News



U.S. Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris speaks during the first presidential debate with Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia Sept. 10. (OSV News/Reuters/Brian Snyder)



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Editor's note: *This is Part 2 of a two-part series focusing on Catholic groups' involvement in the 2024 presidential election. This story focuses on groups that support Vice President Kamala Harris. Part 1 explored groups supporting former President Donald Trump.*

After the announcement that Vice President Kamala Harris would not be attending this year's Al Smith dinner, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan quipped that the last presidential candidate to miss the charity event, Walter Mondale in 1984, went on to lose in 49 states.

Harris' campaign has said she is skipping the historic fundraising dinner to focus on battleground states and reaffirmed her commitment to engaging Catholic voters.

That engagement is happening not only through the campaign's official outreach to Catholics, but through a number of other groups — some with such similar names that it can be difficult to keep them straight. There are Catholics for Harris-Walz, Catholics for Kamala, and Catholics for Harris.

This is in a campaign that has perhaps mastered the use of identity-based affinity groups to raise money and enthusiasm in a way no other candidate has. What started with a group of Black women supporting Harris has resulted in gatherings for Black men, white women, "white dudes," South Asian women, Latinas, Black queer men, even a call for "Paisans" or Italian Americans and one for "Deadheads for Kamala."

In August, a "Christians for Kamala" call was organized by John Pavlovitz, a progressive Christian author and activist, who said the group's goal was to "normalize being a non-Republican Christian." Pavlovitz reported that 35,000 viewers on the call raised $150,000, with another $50,000 coming in later.

That call featured 30 speakers, including two Catholics: Patrick Carolan of Catholics Vote Common Good and comedian John Fugelsang, who said he was a progressive

Catholic.

In September, Catholics had their own call, this time hosted by the Harris campaign, as part of its official launch of its Catholic outreach. Catholics also had a presence at the Democratic National Convention, with Catholics Vote Common Good hosting a panel on "The Importance of Catholic Voters."

Advertisement

Harris has a diverse religious and spiritual background, having been introduced to Hinduism and Christianity as a child. She joined a Baptist church as an adult, and is part of a Jewish family, since her husband and stepchildren are Jewish. Harris still identifies as a Baptist today and considers the Third Baptist Church in San Francisco, which has a history of working with civil rights leaders, her home church.

She does not often speak publicly about her faith, but has said that her connection to both Hinduism and Christianity helped ignite her commitment to social justice. "My earliest memories of the teachings of the Bible were of a loving God, a God who asked us to 'speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves' and to 'defend the rights of the poor and needy,' " Harris wrote in her 2019 memoir. "This is where I learned that 'faith' is a verb; I believe we must live our faith and show faith in action."

Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, is Lutheran, although he grew up Catholic. He also does not speak frequently about his faith, but has referred to Pilgrim Lutheran Church in St. Paul as his parish. It is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a mainline denomination on the more liberal end of the spectrum.

Last month, Pope Francis described both Harris and her opponent, former President Donald Trump, as "against life" and said voters must choose "the lesser of two evils." Although one recent survey showed Catholics favoring Harris, most polls show Trump ahead among Catholic voters, especially white Catholics, although the lead is slim.

Below is an NCR snapshot of some of the most notable Catholic-led groups and organizations supporting Harris:

Catholics for Harris-Walz

Catholic coordinator, Harris for President: Alex Nason

Type of organization: official campaign committee

Mission: "This election, there's so much at stake for our democracy, our freedoms, rule of law and our culture and the free world."

Having launched its outreach to Catholics with a national organizing call in mid-September, the official campaign committee is now hosting weekly phone banking to Catholic voters and helped organize watch parties during the vice presidential debate.



A screenshot of the Catholics for Harris-Walz website (NCR screenshot)

The Harris-Walz outreach will include a concerted effort to reach younger Catholic voters, who are tired of the polarized and hateful rhetoric, Catholic coordinator Alex Nason told NCR. Nason is also the campaign's coordinator for Irish Americans.

