News



A screenshot of an illustration of a Catholics for Catholics Mass card for Donald Trump. (NCR screenshot/YouTube)



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A Catholic group that hosted a prayer event for former President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago in March is now trying to have Masses said for the presumptive GOP nominee before the November election, prompting concern from some priests who say it could politicize the Eucharist.

The well-funded Catholics for Catholics group said the "Holy Masses for President Trump Campaign" aims to have 2,024 Masses said between Trump's birthday, June 14, and Election Day, Nov. 5. A spokesperson told NCR that 92 people from all over the country had committed to request a Mass intention since the project was officially launched on June 19.

"These Masses will be offered for all patriots working hard during this election period to fight back vs the atheistic communism that seeks to destroy the family, male and female genders, our borders, the victims of human trafficking, the rights of the unborn etc.," said CEO John C. Yep in a June 19 mass email.

Yep said that "the very first Mass of this great Campaign" was offered at the "People's Convention" June 14-16 in Detroit, which Trump attended. The event was sponsored by Turning Point Action, the political advocacy arm of the conservative group Turning Point USA, both founded by activist and former radio host Charlie Kirk.

"Christ Himself became present with us in that room fueling our hearts for the battles ahead," Yep wrote about that liturgy.

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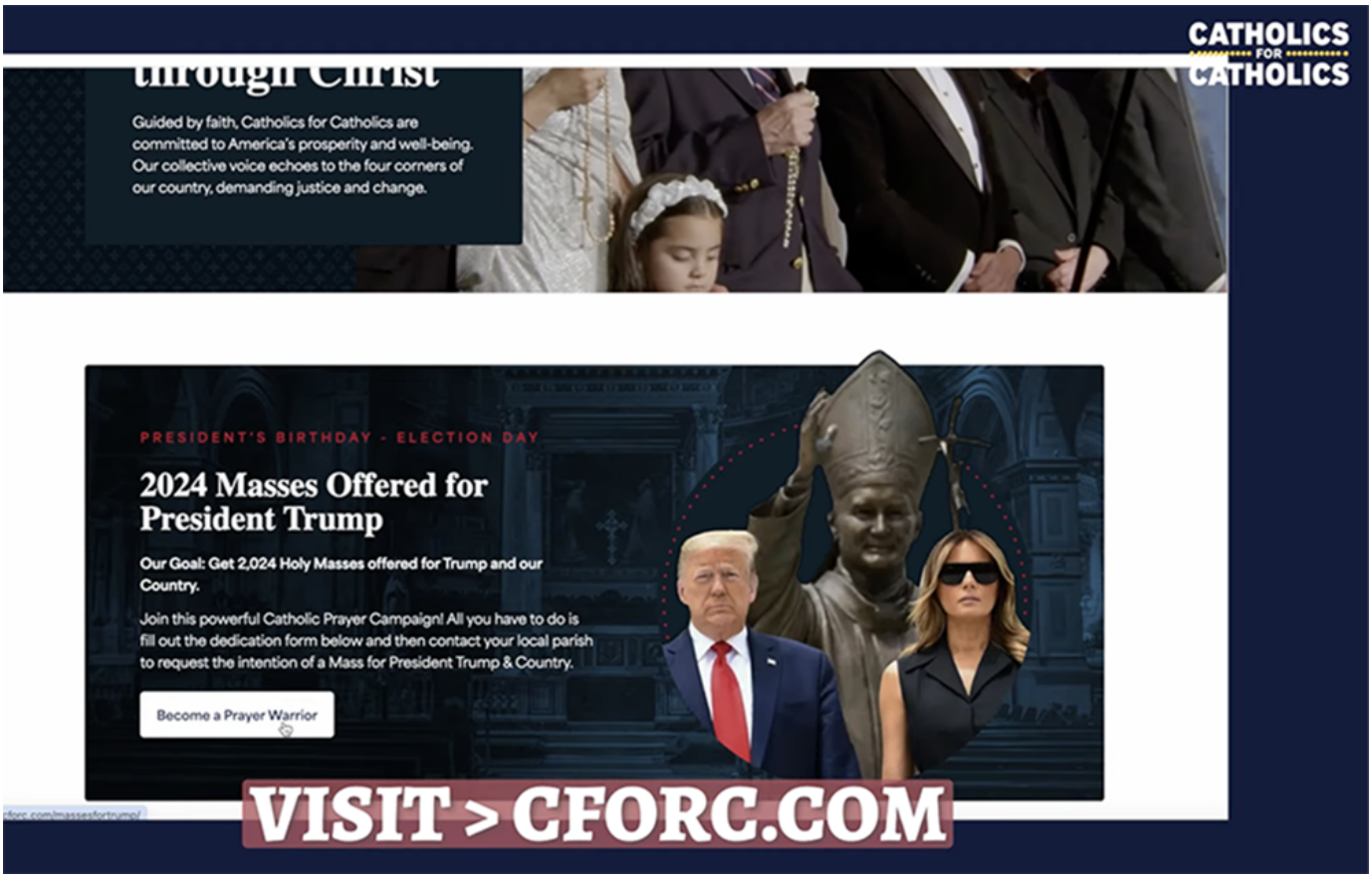
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But Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, a longtime church commentator and columnist for Religion News Service, said the project "prostitutes the Eucharist for political purposes."

