Rallying the Right-to-Lifers: Grassroots Religion and Politics in the Building of a Broad-based Right-to-Life Movement, 1960-1984

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This dissertation explores the formative years of the right-to-life movement in the decade prior to *Roe v. Wade* and explains how early right-to-lifers built a vast and powerful movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas most previous studies have focused on the connection between right-to-life organizing and the conservative ascendancy in religion and politics in the 1970s and 1980s, this dissertation studies the movement's origins in state and local organizing in the years before *Roe v. Wade* and its growth into a national political crusade in the 1970s. During these years, grassroots activists fostered a vision for a broad-based right-to-life movement—a movement consisting of Americans from across the political and religious spectrums. This movement was made up of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, lay people as well as religious leaders—all of whom opposed legalized abortion for a range of reasons. Right-to-lifers believed their broad-based approach was the most effective way to fight abortion, and they embraced this diverse coalition, attacking abortion on a number of fronts with strategies ranging from legislative lobbying to alternatives to abortion to nonviolent direct action. Though their coalition eventually broke apart in the 1980s, this eclectic group of right-to-lifers built a dynamic and diverse movement and proved the powerful resonance of the abortion issue in American society.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1967, six years before the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade,* Dr. John McKelvey, a local obstetrician, attended a hearing before the Minnesota Senate Judiciary subcommittee on reforming Minnesota's abortion law. The hearing was one of several that had been held in the 1960s to try to update the state's nineteenth-century abortion law. The committee heard several arguments for and against the proposed bill but McKelvey's testimony stood out. When it was his turn to speak, the doctor surprised the committee by placing a preserved 11-week-old fetus on the table in front of the committee members, challenging them to answer on the spot "whether that is a human life or not and whether we are going to destroy it."[1] Shortly after, he and about twenty-five other Minnesotans met together to form the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL) and to officially begin their fight against abortion.

From these small beginnings, with just two dozen or so members, MCCL and the right-to-life movement in Minnesota would grow into a powerful lobby in state and national politics. Just seven years later, nearly five thousand Minnesotans gathered to circle the capitol building in St. Paul on January 22, 1974. They marched in solidarity with right-to-lifers across the country to mark the first anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. In New York, several hundred protesters turned up at the capitol building in Albany with at least one scuffle breaking out when a pro-life protester "grabbed away and destroyed a

[1] Pat Scharber, "Destruction of the human life held real issue in discussing abortion," *The Catholic Bulletin*, March 31, 1967. Reel 1, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Newspaper Clippings Microfilm Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

pro-abortion sign displayed by two young girls."[2] And in Washington, D.C., ten thousand people rallied in support of a constitutional amendment to reverse *Roe v. Wade* and make abortion illegal again. It was the first March for Life, which would become an annual tradition for the movement. Right-to-lifers gathered that day to show that despite the legalization of abortion they had not given up. In fact, in the preceding years, they had turned a disparate grassroots movement rooted in state and local action into a tough and determined national crusade. Fran Watson, president of the Celebrate Life Committee from Long Island and an attendee of the rally in Washington, D.C., praised what she saw as a strong and diverse movement built on the "concern by people from all walks of life…hope for the future of our country."[3] Now right-to-lifers were ready to continue the fight in their towns and cities and to make their presence felt in the halls of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the White House.

In less than a decade, the right-to-life movement coalesced into a national political force, growing out of the organizing efforts of a few dozen activists scattered across the country in the late 1960s. These activists gathered in homes, churches, and schools, determined to halt any attempts to liberalize or repeal their states' abortion laws. They included Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, Protestants and Catholics, lay people as well as priests and ministers. For many, it was their first experience with political activism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this eclectic group built a powerful political movement centered on the belief that their cause was "broad-based." By this, right-to-lifers meant that the movement they intended to build was for all

[2] "Capitol Steps Conflict," *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), January 23, 1974, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[3] "'Right to Life' rally in Washington," *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), January 31, 1974, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

Americans. These activists not only believed that their cause was in line with the rights enshrined in America's founding documents but also that their movement should include all Americans, regardless of their political or religious affiliations. This core belief shaped the movement into the early 1980s as right-to-lifers built up national organizations, recruited thousands of new members, welcomed a range of approaches to activism, and developed complex legislative and social strategies to fight abortion at the state and national levels.

The process of building this broad-based movement and its networks, rhetoric, and strategy was complicated, and scholars continue to grapple with how to explain the right-to-life movement's enduring, if controversial, place in American politics and society. Until the last few years, most of the answers to questions about the movement's motivations and makeup revolved around discussion of the Religious Right and the conservative turn in American politics since the 1980s. These works characterized the movement as conservative backlash to the turbulent changes of the 1960s and to *Roe v. Wade* and placed the abortion issue at the center of the narrative of the rise of the Religious Right.[4] But now, scholars are beginning to reconsider such one-dimensional characterizations of the movement. Historian Daniel Williams has highlighted the long history of right-to-life activism in the twentieth century and the movement's attempts to establish itself as a human rights crusade in line with liberal human rights values.[5] Neil Young has brought attention to the movement's many attempts at conservative

[4] Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*: *The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994); James Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
[5] Daniel Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-life Movement Before* Roe v. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

ecumenical organizing among Catholics, evangelicals, and Mormons.[6] Mary Ziegler has explored right-to-lifers' sophisticated interpretations and uses of *Roe v. Wade* to bolster their cause and expand their rhetoric.[7] And Randall Balmer has challenged the Religious Right's origin story, its "abortion myth," and questioned narratives that use abortion to explain the Religious Right's rise to political prominence.[8] All of these important works highlight the complexities of right-to-life activism into the 1980s but only begin to explain the movement's multifaceted organizing in the 1960s and 1970s. They point to the need for a reconsideration of the right-to-life movement in its formative years in the 1960s and early 1970s and in its ascendancy as a national movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

By building off these works as well as highlighting the complex nature of the right-to-life movement, its eclectic make up, and its origins in grassroots organizing efforts, I argue that the right-to-life movement was not a monolithic conservative or Catholic venture. Moreover, it was not inevitable that the abortion issue would turn into one of the consummate conservative causes of the last forty years. Rather, during the 1960s and 1970s, the movement organized around the principle that it would be broad-based—a movement made up of a variety of Americans from diverse political and religious backgrounds wielding multifaceted arguments against abortion and pursuing a wide range of political strategies. Though the movement sometimes faced intense disagreements in the 1970s between its Protestant and Catholic as well as liberal and

[6] Neil Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[7] Mary Ziegler, *After Roe The Lost History of the Abortion Debate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[8] Randall Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America* (Baylor University Press: Waco, TX, 2016), 109. Balmer posits that rather than abortion the issue of school desegregation was the real issue around which the Religious Right coalesced.

conservative members, there was room and flexibility for competing dogmas, political views, and strategies into the early 1980s. In making this argument about the movement's dynamism and diversity, I make two important interventions in the historiography.

The first intervention is one of chronology, shifting the analysis to the 1960s and 1970s rather than the 1980s. In the 1960s, the abortion issue became a contentious public health issue, and newly formed abortion rights groups as well as groups of doctors and lawyers began advocating for the reform of state abortion laws. Accompanying this push for the liberalization of abortion laws in the late 1960s, the right-to-life movement emerged to oppose any attempts at reform. Individuals who had little to no awareness of abortion suddenly had to take a stand as their state representatives began debating the abortion issue and introducing legislation to reform or even overturn nineteenth-century abortion laws. In the mid to late 1960s, these individuals formed right-to-life organizations in their cities and states, and in the early 1970s, they began an intense campaign to promote their agenda in state politics. Unfortunately, most histories of the right-to-life movement and the abortion rights movement have failed to account for these early years of organizing. At best, they acknowledge the actions of small groups of Catholic lawyers and doctors in opposing abortion reform in the 1960s.[9] At worst, they ignore the late 1960s and early 1970s completely.[10] For the most part, histories of the abortion debate cite the 1973 Supreme Court decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* as the start of a massive wave of backlash that would kick off the right-to-life movement. If there was opposition to abortion prior to 1973, these sources contend that it was due to

[9] Luker, 14.
[10] Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 48; Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest*; Kerry N. Jacoby, *Souls, Bodies, Spirits: The Drive to Abolish Abortion Since 1973* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

the actions of a small group of people in the Catholic Church hierarchy rather than to any grassroots action. Only Daniel Williams' recent history accounts for the work done by right-to-lifers in the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*.[11]

Ignoring the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*, however, deprives us of the full picture of the movement. While it may have been small, underfunded, and sometimes predominately Catholic in its earliest iterations, right-to-life organizing was taking place in the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s. It often began as a growing individual awareness about the abortion issue and about efforts to liberalize abortion laws at the state level. These individuals, once aware of the issue, took action to oppose abortion such as writing their state legislators or writing letters to the local newspaper. Finally, individuals opposed to abortion began to band together and form groups dedicated to stopping abortion reform. These groups, with names such as Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, the New York State Right to Life Committee, and the Right to Life League of Southern California, would form the backbone of the movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They chose the term "right-to-life" to invoke their early belief that abortion threatened basic human rights; I use this self-designation as well and refer to these activists as right-to-lifers, and later pro-lifers, as they would call themselves in the mid to late 1970s. These activists quickly staked their place in state politics and implemented bold political strategies. This early activism set the stage for the development of a national right-to-life organization and also developed many of the strategies and rhetoric the movement would use into the 1970s.

The second intervention revolves around interpretations of the nature and makeup of the movement. Histories of right-to-life activism tend to mischaracterize the movement

[11] Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn.*

in two main ways. First, some histories classify it as a sort of Catholic crusade coordinated solely by the church hierarchy. These works contend that "the Roman Catholic Church created the right-to-life movement" and directed its initiatives throughout the 1970s by providing funding and other resources.[12] They focus on the role of Catholic priests and lay people in fighting abortion and the transition from this Catholic movement of the 1970s to the New Right and the Religious Right in the early 1980s. Second, other works too often oversimplify the makeup of the movement, depicting it as monolithically conservative in both its politics and religion. This literature connects right-to-life activism to a broader conservative backlash against the 1960s, *Roe v. Wade,* and perceived excesses in American society. Scholars see this backlash as leading to the conservative shift in religion and politics in the 1970s and 1980s, with conservatives suddenly concluding they must defend the American family or traditional American values in the wake of the 1973 Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion.[13]

Neither of these explanations is adequate in capturing the dynamic nature of the movement between the 1960s and the early 1980s. Though the Catholic Church played a major role, especially in the movement's first few years of existence, it was just one of many players. Indeed, the movement has always been composed of a mix of people—Catholics but also liberal Protestants, evangelicals, Mormons, and other religious Americans. Characterizing the movement as the Catholic hierarchy's initiative alone obscures the organizing work of thousands of Protestant and Catholic activists on the ground. These activists' emphasis on a "broad-based movement" also belies the Catholic

[12] Connie Paige, *The Right to Lifers: Who They Are, How They Operate, Where They Get Their Money* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 51; Blanchard, 52; Jacoby, 27; Risen and Thomas, 19.
[13] Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*; Blanchard, 41.

crusade interpretation; both Protestants and Catholics in the movement welcomed a plurality of views on abortion, strategies, religious beliefs, and political approaches. And Protestant right-to-lifers quickly succeeded in making their voices heard in the movement as leaders in the states and in the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). Their influence shaped the movement's strategy and trajectory in important ways in the 1970s.

Furthermore, conservative politics and religion were not at the center of right-to-life activism during these years. Right-to-lifers were not creating a conservative crusade as a backlash to the 1960s but rather saw themselves as building a broad-based movement for all Americans regardless of their political or religious affiliation. Conservative views on abortion were certainly part of the movement, but they existed alongside liberal and even some left-wing approaches to right-to-life activism. The movement's leaders encouraged this diversity in religious and political views, pushed their agenda in both political parties, and welcomed disagreements on strategy and tactics. Thanks to this approach, right-to-lifers built a diverse and powerful movement with a complex legislative and political agenda by the end of the 1970s. Right-to-life activism only became closely tied to conservative religion and politics in the early to mid-1980s, but not without stalwart opposition from many right-to-lifers.

