

**CATHOLICS IN
PUBLIC LIFE**



CHALLENGES TO FAITH IN DEMOCRACY



**THE TROUBLE WITH
CATHOLICS IN ALLIANCE
FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

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FOR
CHOICE**

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FOR
CHOICE**

Catholics for Choice shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make decisions about their lives.

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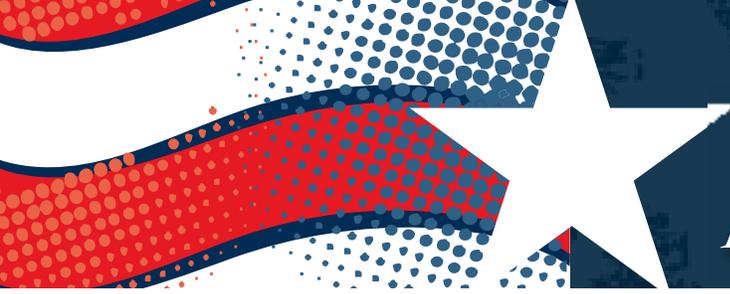
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Executive Summary

The past four decades have witnessed a shift in the political allegiances of the Catholic hierarchy from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. It has also seen the emergence of “prolife” Democratic elected officials who claim to represent the authentic position of the church on life issues.¹

Certainly, the Catholic hierarchy with its fervent antiabortion stance has found a home with the Republican Party, and vice versa. However, there is no question that when it comes to gauging the views of the Catholic electorate with respect to the issues of abortion and reproductive rights, the facts are crystal clear. A majority of Catholic voters support reproductive rights.

While select Democratic officials have tried to assert an antichoice stance in order to align themselves more closely with the church hierarchy, it cannot be forgotten that respecting the ability and capacity of both women and men to make reproductive decisions has been a long-standing tenet of the Democratic Party platform since the 1970s. Indeed, the platform in 2008 included support for strategies that seek to prevent, not prohibit abortion, including expanding the availability and affordability of contraception, improved health-care coverage and quality child care.

Unfortunately, there are some organizations that do not respect or cannot accept the support for choice among the Catholic electorate and the Democratic Party. These organizations have sought to move the party away from its prochoice position in order to win over supposedly antichoice Catholic voters by co-opting the concept of the “common good.”

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (CACG) is one such group. To the untrained eye, CACG may just seem like another Catholic social justice organization, focusing solely on traditional Catholic social teaching such as care of the poor, environmental sustainability and economic justice. However, a closer look reveals that a key aim of CACG is to oppose the availability of legal abortion.

As it seeks to develop a higher media profile, the antichoice beliefs of CACG become more apparent. For example, in November 2008, one CACG letter to the editor in the *Washington Post* in response to an article entitled “Some Abortion Foes Shifting Focus from Ban to Reduction” stated, “[Pope John Paul II’s] language about building a “culture of life” addressed the need for a broad response—legal, social, and cultural—to prevent abortion.”² This letter did more than all the public pronouncements of Catholics in Alliance to reveal its true colors: it is at one with one of the most antichoice popes in the modern era on abortion. •

Introduction

Many organizations have sought to take responsibility for the seven percent of Catholics who moved their vote from the Republican candidate to the Democratic one in the 2008 elections. However, very few nonprofit organizations have been as focused on this task as Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (CACG). Using the thinly veiled guise of the “common good,” CACG has tried to convince voters that while in their view abortion is evil, voting for a prochoice candidate is not wrong. Though the group tries to avoid discussing reproductive rights, when pressed, its message on abortion is far from moderate, very often mirroring the extreme antichoice stance of the bishops and ultra-conservative Catholic organizations.

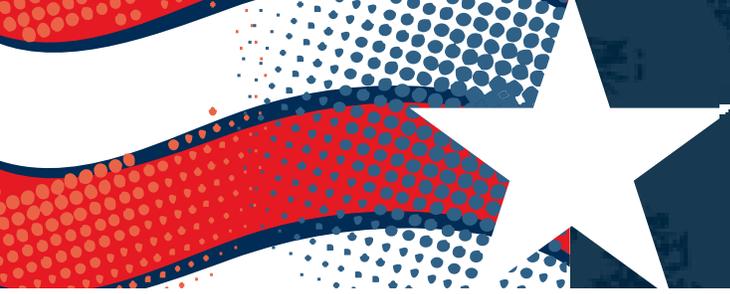
Despite its stated support for some antipoverty measures, CACG is an antichoice organization committed to severely restricting access to reproductive health services that most consider key to the “common good.” CACG avoids the question of legalization (although its executive director,

Alexia Kelley, assures us that they are against that, too)³ by asserting that the rate of abortion could be reduced through antipoverty measures. While such measures are obviously beneficial for many reasons, poverty reduction will not by itself reduce the need for abortion. Preventing unplanned pregnancies through access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education are generally seen as the primary means of achieving this goal. However, on these issues, CACG, much like the church hierarchy, is almost completely silent.

