

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** FRANCES KISSLING, PRESIDENT  
**SUBJECT:** NEW RESEARCH: US BISHOPS AND PROCHOICE CATHOLIC POLITICIANS  
**DATE:** JUNE 2004

During this political season there has been a concerted campaign by conservative Catholics to politicize the sacraments. A number of right-wing Catholic fringe groups have called on the US bishops to deny Communion to Senator John Kerry and other prochoice Catholic legislators, of whom there are more than 70 in the US Congress alone.

As the attempts to punish prochoice Catholics continued to hit the front pages, Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) initiated a survey of all US Catholic dioceses that examined how the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and individual bishops treated Catholic politicians who openly expressed prochoice positions.

At the conclusion of the June 14-19 bishops' retreat in Denver, Colorado, the USCCB released the statement "Catholics in Political Life" that noted

"[g]iven the wide range of circumstances involved in arriving at a prudential judgment on a matter of this seriousness, we recognize that [the decisions to deny communion to Catholics in public life that support abortion] rest with the individual bishop in accord with the established canonical and pastoral principles. Bishops can legitimately make different judgments on the most prudent course of pastoral action."<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, the bishops declared, "The Catholic community and Catholic institutions should **not honor** those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions."<sup>2</sup> [emphasis in original]

By the time of this statement, 145 dioceses had weighed in on the issue either through interviews, statements, or the media. The results follow.

#### TOPLINE RESULTS

From our interviews with the dioceses and our analysis of recent diocesan statements, it appears that when it comes to dealing with Catholic politicians who do not vote as the church hierarchy wishes, bishops are forging their own path rather than pandering to the wishes of conservative Catholic organizations.

Only five out of 178 Latin-rite Roman Catholic dioceses in the US have indicated that they will deny prochoice Catholic politicians the Eucharist (Camden, NJ; Colorado

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<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Catholics in Political Life," Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 18 June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Springs, CO; LaCrosse, WI; Lincoln, NE; and St. Louis, MO). These dioceses are following the directives of four bishops: Bishops Bruskewitz, Burke, Galante, and Sheridan.<sup>3</sup> The remainder appear to be more prudent, understanding that Catholics have a right in canon law to receive the sacraments and that there is no infallible teaching on how to vote on either abortion or other controversial issues in America, such as the war in Iraq or the death penalty. Indeed, before the June retreat, published USCCB guidelines did not restrict prochoice Catholic politicians from receiving communion, receiving honors or speaking at church-sponsored events.

CFFC research indicates that prior to the issued statement, the vast majority of bishops who would discuss this matter would welcome prochoice Catholic policy makers to communion.

- Just 19 dioceses had bishops who have encouraged Catholic policy makers to abstain from communion because of their prochoice position.
- Through a conversation with the CFFC researcher or through the media, 138 bishops representing the same number of dioceses made it clear that they would not deny anyone the Eucharist, or that it would be the very last resort.

## METHODOLOGY

CFFC contacted 178 Latin-rite Roman Catholic dioceses in the US by telephone between April 12 and April 21, 2004. Initially, the Byzantine and Eastern-rite Eparchies were also included, but their responses indicated that they did not perceive this to be an issue they had to deal with as Eastern-rite Roman Catholics.

Each diocesan representative was asked, “Do you have a policy on Catholic politicians who call themselves prochoice?” Follow-up probes included, “Can they receive honors?” “Can they speak on church grounds?” and “Can they receive Communion?”

If the person answering the phone did not know the answer, CFFC asked to speak with someone in the Chancery, Public Affairs, or Communications offices. Messages were left and calls were returned. In several instances, the bishop called back directly.

Responses ranged from friendly and helpful to suspicious and unpleasant. The researcher explained that she was conducting research but did not identify herself as an employee of CFFC. She left a cell phone number as a call back option and provided her home address for any materials that were sent. One diocese wanted to check with her school to ensure that she was indeed a student.

Follow-up calls to non-responding dioceses were made between April 28 and May 3, 2004. Each non-responding diocese has been contacted between two and four times. A handful of dioceses returned calls in May. CFFC also collected official statements and

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<sup>3</sup> Bishop Burke had been the head of the La Crosse dioceses, but in early 2004, he became the head of the St. Louis diocese.

media reports of recent statements made by 45 bishops and cardinals on the issue of denying the sacraments to prochoice politicians.<sup>4</sup> By the time the bishops issued “Catholics in Political Life,” 145 dioceses had weighed in on the issue either through interviews, statements, or the media.

