

Knippers, conservative critic of mainline, dies: One of Time magazine's 25 most influential evangelicals

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Diane Knippers, 53, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a conservative center best known for decrying progressive stances and liberal leaders in mainline denominations, died April 18 in Arlington, Virginia, of complications from cancer.

Knippers, a fixture at the Washington-based IRD since 1982 and its president since 1993, in February was named by *Time* magazine as one of the country's 25 most influential evangelicals. She had battled colon cancer for more than a year and had been granted a seven-month writing leave on April 4.

Knippers recently worked with the National Association of Evangelicals as coeditor of "Toward an Evangelical Public Policy," a political manifesto that urges conservative Christians to expand their policy agendas.

The daughter of a United Methodist minister, she later joined the Episcopal Church and was vocal in recent years in opposing the ordination of an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire. Knippers was a key lay leader at Truro Church in Fairfax, Virginia, a bulwark of the conservative Episcopal movement, and was a board member of the American Anglican Council.

"Under her gentle but always brave leadership, IRD was very often the mouse that roared, terrifying the great gray elephants of national church bureaucracies into frantic panic," said Michael Novak, director of social and political studies at the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute and an IRD board member.

“She set an example of faithful Christian witness amidst church and political conflicts,” said Alan Wisdom, IRD’s vice president. She also voiced IRD concerns about the persecution of Christian minorities in Sudan and elsewhere.

Knippers was not, however, without controversy. When IRD published a scathing report last September about mainline churches’ policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the National Council of Churches accused Knippers of playing “partisan secular politics.”

Knippers and the IRD often accused the NCC and the Geneva-based World Council of Churches of leftist political activity, and urged member churches to pull their funding from both bodies.

Prior to joining IRD in 1982, Knippers spent eight years at Good News, a conservative Methodist renewal group.