"Vice President Harris and Gov. Walz are united by a set of core values rooted in faith," he said. "Those are the values at the heart of this campaign, and we think they are what Catholic voters are looking for."

Nason said he also believes that "Donald Trump and JD Vance are taking these [Catholic] votes for granted."

The launch event featured remarks from Joe Donnelly, former ambassador to the Holy See; Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell, former executive director of Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice; Anthea Butler, a University of Pennsylvania professor and MSNBC commentator; and U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, who represents the 3rd District of Connecticut.

Nason is assisted by a "kitchen cabinet" of about 30 Catholics who are advising the campaign. They include representatives of other Catholic groups, such as Catholics Vote Common Good and Catholic Democrats, as well as other activists, political strategists, elected officials, theologians and scholars.

Catholics Vote Common Good

Founded: 2021

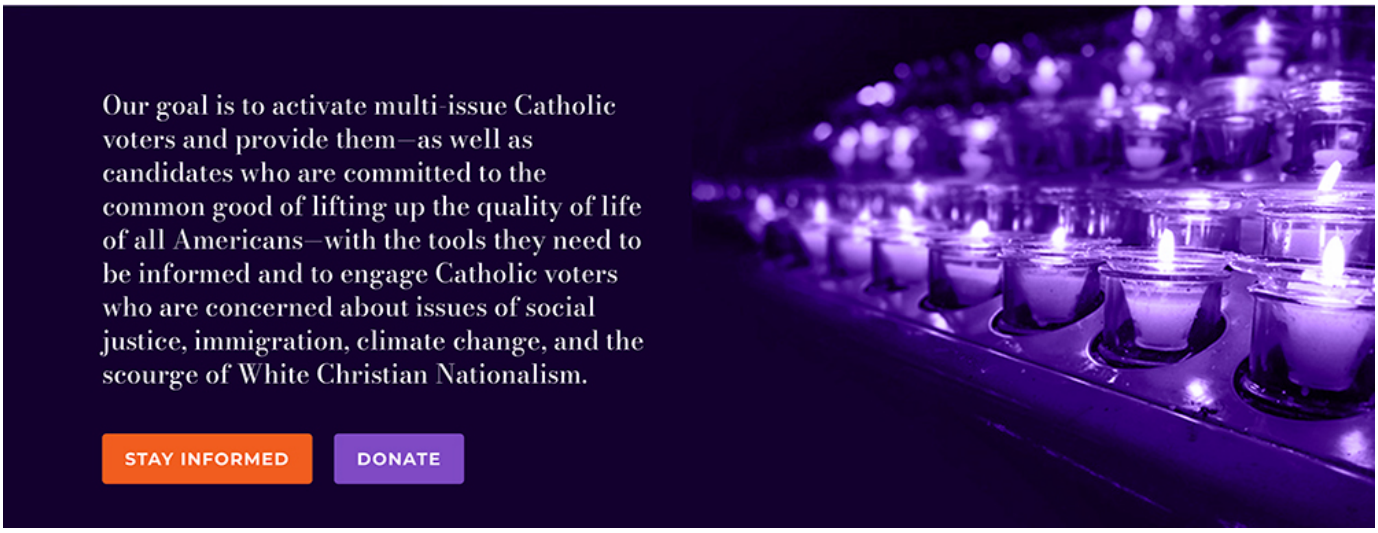
National co-chairs: Denise Murphy McGraw and Patrick Carolan

Headquarters: Edina, Minnesota

Type of organization: 501(c)(4)

Mission: "We are a non-profit organization that seeks to create common ground at the intersection of faith and politics for Catholics by finding areas of agreement based on common ideals, such as respecting the dignity of all people and building community."

The ecumenical, progressive Christian organization Vote Common Good has included outreach to Catholic voters since its founding in 2018. But after the 2020 election, a group that also had worked on the Catholics for Biden campaign committee decided to work together on the runoff elections in Georgia. They formed Catholics Vote Common Good, which partners with Vote Common Good.