## RESULTS

The USCCB reports that there are 146 Latin-rite Roman Catholic Dioceses and 32 Latin-rite Roman Catholic Archdioceses. Using their website as a starting point, CFFC contacted all of the Roman Catholic dioceses. We did not pursue the Eastern-rite Catholic dioceses as the initial responses indicated that they did not see the relevancy of the question as they follow their own code of canon law (the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches*).

In April 2004, CFFC made telephone contact with 178 archdioceses and dioceses and received responses from 137 dioceses.

Based on the telephone interviews,

- Only one diocese of the 137 respondents had a formal policy on prochoice Catholic politicians by April 2004.

The Wisconsin diocese of La Crosse has an established policy set by its former bishop, Raymond L. Burke, in a notification accompanying his pastoral letter “On the Dignity of Human Life and Civic Responsibility.” This policy states that Catholic politicians who break Canon 915 are denied sacraments but are not excommunicated.<sup>5</sup> Bishop Burke has been transferred to St. Louis; a new bishop has not yet been installed in La Crosse.

A number of dioceses interviewed by CFFC in April 2004 had standardized but unwritten policies or positions on prochoice Catholic politicians. We categorized these where the diocese denied having an official policy but could delineate actions and positions it enforced as follows:

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<sup>4</sup>Cardinals George (Chicago) and McCarrick (Washington, DC); Bishops Angell (Burlington, VT), Aquila (Fargo, ND), Bruskewitz (Lincoln, NE), Burke (St. Louis, MO), Carlson (Sioux Falls, SD), Chaput (Denver), Charron (Des Moines), Cote (Norwich, CT), Curtiss (Omaha, NE), D’Arcy (Fort Wayne-South Bend, IN), DiMarzio (Brooklyn, NY), Donoghue (Atlanta, GA), Galante (Camden, NJ), Gregory (Belleville, IL), Hubbard (Albany, NY), Hughes (New Orleans), Kicanas (Tucson, AZ), Kinney (St. Cloud, OH), Loverde (Arlington, VA), Mahony (Los Angeles, CA), McCormack (Manchester, NH), McManus (Worcester, MA), Mengeling (Lansing, MI), Morlino (Madison, WI), Moynihan (Syracuse, NY), Mulvey (Providence, RI), Myers (Newark, NJ), Nevins (Venice, FL), Olmsted (Phoenix, AZ), O’Malley (Boston), Pilarczyk (Cincinnati, OH), Pilla (Cleveland, OH), Ricken (Cheyenne, WY), Serratelli (Paterson, NJ), Sheridan (Colorado Springs, CO), Skylstad (Spokane, WA), Smith (Trenton, NJ), Tafoya (Pueblo, CO), Vlazny (Portland, OR), Weigand (Sacramento, CA), Wenski (Orlando, FL), Wuerl (Pittsburgh, PA) and Zubik (Green Bay, WI).

<sup>5</sup>Bishop Raymond Burke, “On the Dignity of Human Life and Civic Responsibility,” notification to politicians, 23 November 2003. [http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com/whats\\_new/notification.pdf](http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com/whats_new/notification.pdf), accessed 6 May 2004.

- Of the 137 responding dioceses, 85 had an unwritten policy or practice regarding prochoice Catholic politicians.
- 68 reported that they impose restrictions as a matter of practice, not policy.
- 19 of the 137 responding dioceses stated that they informally take steps to influence politicians, such as educating parishioners to vote for “pro-life” candidates and meeting with politicians to educate them about church teachings.

Before the USCCB released its statement “Catholics in Political Life,” forty-five US diocesan representatives had publicly commented about the eligibility of Catholic politicians who support reproductive rights to receive the Eucharist, including 26 who issued formal statements.

The majority of bishops who spoke out on the issue or responded to CFFC’s researcher would not deny the Eucharist.

- 138 dioceses had bishops who would give Communion to a prochoice Catholic politician.
- Five dioceses under the direction of four bishops (Bishops Bruskewitz, Burke, Galante, and Sheridan) would deny Catholic prochoice policy makers Communion.
- 19 dioceses had bishops who suggest that individuals should abstain from Communion

Many dioceses continue to take no position on the issue. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago refused to take a position, quipping, “I’ve been asked that question so often lately that I have considered a policy of denying Communion to reporters.”<sup>6</sup>

Not all dioceses whose bishops and cardinals have gone on the record provided information to CFFC researchers, including Green Bay, Providence, and Washington, DC. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend indicated to CFFC that the “bishop’s own judgment is used. The bishop will meet privately with politicians and talk about the issue involved and discuss what one’s Catholic identity means to the individual.” The spokesperson did not declare that the diocese denied prochoice Catholic politicians the opportunity to speak or to receive honors. In April 2004, however, South Bend’s St. Joseph High School, at the request of Bishop D’Arcy, withdrew the invitation for Catholic prochoice Governor Joe Kernan to speak at commencement.

