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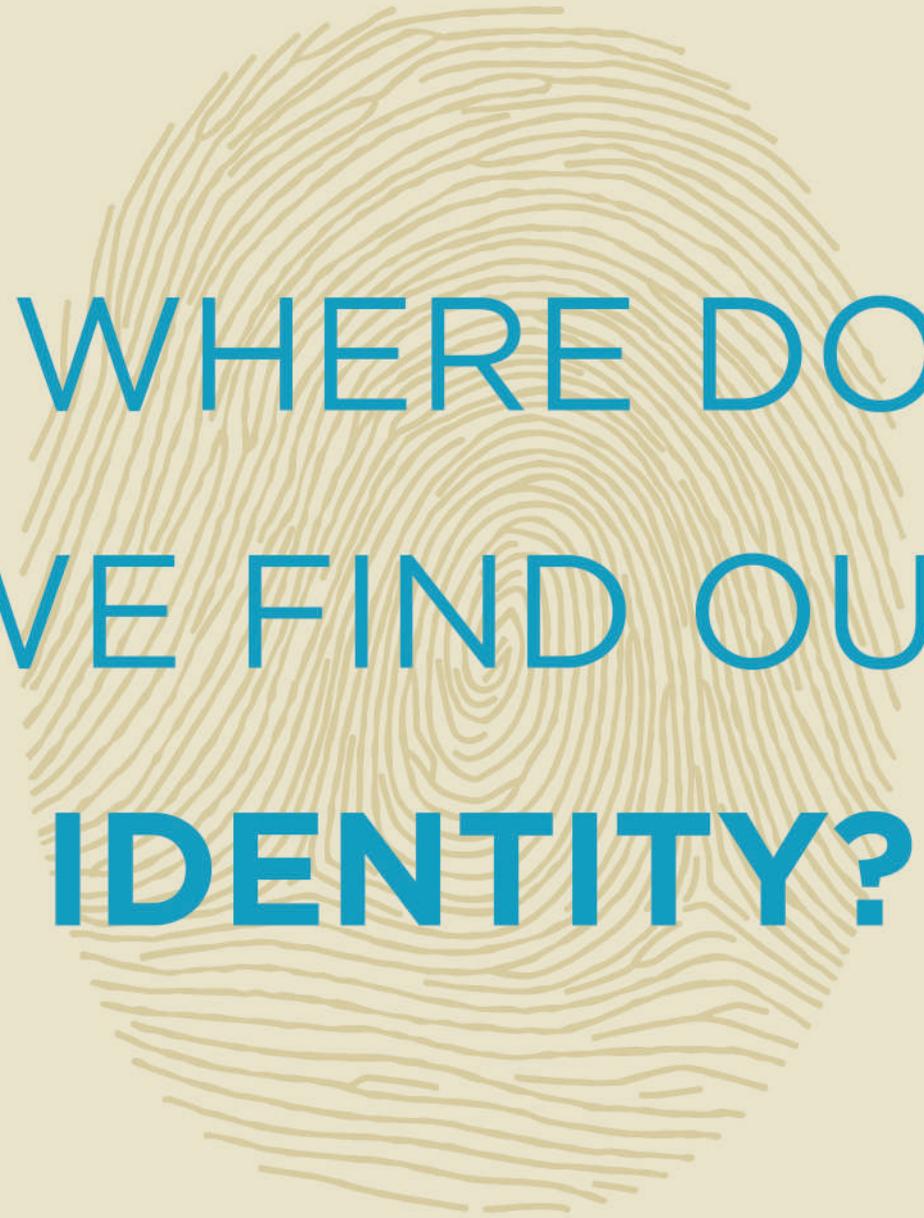
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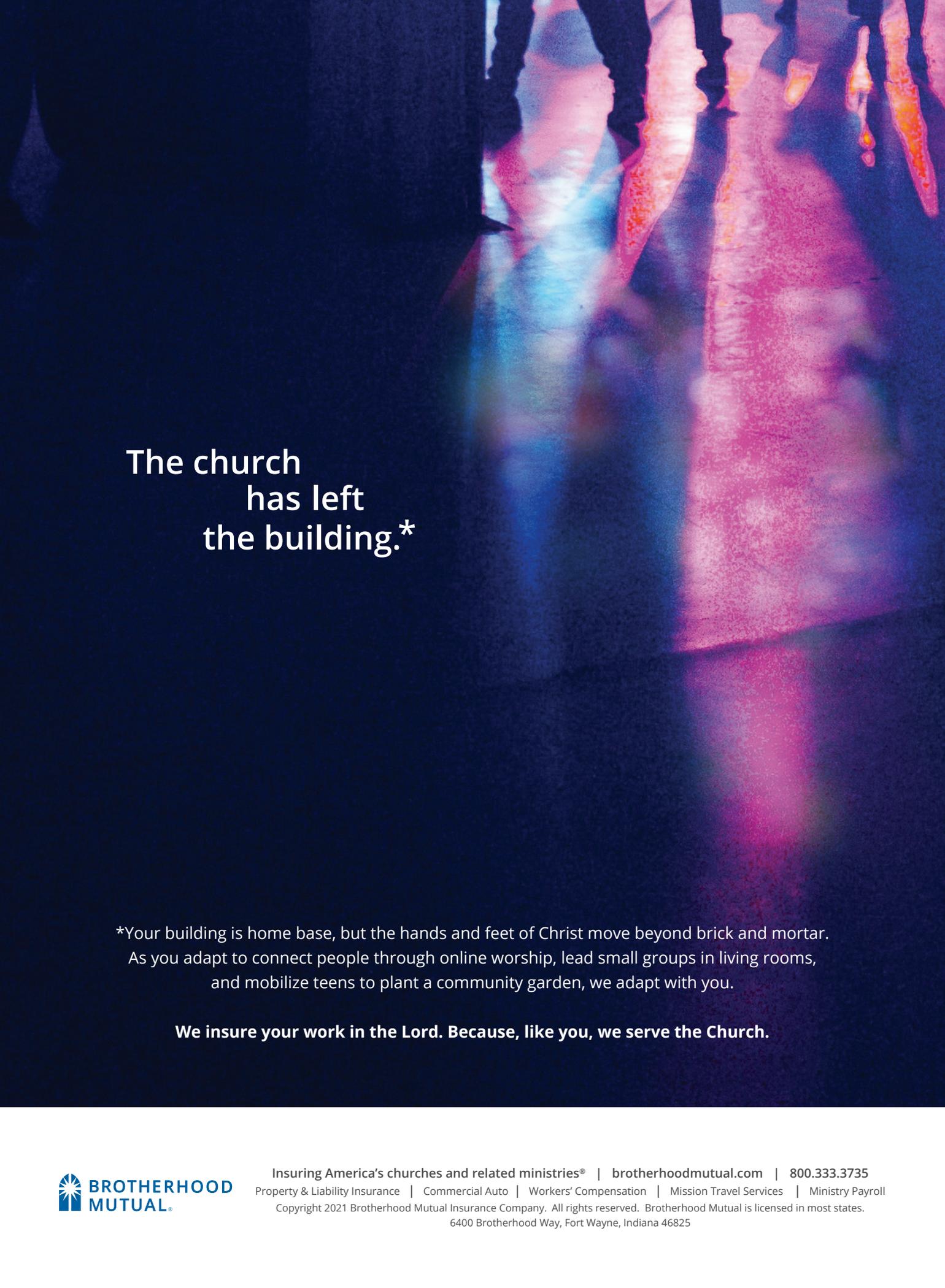
Evangelicals

Magazine | Winter 2021/22 | Vol.7, No. 3



WHERE DO
WE FIND OUR
IDENTITY?