In concentrating on reducing the number of abortions, rather than the need for abortion, CACG is simply repackaging the antiabortion stance of the most conservative elements of society and denigrating those who argue for full sexual and reproductive rights. As debate and discussion move forward from the 2008 election cycle, it is crucial that both the electorate and elected officials are fully aware of CACG’s position on myriad reproductive health issues. •

THIS REPORT:

- Chronicles the development of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
- Provides an understanding of CACG as part of the progressive antichoice movement
- Deconstructs CACG’s “common good” argument
- Provides an in-depth analysis and critique of CACG’s premiere study on abortion
- Examines CACG’s activities in the 2004, 2006 and 2008 election cycles



History and Background

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (CACG) was founded in 2005, following John Kerry's loss to George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election. Originally, a main thrust of CACG was to reach so-called values voters in key swing states with large Catholic populations. Kerry, who is Catholic, was attacked during the campaign by a few Catholic bishops and

conservative Catholic groups allied with the Republican Party for his prochoice position. Few moderate Catholic voices spoke on Kerry's behalf, despite the fact that his position represents mainstream Catholic opinion on abortion.

Kerry lost the Catholic vote to George Bush by 47 percent to 52 percent; a loss that was considered a major factor in his defeat. Some in the Democratic Party expressed concern at the time that the party would continue to lose unless it could find a way to win over Catholic voters in swing states such as Ohio, several incorrectly assuming that Catholic voters are overwhelmingly antiabortion.

So, while upholding reproductive rights has been a long-standing plank of the Democratic Party platform, influential voices in the party suggested that the party should tone down its historic support of abortion rights to attract more support. Said Democratic political consultant Paul Begala: "It's about time a Democrat stood up and said there are too many abortions in America, we ought to restrict the number, and people who oppose

abortions are good people."⁴ John Kerry himself told party activists that "they needed to make people understand that they didn't like abortion."⁵

Thus was born Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, as a political strategy to co-opt the Democrats' prochoice position to win over supposedly antiabortion Catholic voters. The co-founders of CACG were Alexia Kelley and Tom Perriello, who was elected to the House of Representatives in 2008. The concept of the "common good" upon which CACG was founded reportedly came from the Center for American Progress,⁶ founded by co-chair of President Obama's transition team John Podesta, which subsequently helped form alliances between CACG and similar organizations.⁷ These "common good" Democrats stress the traditional Catholic social justice themes of caring for the poor, protecting the environment and shoring up health and human services.

From the beginning, a central tactic of CACG was to play down abortion rights and reframe the debate in terms of reducing the number of abortions as a way to

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assure Catholics that they could safely vote for Democratic candidates—although polls consistently show that the majority of Catholics support abortion rights.

At an event launching what it called its “multi-year public education campaign” in July 2006, Executive Director Kelley noted: “At the core of Catholic teaching is a moral obligation to promote the common good. This includes looking out for the least fortunate and creating a society in which we as citizens care about our neighbors as ourselves.”⁸ Other speakers mentioned “great moral matters” such as poverty, war and torture, and global climate change, but abortion was never mentioned, as CACG began the process of decoupling abortion from core Democratic values.

CACG’s position on abortion is firmly planted on the far right. It mirrors the language of the very Christian conservatives CACG hopes to rebuff in its belief that abortion can never be a moral option for women nor should it be an essential part of social justice. In its own words: “Catholics in Alliance is prolife.

We support full legal protections for unborn children, as a requirement of justice and as a matter of essential human rights.”⁹

On its Web site, CACG maintains that it is a separate entity from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); however, the abortion position of CACG, as well as other hot-button social issues such as stem-cell research and gay marriage, exactly mirrors that of the USCCB. CACG staff and board members have long-standing ties to the USCCB. The organization has continually directed Catholic voters to the USCCB voting guide *Faithful Citizenship*, at times suggesting, incorrectly, that “Catholics cannot, in good conscience, disagree with the Church on questions of morality.”¹⁰

CACG attempts to counterbalance its far-right abortion position by supporting policies that supposedly encourage women facing the abortion decision to continue their pregnancies: “We support the implementation of social, economic and material supports for pregnant women and

While CACG emphasizes the progressive Catholic social justice tradition, its abortion position is firmly planted on the far right

vulnerable families, as part of the solution to ending abortions...Our Catholic faith and the Catholic social tradition affirm that all life is sacred, and that every person has essential worth and dignity. We believe that as a society, we must care for all life—whether born or unborn, guilty or innocent, young or old. We work to promote the essential conditions for a culture of life—a culture that upholds the sacred and inviolable dignity

of the human person against affronts to human life at all stages.”¹¹

CACG talks about promoting a “culture of life” as a way to disguise its antichoice position—the supposition being that abortion would not have to be banned if all women would choose to make the “correct” decision to continue a pregnancy. At a pre-election audio conference in the fall of 2008, Kelley made the stunning assertion that social and financial supports would make women “more likely to choose life and carry their pregnancy to term—and that is what we all want—to end the tragedy of abortion in this country.”¹²

There little evidence that such supports would lower the abortion rate. But CACG’s position that the government should coerce pregnant women to continue unintended pregnancies with short-term financial incentives is extreme and its assertion that everyone wants to see all unintended pregnancies continued untenable. In focusing on the rate of abortions and not the root causes of abortion, CACG, like the

religious right, is ignoring pivotal steps necessary to reduce the need for abortion. Indeed, CACG is far outside mainstream US sentiment on abortion as the majority of Americans support a woman’s right to choose the option that best suits her and her family in the event of an unplanned pregnancy.

