

Christian Groups Form 'Freedom Federation'

✖ A cross-section of conservative Christian groups have united to form a federation that will promote biblical values in political, social and cultural arenas.

Announced Tuesday during a press conference in Washington, D.C., the Freedom Federation comprises more than two dozen groups, including the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Teen Mania, Liberty University, TheCall, MorningStar Ministries; Concerned Women for America, the High Impact Leadership Coalition and Strang Communications, which publishes *Charisma* magazine.

"There is nothing that has ever existed on this kind of broad-based, large scale that is truly multiethnic and transgenerational," said Mathew D. Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, which is a founding member of the federation. "So it really provides a unique component to [address] these issues that has never existed before."

Staver said the groups signed a Declaration of American Values, which affirms 10 principles including the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, religious liberty and limited government. He said the organization is primarily spiritual, but federation members will network to mobilize their constituents to protect those values when challenged politically or socially.

"We all agree on these shared core values and agree that there's an urgency now to protect those values because they have been eroded or come under attack in the cultural and

social and religious and political arenas," he said, noting that the group's concerns preceded President Obama's election but have been accelerated during his administration

In the coming months, the federation will likely issue a position statement on health care reform, and express their opposition to federal funding of abortion and efforts to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act. But participants said the group will address issues beyond those typically championed by Christian conservatives.

"[The federation] will have a biblical bent as its priority," said Bishop Harry Jackson, chairman of the High Impact Leadership Coalition, a network of mostly African-American and Hispanic ministries. "The religious right has really, seemingly, specialized in dealing with a handful of issues and has not engaged in terms of political activism in issues that would be considered social justice issues."

"So the opportunity is for us to be relevant in terms of what's being decided now," he added, pointing to the environment, health care and immigration reform. "All of these issues have a biblical perspective that can unify us."

Jackson said the federation also hopes to change the "very severe image problem" that politically active Christians have in the culture. He said the federation's multiethnic membership will not only help change public perception but also provide more holistic policy recommendations.

"I've been in these rooms many times," Jackson told *Charisma*. "You have white guys with a handful of blacks in the room, making decisions for everyone else in the world and saying, 'Well, we need to educate the black community or Hispanic community about these issues,' rather than having those very same people at the table.'

"Those kinds of discussions, when these cultures are engaged, I think, will inherently carry better policy recommendations,

and it will give an opportunity for better messaging to the culture. And it won't just be the window dressing of, 'Wow, we really learned how to speak Hispanic,' but we truly will serve the Hispanic, the black and the white community simultaneously because there's been an input, give and take."

Teen Mania founder Ron Luce said the federation's broad participation may also help engage younger believers, who often see religious conservatives as harsh and condescending.

"Our interest is in trying to help shape the communication to the younger generation so they're more willing to embrace what the Bible says and live conservative values from the Scriptures," Luce said.

"The whole point of the federation is groups coming together saying, let us put a new face on and a new amiable stance in what we believe," he added. "Not changing what we believe, but a more amiable approach as well as a more thorough approach. It's not just two issues; we're talking about all kinds of issues and principles from Scriptures that we as believers ought to care about-not associating ourselves with a particular political party. It's about, let's live conservatively in our own personal lives and then let's make our voice known."