ED STETZER & ANDREW MACDONALD



The church
has left
the building.*

*Your building is home base, but the hands and feet of Christ move beyond brick and mortar. As you adapt to connect people through online worship, lead small groups in living rooms, and mobilize teens to plant a community garden, we adapt with you.

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YOUTH
THEOLOGY
NETWORK

Awaken What's Possible for The High School Students in Your Life

As a mentor to high school students who are considering ministry, do you:

- Know your work is meaningful, but also feel alone or overwhelmed?
- Want to find a program that can help equip them for the future?
- Plan to build or grow your own vocational ministry program?
- Wonder who will lead the church in years to come?
- Need resources to help you or students take the next faithful step?

The Youth Theology Network is your answer for helping high school students explore the question, “Is God calling me to ministry?”

Like you, YTN is dedicated to seeing students live out their purpose, passion and calling.

youththeologynetwork.org

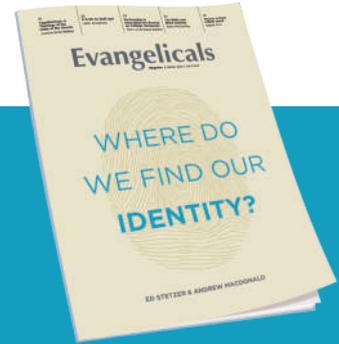


“One of the main changes I noticed was that I was more confident about my future and about my identity. I didn’t have everything in my life figured out, but I had the confidence that God would be helping me and guiding me.”

Rebeca Dominguez

Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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Your NAE

For more resources and opportunities, visit [NAE.org](https://www.nae.org) anytime, anywhere — on your phone, tablet or computer.

PODCAST

Today's Conversation provides opportunities for you to hear from leading thinkers, theologians, activists, culture-makers and more.

EVENTS

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Evangelicals magazine comes to you as one of many NAE resources to help leaders and their communities navigate complexity with biblical clarity. NAE member institutions can receive bulk subscriptions for their ministries at no charge. More at [NAE.org/membership](https://www.nae.org/membership). To receive a personal subscription, we invite you to partner with us at [NAE.org/give](https://www.nae.org/give).

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With Support From **Brotherhood Mutual**



In the 1950s, one's identity was closely tied to religion. Parents would be more concerned if their child wanted to marry someone of a different faith than a different political party. Today the opposite is true. Political affiliation has become much more tightly connected to one's identity. There are also surveys that show that people of different religions, like Muslims and Jews, are increasingly identifying as “evangelical” — possibly because they interpret the term to mean a devout believer or a member of a particular political movement.

As Christians, our primary identity should be who we are in Christ. Sadly, we don't always see this on display in members of our churches. What does it mean to root our identity in Christ? If our identity in Christ profoundly shaped us, how would that impact the unity in our churches and the greater Body of Christ?

In this *Evangelicals* magazine edition, we discuss questions and discover answers about our Christian identity and unity in the Body of Christ. They are questions that the Church must grapple with in order to present a clear and compelling witness to the world.

In the cover article, Ed Stetzer and Andrew MacDonald discuss how culture wars have skewed evangelical identity and hindered unity. We are also reminded by Joanne Solis-Walker that unity (or togetherness) is oneness, not sameness (Page

18). Diversity in the Body of Christ is to be embraced as we hold tightly to the things that unite us, such as our love for God and our loyalty to the Bible.

Still there may be times when division is necessary. Leith Anderson writes about healthy division and harmful division, and indicates that we can foster unity even when we operate in different spaces with different callings (Page 20). One such example is how InterVarsity and Cru have chosen collaboration in ministry over competition (Page 23).

Our identity in Christ should drive the way we engage with other believers and with the world. Jesus prayed that all of his followers would be one “just as you [Father] are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). **E**

America's Peers Are Not in Europe

“ U.S. history, geography, and demography have little in common with the smaller, older, more homogeneous nations of Europe. European-inspired policies may be worth trying, but we generally have different policies and institutions because we have different experiences, resources and expectations.

That doesn't mean that the U.S. is peerless. In an intriguing tweet, political scientist Paul Musgrave observed that many of our 'exceptional' features seem pretty normal if you look closer to home. While it's not much like European nation-states, the U.S. has plenty of similarities to other post-colonial, pluralistic societies in North and South America.”

Samuel Goldman, national correspondent, in The Week



“Likes” and “Shares”

“ Incentives of social media platforms like Twitter really do change how people post. Users who received more 'likes' and 'retweets' when they expressed outrage in a tweet were more likely to express outrage in later posts. To back up these findings, the researchers conducted controlled behavioral experiments to demonstrate that being rewarded for expressing outrage caused users to increase their expression of outrage over time. The results also suggest a troubling link to current debates on social media's role in political polarization.”

Bill Hathaway, writer for the Yale Daily News, about a new Yale study

A New Bible Version for Indigenous People

“ Even though it's still English, it feels like it's made by us for us. This is a version of Scripture that is for Native people, and it's indigenized. You're not having to kind of sort through the ways other cultures talk about faith and spirituality.”

Megan Murdock Krischke, national director of Native InterVarsity, who is Wyandotte and Cherokee, in Christianity Today





An Afghan Refugee Story

“ When we arrived in America in 2020, we were greeted at the airport by volunteers from World Relief Memphis, an advocacy group for immigrants and refugees in the United States. We were lucky that we already knew English, so we didn't have as much culture shock as some immigrants, but we came with nothing. World Relief Memphis helped us find jobs and a place to live. Today, I work with my county's emergency rental and utility assistance program in Memphis, and I am hoping to go to graduate school.

My husband and I were the fortunate ones. We were among the more than 15,000 Afghans who worked with the United States and whose lives have been saved by this program. But there are 18,000 others who are still waiting for visas.”

Seeta Habib, an Afghan refugee, in USA Today

Good to see @NAEvangelicals @WorldRelief mentioned in this @SpokesmanReview piece today, on welcoming Afghan refugees to Spokane.
Aaron Griffith @AaronLGriffith



How can we, as Christians, feasibly help a hurting and fallen world? Listen as World Relief President and CEO Myal Greene speaks with @NAEvangelicals President Walter Kim about how the church can play an active role: <https://bit.ly/2XqHCYI>.
World Relief @WorldRelief



It was great to connect with Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, on their podcast. Take a listen if you get a chance. NAE.org/villodaspodcast
Rich Villodas @richvillodas



preacher

historian

mentor

Jennifer Powell McNutt, Ph.D.