And while CACG officially plays down the need for legal restrictions on access to abortion in order to soft-pedal its antichoice position, at the same audio conference Kelley agreed with other speakers who supported legal restrictions on abortion, saying, “Catholics in Alliance supports these restrictions as well.”¹³ This has been a mantra among Catholics in Alliance staff. In an interview just before the 2006 mid-term elections, then-communications director Chris Korzen emphatically and repeatedly stated that Catholics in Alliance is opposed to abortion: “We are a prolife organization; we are not a prochoice organization.” He complained that his organization “spend[s] a lot of time responding to the right wing to show we are not providing cover for prochoice Democrats.”¹⁴

Simply put, CACG asserts that voting for a prochoice candidate is moral, even though abortion is evil. Ignoring church teaching on conscience, the organization incorrectly frames voting for a prochoice candidate in terms of prudence, asserting that one can vote for a prochoice candidate if the voter is voting based on “proportionate reasons” and not on the candidate’s position on reproductive rights. Nonetheless, CACG still holds that the act of abortion is immoral. As Alexia Kelley wrote in the book she co-wrote with Catholics United executive director Chris Korzen, *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division*, “Performing an abortion or driving someone to an abortion clinic to have one would be a clear example of formal cooperation in evil. But voting for a candidate who does not believe abortion should be illegal would constitute only material cooperation.”¹⁵ In its attempt to dispel the fears of Catholics who support prochoice candidates, CACG is reinforcing the antiabortion stance of the church hierarchy from which women around the world are suffering. •

Organization

CACG is headquartered in Washington, DC. It currently has a staff of seven, including Executive Director Alexia Kelley, a communications person and a field director. Both Kelley and senior writer and media specialist John Gehring formerly worked for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

CACG is organized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its three main program areas are communications, grassroots outreach and strategic coordination. Organizations that it says it currently works with are the Catholic social justice lobby NETWORK, the Center of Concern, Pax Christi USA, Sojourners and Faith in Public Life.¹⁶ However, when the organization was officially launched in July of 2006, it also listed a number of organizations of men and women religious among its partners, including the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Franciscan Federation.¹⁷

According to its 2006 tax filing with the IRS, CACG is related “through common membership, governing bodies, trustees, officers etc.” to Catholics United,

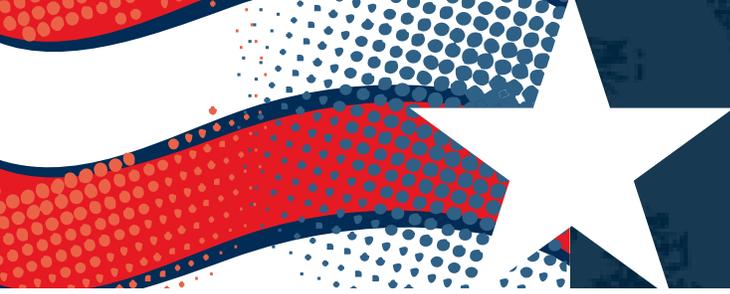
a group with a similar purpose and a “common good,” antichoice orientation. Catholics United founder and executive director Chris Korzen was a member of the CACG staff before he founded Catholics United. Korzen and Kelley co-authored the book *A Nation for All*. In the book, Kelley and Korzen thank trustees and donors of both organizations for funding support that “make projects like this book possible.”¹⁸ Like CACG, Catholics United is far outside mainstream Catholic thinking on abortion rights and works to move the Democratic Party in a conservative direction by claiming that no woman would choose abortion if given adequate financial and social support.¹⁹

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good was founded in 2005 with a budget of \$500,000.²⁰ The organization did not begin its activities until 2006. It reported \$1.1 million in public contributions in its 2006 filing with the IRS.²¹ However, in 2007, its public contributions plummeted by nearly \$300,000.²² CACG has received support from large liberal-leaning donors. It received \$50,000 in general support from the Open Society Institute in 2005 and 2006 and

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good is far outside mainstream Catholic thinking on abortion rights and works to move the Democratic Party in a conservative direction

\$40,000 from the Tides Foundation in 2006 and \$85,000 in 2007.²³

CACG has a 10-member board of directors and a 37-member advisory council, whose members “provide ad-hoc advice and insight to the Alliance on a range of projects and activities.”²⁴ Interestingly, none of the members of the board or the advisory council have been publicly prominent in the antiabortion movement. Most are aligned with the Democratic Party or progressive educational institutions, organizations or religious orders or with the USCCB or The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. •



The 2006 Mid-Term Elections and the “God Gap”

The 2006 mid-term congressional elections were a coming-out party of sorts for CACG. The organization had been officially incorporated in 2005 but hadn't done much prior to the 2006 election cycle. It debuted its voting guide, a 12-page booklet called “Voting for the Common Good: A Practical Guide for Conscientious Catholics,” in October 2006. The organization positioned the guide as a break from similar guides from far-right Catholic groups that hold up a candidate's positions on abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, cloning,

euthanasia and gay marriage as non-negotiable litmus tests. “Since we seldom, if ever, have the opportunity to vote for a candidate with the right position on all the issues important to Catholics, we often must vote for some candidates who may hold the ‘wrong’ Catholic position on some issues in order to maximize the good our vote achieves in other areas,” read the guide.²⁵

