

# **Iowa Evangelicals Answered Call to “Elect a President Who Will Lead in Godly Ways”**

A blizzard of evangelical voters carried Texas Sen. Ted Cruz to an upset victory over business mogul Donald Trump in the Iowa Republican caucus on Monday.

White evangelical voters always play a strong role in the Iowa Republican caucus.

They propelled former Arkansas Gov. and Southern Baptist pastor Mike Huckabee to victory in 2008 and then former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum in 2012.

However, they turned out in even larger numbers this year.

Even with record overall turnout for Republicans, the evangelical share of Republican voters jumped up 7 percentage points from 2012 to account for 64 percent of the votes this year.

Cruz captured 34 percent of evangelicals, easily outpacing Trump’s 22 percent and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio’s 21 percent.

Among non-evangelicals, Trump won 29 percent, compared with 26 percent for Rubio and 18 percent for Cruz.

Although Cruz overwhelmingly won evangelicals, it was still a split demographic. When evangelicals accounted for 60 percent of the Republican turnout in 2008, Huckabee claimed 46 percent of their votes even as no other candidate hit 20 percent.

“To God be the glory,” Cruz declared to start his victory speech. “God bless the great state of Iowa.”

He also quoted Psalm 30:5 in his speech.

“While Americans will continue to suffer under a president who has set an agenda that is causing millions to hurt across this country, I want to remind you of the promise of Scripture: ‘weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning,’” Cruz said Monday night. “Tonight Iowa has proclaimed to the world, ‘morning is coming, morning is coming.’”

A key to victory for Cruz, who is a member of a Southern Baptist church and the son of an evangelist, came as he crisscrossed the state quoting Scriptures and speaking in churches. He [pinned](#) his victory on being able to “awaken the body of Christ that we may pull back from the abyss.”

On the eve of the caucus, he spoke Sunday night at Adventure Christian Community in Davenport. For the rally, Cruz signs filled the church’s walls, outside and inside.

Speaking in the worship space with radio talk show host Glenn Beck, Cruz fired up the packed room that overflowed down the hallways.

With a cross off to the side of him, he spoke with the energy and emotion of a revival preacher as he talked about stopping immigrants, overturning the Affordable Care Act and carpet-bombing in Syria. Ripping from Matthew 5, he praised America as a “shining city on a hill.”

Beck, a Mormon who served as Cruz’s warm-up act at the church rally, cursed as he praised the glory of America’s might. After Beck attacked Democratic hopeful Hillary Clinton, someone in the crowd shouted, “Preach, brother, preach!”

Cruz’s opponents did not concede the evangelical vote before the election. The radio airwaves filled with ads praising the religious qualifications of various candidates.

One praised Huckabee as a “man of faith.” Another featured Carson bragging that he was not afraid to talk about God in public. A faith-focused ad for Cruz featured

“Duck Dynasty” star Phil Robertson. Santorum and Rubio also often interjected religious rhetoric in their campaign pitches.

In a speech in Cedar Rapids on Sunday, Rubio talked about honoring God through public service, the importance of religious liberty and the “God-given” Second Amendment right to bear arms. He also attached divine will to the forthcoming vote.

“Everything that happens tomorrow night at the caucus will be part of God’s will,” Rubio said.

Even Trump, a thrice-married casino owner, touted his own religiosity in hopes of gaining evangelical support.

A Trump radio ad featured Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. praising Trump for Christian character, and a Trump TV ad [featured](#) him thanking “the evangelicals” and showing off his mom’s Bible.

Trump even attended church the two Sundays before the caucus, although he mistakenly [started](#) to place money in the communion plate the day before the vote.

At an event in Cedar Rapids just hours before voting started, Trump attacked Obama for “hurting Christianity.” He also said “the evangelicals have been great” in the campaign.

As the political ads suddenly disappeared from radios and televisions in the waning minutes before the caucuses started Monday night, religion did not disappear.

About 10 percent of the GOP precinct caucuses [occurred](#) in churches, along with about 4 percent of Democratic ones. Research [suggests](#) voting in a church can subtly impact voter decisions.

Community Heights Church in Newton hosted five GOP precinct caucuses,

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including one that attracted a couple hundred voters in the church's sanctuary.

The caucus in the sanctuary started with a prayer urging God to keep America a Christian nation. With a large cross and an American flag behind them, speakers pitched candidates to their neighbors.

Helping drive high turnout among evangelicals to caucuses - in churches, schools, community centers and even homes - was the conservative Christian activist organization The Family Leader.

While Bob Vander Plaats, the group's leader, endorsed Cruz - just as he endorsed winners Huckabee in 2008 and Santorum in 2012 - the group ran generic radio and television ads urging Christians to caucus.

"It's time for the voice of the church to help elect a president who will lead in godly ways," the ads declared. "It's time for the church to respond, for America to be restored, for Iowa Christians to honor God by attending your Iowa caucus on Feb. 1."

Iowa's evangelicals answered that call.

✖ [Brian Kaylor](#) is a contributing editor for *EthicsDaily.com*. You can follow him on Twitter [@BrianKaylor](#).

*Editor's note: A photo news story of the Iowa caucus is available [here](#). A video interview in which Kaylor explains the caucus process and the influence of evangelicals can be viewed [here](#).*