American Society of Church History Awardee

Royal Historical Society Fellow

Author of *Calvin Meets Voltaire*

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Be mentored by Dr. McNutt to faithfully steward your Christian heritage. Go beyond the classroom and conduct original research in archives dedicated to C.S. Lewis, evangelism, or modern global Christianity. Participate in the life of more than 10 academic centers producing original research in service of the church, the academy, and the world. Enroll in the **School of Biblical and Theological Studies** and become more than a graduate student. Become servant scholar.

EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

JANUARY 31 & FEBRUARY 7, 2022

Christian Student Leadership Conference

Virtual

National Association of Evangelicals
NAE.org/csclc

The Christian Student Leadership Conference equips and trains college students to be part of the solution. Students learn to explore public policy issues, careers in government or public service, what it means to be engaged citizens and how to bring the light of Christ into the public square.



FEBRUARY 9-11, 2022

EFCA Theology Conference

Chicago, IL

Evangelical Free Church of America
EFCA.org

The EFCA Theology Conference exists to intentionally encourage and equip EFCA pastors and leaders in their personal lives and in their ministries in the local church through biblical and theological education for the sake of the gospel.



FEBRUARY 16-18, 2022

ABHE 75th Annual Gathering

Orlando, FL

Association for Biblical Higher Education
ABHE.org/annual-meeting

This annual meeting serves as the rallying point for 200 institutions of biblical higher education in North America. Leaders in biblical higher education gather to confer and sharpen their gifts and abilities.

APRIL 26-28, 2022

The Outcomes Conference

Louisville, KY

Christian Leadership Alliance
OutcomesConference.org

The Outcomes Conference is the premier leadership training event for those who are called to the faithful stewardship of Christ-centered nonprofits, churches, educational institutions and businesses.

FEBRUARY 3-4, 2022

Take Care: What We Are Learning

Nampa, ID

Northwest Nazarene University
NNU.edu/WesleyConf

The global pandemic reached deeply into our lives, including the ways pastors and leaders have historically done ministry. This conference is about how to faithfully offer care in today's context.

APRIL 10-12, 2022

EPA Christian Media Convention

Colorado Springs, CO

Evangelical Press Association
EPAconvention.com

The annual Evangelical Press Association convention is a source of creative innovations and practical skills for Christian communicators. From writers to designers, editors to publishers, and seasoned veterans to emerging talents, the EPA convention provides an opportunity to grow and become something greater.

OCTOBER 4-5, 2022

Flourish

National Association of Evangelicals
NAE.org/flourish

Flourish, a new conference of the NAE, will offer pastors and leaders a space to have hard conversations on the toughest issues facing the Church today. At Flourish, they will be equipped to foster thriving communities and navigate complexity with biblical clarity.



FEBRUARY 7-14, 2022

National Marriage Week

Marriage is Worth It!

NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org

Join with others across the country to organize a marriage event or online programming during the week leading up to Valentine's Day. Focus on practical ways to strengthen marriages in your church and community.

✓ A Deciding Case for Abortion

Since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973, the Supreme Court has held that the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits restrictions on abortion prior to viability outside the womb, currently estimated at 23–24 weeks gestation. On this basis, when Mississippi adopted a law restricting most abortions after 15 weeks, the federal district court and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals enjoined the state from enforcing the law. In May, the Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal in the case, focusing on the question of whether all pre-viability prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional. Oral arguments were held on December 1 and a decision is expected May or June 2022.

The NAE joined an amicus brief in the case, in which we argue that the Constitution does not create a right to an abortion of an unborn child before viability or at any other stage of pregnancy. On the contrary, abortion

restrictions were common throughout American history until 1973. The Supreme Court's choice of viability as the point at which restrictions on abortion are permitted is arbitrary and ultimately unworkable. Accordingly, we urge that the *Roe v. Wade* decision be overturned, allowing decisions on abortion policy to be returned to the citizens and to the state legislatures they elect.



✓ Responding to the Refugee Crisis

In 2021, heartbreaking images from Afghanistan and the U.S. border highlighted deep vulnerability and need for refugees everywhere. Christians, often at the forefront in responding to crises with love and compassion, desired to step in to help the vulnerable.

As individuals sought practical and loving ways to respond, the NAE hosted a webinar to help expand individuals' understanding of the situation and possible solutions. The webinar included refugee resettlement, policy and security experts as well as a testimonial from an Afghan refugee and the church who welcomed her. Myal Greene, president of World Relief, also sat down with Walter Kim in the NAE podcast to encourage Christians about the opportunities and responsibilities we have to meet refugees with welcome.

Evangelical leaders with the Evangelical Immigration Table, including NAE President Walter Kim, urged

the administration to protect those seeking refuge, especially foreigners who served the U.S. military. The letter makes it clear that churches are ready to welcome persecuted individuals and families.



Watch the Afghan Refugee Crisis webinar at [NAE.org/afghanrefugeewebinar](https://nae.org/afghanrefugeewebinar)

Listen to Today's Conversation podcast with World Relief President Myal Greene at [NAE.org/greenepodcast](https://nae.org/greenepodcast)

✓ NAE to Host New Event for Church Leaders

Flourish, a new conference of the NAE, will offer Christian pastors and leaders a space to have hard conversations on the toughest issues facing the Church today. At Flourish, they will be equipped to foster thriving communities and navigate complexity with biblical clarity.

Flourish will include:

- Dynamic presentations representing rich, diverse and thoughtful evangelical perspectives on difficult issues;
- Guided table discussions to reflect and further enhance one's understanding of challenges and opportunities;

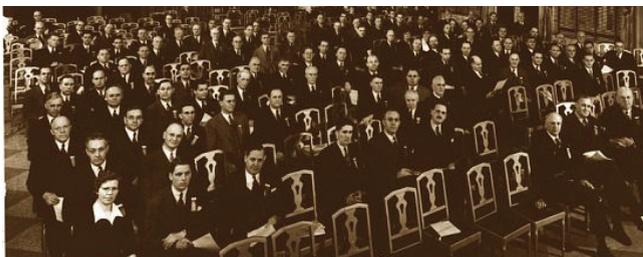
- Mentoring by a seasoned evangelical leader who will facilitate table discussions; and
- Transformative resources and connections on each topic.



