to abortion,” said Sider, then president emeritus of Evangelicals for Social Action, in an RNS interview after speaking to an evangelical conference that preceded the 2016 March for Life. “We want to reduce it, but it also relates to death by starvation and smoking and racism.”

Among other causes he espoused was work to address climate change. Amid an evangelical divide on the issue, Sider was one of the dozens of signatories of a 2006 document titled “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

He said he respected some who chose to oppose activism on global

warming but was saddened by their stance.

“Frankly,” he told RNS at the time, “they’re going to look really silly in another 10 years.”