A screenshot of the Catholics Vote Common Good website (NCR screenshot)

Both groups had a presence at this year's Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where they hosted a panel discussion on "The Importance of Catholic Voters," which featured Catholic politicians, scholars, activists and delegates. The overall message: "You won't go to hell for voting Democratic."

The Catholic group also assists Vote Common Good with its cross-country tour, identifying and reaching out to Catholics in the areas on the tour. The group also organizes phone banking to Catholics and encourages postcard writing.

"People always like to hear from other Catholics," said Patrick Carolan, who serves as co-director with Denise Murphy McGraw.

Volunteers can order pre-printed postcards (15 for $30) that say, "As a person of faith, please join me in voting for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness & self-control and for Harris/Walz." Also available are "Catholics for Harris/Walz" yard signs for $20 apiece.

"Our goal obviously is to help Kamala get elected and then to keep it going, to help raise awareness for the Catholic vote going forward," Carolan said.

Catholics for Kamala

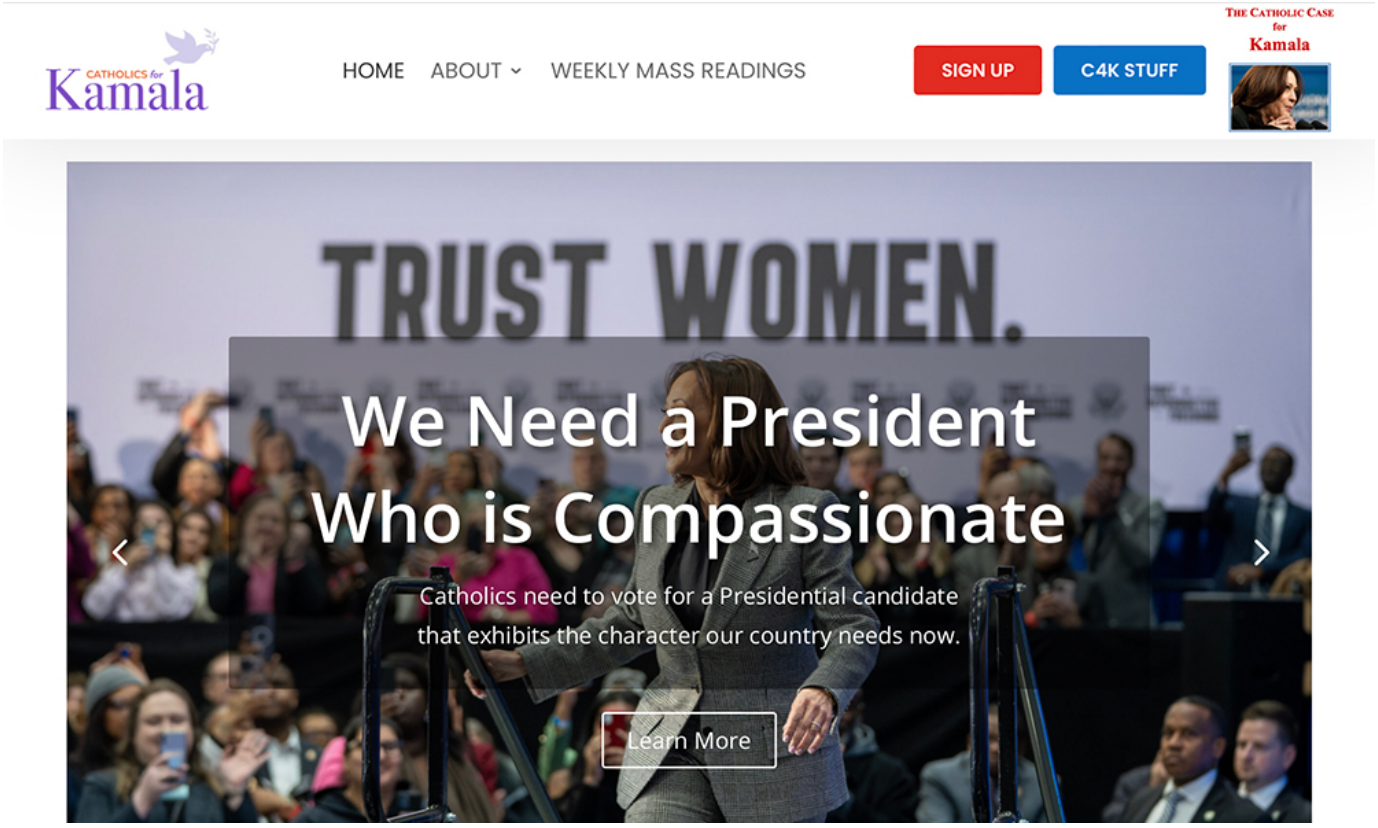
Founded: 2024

Organizers: Dr. Patrick Whelan and Catholics Vote Common Good

Mission: "Catholics for Kamala is a joint effort by Catholic advocacy organizations working together to elect Vice President Kamala Harris and Governor Tim Walz to this nation's highest offices and help them advance Catholic social justice priorities in our country."

Catholics Vote Common Good organizers are working with bioethicist Dr. Patrick Whelan, founder and former president of Catholic Democrats, on a website at Catholics4Kamala.org. It is funded by Catholics Vote Common Good, in part through sale of its "Catholics for Kamala" merchandise that includes yard signs, T-shirts, buttons and magnets.