✓ Celebrating NAE's 80th Anniversary

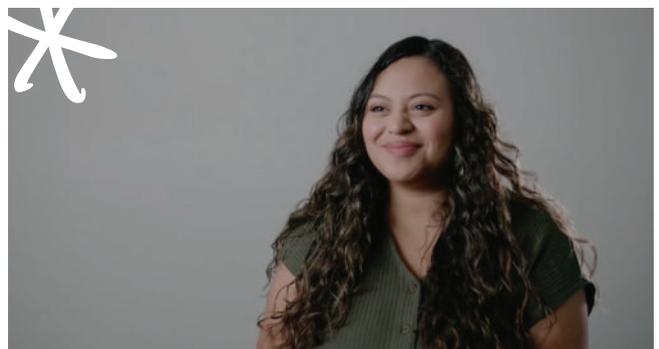
In the spring of 1942, the world was embroiled in war. Yet, it wasn't only military conflict that raged. Theological lines were also being drawn, particularly in the United States between mainline Protestantism and fundamentalism. In the midst of this, dissatisfaction with both of these worldviews was growing in certain circles. There had to be a better way for the gospel to be represented.

On April 7, 1942, 150 Christian leaders gathered in St. Louis to establish the National Association of Evangelicals as a "middle way" and as a uniting force for Christians who believed in the Bible's authority, the lordship of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church. April 7, 2022 marks 80 years of the NAE's impact for the gospel. As we celebrate this important milestone and building on the rich heritage of the past, we eagerly follow God's leading into the future as an *Influence for Good*.



✓ I Am Your Immigrant Neighbor

"I Am Your Immigrant Neighbor" is a new video series seeking to draw evangelical leaders and individuals toward the biblical call to aid immigrants and refugees. The videos reframe the immigration conversation with empathy and compassion. Becky Liu born in mainland, China; Sharon Ardon Morales, a first generation American whose parents are from Guatemala; Ojulu Ochalla from Ethiopia; Christian Ngong from Cameroon; Khiengchai Fulton from Laos; and Jacques Ilunga from Democratic Republic of Congo share their stories of how they came to the United States and the importance of showing God's love to every neighbor.



Watch the "I Am Your Immigrant Neighbor" videos at [NAE.org/immigrantneighbor](https://nae.org/immigrantneighbor).



Uniting for Global Impact

World Evangelical Alliance Mobilizes Churches of Diverse Backgrounds

Six hundred million Christians across the world belong to churches that network through national evangelical alliances (like the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States) in 143 countries on all continents and growing. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) brings together these groups and its work is rooted in local churches.

The churches come from the whole spectrum of the Protestant faith from Reformation times (e.g., Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed and Anabaptists), later centuries (e.g., Baptists, Methodists and The Salvation Army) and newer churches after 1900 (e.g., Pentecostals, Charismatics and Independents). Considering the fact that each national alliance has its own diverse history, while all have an equal vote in the WEA General Assembly, and considering the fact that evangelicals come from hundreds of ethnic groups and speak around 1,000 languages, the WEA is as colorful as ever before.

The World Evangelical Alliance unites evangelicals around the world for prayer, evangelism, mission, religious freedom, human rights advocacy and all areas of social justice and transformation, such as helping refugees, fight human trafficking or child labor, and grassroot engagement for peace and reconciliation. The WEA has always bridged the whole range from prayer and evangelism to all elements of fighting structural evil and cooperation with many for a just and peaceful society and world.

One hundred and seventy-five years ago, some 800 evangelical leaders from 11 countries representing 52 Christian denominations resolved to establish the WEA. They

described it as “a new thing in Church history — a definite organization for the expression of unity amongst Christian individuals belonging to different churches.” Building on the momentum of the Great Awakenings and with a desire to respond to some of the grave social issues in society, they came together from all backgrounds of evangelicalism at that time.

Since then, the WEA has grown to a truly global organization with national evangelical alliances established in 143 countries on all continents. The WEA speaks as a representative voice on behalf of evangelicals at the United Nations and to governments and media, contributing an evangelical perspective on issues that are relevant to the Church globally. In our work, we are privileged to see the global body of believers partnering together in diversity for the kingdom of God.

The central role of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, the Bible as our supreme constitution and the goal to transform the world by preaching and practicing the “evangel,” the gospel, has always stayed in the center of the global network. We continue to put every effort into fulfilling Jesus’ prayer “that all of them may be one, so that the world may believe” (John 17:21–23). **E**

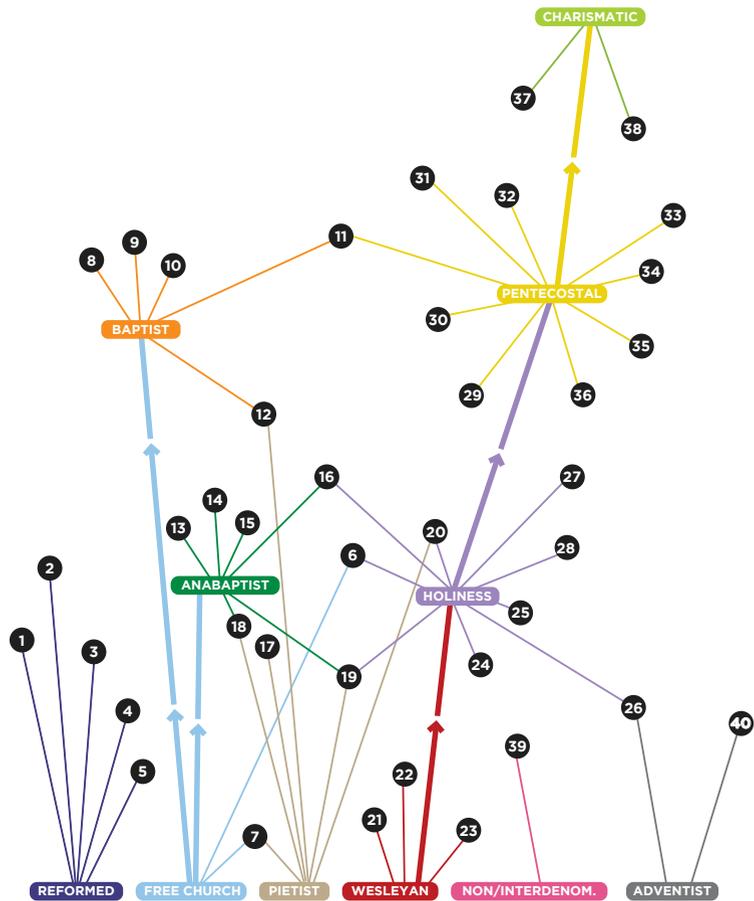
NAE Denominations & Networks

THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

- REFORMED ●
- FREE CHURCH ●
- BAPTIST ●
- ANABAPTIST ●
- PIETIST ●
- WESLEYAN ●
- HOLINESS ●
- PENTECOSTAL ●
- CHARISMATIC ●
- NON/INTERDENOMINATIONAL ●
- ADVENTIST ●