The dissertation begins with a close examination of how right-to-life organizing began in three states: Minnesota, New York, and California. These three states provide diverse examples of how the movement developed on the ground in different parts of the country. Moreover, activists and organizations from New York, California, and Minnesota would make vital contributions to the growing national movement in the 1970s. In the mid-1960s, as abortion rights groups began to organize and push for the

liberalization of state abortion laws, local and state right-to-life groups emerged and soon became vital centers for organizing and mobilizing grassroots support for the cause. In these years, right-to-lifers—mostly a mix of Catholics and mainline Protestants—as well as the institutional Catholic Church formed more permanent organizations, developed political and educational strategies, and began working on long-term plans of action to sustain their fight against abortion. Building off this early grassroots mobilization, state right-to-life groups practiced and developed the strategies and rhetoric the movement would deploy in the years after *Roe v. Wade*.

Chapter 2 explores a shift in strategy as right-to-lifers went on the offensive and took steps to implement their agenda rather than acting defensively to halt attempts at liberalization. By 1971, state leaders were also making plans to form their own national organization. They had realized local and state efforts were not enough to stop the growing push for the repeal of abortion laws and instead began developing bold political strategies and powerful rhetoric connecting abortion and violence in American society. This pivot in strategy turned their focus more fully to state and national politics as well as to mobilizing new groups of people—particularly women and young people. The early organizing in local cities and in state politics laid the foundation for the strong national right-to-life movement that emerged in 1972 and 1973.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to how state right-to-life leaders used their experience in organizing in their local communities to build a national movement in the wake of *Roe v. Wade.* Though *Roe v. Wade* took many right-to-lifers by surprise, they quickly returned to pursuing the aggressive political strategies they had implemented in the states in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, state leaders worked determinedly to

form a national right-to-life organization—the NRLC, which they had been trying to officially separate from Catholic Church oversight for a number of years. In making the NRLC independent, the movement's leaders hoped to finally realize their vision for a broad-based movement. Yet, just as the NRLC achieved independence, latent tension between Protestants and Catholics in the movement erupted into open conflict between Catholic and Protestant leaders of the NRLC. This infighting was only resolved after a series of compromises over organizational policy and the make up of the movement's leadership.

Chapter 4 explores the period between 1974 and 1979, when the movement was at the height of its strength and was closest to fulfilling its goals of creating a broad-based movement. After the upheaval of *Roe v. Wade* and the turmoil in the NRLC, the right-to-life movement came into its own. During this time, right-to-lifers pursued a wide range of political strategies. Some continued lobbying for a human life amendment to reverse *Roe v. Wade.* Others pushed for greater access to contraception and policies that supported women and their children. Still others decided that the only solution was nonviolent direct action and began staging sit-ins at abortion clinics. While implementing these dynamic strategies, right-to-lifers also welcomed a diverse cohort of activists: Republicans and Democrats, feminists, antiwar activists, conservative evangelicals, and more.

Chapter 5 analyzes how this coalition came apart and highlights those right-to-lifers who tried to sustain their vision for a broad-based movement. With the rise of the New Right, the election of Ronald Reagan, and an increase in conservative rhetoric surrounding abortion and other social issues, this broad-based movement began

unraveling in the early 1980s. But some members of the Catholic Church hierarchy, pro-life moderates, and the pro-life left fought to maintain their movement's broad-based identity and challenged the New Right's growing involvement in right-to-life politics. But they found themselves increasingly alienated from their fellow right-to-lifers and from both political parties as the 1980s progressed and political divisions crystallized.

Ignoring the early years of right-to-life organizing as well as the complexity of the movement's makeup, strategies, and rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s skews our understanding of religion and politics of the last fifty years. Today a person's stance on abortion hews closely to their political and religious affiliation but that has not always been the case.[14] At least until the mid-1980s, abortion held a more complicated place in American life. Rather than starting out as backlash to the 1960s and to *Roe v. Wade* and rather than serving as a harbinger of the conservative shift in American politics and religion, the right-to-life movement started as a grassroots effort to create a movement for all Americans that would affirm the fundamental rights that right-to-lifers believed were at stake and would provide a range of solutions to the abortion question. This diverse and vibrant group of activists overcame their vast differences on politics, religion, and strategy to create a broad-based right-to-life movement. In doing so, they created many of the rhetoric, strategies, and tactics that have sustained activism on the issue in the years since, and they created a political movement that endures to today.

[14] Putnam and Campbell, 384; Hannah Fingerhut, "On abortion, persistent divides between—and within—the two parties," July 7, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/07/on-abortion-persistent-divides-between-and-within-the-two-parties-2 (accessed February 1, 2018).

1.0 A Movement Begins: From Individual Mobilization to Grassroots Organizing in the Right-to-Life Movement, 1960-1969

Introduction

In 1967, State Senator Anthony Beilenson faced an unexpected and overwhelming flood of opposition mail after he introduced a bill to liberalize California's abortion law. Hundreds of letters poured in from his constituents as well as other Californians, castigating Beilenson in all sorts of ways. Some letters compared Beilenson's efforts to Hitler's actions in Nazi Germany. Others invoked the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Still others lamented that by contemplating abortion reform America had forsaken God and all Christian values. Some simply attacked Beilenson himself with a surprising vitriol, calling him "Killer Beilenson" or wishing his own mother had aborted him. Despite the massive letter writing campaign, Beilenson's bill passed and was signed into law by Governor Ronald Reagan.

That same year, Fred Mecklenburg, a physician in Minneapolis, and his wife, Marjory Mecklenburg, walked over to a neighbor's home to hear a presentation on abortion. They were joined by fellow neighbors along with about twenty-five other Minnesotans. Some had recently met each other at hearings on the abortion law at the state capitol; others had heard about new attempts to reform the state's abortion statute in their local newspapers. All were concerned about the growing push to legalize abortion in their state.[15] The Mecklenburgs left the meeting determined to take action. Shortly after,

[15] Patricia Ohmans, "Obsession," *Machete* 1980, Box 35, Folder 6, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as ACCL Records); Marjory Mecklenburg to James Kelly, "Responses to questions in letter from James Kelly," November 1980, Box

the couple and their neighbor Alice Hartle, who had hosted that first meeting, formed the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life. The organization was dedicated to fighting all attempts to liberalize abortion laws in Minnesota and would soon become one of the most successful state right-to-life groups. Fred Mecklenburg became the group's first president.

Meanwhile, New York's Catholic bishops released a joint statement—an unprecedented move—that was read at all masses in the state and denounced recent attempts at abortion reform in the state legislature. Invoking divine law, the Second Vatican Council, and Catholic tradition, the bishops condemned abortion reform in the strongest terms and reiterated that the Church viewed abortion as a serious crime. The bishops compelled Catholics in the state to take action immediately: "We urge you most strongly to do all in your power to prevent direct attacks upon the lives of unborn children."[16] The bishops had entered the fray of abortion politics and now encouraged New York's six million Catholics to do the same.

After witnessing the turmoil of abortion politics in places like California, Minnesota, and New York in 1966 and 1967, the Catholic Church finally took decisive action and formed a national organization to oversee its right-to-life activity—the National Right-to-Life Committee (NRLC). Church officials were no longer content to fight abortion on an ad hoc basis alone. And while lay Catholics were their initial targets, they also realized that in forming the NRLC they must foster a "broad-based opposition"

23, Folder 5, ACCL Records; Joan Mahowald, "Marjory Mecklenburg is for Life," *The Catholic Digest*, June 1973, Box 35, Folder 3, ACCL Records.

[16] George Dugan, "Ask Fight on Abortion Bill: Pastoral Letter Read," *New York Times*, February 13, 1967.

of Catholics as well as non-Catholic allies.[17] Though the organization started out as a simple clearinghouse to provide local activists with information on abortion reform legislation and right-to-life activities across the country, the NRLC would soon become the leading organization for the cause. It would be one of the main developers of national right-to-life strategy and the site of debate over the trajectory of the movement through the 1970s and into the 1980s.

As evident in these episodes, in the mid to late 1960s more and more Americans became aware of the debate going on over abortion policy in their states. They learned about the growing support for abortion reform in their workplaces, from neighbors, at their church services, or from their local newspapers. Disturbed by the suggested changes to abortion law, some people began to take action, writing letters to their legislators and local newspapers, attending hearings on new abortion laws, and organizing groups to oppose reform. These new activists were a diverse group, including Catholic priests and religious, lay Catholics, liberal Protestants, Democrats and Republicans, doctors, lawyers, professors, housewives, and others. For many of them, this was their first foray into political activism. Alongside these individual Americans, the Catholic Church hierarchy was also spurred to action and began a serious campaign against abortion. Though the Church did not have outright control of the right-to-life movement during this time, right-to-life activism would not have survived the 1960s without its support and funding.

The individual awareness of the abortion issue soon turned into organized and sustained grassroots action with the formation of right-to-life organizations at the state and national levels. Organizations like the New York State Right-to-Life Committee, the

[17] James T. McHugh, "Report on Abortion Questionnaire," September 9, 1966, Box 94, Folder 5, Catholic Charities USA Papers, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Catholic Charities USA Papers).

Right-to-Life Leagues in California, and Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life worked to mobilize individuals at the state level, educate them on abortion, and get them engaged in political activism. Through their organizing in the states, these groups hoped to halt abortion reform. During this time, the Catholic Church also founded the NRLC, which it hoped would spread awareness of the movement, recruit new activists, and create a national network of right-to-lifers. All these efforts laid the foundation for later organizing in the states and in national politics.

In fact, this early organizing allowed the right-to-life movement to begin developing the rhetoric, strategies, and networks that would be vital in the decades to come. The use of local networks to mobilize new activists, the arguments made in the many opposition letters sent to Beilenson, the strong denunciation of abortion in a public joint statement by New York's Catholic bishops, the appeals for a broad-based and diverse coalition, and the formation of a national organization to conduct right-to-life activities across the country—all these would be the main strategies for right-to-lifers in the 1970s and early 1980s. Too often, the literature on the movement either ignores this period or glosses over it in favor of focusing on the movement following *Roe v. Wade.*[18] But right-to-life activism in the latter part of the 1960s is central to understanding the activism in the 1970s and 1980s. In these early years, right-to-life leaders in the states and in the Church figured out what strategies worked and developed a vision for a broad-based movement—a political and moral crusade that would be for all Americans. By the end of the decade, the individuals and groups that would help make the right-to-life

[18] Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)*;* Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 48; Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), Kerry N. Jacoby, *Souls, Bodies, Spirits: The Drive to Abolish Abortion Since 1973* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

movement a national political force in the 1970s and 1980s were already practicing the tactics that would be central to their later organizing.

In this chapter, I will trace these early years of debate and organizing among right-to-lifers as they moved from individual opposition to the abortion issue to a more structured movement, focusing on organizing and activism in California, Minnesota, and New York as well as within the Catholic Church. Right-to-life organizing began in fits and starts in these years and sometimes struggled to find consistent support from people. It often arose in response to proposed abortion reform legislation at the state level and, once the immediate threat was over, the opposition would mostly fizzle out, aside from a few dedicated activists or professionals who were more likely to encounter the abortion issue in their day-to-day work. Yet, by the end of the 1960s, this pattern was changing as the right-to-lifers formed more permanent organizations in their cities and states and began working on long-term plans of action, looking decades ahead to sustain their fight against abortion.

1.1 The Abortion Debate in the 1960s

Abortion began to reemerge as a legislative, political, and public health issue in the 1960s. It had been a contentious issue in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with physicians leading the fight to criminalize abortion in the United States and arguing that the procedure was dangerous and immoral.[19] But following the successful implementation of laws to prohibit abortion, the issue mostly disappeared from public debate for nearly a century, a period sociologist Kristin Luker has called the "century of

[19] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 20. Luker describes this period as the "first right-to-life movement." Physicians approached the issue with particular social and political aims in mind as they fought to criminalize abortion.

silence."[20] In the 1960s, many states still had the same nineteenth-century abortion laws. Thus, when the abortion issue was addressed again in the 1960s, it was initially discussed as a legal and public health issue, rather than an issue of privacy or women's rights. For many people, it was just time to update the laws to match current trends and attitudes and to ensure the best and safest medical practice, rather than to revolutionize women's rights. The main issue was therapeutic abortions, abortions performed to save a woman's life. A doctor had to recommend a therapeutic abortion, which then had to be approved by a hospital committee. As the push for abortion reform began, supporters of reform wanted to ensure the legality of these abortions. They believed this would better protect women who needed abortions as well as the doctors who performed them.