The guide argues that the totality of a candidate's positions on key social justice issues such as poverty, war, human rights and the environment must be considered along with abortion. The guide, while appearing to give Catholics latitude to follow their own consciences on key moral issues, defers completely to the USCCB position on these issues. It recommends that Catholics consult *Faithful Citizenship* as their first step in educating themselves about these issues and consult their own consciences, but then states that “Catholics cannot, in good conscience, disagree with the Church on questions of morality.”²⁶

This assertion is false as it misrepresents centuries of church teaching on the primacy

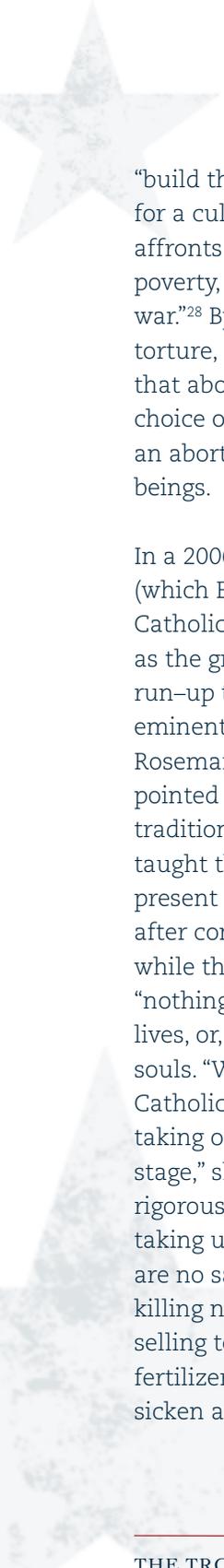
of conscience. Instead of saying that Catholics have an obligation to follow their own conscience on these issues, and that abortion can be a moral choice for women, the guide offers poorly reasoned “wobble-room” for Catholics to vote for a prochoice candidate by asserting that no one candidate is perfect, so some compromises must be made.

In answering the question “Is it okay to vote for a ‘prochoice’ candidate?” the guide quotes former Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, in saying that it could be acceptable if one is voting based on other “proportionate reasons” and not the candidate's “prochoice beliefs.”²⁷ Again, the guide appears to be providing cover for Catholics to vote for prochoice candidates while at the same time tearing down the importance of protection for a woman's right to choose—suggesting that prochoice candidates may be “good enough” if other positions on issues such as poverty and war outweigh their support for abortion rights.

More disturbingly, the guide equates abortion with the horrors of torture and war, saying that Catholics have a duty to



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“build the essential conditions for a culture of life, to end affronts to human life such as poverty, abortion, torture, and war.”²⁸ By equating abortion with torture, CACG shreds any idea that abortion can be a moral choice or that women who have an abortion are moral human beings.

In a 2006 talk to Pax Christi (which Eric McFadden, then of Catholics in Alliance, described as the group’s key ally in the run-up to the 2006 election), eminent Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether pointed out that the Catholic tradition has never actually taught that a human soul is present in a fertilized egg just after conception. She noted that while that fertilized egg is not “nothing,” war affects actual lives, or, if you will, actual human souls. “While theoretically Catholicism forbids the direct taking of innocent life at any stage,” she noted, “the most rigorous sanctions are applied to taking unborn life, while there are no sanctions applied to killing non-combatants in war, selling toxic waste to farmers as fertilizer that causes people to sicken and die, favoring military

spending over social welfare spending.”²⁹

The position that abortion is equal to war or torture is completely in opposition to the historically pro-woman positions of the Democratic Party. It equates women who have abortions with those who would torture or wage war against civilians, as people lacking moral values and uncaring for human life and value, when in reality many women choose abortion because they value already existing life, be it their own or their children’s. This language makes it impossible to view abortion as a moral, or even rational, choice and is well outside the mainstream of Democratic Party thinking and positions, which assert that women have a right to choose abortion in consultation with their religious values, families and doctors, and that good women do choose abortion.

In addition to the voters’ guide, CACG made its first foray into grassroots organizing for the 2006 mid-term congressional election. It established offices in the heavily Catholic swing states of Michigan, Ohio and

Pennsylvania. Organizers distributed voter guides and did parish outreach in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Kansas and Virginia. CACG also ran ads in Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia papers that urged voters to “challenge poverty, corruption and unjust war” and “Vote for the common good.”³⁰

When Democrats took back the majority in Congress and Democratic governors scored victories in Ohio and Pennsylvania thanks in part to a swing in the Catholic vote back toward Democrats, CACG was quick to take credit for helping to close the so-called “God gap” by winning religious voters over to the Democratic Party. “This was a significant shift in the religious vote, where you see a reclaiming of the values debate,” said Alexia Kelley.³¹