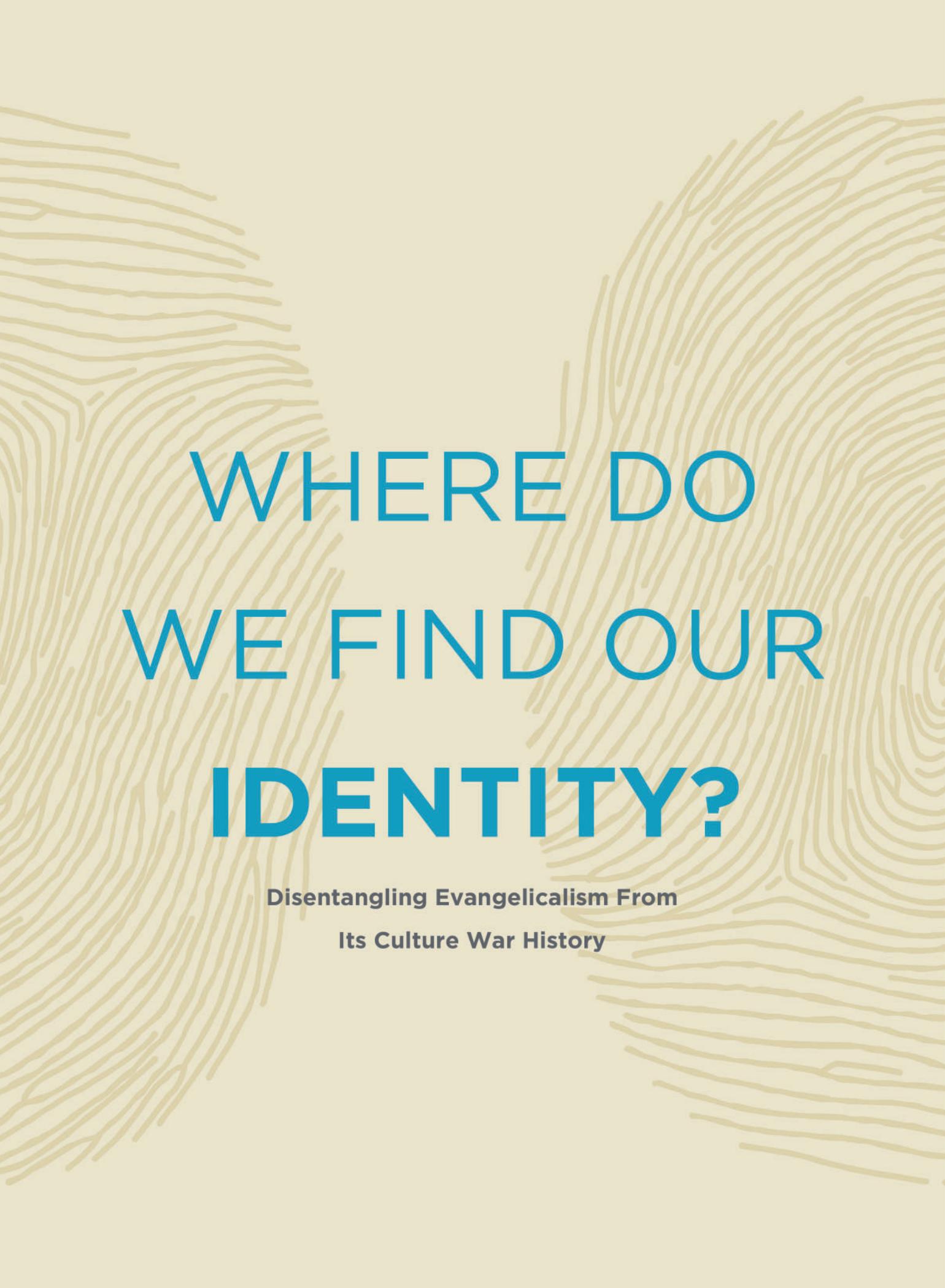
DENOMINATIONS & NETWORKS

1. Christian Reformed Church in North America ●
2. Presbyterian Church in America ●
3. ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians ●
4. Evangelical Presbyterian Church ●
5. Conservative Congregational Christian Conference ●
6. Evangelical Friends Church ●
7. Evangelical Free Church ●
8. The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of the USA & Canada ●
9. Transformation Ministries ●
10. North American Baptist Conference ●
11. Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church Inc. ●
12. Converge Worldwide ●
13. Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches ●
14. US Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches ●
15. Fellowship of Evangelical Churches ●
16. Missionary Church, Inc. ●
17. United Brethren in Christ ●
18. The Brethren Church ●
19. Brethren in Christ Church ●
20. Evangelical Congregational Church ●
21. Primitive Methodist Church USA ●
22. Free Methodist Church - USA ●
23. The Wesleyan Church ●
24. The Evangelical Church of North America ●
25. Church of the Nazarene ●
26. Grace Communion International ●
27. The Salvation Army ●
28. Church of God (Anderson, IN) ●
29. Church of God (Cleveland, TN) ●
30. Open Bible Churches ●
31. International Pentecostal Church of Christ ●
32. Foursquare Church ●
33. International Pentecostal Holiness Church ●
34. Assemblies of God ●
35. Elim Fellowship ●
36. Royalhouse Chapel International ●
37. Every Nation Church and Ministries ●
38. The Vineyard, USA ●
39. The Alliance ●
40. Advent General Christian Conference ●



Much like the WEA on a global scale, the NAE represents a vibrant and diverse group of Christ followers across the United States. Our community brings together Reformed, Holiness, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and other traditions, all united in the midst of diversity by our core theological convictions.

In addition to thousands of churches, schools and nonprofits, the NAE brings together 40 evangelical denominations and networks that seek to collaborate and connect for God's glory. This NAE Denominational & Network Diagram demonstrates how our denominations are connected by tradition and to one another.



WHERE DO WE FIND OUR IDENTITY?

Disentangling Evangelicalism From
Its Culture War History



Ed Stetzer is executive director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center and author of *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst*.



Andrew MacDonald is associate director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center Research Institute and a doctoral candidate in historical theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In a recent New York Times article, Molly Worthen asks the question we've heard from countless church leaders: "Is there a way to dial down the political hatred?" We seem to have reached a place where the overwhelming majority are burned out by the endless and rapid cycle of outrage, yet completely unsure both of how we arrived at this point and how to dig our way out.

In her analysis, Worthen begins to shed light on the first of these questions by tracing how political identity progressively supplanted a religious one. Thus, old religious dogmas were not dismantled but merely replaced with a political tribalism complete with its own gatekeepers, scapegoats and prophets. While many continue to embrace the culture war, a growing majority are simply exhausted.

Church leaders must recognize that this exhaustion cannot be addressed by simply opting out of cultural engagement. Condemning the culture wars and retreating ignores the challenging reality most Christians face in a rapidly secularizing country. Instead, leaders need to offer a holistic approach to culture that simultaneously addresses concerns of hostility, empowers creativity, and refocuses mission on love and our identity as Christ followers.