A few events in the early 1960s helped bring the issue to the attention of the general public and began to shift public opinion in favor of reform. First, there were a few high profile cases of abortions that made it into the local and national news, such as the case of Sherri Finkbine.[21] Finkbine had mistakenly taken her husband's thalidomide early in her pregnancy, before it was widely known that thalidomide could cause severe birth defects. Finkbine's doctor recommended an abortion but the local hospital committee rejected her request. And though her story received widespread news coverage, the hospital committee would not reverse its decision. Finkbine ultimately traveled to Sweden in order to get an abortion. Her story is significant because it made abortion a public issue and put a face to the abortion issue. Finkbine was a normal, married mother of four who needed an abortion due to a medical mistake—her story challenged people's common misconceptions about why a woman might seek an

[20] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 40.
[21] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 62.

abortion.[22] In addition to the thalidomide controversy, there were several outbreaks of rubella in the mid-1960s, which in early pregnancy could impact fetal development.[23] The rubella outbreaks sustained the discussion about the necessity of legal abortion. Both of these events, and the publicity they received, helped shift public opinion and speed up the discussion of reforming abortion laws to make it easier and safer for women who needed an abortion for therapeutic reasons.

At the same time, professional organizations of lawyers and doctors were reconsidering their official stances on abortion. As early as 1959, the American Law Institute (ALI) recommended changes to the country's abortion laws.[24] They believed that abortions should be allowed in cases to protect the mental and physical health of the mother, in cases of rape or incest, and in cases of fetal deformity. The American Medical Association, as well as other professional organizations, followed the same trajectory, and many doctors also spoke out individually in favor of reforming abortion laws.[25] Prominent doctors, such as Alan Guttmacher and Bernard Nathanson, helped lead the fight to change the nation's laws. They framed the issue as a medical safety and public health issue aimed at reducing the number of illegal abortions and ensuring women and their doctors knew when abortions could be legally performed.

All of these events caused state legislators to begin reconsidering the issue as well, and debating whether it was time to reform state laws regarding abortion. Most states had laws that allowed for abortion to save a woman's life in some limited instances. But with cases of thalidomide and outbreaks of rubella, legislators began to

[22] Ginsburg, *Contested Lives,* 36.
[23] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 80-81.
[24] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 69.
[25] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 88.

wonder whether abortion should be allowed in cases of fetal deformity or to protect a woman's mental health. They also began to question the process by which women were able to procure abortions. Was it right for a hospital committee to make such decisions or should it be left to a woman and her doctor? Should abortion be allowed in cases of rape or incest? States began to tackle these issues as legislators offered various bills to reform, and later to repeal, abortion laws.[26]

In addition to legislators, doctors, and lawyers, groups dedicated to abortion reform, or in some cases to the repeal of all abortion laws, began to emerge at both the state and national level. At the state level, groups like the Society for Humane Abortions in California and the Minnesota Council for the Legal Termination of Pregnancy (MCTLP) urged legislators to reform abortion laws and worked to sway public opinion on the issue. In 1969, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) began urging the repeal of all abortion laws.[27] NARAL and other repeal groups believed that those who wanted to reform abortion laws were not going far enough, and they argued that abortion should be a matter decided between a woman and her doctor.

It was in this environment that the right-to-life movement began. Abortion was no longer the taboo subject it had been a decade earlier. Individuals, doctors, lawyers, legislators, and the media were much more willing to have frank discussions about abortion and to consider making it easier for women to obtain abortions. But not everyone was so happy with these changes. The seemingly easy acceptance of abortion

[26] Daniel Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-life Movement Before* Roe v. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39-41, 62-63. Kristin Luker expertly traces this shifting debate in California in the 1950s and 1960s. Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 66.
[27] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 106.

by many people left some individuals feeling that America was becoming unmoored from its foundational values. These Americans were baffled by how people could accept an act that they were firmly convinced was murder. And they suspected that the push for therapeutic abortions was really a front for legalizing "abortion on demand"—legal abortion with few restrictions. By the end of the 1960s, these individuals had begun to join together and create formal organizations to fight attempts at abortion reform in their individual states, and they had also begun to see the need for broader opposition to abortion across the nation.

1.2 The Catholic Church and the Abortion Issue

One of the earliest responses to the growing push for the liberalization of abortion laws came from the institutional Catholic Church. The Church had a head start on the issue thanks to its long history of opposing abortion; it had a clear stance while most other religious groups in the United States had yet to make decisive statements either in favor of or against legalized abortion. The Catholic Church was also on high alert in the 1960s as it had already been dealing with changes in laws and public opinion regarding the use of contraceptives.[28] However, like other right-to-life organizing, the church's political opposition to abortion was initially sporadic. Before 1965, its usual course of action was to leave the issue to the local priests and bishops. If the abortion issue came up, the church hierarchy allowed the local bishop to issue a statement emphasizing the church's position on abortion.[29] But from 1966 the Catholic Church in the United States

[28] Most recently, the Catholic Church faced defeat in *Griswold v. Connecticut,* a decision in which the Supreme Court overturned anti-birth control laws. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 58-59.
[29] Sagar C. Jain, PhD, and Steven Hughes, "California Abortion Act 1967: A Study in Legislative Process," Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1969, Box 254, Folder 2, Anthony C. Beilenson Papers (Collection 391), UCLA Special Library Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, (hereafter cited as Beilenson Papers).

devoted extensive resources and time to studying the abortion issue, developing important rhetorical strategies, mobilizing its national network of dioceses, and setting itself up as the most vocal opponent of abortion reform. The Catholic Church did not create the right-to-life movement on its own, but the movement might not have survived its earliest years without the support and funding of the Church. Indeed, the Church laid the foundation for right-to-life organizing by developing some of its main strategies and rhetoric, especially in envisioning a broad-based movement for Catholics and non-Catholics alike and founding a national right-to-life organization: the NRLC.

By the middle of the decade, church officials, led by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), realized the strategy of leaving right-to-life activity to local bishops and dioceses was no longer sufficient to answer the growing push for more relaxed abortion laws and the increased publicity on the issue. They also realized that the church hierarchy had little idea of what was happening on the ground among lay Catholics and local priests in response to abortion reform. Thus, before diving headfirst into abortion politics, the NCWC decided to undertake a serious study and discussion of the status of abortion in the United States, assessing what reform measures had been proposed across the country and how local parishes had taken action to oppose those measures. The Church's ultimate goal was to determine how it should approach the issue both at the national level and in local parishes.

This exploratory mission began in 1966, when the NCWC and some other church officials decided to hold a series of meetings in response to news of widespread abortion reform legislation and to a request from a state legislator in California for more

information on the abortion stance held by the NCWC.[30] Their initial response to the legislator's inquiry was simple and straightforward: "we see no basis for a position other than total opposition to such a proposal."[31] At the same time, the officials realized such a simple response was no longer sufficient since public opinion on the abortion issue was rapidly changing. Now, they would need to prepare for more questions about abortion and develop a range of arguments to counter the growing reproductive rights movement that was employing increasingly sophisticated and diverse arguments in favor of expanding abortion rights. Thus, church officials scheduled a series of meetings to develop a plan.

The first meeting was held in June 1966. A number of bishops were in attendance as well as representatives of the NCWC's Legal Department, its Bureau of Health and Hospitals, and Catholic Charities. Father James T. McHugh, who would become the leading figure in the NRLC, was also at the meeting. Several of those in attendance remarked that they were hearing from various dioceses across the country that there was a "mounting campaign favoring the liberalization of abortion laws."[32] The group also noted that while there was an awareness of the problem at the diocesan level and in local Catholic hospitals, there was little concrete action being taken because "everyone seems to be waiting for someone else to start a program."[33] Moreover, they expressed concern

[30] Mr. Consedine to Bishop Tanner, "Legalized Abortion," May 17, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USCCB Records); The NCWC still served more of a consulting role for the church rather than making firm policy decisions though it paved the way for the new National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), which would oversee the Church's abortion policy. Robert N. Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its history, and the Emergence of the Pro-life Movement Prior to *Roe v. Wade*," *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3, July 2011, 533.
[31] Mr. Consedine to Bishop Tanner, "Legalized Abortion," May 17, 1966, USCCB Records.
[32] National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC), "Minutes of Meeting on Abortion," June 23, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.
[33] NCWC, "Minutes of Meeting on Abortion," June 23, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.

over the well-organized abortion rights campaign. The supporters of abortion rights had already developed material to counter any moral statement against abortion by the Catholic Church and recruited clergy of other faiths to make strong moral and religious arguments in favor of abortion reform. At the end of the meeting, the group reached the same conclusions: "there is a great need for a special campaign against abortion."[34]

But before developing a right-to-life campaign, the NCWC needed more information on what dioceses and their parishes were already doing to oppose abortion in their local communities. The answer to this problem and to the lack of a unified plan of action was to send out a questionnaire to each diocese. The questionnaire asked dioceses to explain what was going on with the abortion issue in their respective state. The NCWC wanted to know if there were any bills before state legislators or cases in the courts to liberalize abortion laws. They wanted to know what medical professionals were recommending in the state and what local chapters of Planned Parenthood were doing to change the laws. They also asked the diocesan officials to summarize media coverage of the abortion issue and make recommendations for what actions the Church should take to confront the abortion rights movement.[35] Regardless of whether or not there were efforts to reform abortion laws in their states, most of the respondents recommended that the Church craft an "education campaign…locally and nationally, stressing the right to life."[36] In addition, the respondents argued for a program that could reach both Catholics and non-Catholics and encourage them to work together, early recognition that the Church could not fight abortion reform alone.

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[34] Ibid.
[35] NCWC, "Questionnaire Regarding Abortion Law Change," July 5, 1966, NCWC, Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.
[36] James T. McHugh to Bishop Paul Tanner, "Response to Abortion Questionnaire," August 18, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.

At the same time as they consulted local parishes and dioceses, the NCWC sought information from a number of different experts on abortion and set about developing the strategy and rhetoric to be used by bishops, priests, and lay Catholics. These experts were usually Catholic doctors, lawyers, social workers, theologians, and psychiatrists, and the meetings with the experts continued through 1966 and into 1967. The leading Catholic experts included people such as John T. Noonan, Charles E. Rice, and Robert Byrn, all lawyers who taught at various Catholic universities. Noonan was a particular favorite and appeared at many legislative hearings, contributed frequently to various movement publications and announcements, and also wrote several books on abortion, which the right-to-life movement frequently used. These experts helped the Church develop and deploy new arguments against abortion based on medical, legal, sociological, and theological evidence rather than solely on church doctrine.

It was from among these experts that a momentous recommendation was made: "A broad-based opposition should be formulated, one that would elicit support from non-Catholics as well. Emphasis must be placed on human dignity and the right to life."[37] The diocesan directors of Catholic Charities echoed theses sentiments and went a step further, recommending the formation of a national organization.[38] Though it was just a suggestion at this point, the recommendation for a broad-based movement, a movement for Catholics as well as their non-Catholic allies, was an important milestone and would set the tone for right-to-life organizing into the next decade. Church officials and their experts had quickly decided that Catholics alone could not sustain this new crusade. A parish

[37] James T. McHugh, "Report on Abortion Questionnaire," September 9, 1966, Box 94, Folder 5, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[38] Msgr. Lawrence J. Corcoran, "The Problem of Abortion (Discussions with Directors of Charities)," July 1966, NCWC, Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.

education campaign was necessary, but the work of the Church could not stop there. It needed to recruit Catholic lay people as well as non-Catholics into the movement, and it needed to prepare for right-to-life activism at the national level.