But many election analysts disputed the contention that the “values” debate had much effect one way or another. At the same time that CACG launched its ad campaign in late October, polls were already showing that a majority of white Catholics were saying they would vote for a Democratic congressional



candidate, a major shift from 2004 when white Catholic voters were overwhelmingly likely to vote Republican.³² Results from exit polls showed that the decline in Catholic support for the GOP had less to do with faith-based outreach efforts and more to do with disenchantment

with the Republican Party, including dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war in Iraq, concern about the economy, and the impact of mounting Republican political scandals.³³ John Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, said while it was

difficult to determine the exact reason for the shift of Catholics back to the Democratic Party and that faith-based outreach efforts may attract some voters, “it could be that many Catholics that had voted Republican in the past were not real happy with that vote.”³⁴ •

The Politics of Abortion

Beginning with the 2006 election cycle, CACG has claimed that it represents mainstream Catholic opinion on abortion, while it simultaneously works to erode the Democratic Party's position on abortion rights. CACG paints a picture of Catholics struggling with the abortion issue and conflicted about how it affects their choice of candidates. But a recent survey by Belden Russonello & Stewart showed a very different picture. It found a full 58 percent of Catholics are prochoice and only 31 percent feel they have a moral obligation to vote against a candidate who supports legal abortion.³⁵ A recent study from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life correlated those findings. It found that less than one in four Catholics say they oppose abortion and see it as a politically important issue.³⁶

The rabidly antiabortion Catholic vote appears to be a mirage, but it is a mirage on which CACG is built. Starting in 2006, CACG began to position itself to the right of the Democratic Party on the abortion issue—without challenging it directly—by taking the tack that the best way to reduce abortion was to

address the root causes, rather than try to ban it.

CACG “welcomed” the Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act when it was introduced in the House of Representatives in September 2006. The legislation was modeled after Democrats for Life’s “95-10 Initiative,” which aims to reduce the US abortion rate by 95 percent over the next 10 years by increasing support for sexuality education and contraceptive services for low-income women and by increasing support for women who decide to continue an unintended pregnancy. The measure was widely seen as a compromise between pro- and antichoice forces on measures that both sides agreed would reduce the need for abortion. CACG, however, rejected the provisions of the bill that would increase access to contraception, the key means of preventing unintended pregnancies.

Sister Sharon Dillon, executive director of the Franciscan Federation of the United States, spoke in support of the measure on behalf of CACG: “Because the social ill of abortion cannot be

The rabidly antiabortion Catholic vote appears to be a mirage, but it is a mirage around which CACG has built its whole rationale

separated from its contributing factors of poverty, lack of affordable health care, job insecurity, and other challenges...the provisions contained in the Act...constitute an honest and promising attempt to reduce the occurrence of abortions in our country... Although as Catholics, we cannot support all the provisions found in the Reducing Abortion and Supporting Parents Act, we recognize that this kind of comprehensive approach is an extremely important step.”³⁷

Thus began a pattern of CACG claiming that the real key to reducing abortion was to increase support for low-income women in the absence of discussing what reproductive health experts agree is the single most effective way of reducing abortion: preventing unintended pregnancies in the first place through comprehensive sex education and contraception—measures that, not

Prochoice forces were successful in ensuring that calling for a reduction in the need for abortion remained the official party position, as did a strong reiteration of the party's support for Roe v. Wade

coincidentally, are opposed by the Catholic hierarchy.

Like most conservative, antichoice organizations aligned with the Republican Party, CACG refuses to acknowledge that the abortion rate is largely driven by the rate of unintended pregnancies—nearly half of which end in abortion—and that lowering this rate is the single most effective way to reduce the need for abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute, the authoritative organization on abortion statistics in the United States, “the high rate of unintended pregnancy in the United States...explains the country’s high abortion rate...Clearly, improving contraceptive use among those women who are already active users of contraception would reduce the number of abortions in this country. By the same token, moving even a portion of the much smaller number of women who are not using contraceptives into the user column, at virtually any level of effectiveness, would also have a major impact.”³⁸

At the same time, the Guttmacher Institute says that the “95-10 approach” is “dubious.” It notes that “its relatively

modest, short-term offerings fail to address the much larger, longer-term economic issues that women, especially young and low-income women, face in raising families,” such as accessing child and health care, getting a good-paying job and affordable housing and higher education.³⁹ Even if there was the will to dramatically expand social and financial supports for young, poor women facing an unplanned pregnancy, “In the current climate, and likely for years to come, advocates for the young and the poor will need to work overtime just to stave off draconian cuts to health and social welfare programs, let alone revolutionize the entire national approach to addressing the problems of poverty and disadvantage.”⁴⁰

Nonetheless, CACG aligned itself with other antiabortion groups in the summer of 2008 as the Democratic Party developed the abortion plank for its party platform to try and push the idea that short-term financial support would dramatically reduce the abortion rate. Working with organizations such as Catholics United and Sojourners—a left-leaning, antiabortion evangelical group—it fought for language in the platform saying the party

supports a reduction in the number of abortions, not just a reduction in the need for abortion, which they viewed as stressing a reduction in unintended pregnancy. Prochoice forces were successful in ensuring that calling for a reduction in the need for abortion remained the official party position, as did a strong reiteration of the party's support for *Roe v. Wade*. However, CACG and its allies were successful in inserting language that asserts: "The Democratic Party also strongly supports a woman's decision to have a child by ensuring access to and availability of programs for pre- and post-natal health care, parenting skills, income support and caring adoption program."⁴¹