In this respect, a good starting point is to conceive of cultural engagement as involving three distinct roles. Just as with a three-legged stool, all three legs are critical to its balance, and the absence or corruption of any one destroys its integrity. The first role is *culture creator* — those innovative leaders who engage the world by creating a compelling vision of what the world might look like if Christ reigns as king. The second role is *cultural missionary* — those contextualizing



leaders who navigate the complexity of the Christian mission by not only interpreting the world for the Church, but interpreting the Church for the world. The final role, and perhaps the most popular and misunderstood, is the *culture defender*. Through articulating a clear and compelling vision of Christian orthodoxy, the role of the defender combats the forces of syncretism and theological drift. This extends beyond debate within the Church as defenders serve a critical function in advocating for the rights of Christians to maintain beliefs that may become, and in fact are now becoming, culturally untenable.

Our current exhaustion arises when this role of cultural defender becomes not only dominant but exclusive. As defense of the gospel and the Church has transitioned to a war for the gospel and the Church over culture, we not only lose sight of the other two elements of cultural engagement, we risk losing sight of the entire purpose in engaging: God's mission to show and share the love of Jesus.

Cultural Divide Among Christians

The conflict that can arise when culture defenders dominate our mission of cultural engagement is illustrated in a rarely remembered, 1995 exchange between church historian John Woodbridge and Focus on the Family

President James Dobson. In Christianity Today's "Culture War Casualties," Woodbridge cautioned against the growth of warfare rhetoric among evangelicals. In his perspective, this rhetoric fed polarization by diminishing nuance and empowering extremist voices. While recognizing culture's increasing hostility to faith, Woodbridge called evangelicals to consider how the culture war was shaping their witness. Although it demanded sacrifice, it was possible to love your cultural enemies and defend the faith.

Singling out Dobson by name, Woodbridge charged that the evangelical leader's frequent reference to a "civil war" of values in popular media was a significant factor in its embrace by the broader movement. Dobson later responded in Christianity Today, arguing warfare language was scriptural, and that Woodbridge and other evangelicals had lost the forest among the trees. "Instead of decrying the evils around us," Dobson lamented, they "conclude the real problem is one of inappropriate language used by alarmed Christians." Frustrated at the perceived apathy of his fellow evangelicals, Dobson asked those "on the sidelines" of the culture war to refrain from making the task of waging it any more difficult.

Woodbridge responded by agreeing that a cultural hostility to orthodox Christianity was an urgent and daunting challenge but maintained that "war talk" was corrosive in the long-term to Christian witness. By defining victory in political terms, warfare rhetoric fostered fear of those outside the Church, the very people the gospel calls us to love. Woodbridge concluded that while this call to war could invigorate Christians in the short run, it eroded the foundations of society by engendering fear of our neighbors.

Generational Evangelical Tensions

While few remember the exchange, it produced waves of letters to the point that CT's editors needed to step in. In their respective positions, Dobson and Woodbridge captured a defining tension within evangelicalism between engagement as war versus mission. For those who felt embattled by modern culture, Dobson captured their anxieties over new cultural moralities and frustrations at a perceived anemic pushback from others in the Church. As they felt mounting pressure to conform to an emerging secular ethic, the lesson they drew was to fight harder and, at times, to turn to politicians who promise to fight for while not necessarily with them.

On the opposite end, Woodbridge embodied those

concerned over the growing obsession with conflict, recognizing the damaging impact it can and has had on our witness to our neighbors. While concerned about the same social pressures, they recognized how culture wars have exacerbated the situation for evangelicals in public. This feeling of being caught between their evangelical family and their mission field inevitably alienated them from both, aggravating exhaustion.

If there are any winners in the evangelical movement, it is its pastors, seminary professors, Sunday school teachers and next-door neighbors — all who are faithfully engaging their communities with little fanfare.

In recent years these two positions have only intensified. Where their shared theology provided the illusion of unity, fundamental differences on engaging culture are proving increasingly difficult to bridge. Often couched in eschatological terms, the primary lens of engagement for culture defenders was conflict against an opposing world. In contrast, culture missionaries located the mission of God as one of renewing the world. As such, our cultural engagement revolved around showing and sharing the love of Jesus to a lost world.

What Identity Are We Defending?

As we look for ways to put the three-legged stool back together, the answer lies in resisting the opposite temptations in a healthy vision of cultural defense. We are firmly within a post-Christian world, and hostility to orthodox Christianity presents real challenges. When church leaders dismiss these concerns, it can push Christians into the arms of those who foster conflict. If an “evangelical” identity is going to be anything more than a political identity, we must contend for a theological identity that takes orthodoxy seriously and presents it in creative ways that emphasize what we are for,

rather than what we are against. We must do so without reducing cultural engagement to its caustic or isolationist tendencies, but to care about — and even defend — orthodoxy and proper culture engagement.

Central to an evangelical theological identity is rethinking what we are defending. For generations, political and culture wars have set the table to the point that even words like “heretic” are ripped from their theological meaning and used as weapons in a political conflict. Within this culture, too many evangelicals have had their orthodoxy questioned simply because they challenged political idols.

Turning to true defense of a gospel identity, our emphasis must be both theological and generational. Whatever success the evangelical church has experienced in past generations lies less in its loudest voices than in its quieter, more obscure leaders. Returning to the example of John Woodbridge, few have defended the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy so successfully. His career proves the Church’s need for leaders who will thoughtfully defend its beliefs against waves of derision and mischaracterization of this world.

Yet just as important has been Woodbridge’s dedication in passing this theological heritage to generations of evangelicals through teaching and writing. Time consuming, humbling and not for the faint of heart, the challenge of defending the gospel in our communities, churches and seminaries often goes unnoticed and underappreciated. Feeding the sheep, it may not look like winning to the outside but seen within a kingdom lens, its value is eternal. Indeed, if there are any winners in the evangelical movement, it is its pastors, seminary professors, Sunday school teachers and next-door neighbors — all who are faithfully engaging their communities with little fanfare.

We feel the exhaustion. We are exhausted by the same debates and tribalism that ensnared past generations. So as church leaders consider what it means to engage a culture that is increasingly hostile, we need a holistic approach that simultaneously defends, creates and contextualizes.

We will need all the legs of the stool not to fall — and the stool is wobbling right now. Our posture will shape our future path, and important conversations are before us. May we wisely engage this moment, so that future generations see an evangelicalism that reflects the character of Christ and the teachings of Scripture in the fullness of the Spirit. **E**



Joanne Solis-Walker is associate professor of practical theology at Northwest Nazarene University.

Together: A Theology of the Unity of the Church

I grew up in a Spanish speaking church where it was common to hear the phrase: *En la unión está la fuerza* (In unity there is strength). For the longest time, I thought this was a Bible verse. Picture my surprise when a caller, asked this question on a live radio show. I was co-hosting and I publicly shared my overly confident response: “Of course, it is a Bible verse!” I searched the Bible to no avail. You can’t imagine the embarrassment.

If I had to trace it back to a particular passage, I would lean on Ecclesiastes 4:9: “*Más valen dos que uno, porque obtienen más fruto de su esfuerzo*” (“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor”). This message was regularly preached at my church to remind us of the mutual blessings and unbreakable strength in the togetherness of unity. Togetherness was our theology of the unity of the Church.