This recommendation for broad-based organizing guided the early development of the rhetoric and strategy for the movement, especially in the books and pamphlets the Church commissioned during this time. The experts and church officials recognized that their target audience was bigger than just priests and bishops. They wanted lay people involved as well as non-Catholics so they needed to tailor the literature on abortion to these groups. Right-to-life literature was also a concern because one of the main findings from the questionnaire was that there was little activity going on at the parish level. Thus, developing literature became a way to educate people and mobilize them to action. Reflecting the work of the Catholic experts, the documents often deployed professional arguments against abortion, including reports from doctors and psychiatrists, an analysis of the legal issues surrounding abortion, papers on its moral and theological ramifications, and a short booklet on abortion and public policy, "a popularly-written booklet for general reading."[39] While not necessarily the most accessible material for the lay reader, this literature did move the arguments against abortion away from arguments rooted solely in church dogma—arguments the church feared might alienate non-Catholics. And despite the more professional bent of the material, church officials had a broader audience in mind—as indicated above, one of the booklets was intended "for general reading" and another booklet included study questions at the end, as if the booklet were meant to be read and discussed in a small group, perhaps in a local church.[40]

[39] James T. McHugh, Untitled Memo, March 31, 1967, Box 94, Folder 7, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[40] James T. McHugh, Untitled Memo, March 31, 1967, Box 94, Folder 7, Catholic Charities USA Papers.

These early booklets and pamphlets would be the tools for recruiting activists for this new broad-based right-to-life movement.

The bishops worked with their experts to carefully frame the arguments against abortion to avoid controversies on issues like contraception as well as to try to reach a more general audience. They wanted to distinguish abortion as a distinct, and very serious, moral problem. Father McHugh, who would be pivotal in founding the NRLC, detailed their stance in a 1967 report, "Abortion: Some Theological and Sociological Perspectives." In the first main point of the paper, McHugh set the abortion issue apart from the issues of contraception and sterilization. "The issue of abortion is specifically different from contraception and from sterilization," he commented, "it must be theologically evaluated as such, and any moral analysis should maintain this separation."[41] Abortion moved beyond these two issues for two main reasons. First, setting abortion apart from the issues of contraception and sterilization helped church officials avoid the current controversies regarding contraception both within the Church as well as in the American court system.[42] Second, the Church wanted to frame abortion as a much more serious issue—as the murder of unborn babies. This simple fact was reflected in the initial response of the NCWC to the inquiry from the legislator in California—there was never any other option for the Church besides unequivocal opposition to abortion because abortion meant taking innocent human life.[43] The Church decided to rely primarily on this straightforward message.

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[41] James T. McHugh, "Abortion: Some Theological and Sociological Perspectives," Family Life Bureau, USCC, April 28, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[42] The Court had only recently decided the case *Griswold v. Connecticut,* ruling the Connecticut's ban on the sale of contraceptives violated privacy laws. The Church was also in the process of studying the birth control issue, and the pope would address it formally in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.
[43] Mr. Consedine to Bishop Tanner, "Legalized Abortion," May 17, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.

In doing so, the bishops could also claim to be speaking for all moral Americans as they emphasized the "human dignity" and "the rights of man [sic]" rather than relying "solely on Catholic moral theology."[44] This reasoning was also in line with their strategy of creating a broad-based movement. After all, every moral person—Catholic or non-Catholic—should agree that murder is wrong. And though right-to-lifers were sometimes accused of resorting to overly emotional arguments against abortion because they called it murder, McHugh contended that right-to-lifers were using a "clear and reasoned" approach when they used such reasoning. The bishops and other church officials hoped this approach would reach a broad audience and mobilize American Catholics as well as other religious Americans.

The final, and most important, strategic decision made by church officials was the formation of the NRLC in 1968. It grew out of the series of meetings among church officials and Catholic professionals as well as the reports from the diocesan questionnaire. The decision to form the NRLC, or at least some sort of national organization, was first suggested at one of the meetings in 1966, though it took several years to come to fruition. At the very end of his report on the meeting with the directors of Catholic Charities, Msgr. Lawrence J. Corcoran noted their recommendation: "It might also be wise to organize a broadly-representative committee nationally (with local affiliates) to fight abortion liberalization (or for the defense of the unborn child.)"[45] The discussions about forming a national organization continued throughout the year. In April 1967, Msgr. James Murray gave an update on the Church's progress to the directors of

[44] James T. McHugh, "Telephone conversation with Father Donald Weber, Milwaukee Family Life Bureau, July 17, 1969," Memorandum to Bishop Bernardin, July 17, 1969, Box 79, Folder Birth Control 1968-1969, USCCB Records.
[45] Msgr. Lawrence J. Corcoran, "The Problem of Abortion (Discussions with Directors of Charities)," July 1966. NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.

Catholic Charities. It turned out the bishops had met in Chicago earlier in the month and had approved $50,000 for a national right-to-life project—the National Right to Life Committee. Murray described it as an "educational program to be coordinated by the Family Life Bureau of USCC" but whose mission would extend far beyond the Family Life Bureau and the Church's dioceses.[46] It was time for the Catholic Church to start coordinating right-to-life activity across the country.

The NRLC was initially the informational wing of the burgeoning right-to-life movement.[47] In its early years, the Catholic Church used it as a tool to monitor right-to-life activity across the country and to distribute the literature it was beginning to develop. Local and state right-to-life groups also used the NRLC and its newsletter, *National Right to Life News,* to keep track of what other right-to-life groups were doing around the country. In its first few years of existence, the group remained closely tied to the United States Catholic Conference's Family Life Bureau, which Father James McHugh directed. The bishops even asked McHugh to head the new NRLC. Though McHugh passed day-to-day control of the group to Michael Taylor, a Catholic layperson working for the Family Life Bureau, he remained a vital presence in the movement.[48] Under McHugh's leadership, the NRLC soon became the leader for the growing movement and one of the only national groups that organized before *Roe v. Wade.*

The NRLC implemented the strategy the NCWC had been discussing since 1966, continuing to develop literature on the abortion issue, starting a newsletter to monitor the

[46] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[47] During the 1960s, the NRLC served as gatherer and distributor of right-to-life news and information, while the state and local right-to-life groups spearheaded political initiatives. In the 1970s, the NRLC became more actively engaged in national politics.
[48] Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-life Movement Prior to Roe v. Wade," 537-538.

right-to-life movement in each state, and targeting a more diverse range of Americans with both these endeavors. The NRLC leadership intended their literature and newsletter to be used by local and state groups or dispersed in local churches. In addition, they used this literature to practice a number of arguments against abortion. In some early booklets, the NRLC focused on reasons to oppose abortion that were not related to religion—a major early right-to-life project meant to counter charges that those opposing abortion did so only because of their religious faith. The reasons the NRLC cited generally fell under three categories—medical, legal, and social—again reflecting the reliance on doctors, lawyers, and other professionals to advise the Church on its antiabortion policy and condensing the arguments of these experts into manageable explanations for the lay reader.[49] For example, the organization's early literature described the medical arguments against abortion by highlighting the physical and emotional damage it believed abortion could cause for women and explaining the stances of doctors and psychiatrists who opposed abortion. All these arguments followed the same patterns that church officials used in planning the NRLC, but with a more lay-oriented approach focused on educating not only Catholics or professionals but non-Catholics as well.

Yet, the NRLC moved beyond a reliance on experts, and its early literature began invoking what historian Daniel Williams has called a "rights-based" approach. Most often, this approach involved citing the Declaration of Independence and the UN Declaration of Human Rights.[50] The NRLC and church officials claimed a "long and respected legal heritage" that recognized the right to life of all people, including the

[49] National Right to Life Committee, "Questions and Answers on Abortion," Date unknown, c. 1968, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1968-1969, USCCB Records.
[50] National Right to Life Committee, "Questions and Answers on Abortion," Date unknown, c. 1968, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1968-1969, USCCB Records; James T. McHugh, "Abortion: Some Theological and Sociological Perspectives," December 1968, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1968-1969, USCCB Records.

unborn, and quoted the sections of the Declaration of Independence and the UN Declaration of Human Rights that recognized this right to life.[51] This "rights-based" approach would become an essential part of early right-to-life rhetoric.[52] As with its literature, the orientation of the NRLC, and its diverse arguments against abortion, church officials had a bigger target in mind—they wanted to speak for all Americans, not just American Catholics. The bishops, especially, truly believed that they could be the moral and authoritative voice on abortion, proclaiming its immorality on legal, social, and medical grounds backed up by the founding documents of the country, and they assumed that other religious Americans were bound to agree with their stance. The NRLC, then, was the Church's means of reaching this broader audience and promoting the rights-based approach to right-to-life activism.

Not everyone was convinced by the Church's shift in rhetoric, and in light of the Church's involvement in the NRLC's founding, claims of the Catholic hierarchy's machinations became a common refrain among abortion rights supporters. These claims would haunt the new right-to-life movement for years to come. Starting the NRLC had been the Catholic Church's attempt to "shift attention away from the so-called 'exclusively Catholic opposition,'" but the abortion rights movement jumped on the fact that the Catholic Church hierarchy had been responsible for starting the NRLC and that local bishops were the most public opponents of abortion in the early 1960s.[53] Supporters of abortion reform saw their chance to portray the movement as solely an endeavor of the Catholic hierarchy and in turn framed the fight over abortion as a religious freedom issue. NARAL used examples such as a paper presented by Dr. Lester Breslow in which he

[51] Ibid.
[52] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 4.
[53] James T. McHugh to bishops, January 10, 1969, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1968-1969, USCCB Records.

characterized opposition to abortion as "the influence of one church whose dogma that human life begins with conception has been, in effect, foisted upon the body politic."[54] It argued that those opposing the right to abortion were trying to impose their religious beliefs on others, violating the First Amendment. In its official literature, NARAL firmly stated, "No one sect should be allowed to impose its view on other religious groups."[55] To back up this claim, abortion rights activists also recruited a range of Protestant and Jewish leaders, as well as some pro-choice Catholics, to speak in favor of expanded abortion rights, and they highlighted these leaders' reasonableness and rationality as opposed to what they argued were the overly emotional and irrational arguments of the Catholic Church hierarchy.[56]

Such allegations of a Catholic conspiracy were ubiquitous in abortion rights rhetoric throughout the 1970s, and even made their way into the letters of ordinary people to their representatives and local newspapers and into the historiography of the right-to-life movement itself.[57] Californian Nan Turner voiced her concerns to State Senator Anthony Beilenson: "I can't see how one or more churches can dictate for everyone."[58] And Minnesotan Marie Saunders wrote to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, explaining her support for reproductive rights by citing the separation of church and state: "If the Catholic Church chooses to disagree with law, science, and other theology, that is its

[54] Lester Breslow, M.D., "Abortion: The Case for Repeal," February 15, 1969, Box 1, Folder 20, National Abortion Rights Action League Records, 1968-1976 (MC 313), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, (hereafter cited as NARAL Records).
[55] NARAL, "Abortion: Questions and Answers," 1969, Carton 6, Folder Campus 1969-1970, NARAL Records.
[56] Howard Moody, "Men's Vengeance on Woman: Some reflections on abortion laws as religious retribution and legal punishment of the feminine species," *Renewal* magazine, 1967, Box 1, Folder 23, NARAL Records.
[57] For a clear example of this in the historiography, see Connie Paige, *The Right to Lifers: Who They Are, How They Operate, and Where They Get Their Money* (New York: Summit Books, 1983).
[58] Nan Turner to State Senator Anthony Beilenson, March 4, 1967, Box 78, Folder 2, Beilenson Papers.

prerogative. However, to impose this thinking on the rest of the public is to deny the fundamental separation of church and state."[59] NARAL and other abortion rights groups were very successful in framing the fight over abortion as a fight over religious freedom. And their argument had some basis in reality, given the close association of the Catholic Church to the right-to-life movement in the late 1960s and even up to early 1973 when the NRLC finally shed its official ties to the Church.

Though the Catholic Church was not orchestrating all right-to-life endeavors, the early movement could not have organized as quickly and substantially were it not for the work done by church officials, Catholic professionals, and the NRLC in the mid-1960s. The Church had the resources to quickly respond to abortion reform and begin right-to-life organizing, and it also had a network of doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers, professors, and social workers who helped develop a variety of arguments against abortion. The NRLC proved especially useful. It provided important information for right-to-lifers on the ground and a way to build networks of activists and organizations across the country. Most importantly, church officials used the NRLC to foster a broad-based movement that they hoped could mobilize Americans regardless of their religious affiliation. Despite the Church's overt role in founding and funding the NRLC and the claims that the hierarchy orchestrated the entire opposition, lay Americans—both Catholic and non-Catholic—would be the main driving force behind right-to-life activity at the state and local level. Without this grassroots mobilization, the NRLC would remain simply an educational venture. But at the same time as the Catholic Church was starting to take action, lay Catholics as well as people of other religious faiths, especially a growing number of

[59] Marie Saunders, "Not Decision of Church or State," Letter to the Editor, *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 1969, Reel 3, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Newspaper Clippings Microfilm Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN. (hereafter cited as MCCL Newspaper Clippings).