One of CACG's evangelical allies, the Rev. Joel Hunter, went so far as to make the completely unproven assertion, "Every indication is that with financial support and different forms of supporting pregnant mothers and then some post-birth help also we could come close to a 50% reduction in abortions."⁴² According to platform director Michael Yaki, the insertion of this language about support for pregnant woman was "significant," because it gave antiabortion

Democrats a platform from which to advocate for "abortion reduction in even stronger terms."⁴³

CACG ratcheted up its claims about the supposed effects of economic policies on abortion in August 2008 when it released a study that claimed that social and economic support for pregnant women and low income families "dramatically reduce the number of abortions." The study examined all US states from 1982–2000 and claimed that "a two standard deviation increase in economic assistance to low income families is correlated with a 20% lower abortion rate in the 1990s. Across the entire United States, this translates into roughly 200,000 fewer abortions."⁴⁴

The only fact in the study that is certain, however, is that the abortion rate dropped throughout the 1990s. The authors of the study attempt to correlate that drop with other trends in the same decade, but cannot establish causality. For example, they note that states that provided higher levels of economic support for pregnant women reported fewer abortions in the 1990s. But they offer no evidence that can directly link that economic support with the

decrease in abortions. Abortion could have dropped for other reasons such as increased funding for contraceptive access or changes in the composition of the population. Throughout the study, the authors make no attempt to control for factors such as age or income level of the population that may affect their findings or other policies that may have affected the abortion rate.

In addition, the study is full of unproven, flimsily constructed suppositions such as: "Policies that allow Medicaid funding to pay for abortion services or that directly decrease the benefits associated with bringing a pregnancy to term (such as a family size cap on government assistance) *should* increase the abortion rate. Take away these direct policy interventions and the abortion rate *should* decrease."

More importantly, they ignore evidence from leading experts on abortion rates in the United States, such as the Guttmacher Institute, that suggests that the decrease in abortion is due to a confluence of factors, including "better contraceptive use, lower levels of unintended pregnancy, more women carrying unintended pregnancies to term and greater

difficulties accessing abortion services in some geographic areas.”⁴⁵

They also completely discount the fact that some women, when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, may simply decide that it is not the right time for them to have a child, no matter

what inducements the state may offer to them to continue the pregnancy.

Nonetheless, CACG heavily promoted the study as the ultimate solution to the abortion issue: “Too often our abortion debate has been used to score political points by both sides, rather than to identify what kinds of public policies will actually prevent and reduce abortions in America. This data shows that policy makers on both sides of the aisle have a moral imperative to enact legislation that provides economic and social supports for vulnerable women and families in order to reduce abortions,” said Kelley.⁴⁶

However, in November 2008, CACG stealthily removed the original study from its Web site and replaced it with an updated version. Apparently, the authors of the original study used incorrect abortion data for the years following 1997. One author removed his name from the flawed study, while the other, Professor Joseph Wright of the University of Notre Dame, maintained that while the initial analysis was erroneous, the notion that lowering poverty

rates would reduce the number of abortions in the country still held true. At the same time, Wright acknowledged that with analysis of the correct data, the correlation between abortion rate reduction and family caps of the Women, Infants & Children Nutrition Program (WIC) severely diminished.⁴⁷

This discovery of faulty research only confirms the flimsiness of the study and reaffirms the fact that CACG is staunchly antiabortion. In a scramble to refute antiabortion critics of the study, Wright went so far as to say, “While the findings suggest that state laws restricting abortion have little effect on the overall abortion rate, this does not diminish Catholics in Alliance’s support for such legislation.”⁴⁸ Indeed, legislation prohibiting abortion has no effect on reducing the need for abortion, not just the rate as the study insists. Similarly, the antipoverty initiatives which CACG seeks to name as the panacea for reducing the number of abortions are scarcely as effective as evidence-based, prevention practices such as contraception promotion and comprehensive sexuality education, measures CACG vocally opposes. •

Like most conservative, antichoice organization, CACG refuses to support evidence-based, prevention practices such as contraception promotion and comprehensive sexuality education

The 2008 Election

Again in the 2008 election cycle, CACG attempted to take credit for ongoing shifts in the electorate toward the Democratic Party and to claim that its positioning on abortion was key to regaining Catholic voters. After Barack Obama was elected, Kelley said: “The election of Barack Obama represents a historic moment for our nation. Across the often bitter divides of race and class, Americans united behind a shared vision for the common good.”⁴⁹

Clearly Catholics were a major force in the 2008 election, just as they had been in prior elections. According to exit polls, Catholics voted for Barack Obama over John McCain by 54 to 45 percent—a seven point increase over John Kerry’s showing in 2004. But for Catholics, like the population as a whole, the driving factor was the economy. In a post-election analysis, Rev Thomas Reese SJ, of the Woodstock Theological Center in

Georgetown University was skeptical that either the Catholic bishops or progressive organizations had much impact on the Catholic vote: “For Catholics, as for other Americans, the economy became the dominant issue in the election...Catholic voters did not embrace either the conservative nonnegotiables or the church’s preferential option for the poor. They were concerned about themselves and their families.”⁵⁰

