

Christians, Evangelicals Rally for Kamala Harris Ahead of DNC

“Voting Kamala ... (is) a vote against another four years of faith leaders justifying the actions of a man who destroys the message Jesus came to spread,” said Jerushah Duford, granddaughter of the Rev. Billy Graham

By Jack Jenkins

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(RNS) – A diverse group of Christians is throwing support behind Vice President Kamala Harris’ White House bid, organizing fundraisers and Zoom calls in hopes of helping catapult the Democrat to victory in November – and, they say, reclaiming their faith from Republicans in the process.

Their efforts come on the heels of similar campaigns aimed at specific constituency groups, such as the recent “White Dudes for Harris” Zoom call that featured celebrities and grabbed headlines. **John Pavlovitz, a liberal-leaning Christian author and activist**, was on that call when he hatched the idea for a Christian-centric version and texted his friend Malynda Hale, a singer, actress and fellow activist.

“We had a conversation about how, specifically on the Democratic side of the political spectrum, you don’t hear a lot of people talking about their faith,” Hale told Religion News Service in an interview. **“We wanted people to know that there are progressive Christians, there are Christians on the Democratic, left-leaning side, so that they didn’t feel alone.”**

The result was Christians for Kamala, a part-fundraiser, part-virtual roundtable livestreamed event on Monday (Aug. 12). **Featured speakers cited their faith as they praised liberal policies and personally endorsed Harris** – who recently entered the presidential race after President Joe Biden bowed out – and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. Over the course of the nearly three-hour event, the group raised more than \$150,000 for the Harris campaign, a number that has climbed to just shy of \$200,000 in the days since.

“It’s been really difficult to keep up with the flood of comments and connections that have been coming in,” said Pavlovitz, who said the only formal help he received from the Harris campaign was in setting up a donation system for fundraising.

A number of Christian groups – including evangelicals, a constituency key to former President Donald Trump’s base – have assembled similar calls in the lead up to next week’s Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Most have had little to no assistance from the official Harris-Walz campaign, which, barely a month old, has yet to announce a dedicated faith outreach director. The emerging grassroots coalition vies not only to bolster Harris but also to push back on what organizers say is a false assumption that to be Christian is to be a Republican – or a supporter of former President Donald Trump.

Christianity has long been associated with the Republican Party, which is more than 80% Christian, according to a 2022 survey from the Public Religion Research Institute. It has also been associated with Trump, who has benefitted from the consistent support of white evangelical voters.

But while the same PRRI poll found that 31% of Democrats are religiously unaffiliated, the majority – around 60% – still ascribe to various forms of Christianity. The difference lies in the types of Christians that make up each party's ranks: **Whereas 68% of the GOP are white Christians (with 30% of the party represented by white evangelical Protestants alone) only 24% of Democrats are the same, and they are primarily white Catholics (10%) and white mainline Protestants (9%), while white evangelicals only represent 4%. Meanwhile, Black Protestants – a key part of the Democratic base – constitute 16% of the Democratic Party, with Hispanic Protestants representing 3%, Hispanic Catholics 12% and “other Christians” rounding out the group with an additional 6%.**

That diversity was on display during the Christians for Kamala call, which included a mix of faith leaders such as the Rev. Jacqui Lewis, of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, and the Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr., head of the nonprofit Hip Hop Caucus; activists like environmentalist Bill McKibben and LGBTQ+ rights advocate Charlotte Clymer; commentators such as CNN's Van Jones; and politicians, including New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker and Texas State Rep. James Talarico.

The speakers linked their support for specific policies, such as working to blunt the impacts of climate change or passing immigration reform, to their faith and Christian Scripture. **Some rebuked conservative Christianity's ties to the GOP, calling it a form of Christian nationalism.**

“My faith in Jesus leads me to reject Christian nationalism and commit myself to the project of a multiracial, multicultural democracy where we can all freely love God and fully love our neighbors,” said Talarico, a Presbyterian Church (USA) seminarian who has been vocal in his condemnation of Christian nationalism in his state. “That same faith leads me to support Vice President Harris to be the next president of the United States.”

Although a member of a mainline denomination, Talarico was also a speaker on a separate “Evangelicals for Harris” Zoom call assembled on Wednesday evening. Organized by Faith Voters, a 501(c)4 organization, the effort was geared toward conservative Christians who have disproportionately sided with Trump. The call struck a different tone than Christians for Kamala: some speakers noted they had never endorsed a candidate before, and at least one pastor suggested he was risking friendships and relationships with his congregation by participating.