Protestants, were also beginning to get involved in abortion politics and take a public stand to defend the unborn. In fact, by 1967, right-to-life activity was well underway in many states, and state groups, in places like California, Minnesota, and New York, were mobilizing local populations, connecting to right-to-life groups in other states, and sharing strategies and resources for the battle ahead.

1.3 California: Right-to-life Mobilization and the Therapeutic Abortion Bill of 1967

While the Catholic Church tried to develop a strategy that could effectively reach local priests and parishes and organize a national right-to-life movement, the main battle against abortion reform occurred in the states where in the late 1960s thousands of individuals mobilized to oppose reform. California was the site of one of these early fights. Efforts to reform the state's abortion law had begun in the early 1960s, with State Senator Anthony Beilenson largely responsible for spearheading these efforts. His early attempts to introduce this legislation had not been successful, but he was persistent. In 1967, he reintroduced his Therapeutic Abortion Bill, a modest measure that recommended that abortion be allowed in cases to protect a woman's life, in cases of rape or incest, and in cases of fetal deformity. As Beilenson repeatedly attempted to introduce legislation, the Catholic Church remained his major foe—at least until 1967 when he suddenly faced opposition from thousands of Californians. Despite this major opposition, in 1967 he finally succeeded, and the bill passed. Nevertheless, the situation in California provides an illustrative example of how individual Americans first became aware of and reacted to the push for abortion reform. In California, it became clear that abortion could be a powerful and polarizing political issue that resonated with a broad swath of

Americans, and as many residents of the state became aware of Beilenson's reform attempts, they mobilized to take action to oppose legalized abortion.

At first, the right-to-life activity in California mirrored that of the Church. California's bishops had even been some of the first people to warn the NCWC about the efforts to liberalize abortion laws in the state. In June 1966, Bishop Alden J. Bell of Sacramento notified the NCWC of the potential changes to abortion law in California as well as the publicity the issue was getting. He wrote, "the campaign on liberalizing abortion continues at a fast pace…We feel the need of a very succinct and effective statement on the moral issues involved as a basis for an educational program among even our own Catholic people."[60] Bishop Bell also warned that the abortion issue would most likely become a national issue in the coming years. The bishops in California joined together at the end of that year to make a formal statement opposing abortion reform. The statement, entitled "Thou Shalt Not Kill," laid out various arguments against abortion and reiterated the Church's strict stance: "Those who would weaken laws which protect human life are posing both a threat to society itself and to the fundamental moral principles upon which society is based."[61] They stated that they opposed abortion not only because of the Church's teaching but also because of scientific evidence about embryonic life and the rights enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.

Like their counterparts at the national level, the Catholic bishops in California also began supporting a group of Catholic professionals and experts on the abortion issue

[60] Bishop Alden J. Bell to Bishop Paul F. Tanner, June 20, 1966, NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.
[61] Bishops of California, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," December 8, 1966, Box 511, Folder 16, Beilenson Papers.

who had begun meeting in Los Angeles in 1966.[62] The group of twelve lawyers and doctors crafted a statement to release to the public in California, hoping to counter the positive publicity for abortion reform. They noted the "increasing volume of comment, argument and outright propaganda" in favor of liberalization.[63] They also claimed that the proponents of abortion reform were too "emotionally-charged" and that their arguments in favor of the reform bill were "lacking in substance."[64] While the men on the committee said they were sympathetic to the issues faced by women, they recommended "medical aid, psychological guidance, and social and spiritual assistance" rather than legalized abortion.[65] The Catholic bishops included this report with their own statement, using it to bolster their case against abortion reform. Like the work of the NCWC and other church officials, the statement aimed to show that seasoned experts and professionals could present reasoned and rational arguments against abortion. This was the standard approach to the abortion issue by the Catholic Church and Catholic professionals at this time.

Despite this public statement, Beilenson persisted in his efforts to reform the state's abortion laws. This opposition was, after all, very similar to opposition he had encountered in previous years when he had presented abortion reform legislation; however, Beilenson soon encountered a sudden and impressive wave of opposition to the new proposed legislation. His office and his colleagues' offices were flooded with letters from angry Californians—both his own constituents as well as other residents from across the state. Some were in favor of the bill but the vast majority was not. State

[62] Kristin Luker, Interview Notes, Carton 1, Kristin Luker Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereafter cited as Luker Papers).
[63] Alfredo J. Bayardo, M.D., John J. Brandlin, et al. "A Statement on the Abortion Controversy," NCWC Box 87, Folder 7, USCCB Records.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

Senator George E. Danielson, one of Beilenson's colleagues on the Senate Judiciary Committee, reported that his office stopped counting once they had received over four thousand letters on the bill.[66] Like Beilenson, he also said that the letters had skewed heavily in opposition to the proposed measure to liberalize the abortion law. Initially, Beilenson and the other legislators could not explain where the wave of opposition to abortion reform had come from.

This "mail avalanche" was partly the result of the efforts of local Catholic parishes. Several people reported to Beilenson that the homilies in church on Easter Sunday that spring were devoted to the abortion issue, that the issue was being discussed in Catholic schools and hospitals, and that Catholic priests had urged California's Catholics to write their representatives.[67] Church bulletins also included updates on abortion legislation, letting parishioners know when they should contact their legislators.[68] The announcements in church bulletins framed the issue in the most serious terms and urged immediate action. They asked parishioners, "Did you write your State Senator and State Assemblyman urging them to oppose the 'Inhuman' Abortion Bill, which would legalize Abortion in California? If not, write immediately."[69] They also included emotional antiabortion tracts like the fictional diary of an unborn child, "Slaughter of the Innocent." The account documented the experience of a fetus in the womb: "October 5: Today my life began. My parents do not know it yet. I am small as

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[66] "Mail Avalanche Hits Abortion Bill," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, April 27, 1967, Box 483, Folder 14, Beilenson Papers.
[67] Joyce Gerritsen to State Senator Anthony Beilenson, April 1967, Box 484, Folder 5, Beilenson Papers; Marilyn Fomon to State Senator Anthony Beilenson, May 28, 1967, Box 511, Folder 1, Beilenson Papers. A number of form letters were sent by employees of St, Mary's Long Beach Hospital on March 30, 1967. These letters can be found in Box 511, Folder 16, Beilenson Papers.
[68] St. Ambrose Church, Easter – Feast of Light, Church Bulletin, March 26, 1967, Box 511, Folder 1, Beilenson Papers.
[69] "Re: Therapeutic Abortion Bill, Assembly Bill #834 – Senate Bill #462, Church Bulletin insert, May 1967, Box 511, Folder 1, Beilenson Papers.

the seed of an apple, but it is I already." It continued, documenting various fetal developments before ending on December 28th: "Today my mother killed me."[70] Still another church bulletin invoked the Fifth Commandment, perhaps referencing the bishops' 1966 statement "Thou Shalt Not Kill," and urged parishioners to "oppose the Inhuman Abortion Bill."[71] One bishop reported that he had sent eighty thousand letters to members of his diocese, telling them to write their State Senator in opposition to the bill.[72] All these efforts in local parishes combined to create massive levels of individual opposition to abortion. They also showed that the Church's attempts at education and outreach on the abortion issue were making an impact at the grassroots level and that abortion was a powerful issue that could motivate people to take political action.

Moreover, the constituent letters displayed the varied arguments against abortion that individuals were already using—many of which would be marshaled again and again to oppose abortion and to convince people to join the new right-to-life movement. These arguments fit into four broad categories. First, some people argued that abortion reform was a slippery slope. What was to stop euthanasia or killing of the mentally or physically disabled if states started legalizing abortion? "Why not change the law to read that after a child is born if no one wants it or if it is deformed, then kill it," constituent Frances Buchan of Sun Valley asked.[73] This argument was often combined with the argument that, with legal abortion, America would be "moving stage by stage to something

[70] Ibid.
[71] "Oppose Inhuman Abortion Bill Because:" Church Bulletin insert, Box 511, Folder 1, Beilenson Papers.
[72] Leslie Kinsolving, "Bishop Hits Pro-Abortion Legislators," *San Francisco Chronicle,* July 20, 1967, Box 483, Folder 14, Beilenson Papers.
[73] Frances M. Buchan to Senator Anthony Beilenson, March 24, 1967, Box 512, Folder 3, Beilenson Papers.

potentially indistinguishable from Hitler's Germany."[74] Second, other letters invoked religion. These letters usually went two directions—either they declared that abortion was murder (a violation of the Fifth Commandment, though they often did not get that specific) or they said that abortion was a violation of God's sovereignty, asking, "Who are you to play God?" One of Beilenson's constituents combined the two arguments: "Who are you and your misguided partisans to play god of God?...I am unaware that the Fifth Commandment has been, or even can be, abrogated."[75] Third, the letters framed abortion as a human rights or civil rights issue. These letters often referenced founding American documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, arguing that the right to life was a fundamental American right. The argument mirrored the rights-based approach that would be foundational for the right-to-life movement and which would be used by the NRLC the following year. One such letter pleaded, "Even the unborn child has minority rights despite possible reluctance on the part of the majority to admit it."[76] Finally, other letters placed abortion among other signs of American society's eroding morals and the decline of traditional values. Dorothy Messina of Sepulveda lamented the bill and remarked, "I fervently pray that our country will soon return to the God-fearing, God-loving land our founders intended it to be."[77]

These arguments are significant because they were enduring and because the activity of letter writing would be an entry point into political activism for many right-to-lifers. The arguments in these early constituent letters were reiterated and reused repeatedly even as the right-to-life movement shifted from a local and state orientation to

[74] John and Elizabeth Hook to Senator Anthony Beilenson, March 17, 1967. Box 512, Folder 4, Beilenson Papers.
[75] Constituent to Senator Anthony Beilenson, March 31, 1967, Box 512, Folder 4, Beilenson Papers.
[76] Fred W. Hotteroth to Editorial Department, March 6, 1967, Box 78, Folder 2, Beilenson Papers.
[77] Dorothy Messina to Mr. Haberman (local editor), March 1967, Box 78, Folder 2, Beilenson Papers.

a national one and even as movement demographics shifted with the incorporation of many evangelical Christians in the late 1970s. Letter writing would also be a major strategy of early right-to-life groups. Such actions not only made legislators aware of the growing opposition to abortion but also encouraged individuals to form or join new right-to-life organizations. Writing letters to representatives was a stepping-stone to greater involvement in activism. For example, Marian Banducci of Fremont, who became very active in California's right-to-life movement, recalled her own letter writing endeavors when she wrote her memoir after twenty years of activism. Banducci remembered that after hearing about the Therapeutic Abortion Bill of 1967 she immediately "had to express [her] anger in some way" and "began writing letters to the editors of newspapers."[78] Though it would be two more years before she was involved in a right-to-life organization, letter writing provided her with her first foray into abortion politics. It was low risk and low cost activism—anyone could sit down and write a note to their representative or local newspaper. But it helped the right-to-life movement reach a much broader audience and hone in on the arguments against abortion that would be its most powerful and compelling arguments in the years to come.