It is also important to note that McCain won a majority of white Catholics (52 to 47 percent). Obama won the overall Catholic vote because he won a significant majority (67 percent) of Hispanic Catholics, many of whom were driven to the Democratic Party by the Republican Party’s anti-immigration rhetoric, and Obama did somewhat better among people who attend church once a week.⁵¹ •

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Convention for the Common Good



One member of the steering committee reports, “While not one group listed abortion as one of their top four issues, abortion was included in the platform

Perhaps CACG’s biggest effort in the 2008 election season was the Convention for the Common Good. Held in Philadelphia on the weekend of July 11, CACG and NETWORK convened the events along with several co-sponsors. According to a press release from CACG, more than 800 delegates attended the convention which featured speakers such as Senator Bob Casey, Jr. (D) of Pennsylvania, journalist and Brookings Institution fellow E.J. Dionne, Jr. and AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney.⁵² A main thrust of the convention was the affirmation of the Platform for the Common Good.

The platform was developed in a collaborative process with delegates around the country. At the request of CACG, people convened small group sessions, identified the issues most important to their community and sent their responses back to the steering committee. Over 2,500 people participated in these sessions, according to the post-convention press release.⁵³ The steering committee analyzed this feedback and formulated the platform on the basis of the results, or so they said. War and the economy were, not

surprisingly, the two issues that topped the list. However, one member of the steering committee reports, “While not one group listed abortion as one of their top four issues, abortion was included in the platform.”⁵⁴

The preamble of the platform reads: “Our Catholic tradition raises the best of what it means to be human and challenges us to live up to these ideals... Victimized are the unborn, those experiencing war and violence, those suffering from economic poverty in our own nation, and those fleeing violence and poverty in other nations...” The platform goes on to recommend the following government action: “Promote policies that prevent and reduce abortions by supporting women and families. Ensure robust alternatives to abortion, including adoption.”⁵⁵

After the convention, the platform was sent to all the presidential candidates, political parties, senators and representatives. Delegates from the convention were encouraged to gather eight signatures for the platform. As of December 2008, just over 6,000 signatures had been gathered. Additionally, CACG launched its election Web site—



votethecommongood.com— following the convention. The site offered guests the opportunity to sign on to the platform, volunteer to distribute voter education materials and access voter guides from CACG as well as allied organizations.

The Web site was part of an ad campaign that CACG initiated in the lead up to the 2008 elections, with the slogan “Faith Can Move Mountains: Vote the Common Good.” According to Kelley, the organization spent \$250,000 on radio, print and billboard ads in Scranton, PA, and other heavily Catholic areas emphasizing issues such as jobs, home foreclosures and health care and that highlighted the need to build “a consistent culture of life that honors human dignity at all stages.”⁵⁶ A review of the Web site shows it had at most three or four paid organizers working in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

It is unclear how much of an impact CACG could have had during this election as there were also other forces at work in 2008. Recognizing the importance of the Catholic vote in the key Midwestern swing states, both Barack Obama and Hillary

Clinton had significant grassroots Catholic outreach components to their campaigns and were comfortable discussing how their religious faith influenced their policy decisions. Obama organizers were trained how to discuss Catholic doctrine on abortion and held “brunch for Barack” events after Sunday Mass.⁵⁷

Even the bishops helped move the discussion along. In November 2007, the USCCB released its *Faithful Citizenship* voting guide which clearly left room for Catholics to vote for prochoice candidates. The document said while Catholics could not support a candidate who “takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil” such as abortion or racism, “if the voter’s intent is to support that position.” However, “a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons.”⁵⁸

But more than anything, the deteriorating state of the US economy and continued dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq pushed concerns about social issues such as abortion and gay marriage out of voters’

minds and replaced them with concern about bread-and-butter issues. A poll conducted by Belden Russonello and Stewart for Catholics for Choice in the lead-up to the 2008 election found that Catholic voters were most concerned with the economy (68% saying it should be one of the highest priorities), protecting the US from terrorism (54%), and resolving the war in Iraq (50%), while issues such as abortion (18%) and gay rights (6%) were at the bottom of the list.⁵⁹

In addition, a Pew poll in late August 2008 showed a rising discontent with the continued politicization of religion. For the first time in a decade, a majority of respondents said that churches and other houses of worship should stay out of political matters. There was also a notable increase—from 40 percent to 46 percent—in the percentage of people who said they are uncomfortable hearing politicians talk about how religious they are, which counters CACG’s assertion that introducing more religion into the political debate was helpful.⁶⁰ •



Conclusion

CACG is willing to trade the pro-woman, prochoice heritage of the Democratic Party for the mirage of Catholic voters so cowed by the Catholic hierarchy's position on abortion that they will not vote Democratic

The Democratic Party has asserted both the right of women to make the best reproductive choices for themselves and their families and their moral capacity to do so. It has also asserted the need, and obligation, for society to care for all children, for the poor and for the disenfranchised, not simply as a condition of reducing abortion, but as a moral obligation of all citizens. CACG is willing to trade the pro-woman, prochoice heritage of the Democratic Party for the mirage of Catholic voters so cowed by the Catholic hierarchy's position on abortion that they will not vote Democratic. But the 2008 election proved this is only a mirage. Catholic voters will vote for a prochoice candidate when that candidate articulates positions that they recognize are in their self-interest and the best interests of the country. The overwhelming majority of Catholics do not vote on the abortion issue.