Forty-nine of the dioceses responding to CFFC calls said that they follow USCCB guidelines, including the October 2003 directive “Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility” and the November 2002 “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.”

The USCCB guidelines prior to the June 2004 meeting did not restrict prochoice Catholic politicians from receiving Communion, receiving honors, or speaking at church-

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<sup>6</sup> Joe Feuerherd, “Kerry-as-Catholic story stays alive,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 5 May 2004.

sponsored events. In the bishops' statement accompanying *Faithful Citizenship*, they aver:

It must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals.... A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good. Decisions about candidates and choices about public policies require clear commitment to moral principles, careful discernment and prudential judgments based on the values of our faith.

We urge Catholics and others to promote laws and social policies that protect human life and promote human dignity to the maximum degree possible. Laws that legitimize abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia are profoundly unjust and immoral. We support constitutional protection for unborn human life, as well as legislative efforts to end abortion and euthanasia. We encourage the passage of laws and programs that promote childbirth and adoption over abortion and assist pregnant women and children.<sup>7</sup>

When discussing the responsibilities of the Catholic voter, the bishops offer:

We need more, not less engagement in political life. We urge Catholics to become more involved by running for office; by working within political parties; by contributing money or time to campaigns; and by joining diocesan legislative networks, community organizations, and other efforts to apply Catholic principles in the public square.

The Catholic community is a diverse community of faith, not an interest group. Our Church does not offer contributions or endorsements. Instead, we raise a series of questions, seeking to help lift up the moral and human dimensions of the choices facing voters and candidates.... How will we protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children?

As bishops, we seek to form the consciences of our people. We do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on their personal integrity, philosophy, and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which to address issues in the political arena.

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<sup>7</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003.

For Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life and a framework for action.<sup>8</sup>

**Diocesan Positions on Prochoice Catholic Policy Makers**

<b>Stated Policy</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Respondents (n=137)</b>
Formal as of April 2004	1	0.7
Informal as of April 2004	85	62.0
Unwritten Sanctions as of April 2004	68	49.6
		<b>Percent of Total Respondents and Statements (n=145)</b>
Deny Communion	4	2.6
Deny Honors	6	4.1
Deny Speaking Opportunities*	19	12.4
Deny Participation in Ministries	5	3.4
Follow USCCB Guidelines	49	33.8

\*Does not include Fort Wayne-South Bend, IN

Two of the dioceses contacted indicated that they follow the guidelines of another bishop; Madison, WI, and Colorado Springs, CO, both stated that they follow Bishop Burke. Twenty-four dioceses stated that they encourage politicians to follow church teachings.

**RESTRICTIONS**

- Five dioceses under the current or former direction of four bishops<sup>9</sup> would deny prochoice Catholic politicians Communion: Camden, NJ, Colorado Springs, CO, La Crosse, WI, Lincoln, NE, and St. Louis, MO.
- Six dioceses (Brooklyn, NY, Camden, NJ, Charleston, SC, Lincoln, NE, St. Louis, MO, and Trenton, NJ) would not bestow honors on a prochoice Catholic policy maker.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Raymond Burke was the head of the La Crosse, WI, diocese when he issued his notification to politicians; Bishop Burke is now the head of the diocese of St. Louis, MO. La Crosse has not yet installed a new bishop.

- Four dioceses, including Omaha, NE, St. Louis, MO, and Trenton, NJ, also informed CFFC that a prochoice Catholic politician cannot serve in ministries, and this would also hold true for Lincoln, NE, whose spokesperson asserted that the diocese will implement the same sanctions that Bishop Burke announced.
- While 19 reported that they would prevent prochoice Catholic politicians from speaking at church, most said that they cannot have *any* politicians speak at their church.