The massive campaign of letter writing helped the bill gain wide publicity, and many people began speaking out publicly both for and against the bill. Finally, a hearing on the bill was scheduled for April 27, 1967, and both sides began lining up speakers to argue their case. Hundreds of people turned up to hear each side argue their position, and the hearing lasted for six hours.[79] The proponents of abortion reform went first. They

[78] Marian Banducci, *Twenty Years on the Front Lines: Recollections of a Pro-life Activist* (Modesto, CA: The Voice of the Unborn, 1989), 1.
[79] Ray Zeman, "Abortion Action: Senate Unit Gives Bill a 'Do Pass' Voice Vote Taken After 6-Hr. Debate Abortion Measure Debated Before Overflow Crowd," *Los Angeles Times,* April 28, 1967; Jain and Hughes,

argued that legalized abortion before the twentieth week of pregnancy was in line with "sound medical practice."[80] In addition to the doctors testifying in favor of abortion reform, several clergymen spoke out in support of the bill as well as a number of members of abortion rights organizations. The supporters of the bill wrapped up their testimony shortly after eleven that evening. The opposition was less cohesive with no clear leadership, but they still presented a range of speakers including a Lutheran minister, a pastor of a local community church and representative of the Right to Life League, Bishop Bell of the Catholic Church, and Professor John T. Noonan, who was "one of the best speakers all evening."[81] Similar to those in favor of the bill, the opponents included several doctors and lawyers to testify in regard to the legal and medical ramifications of abortion. The hearing finally ended around two in the morning, and one of the senators at the hearing commented that it had been "one of 'the greatest speaking marathons I have ever witnessed.'"[82] The abortion rights supporters felt they had achieved a major victory with their compelling and well-organized testimony. The legislators must have agreed because they passed Beilenson's bill, and despite some reservations, Governor Reagan signed it into law.[83]

In spite of its defeat, the opposition did not die down once the Therapeutic Abortion Bill was signed into law in 1967. Indeed, some right-to-life activists noted that

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"California Abortion Act 1967: A Study in Legislative Process," Box 254, Folder 2, Beilenson Papers, 50; Jerry Gillam, "Abortion Measure Wins Major Test," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1967.

[80] Jain and Hughes, 52; Ray Zeman, "Abortion Action: Senate Unit Gives Bill a 'Do Pass' Voice Vote Taken After 6-Hr. Debate Abortion Measure Debated Before Overflow Crowd," *Los Angeles Times,* April 28, 1967.

[81] Jain and Hughes, 61.

[82] Jain and Hughes, 63; Ray Zeman, "Abortion Bill Author Predicts Its Passage," *Los Angeles Times,* April 29, 1967.

[83] The Right to Life League of Southern California insist several of their members flew up to Sacramento to intervene and try to convince Reagan to refuse to sign the bill. They report that after their meeting with him, Reagan promised to never sign an abortion bill again. Right to Life League of Southern California, "Right to Life League of Southern California History," http://rtllsc.org/life/About%20Us/history.php (accessed March 1, 2017).

the 1967 Therapeutic Abortion Bill was just the start of their political activism and only further mobilized the opposition to abortion in California. In a similar way to other abortion decisions, including the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade,* the 1967 Therapeutic Abortion Bill loomed large in the minds of right-to-lifers in California. Activist Marian Banducci said that the 1967 bill came as a shock to her, and she was no longer able to ignore the abortion issue. In her memoir, she recalled the passage of the 1967 Therapeutic Abortion Bill as "the event that would change my life forevermore."[84] Sr. Paula Vandegaer, who joined the Right to Life League following the passage of the bill, recalled a similar feeling: "I thought it was such a ridiculous thing. That law would never pass. When it did pass, I was shocked. I didn't know what to say."[85] After the passage of the bill, some of these people immediately turned their ire against Governor Reagan. Groups like the Right to Life League of Southern California urged its leadership and members to write Reagan and tell him to oppose any amended bill that came to his desk; soon after, Reagan's office reported that he was receiving nearly five hundred letters and telegrams a day, most of which opposed any amended bill.[86]

The Right to Life League and other California right-to-life groups tried to marshal this fervor and continued to grow and strengthen in the wake of the 1967 legislative fight. Right to Life Leagues had been started in both the northern and southern parts of the state in 1967, and other groups formed after the passage of the Therapeutic Abortion Bill. Following the bill's passage, members of the Right to Life League of California also

[84] Banducci, *Twenty Years on the Front Lines,* 1.
[85] Sr. Paula Vandegaer. "The Pro-life Movement Ten Years Later," *Heartbeat* magazine, Spring 1983. Box 1, Folder 8, George Huntston Williams Papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Williams Papers).
[86] Dave Tomshany to All Right to Life League Leadership, "New Project," June 2, 1967, Box 483, Folder 8, Beilenson Papers; "Reagan Mail Heavy Against Abortion Bill," *The Sacramento Union*, June 13, 1967, Box 484, Folder 3, Beilenson Papers.

organized more letter writing campaigns and developed their own pamphlets and literature in both English and Spanish, which proclaimed their belief in the fundamental right to life in America's founding documents and in its laws.[87] Marian Banducci joined a local antiabortion group organized by women at her church in 1969. They called themselves the Voice for the Unborn and met regularly at their priest's home. Looking back, Banducci recalled it as "the beginning of a spiritual awakening!"[88] These groups met and operated at the local level and served as a place for right-to-lifers to remain involved in political activism and to develop new strategies following their legislative defeat.

The camaraderie in these early groups as well as news of the existence of similar organizations in their state and across the country invigorated early right-to-life activists and cemented their commitment to the cause. Banducci described the feeling, "A whole new world began to open up for me as I…came to realize that people all over the country felt just as I did and that pro-life groups were forming all over."[89] The mobilization of activists in California also attracted the attention of right-to-lifers in both Minnesota and New York, who sought inspiration from right-to-life strategy in the state. Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life even invited Father Charles Carroll, an Episcopal priest and leading figure in California's right-to-life movement, to speak in their state several times in the late 1960s.[90] However, despite their efforts at organizing to stop the liberalization

[87] Right to Life League of Northern California, "Abortion," pamphlet, 1967, Box 511, Folder 16, Beilenson Papers; Right to Life League, "La Liga del Derecho de Vivir Cree," pamphlet, 1967, Box 511, Folder 16, Beilenson Papers; Right to Life League, "His Right to Live," pamphlet, 1967, Box 511, Folder 1, Beilenson Papers.
[88] Banducci, *Twenty Years on the Front Lines,* 1.
[89] Banducci, *Twenty Years on the Front Lines*, 1.
[90] "Two to speak on abortion at meet," *Catholic Bulletin*, January 3, 1969. Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Right of the Unborn Child Vigorously Upheld," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY),

of California's abortion laws and their respected status among right-to-lifers in other states, California's right-to-lifers failed to achieve their objective of reversing reform—the 1967 Therapeutic Bill withstood their protest and in 1970 the state's Supreme Court struck down the abortion law completely, paving the way for legal abortion without restrictions.[91]

The story in California is one of both successes and failures, showing the halting start of the right-to-life movement before *Roe v. Wade.* Right-to-lifers failed to stall abortion reform, but the Church and local groups in California were able to mobilize thousands of Californians to take part in massive letter writing campaigns and to speak out publicly in opposition to reform—a stark change from previous years. Despite the failure to halt reform in California, there can be no doubt that right-to-life opposition was a potent force, and this early mobilization was vital to later organizing efforts in the state.[92] Individuals became aware of the abortion issue, educated on the various arguments against abortion, and mobilized to act. But despite this mobilization of individual Californians, it was not so easy to turn that individual opposition into more organized opposition, and the movement had yet to settle on a unified strategy, as was evident from its disorganized testimony at the hearing for the bill in 1967. It was becoming clear that the right-to-lifers could no longer rely solely on experts like doctors, lawyers, or church officials to argue against abortion on their behalf, and letter-writing

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December 18, 1966, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Are We Forcing Catholic Dogma to Become State Law?" *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), March 2, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

[91] The state's Supreme Court declared the criminal abortion statute unconstitutional and affirmed a doctor's right to perform abortions. Jane Lang McGrew, "To Be or Not to Be: The Constitutional Question of the California Abortion Law," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 118 (1970): 642.

[92] The opposition to abortion in California was so influential and well known that, in 1969, Beilenson was invited to a meeting of the Abortion Reform Association to serve as the chair on a panel on how to deal with opposition, thanks to his firsthand experience and expertise from dealing with the massive movement to oppose abortion in California. Abortion Reform Association, "ARA Workshop," October 1969, Carton 6, Folder Abortion Reform Association, NARAL Records.

campaigns could only get them so far. Moreover, arguments in favor of abortion were beginning to change to favor the repeal of abortion laws rather than reform and public opinion was turning in favor of the issue. Right-to-lifers had to counter this swell of support for abortion reform (and now repeal) by forming local and state organizations that could effectively raise awareness, implement a clear strategy, and mobilize more people at the grassroots level.

1.4 New York: The Catholic Church and a Right-to-Life Strategy for the States

New York became a focal point for both sides of the abortion debate when the state legalized abortion in 1970, but as in California and Minnesota, opposition to abortion began to coalesce in the state in the late 1960s. This process in New York was slower than in California and Minnesota, partly because New Yorkers had not yet faced serious challenges to the state's abortion law. Abortion reform was introduced but easily defeated three years in a row from 1966 to 1969.[93] For the most part, the state's Catholic bishops and a small group, the New York State Right to Life Committee, coordinated the opposition in the state. In contrast to California, New York's right-to-life strategy was much clearer and more precise, perhaps because the threats of reform were less urgent in the state. This allowed the Church to develop a comprehensive plan to mobilize the state's parishes to oppose abortion reform. The development of a right-to-life movement in New York provides an example of attempts to implement the Church's plan, which had been discussed at the NCWC meetings in 1966 and 1967, at the state level. It was the realization of a grassroots strategy for the new movement, meant to mobilize individuals in the states and then organize them to sustain long-term action. The Church's plan also

[93] "Defeat of Abortion Bill Called 'Victory of Life over Death," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), April 27, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

allowed the movement in New York to test out new strategies and laid the foundation for a strong right-to-life presence in the state. Starting in 1970, the state's lay Catholics would lead a passionate and fierce fight against a new liberalized abortion law and make New York one of the preeminent models of right-to-life organizing.

As with Minnesota and California, abortion reform was on the agenda for New York legislators throughout the 1960s. But New Yorkers who opposed abortion were somewhat surprised when reform legislation was introduced in 1967, not because they had no idea abortion reform was being considered but because they assumed no new legislation would be introduced that year and that there would be no hearings on the issue.[94] Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal had introduced the bill to liberalize the state's abortion law, and it was immediately contentious, splitting the legislature as well as dividing the governor and lieutenant governor. Governor Nelson Rockefeller supported the measure while his lieutenant governor, Catholic Malcolm Wilson, came out publicly in opposition.[95] Like California, New York also had heated hearings over the proposed bills. In these hearings, Blumenthal faced intense questioning by opponents about whether he favored euthanasia, if he was committed to atheism, and whether or not he believed in the Ten Commandments.[96] In 1969, the hearings were once again heated, and the legislature debated the proposed measure for five hours before it was defeated.[97] As in other states, abortion reform in New York could not escape the intense controversy

[94] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[95] Gerry McLaughlin, "Wilson at Odds with Governor On Abortions," *The Ogdensburg Journal*, February 21, 1967, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[96] "Proposed Abortion Law 'Dead' and 'Buried,'" *Catholic Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), February 24, 1967, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[97] "Abortion Bill 'No' 'Victory for Life,'" *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), April 25, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

that surrounded the issue. Yet, despite this intense debate and repeated attempts to introduce reform legislation, no measures managed to pass.

This failure was partly due to the state's Catholic bishops. In New York, the bishops led the fight against abortion as the opposition's public face in the 1960s. They were fierce critics, delivering sermons and making public statements against abortion. For example, in an unprecedented move, the bishops of New York made a joint public statement against abortion when the reform bill was introduced for 1967.[98] Their public criticism of abortion was so extensive that supporters of abortion reform even protested outside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City in March 1967.[99] However, the Church defended its actions. When other religious leaders accused the Catholic Church and right-to-lifers in New York of "lacking the proper attitude in an ecumenical age" because they refused to compromise on abortion, Father James McHugh defended the Church's position and reaffirmed his belief that the Catholic Church was speaking for the moral position of both Catholics and non-Catholics.[100] Despite its critics' complaints, the Catholic Church in New York would not back down from the abortion issue, and the state's Catholic bishops, priests, and local parishes led the fight against legal abortion.