News of the event sparked blowback from conservatives, such as Sean Feucht, an evangelical worship leader and activist who once ran for Congress in California and has at least informally worked with prominent Republican strategists for his own initiatives. Feucht, who has also said he is in regular contact with Trump's campaign staff, accused evangelicals who participated in the call of apostasy and heresy, deriding them on social media as “**Heretics for Harris.**”

In addition, the **Rev. Franklin Graham, son of famed evangelist Rev. Billy Graham, decried a new advertisement produced by Evangelicals for Harris targeting swing state voters, saying it was “trying to mislead people” by using images of his father.**

But call participants like evangelical activist Shane Claiborne appeared unmoved by the

criticism, as was **Jerushah Duford**, a counselor who is also Billy Graham's granddaughter and Franklin Graham's niece. "Voting Kamala, for me, is so much greater than policies," Duford said. "It's a vote against another four years of faith leaders justifying the actions of a man who destroys the message Jesus came to spread, and that is why I get involved in politics."

Jemar Tisby, an author and historian who spoke during the call, told RNS that while he grew up in conservative Christian communities, he does not identify as evangelical himself, preferring the term "evangelical adjacent." Even so, he felt compelled to participate because, he said, "**we have the choice before us between democracy and authoritarianism**, and I feel like this is a historic moment when people of conscience need to take a stand."

Tisby, author of the forthcoming book *The Spirit of Justice: True Stories of Faith, Race, and Resistance*, also praised the diversity represented on the call, some of which was conducted in Spanish. He said it represented a broader understanding of evangelicalism than is often represented in U.S. politics.

"Many people of color, many women, many people who traditionally have not been platformed or been passed the mic, are now able to have their voices heard. I think that's very significant," Tisby said.

The call closed with remarks from former **Rep. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois**, a Republican who drew backlash from fellow conservatives after he became one of 10 Republicans to vote to impeach Trump for insurrection connected to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. **He argued the current Republican Party does not resemble "conservatism or, frankly, Christianity," and lamented "pastors and faith leaders that have sold themselves down the river." Some of today's support for Trump, he said, amounted to a form of idol worship.**

There are "certainly a few things that can make God a little jealous," he said, "and one of those is worshipping something other than Him. And that's what you see in today's GOP."

The calls add to a slate of organizing efforts launched in recent days aimed at specific religious groups. **Nearly 500 faith leaders have signed on to a letter endorsing Harris**, a "Latter-day Saints for Harris" call was convened last week and multiple separate calls have been organized for Jewish Americans – including one on Thursday that targeted Jewish women and featured singer Barbra Streisand.

A separate "Catholics for Kamala" call, facilitated in part by the Harris campaign, was also slated for this week but organizers rescheduled it until after the Democratic National Convention, citing scheduling conflicts.

According to Pavlovitz, his group is already partnering with others, such as Catholics for Kamala, Christian Democrats of America and Vote Common Good. What form their collaborations take remains to be seen, but Pavlovitz said he is hopeful for whatever comes next.

"We've all begun talking as a part of this process about what these partnerships could look like moving forward," he said. "There is talk about some, you know, collective expression of our spirituality, which is really what this was about."

Evangelicals for Harris? Kamala Harris-Tim Walz draws surprising support from these religious groups

Liam Adams

Nashville Tennessean

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The newly energized electorate behind Vice President Kamala Harris' presidential bid is sweeping through faith-based sectors, even among voices who are unexpected.

Harris and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, aim to rally more of that support across different voting blocs at next week's Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which is set for August 19 through August 22. The nominees are expected to outline their vision for the nation, a message that will resonate deeply with some supporters while others will be simply looking for a pitch different from that of former President Donald Trump.

That latter sentiment among voters seeking a Trump alternative is emboldening a subset of voters to voice support for Harris, drawing public declarations from those who hadn't shown the same support for President Joe Biden when he was the nominee. One person to recently make that declaration is ***New York Times* opinion columnist David French, a Nashville area writer and Lipscomb University visiting professor, who said in a column Monday he's voting for Harris "to save conservatism from itself."**

There are other faith voices in similar position to French. Meanwhile, faith groups already expected to support Harris are tapping into newfound enthusiasm and generated participation in faith-based voter engagement initiatives. Here's how the Harris campaign is stirring the religion and politics pot.

Democrats existing religious support gets jolt from Kamala Harris run

The Harris-Walz campaign is boosting engagement with faith-adjacent election advocacy work that was already broadly aligned with Democrats' goals.

Black Protestants and white nonevangelical Protestants already showed majority support for a Democrat in a Pew Research study in April, when Biden was still the nominee. Now, Harris' entrance as a Black woman who identifies as a Baptist, has amplified that excitement among different religious groups.

