Renewing Evangelical Engagement on Climate Change: The Birth and Growth of “Young Evangelicals for Climate Action”

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Framing Evangelicals and Climate Change

The complicated relationship between Christians and anthropogenic climate change—particularly among self-identified evangelicals in the United States—is a hot topic in both academic and popular circles.¹ Consistently, American evangelicals have polled as the group most skeptical of the existence of human-caused climate change and least likely to support climate action and policies.² However, the full picture is more nuanced than can be captured in a news headline or polling survey. Evangelical Christianity is a diverse movement that is also found at the forefront of environmental and climate science and action.³

In light of changing demographics in America and the church, the purpose of this communication is to highlight a growing movement of younger evangelical Christians who are working to awaken the American church to its critical role in overcoming the climate crisis. We offer this unique contribution, having each served as the national organizer and spokesperson for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (YECA, pronounced Y, E, C, A). Since our founding, more than 10,000 self-identified young evangelicals have taken at least one action with us toward advocating for local and national climate solutions. We hope this work will encourage and inspire more faithful action by others.

The Context: The Evangelical Climate Initiative

In 2006, over eighty senior evangelical leaders—led by Jim Ball of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and including Rick Warren, Joel Hunter, and the presidents of numerous Christian colleges, denominations, and major ministries—came together to release the groundbreaking Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), marking the first time that climate change was publicly identified as a major evangelical concern.⁴ Growing to over three hundred influential signatories, their joint statement affirmed that human-induced climate change is real, its impacts are significant—especially on the poor—and that Christian moral and biblical convictions demand that the church respond. The ECI generated widespread media coverage and positive momentum, but also stirred up considerable backlash from US-based climate skeptics both within and beyond the Christian community.⁵
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