News



Vice President Kamala Harris poses for a photo with Della Marie Levi, owner of Della Soul Records, the first Black woman-owned vinyl record store in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Feb. 22. President Joe Biden dropped out of the presidential race July 21 and endorsed Harris. (Official White House photo/Lawrence Jackson)



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August 1, 2024

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Just hours after President Joe Biden ended his presidential race July 21 and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris, a nationwide flurry of social media posts, texts and phone calls rallied a staggering 40,000 Black women and allies for a historic, grassroots-organized virtual gathering backing Harris. The call became a model for other groups over the next several days.

Catholic theologians Kimberly Lymore in Chicago and Valerie Lewis-Mosley in New Jersey both tried to join the July 21 evening Zoom early, but it had reached capacity. The two women logged off before an executive at the video conferencing company removed size restrictions, but they stepped away from their screens energized and excited.

"We weren't able to get in, but that affirmed that there is this incredible network of so very many women who heard the call and responded," said 67-year-old Lewis-Mosley.

Lymore, 66, agreed. "It shows there's this momentum and hope that we will have a different kind of election this time," she said. "I'm personally planning to work to make it happen."

Catholics are nearly evenly split when it comes to party affiliation. Black voters, however, and especially Black women, long have been the Democrats' most steadfast voting bloc and could be crucial to determining the outcome of this year's presidential election.

The enthusiasm for Harris across many demographics following the candidate shake-up last month was expressed by three Black Catholic women interviewed by NCR — even as they critiqued some of the vice president's actions or positions and reflected on the ramped-up racism they said she'll endure.



Kimberly Lymore, a pastoral administrator and theologian, is director of the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union. (Courtesy of Kimberly Lymore)

"It's gonna be ugly," said Lymore, director of the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union. "She has to be prepared for the rhetoric that comes from Republicans and she's got to stand strong. But it's not going to be a cakewalk."

During the 2020 election, President Donald Trump referred to Harris, then a California senator, as "this monster." A few days ago, he called Harris "Dumb as a Rock," and has repeatedly mispronounced her name.

Alessandra Harris (no relation to Kamala) is an author and mother of four in the San Francisco Bay area. She listed the vice president's firsts: first female district attorney

in San Francisco, first female California attorney general, first Black and South Asian senator from California, and first female, Black and South Asian vice president.

When Barack Obama was running his campaign, people said the country was not ready for a Black president, said the 42-year-old Alessandra. "But he made history and was elected."

Lymore and Lewis-Mosley are both staunch Democrats. Alessandra is registered to vote in California as "no party preference" because neither the Republican nor Democrat party completely represent "my beliefs, values and political preferences," she said.

But Alessandra plans to vote for Harris because she said democracy cannot withstand another Trump presidency.



Alessandra Harris, an author and mother of four in the San Francisco Bay area, plans to vote for Kamala Harris in part because she sees Donald Trump as a threat to

democracy. (Courtesy of Alessandra Harris)

"Trump is a person who has been convicted of crimes, massive evidence of business fraud, sexual assault and defamation of a woman, cheated on his wife, and takes every opportunity to spew hatred and vitriol, in addition to trying to overturn a democratic election," she said.

Though Alessandra didn't think Biden could beat Trump, she thinks Harris can.

"I know Black Catholic women who run the spectrum of conservative to liberal," said Alessandra. "But I do think a good number of them will vote for Harris."

The vice president supports legislation to protect the right to abortion nationally, and in March she made what was likely the first official visit to an abortion clinic by a president or vice president.

> 'I know Black Catholic women who run the spectrum of conservative to liberal. But I do think a good number of them will vote for Harris.'
> —Alessandra Harris
>
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More than 70% of Black Catholics say abortion should be legal in all or most cases; for white Catholics it's 56%, Hispanics, 60%.

Alessandra said Harris' "strong support for reproductive justice as she calls it," departs from her own Catholic pro-life beliefs.

Yet "pro-life to me is respecting life from the womb to tomb," said Alessandra, who says she's heard horror stories of women being denied treatment for miscarriages or forced to carry dead babies to term after states limited or banned abortion following the overturn of *Roe* v. *Wade* in 2022.

She added there are Republican governors who have signed laws restricting abortion and also refuse to expand Medicaid. "I believe they are responsible for many hospitals and women's health centers closing, especially in rural and low-income areas, which is not pro-life at all," Alessandra said.



Valerie Lewis-Mosley is a retired nurse and an adjunct professor of theology at both Caldwell University and Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies in Louisiana. (Courtesy of Valerie Lewis-Mosley)

In November, U.S. Catholic Bishops decided to keep "the threat of abortion" as the "preeminent priority" in their guidance to Catholic voters.

"I think the bishops need to focus on the inherent sin that is any attack on human dignity and the sanctity of all — all — life," said Lewis-Mosley, a retired nurse and an adjunct professor of theology at both Caldwell University in Caldwell, New Jersey, and Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies in Louisiana.

Lewis-Mosley said she wishes the bishops were as focused on the attacks on Black lives "in their church and in their nation" as they are on abortion.

"I've been Black and Catholic my whole life, and we still cannot walk in our homes, come down the street and not fear losing our life," said Lewis-Mosley, who is a member of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium. She also highlighted the high rate of death among pregnant Black women and infants.

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Republicans have referred to Harris as Biden's "border czar," blaming her for what they say are failed approaches to immigration. The vice president is in fact not responsible for the border, but she made statements early in the administration that were widely criticized by immigration activists and others.

During her first international trips to and Guatemala and Mexico in 2021, Harris urged "folks in this region who are thinking about making that dangerous trek to the United States-Mexico border: Do not come. Do not come."

Lymore said she believes Harris was still trying to "feel her way" in terms of the complexities of the border and trusts she will surround herself with people who are "going to implement policies that are good and necessary."

Alessandra said she cringed when she heard Harris make that speech but thinks Democrats have a hard case to make because Republicans often criticize them for being "too soft on immigration."

She commended Harris for her work behind the scenes to address the root causes of migration to the United States and compared such an approach to Trump's efforts to build a wall and to his family separation policy.

In the wake of Trump's policy, "news stories have reported thousands of migrant children held in shelters in the U.S. have been raped, sexually assaulted, fondled and other unspeakable actions," said Alessandra. "Scripture tells us Jesus was once a migrant who escaped harm with his family. Imagine if he was torn apart from Mother Mary and St. Joseph and treated so harshly."



Vice President Kamala Harris attends a meeting with President Joe Biden and their "Investing in America" Cabinet to discuss the administration's economic agenda May 5, 2023, in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. (Official White House photo/Adam Schultz)

The three women also pointed to Harris' accomplishments over her tenure as vice president.

Alessandra recalled that Harris cast the tie-breaking vote for the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and has advocated for policies addressing climate change. As district attorney in San Francisco, she created an environmental justice unit.

As Lewis-Mosley reflected on Harris' candidacy, she had a message: "Go vote."

She recounted how the name of an ancestor was documented in a Georgia voter registry in 1867, "when my ancestors were right out of enslavement."

"I would ask people to vote and that they respect the constitution of this nation and that they think hard and deep about who to elect," she said.

When asked what she thinks it would feel like to have the first Black woman president, she paraphrased Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise," including this stanza:

> You may shoot me with your words,
> You may cut me with your eyes,
> You may kill me with your hatefulness,
> But still, like air, I'll rise.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.
A version of this story appeared in the **Aug 16-29, 2024** print issue under the headline: 'Go vote': Black Catholic women talk racism, abortion, hope amid Harris candidacy .