Clearly, CACG was created by a handful of Democrats who felt that Catholics would be unable to reject the instructions of their bishops. It was and is a cynical attempt to use abortion as a bargaining chip with voters. But by trying to steer the Democratic

Party away from its strong tradition of support for abortion rights, CACG seeks to damage the party and women's right to choose.

CACG's focus on reducing the number of abortions through antipoverty measures is also damaging. However, what it neglects to mention is the importance of evidence-based prevention methods such as comprehensive sexuality education, contraception and affordable child care and health care. CACG is only recognizing one side of the picture, and in doing so is stalling much-needed efforts to reduce unintended pregnancy, and hence the need for abortion, through proven solutions such as contraceptive access and education.

In questioning the moral validity both of the abortion decision and of the party that supports women who would choose abortion, CACG degrades the moral agency of women. Its assertion that no woman would freely choose abortion if presented with other options seeks to return shame to the abortion decision and marginalize women who have abortions, a view that is at odds with the prochoice platform of the Democratic Party. •

Appendix: CACG Staff, Board and Advisory Council

CO-FOUNDERS

Alexia Kelley

Kelley has a BA in religion from Haverford College and a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. She spent nearly a decade at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the church's domestic anti-poverty campaign. She is also the author of *Call to Family, Community, and Participation*, an education booklet in a Catholic social teaching series published by the USCCB. She is the co-editor of *Living the Catholic Social Tradition: Cases and Commentary* (2004) and co-author of *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division* (2008). She served as director of religious outreach for the Democratic National Committee and as a religion advisor to John Kerry in the closing weeks of the 2004 presidential campaign.

Tom Perriello

Perriello received his BA and JD from Yale University. From 2002-3, Perriello was special advisor to the international prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra

Leone. He was then special advisor and spokesperson for the international prosecutor who indicted Liberian dictator Charles Taylor. He was a consultant to the International Center for Transitional Justice in Kosovo, Darfur and Afghanistan. Perriello was a fellow at the Century Foundation and consultant to the National Council of Churches of Christ. In 2004, he co-founded Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and served as a senior advisor to the organization. In 2008, he ran for Congress from the fifth district of Virginia and scored an upset victory over long-time Congressman Virgil Goode (R).

BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ADVISORY COUNCIL

Board

Elizabeth Frawley Bagley (Chair):

Bagley is a member of the law firm of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. She served as senior advisor to the secretary of state from 1997-2001 and as the US ambassador to Portugal from

1994-1997. Her husband Smith Bagley is a former national finance vice-chair of the Democratic National Committee.

Francis Xavier Doyle: Doyle was the founding executive director of the Catholic Development Conference, founded in 1968.

From 1971 through 1995, Mr. Doyle served in various positions within the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, including assistant director, government liaison, director of finance and administration, and associate general secretary.

Rev. William J. Byron: Byron is a Jesuit priest and president of St. Joseph's Preparatory School and a former president of Catholic University and the University of Scranton.

Dr. Joseph J. Fahey: Fahey is professor of religious studies at Manhattan College. His publications include *Reinhold Niebuhr on Human Nature and World Peace*; *Peace, War, and the Christian Conscience*; and *Irenology: The Study of Peace, War and the Christian Conscience: Where Do You Stand?* He was a founding member and General Secretary of Pax Christi, USA.

Jennifer Mason McAward:

McAward is an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame School of Law, where she teaches civil rights and constitutional law. As an attorney in Washington, DC, her practice focused on civil rights, children's rights and the First Amendment.

Annette M. McDermott:

McDermott is a Boston College PhD candidate in political science. She served as secretary of social concerns for the Diocese of Springfield, MA, and as a consultant to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Melba Novoa: Novoa is an educational television producer and director with a focus on Hispanic media. Most recently, she served as executive director of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry.

Alfred M. Rotondaro: Rotondaro is currently a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He served for 22 years as the executive director of the National Italian American Foundation.

Stephen F. Schneck: Schneck is associate professor and chair of the department of politics at the Catholic University of America, as well as director of its Life Cycle Institute.

Mark Tuohey: Tuohey is a lawyer at Vinson & Elkins LLP.

Agnes Williams: Williams is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center. She is a former member of the board of directors of Georgetown University and the Woodstock Theological Center. Currently she serves on the board of advisors of the Georgetown Center for Liturgy.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Members include **Professor Lisa Soule Cahill** of Boston College's Department of Theology; representatives of organized labor such as **Steve Callahan** of the AFL-CIO and **Tom Chabolla** of the SEIU; several religious including the **Rev. Charles Currie, SJ**, president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, **Sr. Mary Waskowiak**, president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, **Fr. James Greenfield, OSFS**, of the Oblates of St. Francis De Sales and **Rev. Kenneth Himes, OFM**, chair of the Boston College Department of Theology; **Ambassador Thomas Melady**, former US ambassador to the Vatican; **John Halpin** of the Center for American Progress and **Dr. Kathleen Maas Weigert**, director of the Georgetown University Center for Social Justice, Research, Teaching and Service.

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