What stood out about Catholic activism in the state was its coherent and organized strategy. According to Msgr. James Murray, the Church in New York was taking action on abortion in five specific and calculated ways and, in developing such a comprehensive plan, it was setting important precedents for how the Church would

[98] George Dugan, "Ask Fight on Abortion Bill: Pastoral Letter Read," *New York Times*, February 13, 1967.
[99] Martin Gansberg, "Marchers Favor Abortion Reform," *New York Times,* March 13, 1967.
[100] James T. McHugh, "Abortion: Some Theological and Sociological Perspectives," Family Life Bureau, USCC, April 28, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers. Despite McHugh's claim, Catholic New Yorkers did in fact dominate the movement in New York in the late 1960s.

handle the issue at the state level in the next few years.[101] Much of the work in New York included implementing ideas that had been discussed in the NCWC meetings in 1966. First, the state's bishops organized a priest in each diocese as well as a statewide coordinator to mobilize lay people. This action ensured that they reached every parish in the state and that all parishes adopted the same plan for right-to-life activity. Second, they urged people to get in touch with their legislators—a strategy similar to the one employed by the Catholic Church and right-to-life groups in California. Third, the bishops organized lay people to speak out against the issue at legislative hearings. Fourth, they worked to increase broad-based support for the right-to-life cause by encouraging the formation of independent organizations like the New York State Right to Life Committee. Finally, the bishops wrote a pastoral letter for the state's Catholics. These were all important pieces of right-to-life strategy designed to reach as broad an audience as possible, mobilize individuals, and center lay activism in the fight to stop abortion. Furthermore, this plan informed how the Catholic Church and right-to-life groups in individual states would organize throughout the coming decade, as these five steps remained pillars of right-to-life strategy. In this way, the fight over abortion reform in New York served as a testing ground for the Catholic Church and right-to-lifers to develop new workable strategies and explore what strategies and arguments were most compelling. The plan also provided a path to mobilize lay people to take concrete action to oppose abortion, whether it was writing their state representative, speaking at a hearing on abortion, or joining a local right-to-life committee.

[101] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.

Grassroots mobilization was at the core of the plan, and local dioceses and parishes were central in developing and implementing the Church's strategy. Priests and bishops used local diocesan newspapers to disseminate information on abortion reform and to publish their sermons on abortion. As in California, they often urged parishioners to write to their legislators when there was pending legislation or an upcoming hearing.[102] Many Catholics throughout the state got the message and responded en masse, putting pressure on Catholic legislators and urging them to stand in opposition to the abortion reform legislation. Local diocesan papers also helped New York's Catholics keep track of right-to-life activity in other states. These papers reported on efforts across the country—whether or not activists had succeeded in stopping legislation and what abortion reform looked like in other legislatures. They even reprinted the 1966 antiabortion statement released by California's Catholic bishops.[103] In addition to tracking abortion reform out of state, the diocesan papers tracked how their districts' legislators voted on abortion reform. This was another way to hold legislators accountable, and it was similar to the ways other right-to-life organizations tracked candidates' positions on the abortion issue to guide voting.[104] The papers also issued dire assessments about abortion in the United States. A 1969 article warned that "abortion on demand is the ultimate objective of the pro-abortion forces," a statement that mirrored the slippery slope arguments made by

[102] Bishop Sheen of Rochester, "Make Your Opposition Known on Proposed Abortion Law," *The Catholic Courier Journal* (Rochester, NY), February 17, 1967, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Capitol Hill Round-Up," *The Catholic Courier Journal* (Rochester, NY), April 11, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[103] "Right of the Unborn Child Vigorously Upheld," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), December 18, 1966, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[104] "Abortion Bill 'No' 'Victory for Life,'" *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), April 25, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

Californians in their letters to Beilenson.[105] The range of topics the diocesan papers covered sent the message that American Catholics needed to be ever vigilant for attempts to change abortion laws and needed to be ready to take action at any moment.

The actions of the Catholic Church and grassroots organizing among New York right-to-lifers led to successful hearings to oppose abortion reform. In fact, abortion reform bills failed to pass three years in a row in New York.[106] The hearings in the state legislature were useful for an additional reason: they provided a place for lay activists to meet each other, exchange ideas, and take center stage in right-to-life activism. In a 1967 hearing, doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists, priests and religious were joined by a number of lay organizations and parents to testify at a public hearing on proposed reform legislation. The opponents of the legislation were in agreement: "An unborn child is entitled to the full protection of our social order from all direct attacks."[107] In accordance with the Church's plan, the testimony at these hearings featured lay people as the main speakers. In 1967, seventy-five out of seventy-eight people who testified at one of the public hearings on abortion reform were lay people. And their speeches made a noticeable impression. Leaders in the church contended that it was "the impact of a broad base of citizen support at the public hearings and also the letter writing campaign" that killed the bill.[108] In New York, lay people were the ones driving the action—they had no real obligation to respond to the Church's plea beyond perhaps writing a letter to their legislator, but many still showed up at hearings and joined or started right-to-life groups.

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[105] Russell Shaw, "Abortion on Demand Real Anti-Life Aim," *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), January 31, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[106] "Defeat of Abortion Bill Called 'Victory of Life over Death," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), April 27, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[107] "Change in Abortion Law Meets Strong Opposition; 'Right to Life' Stressed," *The Catholic News*, February 9, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[108] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.

Building off the Church's five-step plan, this early grassroots activity gave the right-to-life movement a firm foundation of grassroots mobilization to build upon once abortion was legalized in New York in 1970.

In addition to learning the value of featuring lay speakers at legislative hearings, right-to-lifers and the Catholic Church learned how to testify strategically and use the media to their benefit. In the first hearing in New York in 1967, right-to-lifers had been outmaneuvered by supporters of the bill. The bill's proponents made sure their supporters spoke first, timing it so the media would cover their testimony but not the testimony of right-to-lifers in the second half of the hearing. It was a Friday evening, and members of the media were anxious to end the workweek and start their weekend. The media heard the supporters of the bill speak and then packed up to head home for the weekend. The bill's opponents spoke but had little coverage in the media. By the third hearing, the right-to-lifers had learned their lesson and "got somebody on at the very beginning who just kept going on and on while we were lining up our people before the TV cameras downstairs."[109] They were determined to make their case and have the media publicize the opposition to abortion. It may also have helped that the Church had hired a public relations firm in the meantime to help with press releases and public appearances.[110] These were savvy strategic maneuvers and show the important lessons right-to-lifers were learning in their organizing efforts in the states in the late 1960s. Moreover, like many of the strategies New York's right-to-lifers were already trying out, clever use of the media, alongside contentions that the media refused to fully cover the right-to-life movement, would become vital strategies for activists in the 1970s.

[109] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.
[110] Ibid.

Finally, in another attempt to implement the Church's plan, right-to-life organizations emerged throughout the state. In 1967, for example, Edward Golden decided to start the New York State Right to Life Committee (NYRTL) after receiving encouragement from the Catholic bishops.[111] Like many early right-to-lifers, Golden, a construction foreman, had little awareness of abortion politics prior to the introduction of abortion reform legislation, and he only decided to form NYRTL after hearing about the 1967 Blumenthal Bill. The group started off small with a budget of only $400 and very limited plans of action.[112] But its influence would spread. As in Minnesota, the group formed committees in other towns and cities around the state, such as in Rochester in 1969.[113] The initial purpose of the new groups was to "alert diocesan laity about attempts to liberalize New York State's abortion laws."[114] NYRTL also reached out to the newly formed NRLC looking for more information and material on opposing abortion.[115] Like the other right-to-life approaches and strategies in the state, these diocesan groups were prototypes for later right-to-life organizations and encouraged lay people in the state to be aware and active on the abortion issue. More importantly, they provided vital experience in activism for people, like Golden, who would help develop the national right-to-life movement in the early 1970s.

Despite the well-organized activity by the state's Catholic bishops, their efforts ultimately failed. In 1970 abortion became legal in New York up to twenty-four weeks of

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[111] Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-life Movement Prior to Roe v. Wade," 539.
[112] Rosemary Nosiff, *Before Roe: Abortion Policy in the States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 83-84.
[113] "Lawyer, Doctor to Head Up Diocese 'Right to Life' Panel," *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), January 31, 1969, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-life Movement Prior to Roe v. Wade," 540.

pregnancy. Nevertheless, a clear strategy was emerging, which privileged grassroots activism, encouraged bold political action, and was starting to produce savvy activists.[116] Because of this foundational work done in the late 1960s and the Church's clear strategy in New York, right-to-lifers in the state immediately took up intense lobbying and organizing efforts to reverse the 1970 decision, and in the early 1970s, New York became a model for right-to-lifers across the country as the fight over abortion in the states only became more and more contentious. The strategy in New York was put to the test and nearly succeeded. Through a flurry of activism, New Yorkers voted in a right-to-life majority in their state legislature and rallied against the liberal abortion law—only the governor's veto prevented the state's legislature from overturning legal abortion in the state.

1.5 Minnesota: The Power and Potential of State Right-to-Life Organizations

In Minnesota, individual mobilization and bold right-to-life strategies coalesced, and a dedicated group of activists formed Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL), which soon became a powerful force in state politics and in the national right-to-life movement. Not only did right-to-lifers organize MCCL, but they also developed a range of political and educational strategies meant to reach a variety of Minnesotans, build a broad-based movement, and sustain activism in the state long-term. In the years preceding MCCL's formation, discussion about changing the state's abortion law occurred sporadically, in a similar manner as in California and New York. As early as 1962, Msgr. Richard T. Doherty warned Minnesota's Catholics of proposed changes to

[116] Msgr. James Murray, "Summary of Presentation on Abortion Legislation: Semi-Annual Meeting – Directors of Catholic Charities," April 19, 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, Catholic Charities USA Papers.

the state law in an editorial for the *Catholic Bulletin.*[117] He urged Catholics and Protestants in the state to find common cause in recognizing the unborn's right-to-life. Bills were introduced in the legislature periodically; however, unlike California and New York, Minnesotans managed to successfully oppose the proposed changes to state laws, and abortion only became legal in Minnesota with the Supreme Court's decisions in 1973. Thanks to their success and passionate organizing in the state, members of MCCL would take center stage in the planning and formation of the national right-to-life movement in the early 1970s. With its diverse political tactics, aggressive lobbying, diverse lay leadership, and statewide outreach efforts, the movement in Minnesota showed the true potential and power of grassroots right-to-life organizing in the states in the 1960s.

As in many other states, the pace of abortion reform picked up in Minnesota in the late 1960s. Legislators introduced a new bill to reform the state's abortion law in 1967, and abortion rights groups, such as the Minnesota Council for the Legal Termination of Pregnancy (MCLTP), worked to convince Minnesotans that abortion reform was necessary. Minnesota's current state laws allowed abortion in some cases to save a woman's life, but as with abortion reform across the country, lawyers, doctors, legislators, and ordinary citizens in Minnesota were beginning to wonder if the cases for legal abortion should be expanded. In response to these attempts at reform, a few Minnesotans decided to form their own right-to-life organization—MCCL—in 1968. In its institutional history, MCCL noted that the 1967 bill was the impetus for MCCL's formation because "the strength of the anti-life push told those who valued life that they,

[117] Msgr. Richard T. Doherty, "Unborn's Life a Right," *Catholic Bulletin,* October 16, 1962, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

too, must organize."[118] Some Minnesotans realized this by reading the news, by encountering abortion in their professions, by attending legislative hearings, or by talking with their neighbors. Alice Hartle, an early leader and mainstay of MCCL and the NRLC into the 1980s, heard about a legislative hearing on abortion and immediately got to work, using "her kitchen table as the platform for building the first stages of the pro-life movement."[119] Fred and Marjory Mecklenburg, also prominent early figures in the movement, joined MCCL after attending a Alice Hartle's neighborhood meeting on abortion.[120] However they were mobilized into the movement, these Minnesotans took quick and decisive action to oppose abortion reform. MCCL members immediately decided to make a statement about their priorities by choosing Dr. Fred Mecklenburg as their first president. The Mecklenburgs were both liberal Methodists, and Fred Mecklenburg, a physician, was a member of the local Planned Parenthood and a proponent of birth control.

