News



Delegates hold signs as former President Barack Obama speaks during the Democratic National Convention Aug. 20 in Chicago. (AP/Brynn Anderson)



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U.S. Rep. Madeleine Dean remembers a homily in her home parish when she was first running to represent Pennsylvania's 4th District in 2018. "The pastor said, 'You know what you have to do on Tuesday. You cannot vote for anybody who is pro-choice,'" she recalled the priest preaching.

Dean, who has been endorsed by Planned Parenthood for her support of legal abortion, said she remembers feeling "disrespected for who I was, what my faith believes and what I stood for."

As a part of an Aug. 21 panel of Catholics at the Democratic National Convention, Dean said she wants her party and her church to know that "Catholics are not a monolith."

Panelist Miguel Diaz of Loyola University Chicago also stressed the diversity of Catholics in the United States and worldwide. "To try to paint a monolithic picture is neither accurate, nor just," said Diaz, former ambassador to the Holy See during the Obama administration.

Whatever their beliefs about abortion or its legality — and there is a breadth of opinions — most Catholic Democrats at the convention say they enthusiastically support the Kamala Harris-Tim Walz ticket and see no problem with their party's pro-choice platform. They told NCR that their faith informs their political views and is the foundation of the values that prompt them to vote Democratic.



The panel included (from left) U.S. Rep. Madeleine Dean, New York delegate Caroline McGraw, U.S. Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon, Miguel Diaz of Loyola University Chicago, Sinsinawa Dominican Sr. Reg McKillip, Catholics Vote Common Good National Co-Chair Patrick Carolan, and Christopher Carroll, a member of Catholics Vote Common Good's national steering committee. (NCR photo/Heidi Schlumpf)

"A lot of my core values align with the Democratic Party and with my faith," said Caroline McGraw, who at 23 is the youngest delegate from New York. She also has seen Catholic pro-life friends who "grew up Republican" support Biden and now Harris, because Trump "is against a lot of our values as Catholics."

McGraw was part of the panel on "The Importance of Catholic Voters," sponsored by Catholics Vote Common Good. The group's national co-chair, Patrick Carolan, pointed out that "the one sin that's mentioned most by Jesus in the Bible and in the Gospels is hypocrisy."

Claiming to be pro-life but refusing to fund the social safety net, or cutting mental health funding after blaming a mass shooting on mental health issues, is "the definition of hypocrisy," Carolan said.

"We need to tell our story and talk about what it means to be Catholic and Christian," he said. "We've allowed the other side to co-opt the term 'pro-life.' Pro-life doesn't start and end with abortion. ... We have to talk about pro-life being everything."

Carolan's message to Catholic voters: "You're not going to go to hell for voting for a Democrat."

Bibiana Boerio, a delegate from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, calls herself a "Pope Francis voter."

"I'm not worried about going to hell," said Boerio, who ran for Congress as a Democrat in 2018 but lost in her heavily Republican district in southwestern Pennsylvania. "I believe the world is too complex for black-and-white simple answers."

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On the abortion issue, Boerio cites the separation of church and state. "I don't want to live in a place where my religion is forced on someone else," she said, noting that people of other faiths have different definitions of when life begins.

Sinsinawa Dominican Sr. Reg McKillip said on the panel that religious women have been supporting "all life issues" for a long time. "This is not a new role for us," she said.

Patrick Kompare, who came from suburban Chicago to attend the panel, believes in "letting people make their own choice on the matter [of abortion] because it's such a deeply personal thing."

A student at the University of Notre Dame, he supports Harris for president in part because during an internship with a labor union he met families for whom "this election could make or break them."

U.S. Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon of Pennsylvania's 5th District recalled a town hall at Villanova University shortly after the *Dobbs* decision that overturned Roe vs. Wade. When students were asked what were the most important issues to them, "every young woman in that room said reproductive rights."

"To be saying that in front of their professors at a Catholic university — that's something," Scanlon said on the panel.



Catholics Vote Common Good and Vote Common Good members are traveling around the country in a bus to engage faith voters. (NCR photo/Heidi Schlumpf)

Scanlon said she appreciated the convention's focus on reclaiming patriotism and faith as "shared American values," especially since "so much of the last eight years has been about dividing people."

Christopher Hale, a political consultant who led Catholic outreach for Barack Obama in 2012, said the idea that one party represents Catholic teaching and values "is just

not true" and that increasingly faith voters are not making their choices based on one issue.

"The reality is that Catholics are going to make choices that are complicated," he said. "A Catholic can vote for Kamala Harris. A Catholic can vote for Donald Trump. I don't think there's any argument that a Catholic should vote for one or the other."

At an offsite press conference on the first day of the convention, the group Democrats for Life of America argued that the party was pushing out pro-life voters.

"To secure victory, Democrats must expand our coalition and engage with swing voters who are more reticent to the pro-abortion rhetoric that has dominated Democratic politics for the past fifteen years," according to a white paper that the group distributed at the press conference.

But Christopher Carroll, a member of Catholics Vote Common Good's national steering committee, said the Democratic Party needs to reach out to all Catholic voters, including ones like him.

"I'm a proud openly gay, pro-choice Catholic," he said on the panel. "I go to Mass every Sunday and Bible study every Tuesday. That doesn't make me a Republican. That makes me Catholic."

Carroll, who is also campaign manager for Connecticut U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, said parties ignore Catholic voters to their peril. "When you reach out to this demographic, you win."

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.