

May 8, 2008

Mr. Bill Donohue
President
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
450 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10123

Dear Mr. Donohue:

We write in our individual capacities and not on behalf of the campaign. Last week you labeled many of our friends, and some of us, as "Catholic dissidents" because we support Senator Obama.

Unlike the Catholic League, the U.S. Catholic Bishops advise careful consideration of candidates' positions on a broad set of issues. While abortion and other life issues are of fundamental concern, the bishops teach that particular issues must not be misused "as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity" such as "racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care or an unjust immigration policy" (Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, #29). Our bishops go on to point out that "these are not optional concerns which can be dismissed."

Across these issues Senator Obama offers much to the well-formed Catholic conscience, which helps to explain why many Catholics are supporting him.

As Catholics, we view abortion as a profound moral issue. But what have nearly three decades of Republican promises to end abortion accomplished? Other aspects of the conservative Republican agenda have been carried out with fervor, such as weakening of the social-safety net, privatization, deregulation, destruction of labor unions, and belligerent and aggressive foreign policy. But ending abortion remains the perennial promise, one that is too often hijacked by partisan operatives who seek only to divide voters. Many Catholics are fed up with the divisive tactics and empty promises around this issue.

Senator Obama recognizes that abortion presents a profound moral challenge, tied in part to a loss of the sense of the sacredness of sex and lack of parental involvement. On the campaign trail he regularly calls on parents to turn off the television and has called on fathers to meet their family responsibilities. Regrettably, these clips are not included in your press releases.

Senator Obama has also reached out to Americans on both sides of this issue and embraces practical proposals designed to reduce the number of abortions in this country, including comprehensive health and sex education, better health care, economic support for women, and promoting alternatives like adoption.

Like other Americans, we have watched as many candidates brought to office on a so-called pro-life platform insisted on policies that have left the lives of millions more of our brothers and sisters at risk from war, uncontrolled pollution, deeper poverty, and growing economic inequality.

Not this year.

This year, there are many Catholics – Democrats, Republicans, and Independents – who won't let that happen again.

We are proud to be counted among Senator Obama's Catholic advisors. Collectively our experience spans decades of scholarship and service working for and with the Catholic Church on the broad set of issues under the "consistent ethic of life."

We were drawn into the campaign by Senator Obama's vision for the common good, his profound message of hope, and his ability to unite citizens across class, race, and even party lines. We are excited about his promise as president, and we commend him to our fellow Catholics.

Mr. Donohue, your work to fight legitimate cases of anti-Catholic bigotry in this country should be applauded. But when you smear other Catholics with whom you disagree, you betray your own cause. Our measure of what it means to be a "good" Catholic is not defined by the narrow pronouncements of partisan operatives; but rather by the rich teachings of our Church and our informed consciences.

Sincerely,

Former Congressman Tim Roemer of Indiana

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton, Congregation of St. Joseph

Governor Jim Doyle of Wisconsin

Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas

Senator Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut

Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts

Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts

Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont

Representative Xavier Becerra of California

Representative Lacy Clay of Missouri

Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut

Representative Anna Eshoo of California

Representative Raúl M. Grijalva of Arizona

Representative George Miller of California

Representative Linda Sanchez of California

Mary Jo Banc, Professor, Harvard Kennedy School

Nicholas P. Cafardi, Catholic Author and Scholar, Pittsburgh, PA

Lisa Sowle Cahill, Professor of Theology, Boston College

Tom Chabolla, Assistant to the President, Service Employees International Union

M. Shawn Copeland, Associate Professor of Theology, Boston College

Ron Cruz, Leadership Development Consultant, Burke, VA

Sharon Daly, Social Justice Advocate, Knoxville, MD

Richard Gaillardetz, Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies, University of Toledo

Grant Gallicho, Associate Editor, Commonweal Magazine

Margaret Gannon, IHM, A Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA

Don Guter, Judge Advocate General of the Navy (2000-2002); Rear Admiral, Judge Advocate General's Corps, U.S. Navy (Ret.), Pittsburgh, PA

Teresa Heinz, Chairman, Heinz Family Philanthropies

Cathleen Kaveny, Professor of Law and Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame

Victoria Reggie Kennedy, President, Common Sense About Kids and Guns

Peggy Kerry, Independent Consultant, New York, NY

Jim Kesteloot, President and Executive Director, Chicago Lighthouse

Vincent Miller, Associate Professor of Theology, Georgetown University

David O'Brien, Loyola Professor of Catholic Studies at the College of the Holy Cross

Reverend Michael Pflieger, Pastor of Faith Community of St. Sabina, Chicago, IL

Sr. Jamie Phelps, O.P., Director and Professor of Theology, Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Xavier University

Peter Quaranto, Senior Researcher and Conflict Analyst, Resolve Uganda (Notre Dame Class of 2006)

Dave Robinson, International Peace Advocate, Erie, Pennsylvania

Vincent Rougeau, Associate Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame

Mary Wright, Inter-Faith Liaison, Louisville, KY