



THE FAITH-BASED COALITION FOR
Healthy Mothers & Children
WORLDWIDE

BACKGROUND: WHY EVANGELICALS AND MILLENNIALS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON GLOBAL HEALTH

The Politics of Evangelicals

In 2002, W Publishing Group published a work on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa titled *The aWAKE Project*. After two decades of hysteria and stigma around HIV/AIDS in the United States, where it was closely related to the homosexual community and intravenous drug use, the evangelical community was only beginning to think about HIV/AIDS as a crisis in Africa. At first blush, some evangelicals dismissed the emergency, laying the blame on sexual practices, often in insensitive ways. But with the publication of *The aWAKE Project* and the leadership of evangelical service providers, politicians, artists, academics, and church leaders who were willing to take a stand on behalf of a generation that was dying of an incurable disease, the tide began to change. Leaders like Franklin Graham, Rick & Kay Warren, and Bill & Lynne Hybels promoted awareness and advocacy on the issue. They were essential in galvanizing political support for what became President George W. Bush's greatest legacy, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which marshaled unprecedented resources for combatting HIV/AIDS in Africa. They were also key supporters of other initiatives such as the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

We know that expanding funding for maternal, newborn, and child health and the healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies could have exponential benefits for women, families, communities and societies, just as expanding funding for infectious diseases has.

It is time for evangelicals to consider this issue in the context of developing nations, and to lend a hand in saving the lives of millions once again.

A New Day: Millennial Interest in Global Health

In 2008, an exit poll conducted in Missouri and Tennessee “found that majorities of both Democratic and Republican evangelical voters want[ed] a broader agenda that goes beyond abortion and same-sex marriage to include ending poverty, protecting the environment, and tackling HIV/AIDS” (Jones 2008). Moreover, younger evangelicals were more likely to identify as centrist (45%) than traditionalist (36%) (Laser, et al. 2010: 6). Furthermore, a study including younger evangelicals (under 35) showed that, “compared to older Evangelicals, they were less likely to identify as conservative and more supportive of government solutions to social problems” (Laser et al. 2010: 13).

Because leading centrist evangelicals embraced the HIV/AIDS pandemic as an issue at the forefront of a social movement, American religious conservatives split into new tribes, manifesting themselves politically. These moderate evangelicals, or centrists, would

influence the faith and politics of the next generation of younger evangelicals, who, in an ever-increasingly globalized world, will be next in line to take on monumental humanitarian issues.