Religion News Service reported that 16,000-plus people attended a "Win With the Black Church Kick-Off Organizing Call" event organized by the Black Church PAC, which has also collected 8,000 signatures on petitions calling on legislators to support Harris. Also, the Progressive National Baptist Convention discussed get-out-the-vote opportunities for Harris at the denomination's recent annual meeting, according to Religion News Service.

Meanwhile, National Catholic Reporter said young Catholics are more interested in the election and supporting Harris. Biden received some Catholic support when he was the nominee due to his Catholic faith. But these newly engaged Catholic voters are inspired less by Harris' religious affiliation and more her stances on various social justice issues.

'Evangelicals for Harris' begin to speak up

Harris' campaign has drawn out more direct support from those who may have sympathized with Democrat ideals but might not have gone out of their way to endorse Biden's former candidacy.

Those kind of faith leaders have now unified around Harris through groups like Evangelicals for Harris. With backing from a mix of progressive-to-moderate voices, Evangelicals for Harris has sought to offer a counter narrative to evangelicals' overwhelming support for Trump.

Among the group's featured proponents is Texas pastor **Dwight McKissic**, who's been active in both the Nashville-based Southern Baptist Convention, a group typically supportive of Republicans, and the Nashville-based National Baptist Convention, USA, an association of Black Baptists typically supportive of Democrats. **McKissic disagrees with Harris' stance on abortion but is basing his decision to support Harris on the fact she's the more qualified candidate, reported *Christianity Today*.**

Positions like McKissic's has fueled criticism among the Christian right.

"Nevertheless, the group aims to convince evangelicals of the Christian bona fides of Kamala Harris, but they have to distort orthodox Christianity to do so," said Denny Burk, president of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, a well-known advocacy group for traditionalist position. "It is, in fact, a betrayal of the gospel."

The shocking support

Outcry over positions exhibited by groups like Evangelicals for Harris took on a new fervor when **the *New York Times* published French's latest column, "To Save Conservatism From Itself, I Am Voting for Harris."**

French, who holds typical traditionalist views such as opposing abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, said Trump poses an overall greater threat to French's conservative religious worldview than he does a net benefit. "It is difficult to overstate the viciousness and intolerance of MAGA Christians against their political foes," said French in the column. "There are many churches and Christian leaders who are now more culturally Trumpian than culturally Christian. Trump is changing the church."

Franklin Graham, President and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, speaks during the final day of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum. The final day of the RNC featured a keynote address by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. French's many critics on the right pointed to the column as an indictment on evangelical leaders compromising their values for wider cultural acceptance.

But for French, that same sort of acquiescence he's accused of is exactly what he cannot bring himself to do for Trump.

"I'm often asked by Trump voters if I'm 'still conservative,' and I respond that I can't vote for Trump precisely because I am conservative. I loathe sex abuse, pornography and adultery," French said in the column. "Trump has brought those vices into the mainstream of the Republican Party."

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Evangelicals For Harris

Evangelicals for Harris exists because of our Christian belief in the common good. As Evangelicals it is our calling from God to love our neighbors, to serve those less fortunate than us, and to stand up in defense of the weak.

While we should let our light shine in every aspect of our daily lives, fulfilling our calling in today's world requires engaging in politics. Whether it be voting, sharing beliefs on social media, or even campaigning, we need to make sure our words and actions match our core Christian values of love, service, justice, and grace.

Evangelicals for Harris is a platform for Christians to access the resources they need to speak out.

Leadership

The Rev. Jim Ball, Ph.D., is author of *Global Warming and the Risen LORD*. For 20 years he formerly served as a **senior executive in a Christian environmental organization**. **The architect of the “What Would Jesus Drive”** educational campaign and the key organizer and national spokesperson for the **Evangelical Climate Initiative**, Jim has testified before Congress and appeared on ABC's Good Morning America, Fox, CNN, and NPR. He has been featured in the *New York Times*, and honored by *Rolling Stone* magazine as one of their environmental “Warriors and Heroes,” and by *Time* magazine as one of its climate change “innovators.”

About Our Organization

Evangelicals for Harris is a project of Faith Voters for Good, a 501(c)4 organization, and not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee. Faith Voters for Good exists to support a diverse community of believers pursuing the common good and seeking to build a more perfect Union.

Our nation thrives when its leaders are people of good character [such as Kamala Harris and Tim Walz?], guided by core values of faith, integrity, and justice. As citizens and voters, we believe it is our responsibility to demand that our leaders hold to those values, and that we continually strive to create a public space and dialogue that lifts up the better angels of our communal nature.