A related group on Facebook, called "Catholics for Kamala Harris 2024," has more than 1,000 members. Its administrator is Michael Fox.



A screenshot of the Catholics for Kamala website (NCR screenshot)

Whelan previously wrote a booklet making "The Catholic Case for Obama," in which he helped craft an approach to abortion that focused on reducing abortions and finding common ground. This election cycle, he has partnered with Kathleen Kennedy Townsend on "The Catholic Case for Kamala," an 80-page booklet that is available for free online.

The publication looks at "issues that matter to Catholics," including the future of democracy, health care, race, corruption, the Supreme Court, global warming, immigration, the economy, the death penalty and foreign policy. On abortion, the authors discuss reducing versus criminalizing it.

In addition to making the case for Harris, the authors also make the case against Trump, warn of the "Opus Dei roots" of "Project 2025" (a collection of right-wing policy proposals from the Heritage Foundation), and discuss the role of conservative Catholics in the 2024 election.

"We decided to write this book because the World of Trump is so offensive to virtually every aspect of what might be considered true Catholic sensibilities," the authors say in the preface.

In the introduction, they say they hope their words "may reassure some people that voting for Vice President Harris and Governor Tim Walz is the right thing to do."

The group is also setting up a PAC called "Catholics for the People."

Catholics for the Future

Founded: summer 2024

Board: Stephen Schneck, Patrick Bergquist and Patricia Fugere

Headquarters: Washington, D.C.