In April 2004, Cardinal Francis Arinze issued a Vatican directive as to the reception of Communion by politicians who have publicly advocated positions in opposition to the teaching the church, including US politicians. Bishop Wilton Gregory responded to the cardinal's statement with his own release, indicating:

Each diocesan bishop has the right and duty to address such issues of serious pastoral concern as he judges best in his local church, in accord with pastoral and canonical norms. To assist us in our common discernment, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has established a task force to discuss issues with regard to the participation of Catholics in political life, including reception of the sacraments, in the cases of those whose political advocacy is in direct contradiction to Church teaching.... It has always been our hope and expectation as bishops that men and women in political life, whatever their religious convictions, would be guided by and live out the truth of the faith given them by God with integrity.<sup>10</sup>

Individual bishops have taken recent actions on this issue:

- Bishop Sheridan of the **Colorado Springs, CO**, diocese indicated that it adheres to Canon 915 and agrees with Bishop Burke; any prochoice Catholic politician coming to the diocese would not receive Communion and a priest would be directed not to give it. Shortly after the interview, the bishop released a pastoral letter stating, "Catholics, whether candidates for office or those who would vote for [abortion, illicit stem cell research or for any form of euthanasia] may not receive Holy Communion until they have recanted their positions and been reconciled with God and the Church in the Sacrament of Penance";<sup>11</sup>
- Bishop John J. Myers of **Newark, NJ**, just released a five-page pastoral statement entitled "A Time for Honesty" that states "no Catholic should approach Communion unless properly disposed.... To receive Communion when one has, through public or private action, separated oneself from unity with Christ and His Church, is objectively dishonest."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, "Bishop Gregory Says Task Force Discussing Participation of Catholics in Political Life," press release, 23 April 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Michael Sheridan, "A Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Colorado Springs on the Duties of Catholic Politicians and Voters," pastoral statement, 1 May 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Bishop John J. Myers, "A Time for Honesty," pastoral statement, 5 May 2004.

- Bishop John Galante, the new bishop of the **Camden, NJ**, has refused to give Communion to Governor James McGreevey, a prochoice Catholic. “I’d give him a blessing,” Galante told reporters about what would happen if McGreevey presented himself at his church. “In his case, he can’t go to Communion.”<sup>13</sup>
- Bishop Robert Morlino of **Madison, WI**, stated that he is in “complete agreement” with Bishop Raymond Burke’s position to deny Communion to Catholic politicians who support abortion and euthanasia, but has not currently decided on the same course of action.<sup>14</sup>
- According to the Weekly Standard, Senator Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) received a letter from Bishop Robert Carlson of **Sioux Falls, SD**, his home diocese, “directing him to remove from his congressional biography and campaign documents all references to his standing as a member of the Catholic Church”<sup>15</sup> because of Sen. Daschle’s support for abortion rights. Both the Senate minority leader and the bishop’s office have refused to confirm this, and the local bishop has not publicly called on Daschle to refrain from calling himself a Catholic nor from receiving Communion because of his prochoice views.
- In **Arlington, VA**, Bishop Paul S. Loverde made a public statement through a letter to area Catholics: “Catholics in politics must reflect the moral values of our faith with clear and consistent priority for the life and dignity of the human person.”<sup>16</sup> For the past five years, he has maintained a monthly vigil outside of a reproductive health services clinic.
- A Catholic in **Miami** who is in good standing is allowed to partake in Communion regardless of political views.
- The diocese in **Orlando, FL**, stated that while it has no policy, it would develop an informal policy if a candidate were high profile and visible in making a prochoice stance known.
- The **Rockford, IL**, diocese said it has no policy because there are no Catholic politicians who claim to be prochoice.

Some dioceses also indicated some electoral activities they have undertaken:

- **Kansas City, MO**, conducts voter education and “pro-life” voter registration.
- **Philadelphia**, sends out questionnaires to local politicians asking if they are prochoice/pro-life and what exceptions they apply in particular circumstances.

As tax-exempt charitable organizations, churches and dioceses are limited in the political work they can do.

**For more information about the survey or to interview Frances Kissling, please contact Michelle Ringuette, Communications Director, at (202) 986-6093, ext. 208 (work) or (202) 550-1231 (cell) or mringuette@catholicsforchoice.org.**

<sup>13</sup> AP, “Bishop: Gov. McGreevey cannot receive communion,” *Newsday*, 30 April 2004.

<sup>14</sup> William R. Wineke, “Madison bishop backs La Crosse bishop on church law,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, 22 January 2004.

<sup>15</sup> J. Bottum, “Tom Daschle’s Duty to Be Morally Coherent: A Weekly Standard Exclusive: The Senate minority leader is ordered to stop calling himself a Catholic,” *The Weekly Standard*, 17 April 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Bishop Paul S. Loverde, “Faithful Citizenship,” letter to area Catholics, 27 October 2003.

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*Catholics for Free Choice (CFFC) 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 sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education, and advocacy, CFFC works in the US and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis, and Catholic social thinking and teaching.*