Threats to Unity

Today, our togetherness as the Church has been threatened. We are challenged to build a community of belonging while being apart. Our day-to-day routines are emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausting. Church gatherings

once nurtured relationships and partaking of the sacraments fostered togetherness. Now, we must learn to practice unity when we can no longer come to the same table to receive the body and bread. It is not surprising that we are confused about our *unión*. The lack of deep connectivity quickly infringes upon our ability to engage in critical conversations especially during chaotic times. We are left relationally distanced within a fractured community and perhaps even at odds with each other.

What must we do differently? What if a theology of unity is less about being in the same room or having the same views and more about making space for each other and remaining together, despite our disagreements?



Hear Alex Mandes and Walter Kim talk about diversity in unity at [NAE.org/mandespodcast](https://nae.org/mandespodcast).



Oneness, Not Sameness

1 Corinthians 12:12–27 calls us to be one body with many different parts. It reminds us that togetherness is oneness, not sameness. A theology of the unity of the Church understands that unity does not mean homogeneity. God is diverse, and brings us together from different parts of the world. He knows our political views and cultural values may be different, and still calls us to belong to the Body.

Despite our differences, we adopt a posture of humility and gentleness while pursuing the unity of the Spirit in peace (Ephesians 4).

in disagreement. Despite our differences, we adopt a posture of humility and gentleness while pursuing the unity of the Spirit in peace (Ephesians 4). We must be willing to stand firm on our convictions without judging or treating others with contempt. When togetherness is our goal, even when we disagree, we choose to genuinely care for one another, and we do so for the primary reason that God is love and God’s love is on display through our oneness.

It still isn’t a Bible verse but *en la unión está la fuerza* reminds us we cannot address the political, social, ethical, racial and ecclesial divides apart from each other. *In unity there is strength* because to bridge the odds that work against the Church two are better than one. A theology of the unity of the Church demands the practice of togetherness in ways that bind us to one another not only when we are physically together but especially when we are apart. **E**

We must also recognize that a theology of the unity of the Church is not void of disagreements. It’s about *togetherness*



Is It OK to Split Up?

Is it okay for churches and denominations to split up? “Well,” you say, “it all depends.”

The brand new, post-Pentecost church of Jerusalem was divided between Hebrew Jewish Christians and Hellenic Jewish Christians. The issue was unfair food distribution. The Top Twelve church leaders gathered to address the divide and agreed on an interesting solution: appoint a committee of seven lesser leaders to solve the problem. According to Acts 6, it worked, and the church stuck together, at least for a while.

Twenty years later St. Paul took on divisions in the

church of Corinth. He heard that factions self-identified as followers of Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ. We can't help but chuckle at Group #4 that title-topped the other three by saying they followed Christ, implying that the others were spiritually inferior if not renegade. Paul told them exactly what to do: “All of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” Did it work? Nobody really knows although Paul writes four chapters later (1 Corinthians 5) to





kick a man out of the church.

While the apostle encouraged all Christians to get along with each other he didn't get along with his colleague John Mark: "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company" (Acts 15:39). If two authors of the New Testament — Mark writing the second Gospel and Paul authoring 13 epistles — couldn't get along, what are the chances for the rest of us?

Learning From Yesterday

Some divisions are good. God divided Israel up into a dozen territorial tribes plus Levi. The churches in the New Testament had distinct identities and geography.

Some divisions are bad. Israel fractured into two kingdoms and entered generations of competing tribes, civil wars, foreign captivity and eventual disappearance of most of the tribes. God became so fed up that he initiated a divorce from his chosen nation: "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries" (Jeremiah 3:8).

Solo, unconnected, independent Christians and churches miss out on the shared blessings of belonging to the family of faith.

Skip ahead thousands of years and thousands of miles to America. Many of our roots come from Europe where immigrants left countries with unified state churches and came to North America either rebelling against or reestablishing those traditions. Church structures in Europe were state monopolies; church structures in the United States became entrepreneurial diversities.

Congregationalists were strong in New England, Baptists in Rhode Island, Presbyterians in the Carolinas and Quakers in Pennsylvania, but every type of church was increasingly established everywhere. Most of the "splits" were healthy missionary expansions as pioneers spread across the frontiers. Tumultuous fissures of established denominations divided with the nation over the Civil War. Whatever the reasons from

multiplication to division, the ecclesiastical math added up to the United States having more Christians than any nation in the world or in history. Meanwhile the European state churches have stuck together and declined.

Divisions have come over baptism, communion, governance, alcohol, marriage, music, eschatology, creation, tongues, race, languages, politics, predestination, eternal security, gender roles, Sunday or Saturday worship, missions, money and personality. The list is longer than this but "personalities" probably outnumber them all. Powerful or disgruntled leaders have often led the charge to separation. Strong biblical reasons have been legitimate causes for parting. But obscure Bible verses are often offered to legitimize unwarranted wounds to the Body of Christ.

Looking back to past generations, some of the splits saved the Church and others turned out to be sinful or silly. None of this is a permission slip for splits. It is a recognition of human failures and creativities. The point is that splits can be good or bad. The standard is that divisions should be done right — in ways that honor God and advance the cause and Church of Jesus Christ.

Unity ≠ Organization

When Paul exhorted those fractious Corinthian Christians, he didn't call for Christ followers to be united in organization but "in mind and thought." Usually, it is best to be organized together and united in thinking. Solo, unconnected, independent Christians and churches miss out on the shared blessings of belonging to the family of faith.

Whether there are good and not-so-good reasons to divide the process matters. Most important is not the legal structure but the adherence to biblical standards and behavior. Division done Christianly prepares all parties to fulfill the call of Christ in righteousness, with love and respect that shows the world the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Division done wrong can be so toxic that Jesus is dishonored, and it can take generations to repair.

Christians are disciples of Jesus. Our love for him and loyalty to the Bible are our axis of unity. Different Christians and churches have different priorities that may best be fulfilled separately. Before there is a split, the highest priority should center on the points of agreement in Christ and Scripture. 



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Tom Lin is president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.



Steve Sellers is president of Cru.

Partnership in Innovation for Revival on College Campuses

Since InterVarsity Christian Fellowship was established in 1941 and Cru in 1951, the Christian organizations have independently worked to create movements on college campuses so that everyone can know someone who truly follows Jesus. But there are still more than 50 percent of U.S. campuses without a known gospel-centered organization.

We started wondering: What will it take to see spiritual awakening and revival on every college campus? As Tom frequently says, “The kingdom of God is a team sport, not a competition. We’re better together, not apart.” So, after decades of college ministry work apart, InterVarsity and Cru are working together to see gospel communities on every college campus.

It started with sharing data on a common platform, which led to co-creating and co-leading a project called “EveryCampus.” EveryCampus is a coalition of like-minded organizations working together to spark revival through mobilizing prayer and catalyzing gospel movements across American campuses.

