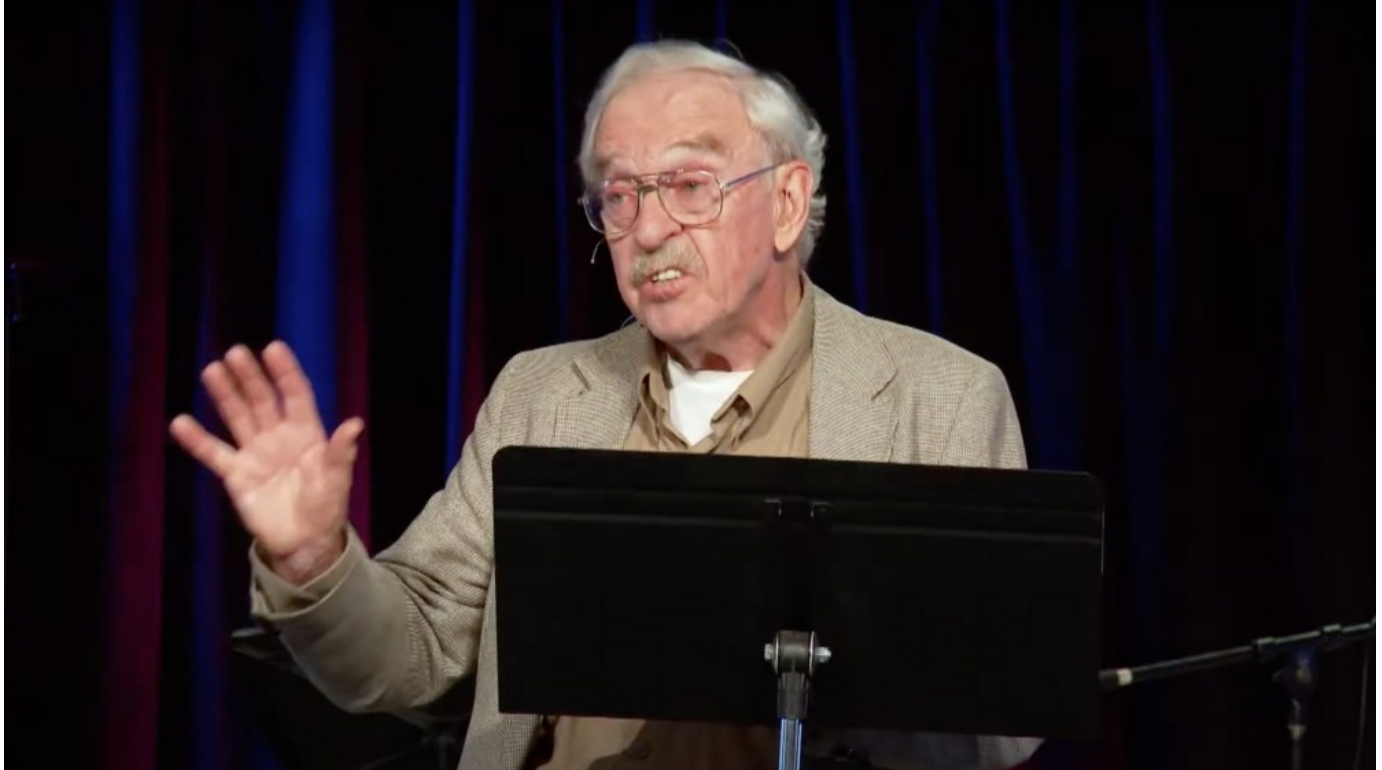


Ron Sider, evangelical activist, dies at 82

by [Bob Smietana](#), [Jack Jenkins](#), and [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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Ron Sider speaks at Biola University in La Mirada, California, in 2017. (Video screengrab)

Ron Sider, an author, seminary professor and evangelical social justice activist, has died, according to an online update from his son.

“I have some bad news: my father Ron Sider died suddenly last night (July 27, 2022), of a cardiac arrest,” Ted Sider wrote in a post on his father’s Substack newsletter website. “Please join our family in grieving for him.”

Sider, a longtime professor at Palmer Theological Seminary, is best known for his 1977 book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving From Affluence to Generosity*, and for founding Christians for Social Action, which seeks to rally evangelicals and other 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 that book. “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.”

He will be missed, Toyama-Szeto said, adding that, as one of her staff said, “He was like family.”

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.”

Sider, who had previously had health issues, described 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 January 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 said 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 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 said at the time, “they’re going to look really silly in another 10 years.”

Sider is survived by his wife, Arbutus, his three children and their families. —Religion News Service