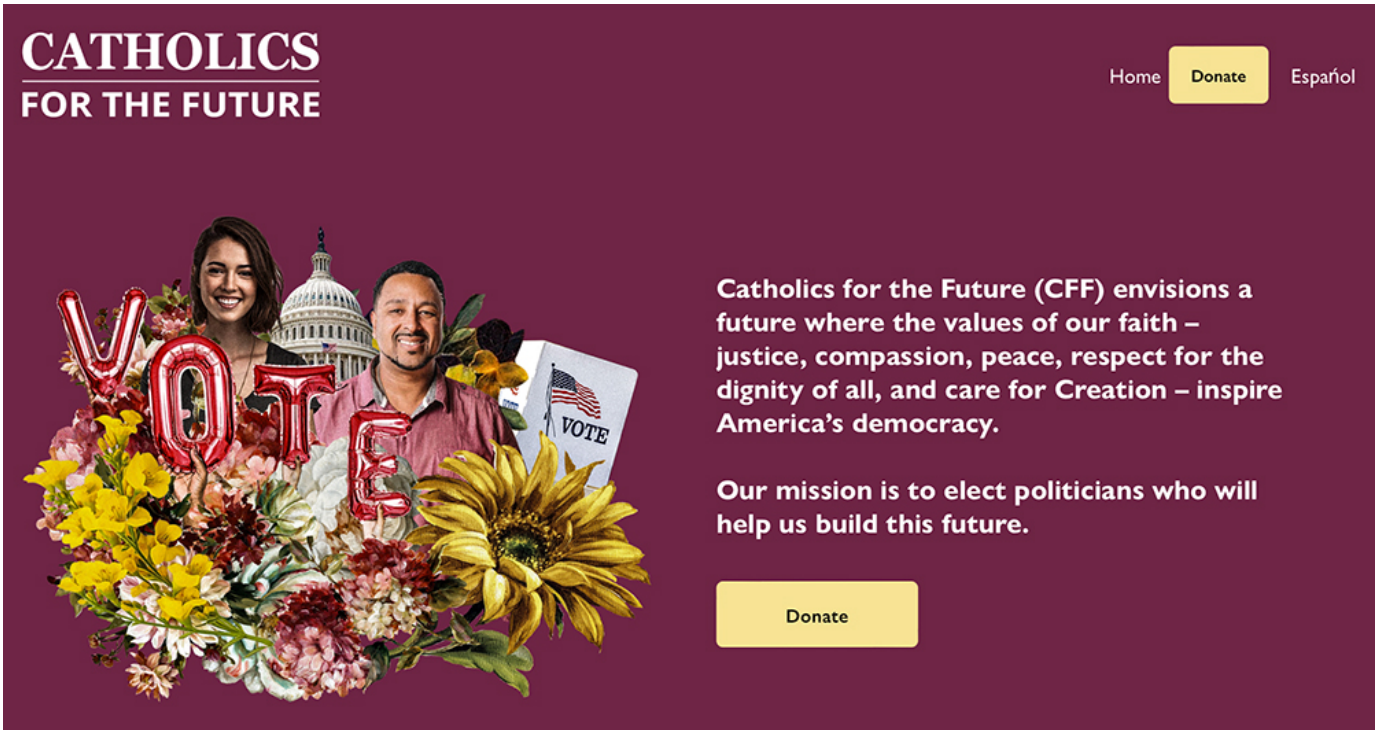
Type of organization: super PAC

One of the newest Catholic groups supporting Harris is a super PAC formed over the summer to raise money to pay for ads in key battleground states. Catholics for the Future's outreach will be to "Catholics, former Catholics and Catholic-leaning populations" in both English and Spanish, according to Stephen Schneck, one of the

group's board members.

Other board members include attorney Patricia Fugere, co-founder and former executive director of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, and management consultant Patrick Bergquist. Schneck is current chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

"The problem, frankly, has been that there has been little money available for Catholic-oriented groups operating in this space," Schneck told NCR. "We are trying to fill that gap."



A screenshot of the Catholics for the Future website (NCR screenshot)

On the Republican side, CatholicVote operates a PAC that is currently running ads accusing Harris of supporting "experimental" gender reassignment surgeries on children. Schneck believes CatholicVote is not representative of U.S. Catholics, who care more about "kitchen table" issues such as affordable housing and health care.

He says Catholics for the Future will be more transparent about its sources of financing than some Catholic "dark money" groups, although the group is still "in the process" of solidifying funders.

The PAC's website features a donation form and says funds will help "elect a president who best reflects the values of our faith."

Catholics for Harris

Founded: 2024

Organizer: Christopher Hale

From a single tweet after President Joe Biden dropped out of the race and endorsed Harris, political consultant Christopher Hale compiled an email list of 19,000 Catholics. His goal, through a "Catholics for Harris" account on X (formerly Twitter), is to serve as a pipeline to the official Harris-Walz campaign.