In our work together, we ask ourselves: What would happen if we stopped caring who was bigger or better, or the most well-known? What could we accomplish if we stopped competing and started partnering? What needs to happen so that every corner of every campus hears the gospel?

Our organizations work together to mobilize intercessors, share technology, address legal challenges, and design platforms to give away their best ministry insights and tools to anyone who wants to minister on campus.

“We aren’t assigning, ‘You do that part and we will do this part.’ We are working together throughout the project,” says Dan Allan, partnership leader with Cru. “Sometimes we joke that we talk to each other more than we talk with our spouses. Collaboration requires consistent and ongoing communication. We have Cru staff members on projects led by InterVarsity staff and vice versa. We have a shared vision, shared people and shared finances with EveryCampus.”

The EveryCampus initiative has grown to more than 75 partners with over 100 groups in the process of becoming partners. Collectively we, along with other partners, prayer-walked every college campus in the United States in its first 18 months.

For InterVarsity and Cru, it isn’t about planting territorial flags or advancing any one organization’s name. It’s about advancing the kingdom of God on unreached campuses. As Steve says, “When I interact with Tom and InterVarsity, it is as if I look into a mirror and see my own passion for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. As we lock arms together, I can’t wait to see the day we see a gospel community on every campus in America.” 





The Bible and Black Identity

John’s apocalypse begins with a vision of the risen and reigning Lord that leaves John undone (Revelation 1:1–20). His epistle then transitions to a series of letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2:1–3:22) and an image of praise in heaven (Revelation 4:1–11). Later, John will reveal a vision of the future that includes both judgment and salvation (Revelation 6–8), but there is a problem.

According to John, there was no one in heaven or earth worthy to open the scrolls that contain God’s will for the future (Revelation 5:1–4). John articulates the central question of human history. What is our future and who controls it? What will become of us? No human agent is worthy. The politicians of Jesus’ day and ours, regardless of their pretensions to power, are not in control.

There is only one person sufficient to unfurl human history and bring about God’s purposes, the one who gave himself for our salvation in weakness and now reigns in power.

Revelation 5:5 says, “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.’” Jesus as the risen and reigning king has won for himself the ability to order history. This is relevant to the question of ethnic identity because Jesus’ vision for the climax of human history lauds the importance of ethnicity.

Revelation 7:9–10 looks to the end, and at the end we encounter ethnic diversity:



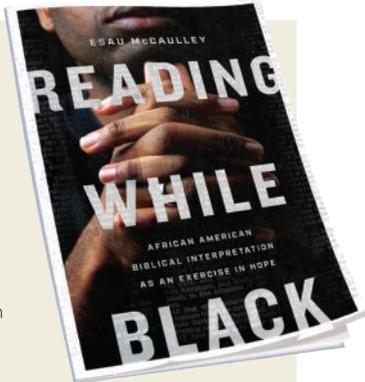
After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

The reference to the multitude calls to mind the promises made to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. It also evokes the promises made to David that his son would gather and bless the nations of the world by his gracious rule. John mentions four aspects of this multitude. It includes people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Each in its own way highlights diversity. These distinct peoples, cultures, and languages are eschatological, everlasting. At the end, we do not find the elimination of difference. Instead the very diversity of cultures is a manifestation of God’s glory.

God’s eschatological vision for the reconciliation of all things in his Son requires my blackness and my neighbor’s Latina identity to endure forever. Colorblindness is sub-biblical and falls short of the glory of God. What is it that unites this diversity? It is not cultural assimilation, but the fact that we worship the Lamb. This means that the gifts that our cultures have are not ends in themselves. Our distinctive cultures represent the means by which we give honor to God. He is honored through the diversity of tongues singing the same song. Therefore inasmuch as I modulate my blackness or neglect my culture, I am placing limits on the gifts that God has given me to offer to his church and kingdom. The vision of the kingdom is incomplete without Black and Brown persons worshipping alongside white persons as part of one kingdom under the rule of one king.

... There are two groups that want to separate us from the Christian story. One group claims that Christianity is fundamentally a white religion. This is simply historically false. The center of early Christianity was in the Middle East and North Africa. But deeper than the historical question is the biblical one. Who owns the Christian story

as it is recorded in the texts that make up the canon? I have contended that Christianity is ultimately a story about God and his purposes. That is good news. God has always intended to gather a diverse group of people to worship him. The energy of the biblical story after the fall finds its footing in the promises made to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. In the stories of Ephraim and Manasseh, we see that this promise was first fulfilled by bringing two African boys into the people of God. We saw the inclusion of Africans again reiterated when a multiethnic group of people left Egypt. These promises to Abraham were expanded into a kingdom vision through the hopes of a Davidic king who would rule and bless the nations. The repeated claim of the New Testament is that Jesus is this king who brings these promises to fulfillment. He gathers the nations under him. We see this vision become flesh throughout the conversion of Africans: Simon and his family as well as the Ethiopian eunuch. Just as at the origin of the Israelites, at the origin of the church we find Black and Brown believers. Finally, we argued that at the end, when we finally meet our savior, we do not come to him as a faceless horde but as transformed believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation. When the Black Christian enters the community of faith, she is not entering a strange land. She is finding her way home. **E**



New Testament scholar Esau McCaulley argues that reading Scripture from the perspective of Black church tradition is invaluable for connecting with a rich faith history and addressing the urgent issues of our times. This excerpt of *Reading While Black* © 2020 by Esau McCaulley is used with permission of InterVarsity Press. Order at IVPress.com.



Church: It Does a Body Good

In the 1980s a very popular campaign for milk used the slogan: “Milk. It does a body good.” The idea was to promote milk as a way to strengthen bones and improve health. While advertisers said this of milk, we can emphatically say “Church. It does a body good.” I mean that literally.

Research amply connects friendship with health. People with significant social ties are less likely to catch colds, recover faster when they do and have better life expectancy. Harvard professor Tyler VanderWeele conducted a study of women and noted that “compared to those who never attended religious services, participants who attended at least once a week were 68 percent less likely to die by suicide, drug overdose or alcohol during the 16 years that followed” (Deaths of Despair and the Role of Religion).

Science affirms what Scripture has longed maintained: We are designed to be in community. Jesus not only saves us from sin but also saves us for life together. And our family identity calls for family commitments: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

The early church theologian Jerome commented on this verse by recounting a story about the apostle John:

The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him

to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, “Little children, love one another.” The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, “Teacher, why do you always say this?” He replied with a line worthy of John: “Because it is the Lord’s commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.”

The length of his life and the proximity of his death led the apostle to distill his teaching to this fundamental, albeit annoying, exhortation. But the command is not a platitude for anyone who really tries to live it. Though Christians’ familial identity is in the church, it can be a place of tremendous pain. We expect so much but are, at times, met with superficial small groups or, even worse, with discord and dissension. If church is to do a body good and to demonstrate unity, we are going to need a lot of John’s type of Spirit-filled reminders. **E**

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(In fact, we don't
think it should be).

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