"Requests by political operatives that priests offer the Mass for partisan politics is appalling and should be forbidden by bishops whether the request comes from Republicans or Democrats," Reese told NCR in an email interview.

Founded in September 2022, Catholics for Catholics has assembled an aggressive media operation and has organized rallies across the country, including a rally last summer outside Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium to protest an LGBTQ drag group. In March, the group hosted the black-tie "Catholic Prayer for Trump" event at Mar-a-Lago, with speakers including conservative lobbyist Roger Stone and U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who served briefly as Trump's national security adviser.

The group is headed by Yep, a former Phoenix diocesan official who has said he spent 14 years discerning priesthood with the Legionaries of Christ. He also was the Arizona state director for the pro-Trump nonprofit CatholicVote during the 2020 elections and treasurer and secretary in 2022 for Blood of Martyrs, a Phoenix group that promoted Fr. James Altman, the LaCrosse, Wisconsin priest removed from ministry for his political and anti-Pope Francis comments.



A screenshot of the Catholics for Catholics website from a YouTube video announcing the "Masses for Trump" campaign. (NCR screenshot/YouTube)

As a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization, Catholics for Catholics can endorse political candidates as long as politics is not their primary activity. However,

parishes and other religious organizations that are designated by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) are prohibited from participating in political campaign activity.

A 48-page guide on political activity and lobbying from the U.S. bishops' Office of the General Counsel does not cover the issue of whether parishes can say Masses for political candidates.

A Mass can be said for any person, living or dead, said Jesuit Fr. John Baldovin, professor of historical and liturgical theology at Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry.

"You can do it for any individual that you want to pray for," he told NCR. "But I would question the wisdom or prudence of a priest who would accept an intention for a partisan purpose. I find that troubling."

The email from Catholics for Catholics instructs people to "contact your local parish and ask that a priest offers up a Mass for this intention" and then use their website to "send a mass card directly to President Trump along with a personalized message letting him know that you had a Mass offered for him."

A $10 donation to Catholics for Catholics to cover printing and shipping of Mass cards is required.

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>
> — Jesuit Fr. John Baldovin
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Whether offering a Mass for a candidate amounts to an endorsement or not is debatable. Reese noted that the U.S. bishops have traditionally not endorsed political candidates and have forbidden priests from endorsing candidates from the pulpit.

"Using the Eucharist as a political tool is contrary to everything the bishops' Eucharistic Revival stands for," Reese said, referring to the upcoming July U.S. bishops-sponsored event whose goal is to "renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist."

In a response to questions emailed from NCR, Catholics for Catholics responded that they believe in the power of prayer.

"We all need prayers, especially during difficult times. The Church considers the Mass the greatest possible prayer of intercession because it is the perfect offering of Christ to the Father by making present the Paschal Mystery of His death and resurrection," the statement said. "We cannot forget that Donald Trump besides being a politician is also a man, a husband, a father."

They noted, however, that neither Trump nor Biden should receive the Eucharist: Biden, because his public support for abortion puts him in "manifest grave sin," and Trump because as a non-Catholic he is "outside the one true Faith."