A screenshot of the Catholics for Harris account on X (NCR screenshot)

"I think the biggest issue Catholics face is needing permission structures to vote for Kamala Harris," Hale told NCR. "Our only purpose is to give people permission to be Catholics for Harris and to flood people into the campaign."

Hale said Catholics for Harris has "no organizational structure" or budget, and that he is volunteering his time. Its only web presence is the X account @Catholic4Harris (no "s" on Catholic).

Hale, a political consultant who led Catholic outreach for Barack Obama in 2012, is also on the "kitchen cabinet" of Catholics for the official campaign. He formerly served as executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

"There's no time to waste doing things that don't work," he said. "We have a structure that exists [in the official campaign]. The biggest thing is to get people into that structure."

Faith in Public Life Action

Founded: 2004

CEO: Jeanné Lewis

Headquarters: Washington, D.C.

Type of organization: 501(c)(4) and its related 501(c)(3) educational organization, Faith in Public Life

Annual revenue: $225,321 for the 501(c)(3); $252,317 for the 501(c)(4) (2023)

Mission: "Faith in Public Life's mission is to advance the moral imperative for a just, inclusive and equitable country that allows each of us to live into our full humanity. We do this by building power and cultures of belonging among diverse influential faith leaders and resourcing them to expand the narrative on the vision for our democracy."

Faith in Public Life Action and its educational counterpart, Faith in Public Life, are not Catholic organizations, per se, but the coalition of clergy and faith leaders has included Catholics and is currently headed by CEO Jeanné Lewis, who is Catholic. John Gehring previously served as its Catholic program director.



A screenshot of the Faith in Public Life Action website (NCR screenshot)

On the morning of the debate between Trump and Harris, Faith in Public Life Action endorsed Harris. "When I consider our shared values of compassion, dignity and accountability, they easily lead us to make the decision to endorse the Harris-Walz campaign," Lewis said in a video released Sept. 10.

The educational arm has been a leader in organizing religious voices against political violence, and is organizing "peacemaker trainings" to help ensure a fair and safe election and peaceful transition of power.

Faith in Public Life's history traces to 2005, when a liberal think tank, the Center for American Progress, examined the progressive faith movement and recommended the creation of an "organizational anchor" for the religious left, according to Religion News Service national reporter Jack Jenkins' book American Prophets: The Religious Roots of Progressive Politics and the Ongoing Fight for the Soul of the Country.

The Rev. Jen Butler, a Presbyterian minister who served as Faith in Public Life's executive director until 2022, has been hired as national faith engagement director for the Harris-Walz campaign. Lewis succeeded Butler.

Catholic Democrats

Founded: 2004

President: Steven Krueger

Headquarters: Boston

Type of organization: unincorporated association operating as 501(c)(4)

Mission: "Catholic Democrats represents a Catholic voice within the Democratic Party and a Democratic voice in the Catholic Church whose mission is to advance the rich Catholic Social Justice Tradition in the public square and within the Democratic Party to help form a more just and peaceful society and to advance an understanding of an 'integral ecology.'"



A screenshot of the Catholic Democrats account on X (NCR screenshot)

Catholic Democrats was founded as "Catholics for Kerry" in 2004 in response to scrutiny of Kerry's Catholicism and what organizers saw as manipulation of church teaching in support of the Republican Party. It has supported every Democratic presidential candidate since then.

In 2020, Catholic Democrats funded media campaigns in the "Blue Wall" swing states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and hosted an online petition supporting Biden after Trump's attacks on his faith.

"We are defining and advancing an authentic Catholic voice in today's divisive environment with the underlying message to Catholic voters that Kamala Harris' policies, track record and character are best suited to advance the common good," Krueger told NCR.

As it has done in previous presidential election cycles, the group plans to reach out to priests in "persuadable" counties to remind them of the U.S. bishops' policy against partisan politicking in parishes, he said.

Read this next: These Catholic-led groups are supporting Donald Trump in the 2024 election
This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.