Choosing the Mecklenburgs, liberal Protestants who promoted alternatives to abortion and the use of contraceptives, as their early leaders helped set the tone for MCCL's opposition to abortion into the 1970s. It suggested that MCCL prioritized making the right-to-life movement broad-based, representing Minnesotans from a variety of political and religious backgrounds with a variety of approaches to the abortion issue itself and challenging its opponents' contentions that the Catholic hierarchy coordinated the entire movement. In addition to Dr. Mecklenburg's involvement with Planned Parenthood, some other members of MCCL also had a slightly more relaxed view on

[118] MCCL, History of MCCL, June 1989, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[119] "Pro-lifers lose a mother," *Catholic Bulletin*, November 17, 1985, Box 23, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[120] Marjory Mecklenburg, "Responses to question in letter from James Kelly," November 1980. Box 23, Folder 5, ACCL Records.

abortion and supported some minor exceptions in abortion law to allow for legal abortion in cases where a woman's life was in jeopardy. MCCL's early policy statement emphasized its opposition to "abortion on demand," which meant the organization opposed legal abortion with no restrictions. MCCL favored "amending" the state's abortion law to require that abortions be performed by a doctor in a hospital and approved by a hospital committee.[121] Even so, MCCL was still cautious about therapeutic abortions. In one of its early policy statements, MCCL questioned the need for such abortions given recent "scientific advances."[122] Instead, the group emphasized "a positive, constructive approach to the abortion issue, namely recognition of the right to life of both mother and child."[123] The flexible stance on abortion allowed MCCL to appeal not only to Catholics but also to Protestants and other Minnesotans who were concerned about abortion but did not believe it should be made illegal in all cases. It also allowed them to develop other strategies besides simply opposing reform, such as promoting alternatives to abortion—programs and policies that were meant to help pregnant women get the social services they needed in order to have a child rather than choose abortion. MCCL would promote this emphasis on a "positive, constructive approach" when its leaders helped form a national right-to-life movement in the early 1970s.

After its formation in 1968, MCCL very quickly developed a broad and impressive range of strategies. They initially went on a two-front offensive: building a

[121] "Stand taken on abortion," *Catholic Bulletin*, December 16, 1968. Reel 1, MCCL Newspapers Clippings; Gordon S. Ovut, "Foes of Liberalized Abortion Organizing," *Minneapolis Star,* October 8, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[122] MCCL, Policy Statement approved by Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Board of Directors. Box 3, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Katherine Wood Taylor Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers).
[123] MCCL, "Policy Statement," Box 3, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

strong lobby in state politics and mobilizing individuals in towns and cities across the state. First, MCCL's members actively engaged in state politics to combat any attempts to repeal or reform Minnesota's existing laws on abortion. Their political activity involved organizing speakers for legislative hearings, keeping their members and the public abreast of any new legislative developments and of how their legislators voted on the issue, and making legislators aware that there were Minnesotans who opposed abortion reform through lobbying efforts at the state capitol. Within a few months of officially organizing, MCCL had already sent out a questionnaire to every legislative candidate in the state in order to ascertain each candidate's stance on abortion. And MCCL's leaders defended this tactic when MCTLP accused them of trying to intimidate state politicians. MCCL claimed its activity was "perfectly fair and honorable under our democratic system."[124] MCCL also started to work within political parties in the state, an activity that would be vital and contentious during the 1970s as both parties fought over the place of abortion policy in their party platforms.

Their second front in right-to-life activism involved educating and mobilizing ordinary Minnesotans. Initially, MCCL relied on experts and professionals to animate this aspect of its work, a typical response in other states as well as in the Catholic Church. Both sides of the debate were still treating abortion as a public health issue rather than as a rights issue (though this too was changing). And it made sense for MCCL to focus on abortion as a medical issue given that the group had a large cohort of doctors in its ranks and had chosen a physician to be its first president. MCCL's early literature also portrayed the organization as concerned with safe and ethical medical practice, citing the

[124] "Candidates' abortion views asked," *St. Paul Catholic Bulletin*, October 28, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

positions of various medical associations, including the American Medical Association, to bolster their opposition to abortion on demand.[125] However, unlike the Catholic Church during this time, MCCL soon pivoted to broader outreach efforts.

MCCL quickly expanded beyond a reliance on experts, engaging in a grassroots campaign to reach as diverse a range of Minnesotans as possible. Through the end of decade, MCCL members organized meetings, debates, and speaking events at the local level across the state of Minnesota. MCCL members met in churches, on college campuses, and in high schools, and spoke to civic organizations.[126] By 1969, the two-front strategy paid off. When MCLTP followed up the 1967 bill with a proposal for an even more liberal abortion law in 1969, MCCL put this two-front approach to good use. First, its members undertook "intensive lobbying" to ensure the bill's defeat in the legislature, relying on the connections they had made and tactics they had developed in their first year of organizing.[127] Second, they reached out to the Minnesotans they had engaged with on the issue, and they made sure their supporters knew how legislators had voted—listing those who voted for and against proposed abortion bills—so that individual Minnesotans could hold their legislators accountable.[128] The legislation failed to pass.

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[125] MCCL to Doctors, February 18, 1969, Box 2, Folder MCCL Clippings and Other Papers, Taylor Papers.
[126] "Abortion to be Discussed at Edina Church," January 9, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "State Abortion Law Keys Talk," *St. Cloud Daily Times,* Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Abortion is Debate Topic at DFL Meet," *St. Louis Park* newspaper, January 20, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Father Hunt to Talk on Abortion at St. Mark's," *Shakopee Valley News*, January 20, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Abortion Law Forum Slated at Fridley High," *The Minneapolis Star*, February 4, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[127] MCCL, "History of MCCL," June 1989, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper; David Jordan, "What's Ahead for the '69 legislature – abortion reform?" *The Minneapolis Tribune*, December 15, 1968, Box 1, Folder Newspaper Clippings, Taylor Papers.
[128] MCCL, "MCCL is Throwing a Party," 1969, Box 3 MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

MCCL and its members succeeded because they worked quickly to increase their scope of action to target all Minnesotans and to get them involved in opposing abortion reform. Rather than remaining a single chapter in a metropolitan area, MCCL decided that the organization should expand across the state, especially to larger rural towns.[129] This strategy, in turn, would help the group put more pressure on the legislators that represented rural communities. To organize in these communities, MCCL used its strategy of holding speaking events and debates in rural towns.[130] MCCL also tried to diversify its strategy by reaching out to right-to-lifers in other states. Its members were anxious to learn about tactics from other state groups and even invited leaders of different organizations to events in Minnesota, including people like Charles Carroll, an Episcopal priest and prominent right-to-life activist in California, and John E. Archibold from Colorado, which had recently legalized abortion. The two men headlined a panel entitled "The Abortion Distortion."[131] MCCL also subscribed to the *National Right to Life News*, the NRLC's newsletter, as a way to "find out what other organizations similar to MCCL were doing in their cities and the different types of ideas and programs they are developing."[132] The group's members could also keep up on the abortion debate in other states thanks to articles in local newspapers on the debate in Colorado, California, and

[129] MCCL, "Notes and Comments taken on the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Meeting, held Monday June 16, 1969…" Box 2, Folder MCCL Clippings and Other Papers, Taylor Papers.
[130] "Panelists Oppose Legalized Abortion," *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, November 18, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "State Abortion Law Keys Talk," *St. Cloud Daily Times,* November 18, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Abortion Legislation Questioned," *St. Cloud Visitor*, November 28, 1968, Reel 1, Newspaper Clippings.
[131] "Two to speak on abortion at meet," *Catholic Bulletin*, January 3, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[132] MCCL, Notes and Comments taken on the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Meeting, held Monday June 16, 1969…" Box 2, Folder MCCL Clippings and Other Papers, Taylor Papers.

New York.[133] Through these means, MCCL spread its message across Minnesota and stayed engaged in right-to-life activities across the United States.

In addition, MCCL began to consider supporting alternatives to abortion, a strategy that was meant to diversify its arguments against abortion and broaden its political aims. If social services were in place to help women and children, MCCL believed the group could argue that legal abortion was unnecessary in most cases. In 1969, Marjory Mecklenburg first pitched the idea that MCCL should support Birthright, an organization that provided social services to pregnant women. Birthright's main assertion was that "every woman has the right to carry a pregnancy to term," and it offered social service support as a way to keep women from choosing abortion.[134] Mecklenburg believed that Minnesota should offer the same services. She proposed that the Minnesota branch of Birthright would be independent of MCCL, though MCCL could offer financial support and volunteers. While this strategy was only a minor goal in MCCL's first several years of existence, it would become even more important in the early 1970s as state groups tried to work together and formulate a successful strategy in national politics. Marjory Mecklenburg relentlessly pursued alternatives to abortion programs even as she took on leadership roles in several national organizations. The notion that the right-to-life movement should pursue positive solutions, rather than simply opposing abortion, was a vital strand of Marjory Mecklenburg's and MCCL's early strategy and political goals.

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[133] "New York to 'Liberalize' Abortion Laws?" *The Wanderer*, October 7, 1967, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Reagan to Sign Liberal Abortion Bill," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1967, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "Governors Take on Abortion Issue," *The Catholic Messenger*, June 18, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "New York Abortion Fight Rages," *The Catholic Messenger,* February 23, 1967, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "NY Catholics Told to Fight Abortion Bill," *The Catholic Messenger*, February 2, 1967, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

[134] MCCL, "Notes and Comments taken on the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Meeting, held Monday June 16, 1969…" Box 2, Folder MCCL Clippings and Other Papers, Taylor Papers.

To further strengthen their arguments and to attract new members, MCCL members engaged in vigorous debate with abortion rights organizations, such as the MCLTP, throughout these years. The debate over abortion raged not only in the legislature but also in the state's newspapers, churches, schools, and professional organizations as both MCCL and MCLTP tried to win over Minnesotans to their side. The groups clashed repeatedly. For example, in 1968, Robert McCoy, co-founder of MCTLP and Rev. William Hunt of MCCL debated the abortion issue in front of an audience at a local Catholic Church in the town of Fridley, a suburb of Minneapolis.[135] The debate received coverage in the local papers as well as in the *Minneapolis Tribune*. This discussion continued into the next year. In 1969 when another bill was reintroduced in the state legislature, a local paper commented on the strides made by both opponents and supporters of abortion reform since the last bill had been introduced in 1967. The paper noted, "This time it will bring a broader discussion, which is good…Continuing learned debate in a matter as sensitive and important as abortion is to be welcomed by a confused citizenry."[136] Debates like the one between McCoy and Hunt helped ensure an active and engaged public and strengthened both sides of the abortion debate in Minnesota.

This flurry of activity sustained MCCL even when no abortion legislation was pending and helped it quickly gain several thousand members. MCCL and its members throughout the state developed robust strategies, a strong central organization, and the

[135] "Abortion Pros, Cons will be Debated," *Columbia Heights*, July 29, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Irene Parsons, "Abortion Panel Ponders; Finds 'No Easy Answers,'" *St. Anthony Sun,* August 5, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Legalized Abortion Debated in Fridley, *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 3, 1968, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[136] "On with abortion debate!" *Mankato Free Press,* January 29, 1969, Reel 1, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

beginnings of a broad-based coalition, thanks to the involvement and leadership of liberal Protestants like the Mecklenburgs. MCCL had successfully turned individual opposition to abortion into more organized and sustained opposition. Thanks to this early activism, MCCL and its members would become leaders in building the national movement at the start of the 1970s. And as the decade came to a close and the organization celebrated its first anniversary, MCCL started planning for the future of this new initiative. "We have won the battle, but the war will go on," the group noted in 1969, "Some experts project this issue as a 25-year controversy."[137] At another meeting that same year, Dr. John McKelvey warned that MCCL "should be prepared to eventually take their cause to the Supreme Court" and that "Preparation for such action would be best organized on a national basis."[138] These Minnesotans did not yet know how accurate these statements would become in a few years, but they show that MCCL and its members were aware that the fight over abortion would not be confined to state politics. MCCL's members acknowledged that their fight would be a long one, perhaps even decades long, and in the late 1960s they were starting to realize that it might require cooperation beyond their local and state organizations—a cooperative effort that could truly marshal the growing individual opposition to abortion and turn it into a strong and formidable national right-to-life movement.

Conclusion

In just a little over a decade, the abortion issue transformed from a taboo subject—in the media, in government, and in daily life—into a divisive and public issue. Abortion reformers championed new liberalized laws in several states, yet clashed with

[137] MCCL, "MCCL is Throwing a Party," 1969, Box 3, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[138] MCCL, Notes and Comments taken on the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Meeting, held Monday June 16, 1969…" Box 2, Folder MCCL Clippings and Other Papers, Taylor Papers.

both opponents of abortion reform and with people who were coming to believe that the only solution to the abortion issue was the total repeal of all abortion laws. Right-to-lifers struggled to mobilize sustained opposition to abortion reform, though they did have some success. The organizations formed during this period, like MCCL, the New York State Right to Life Committee, and the Right to Life League of California, were the future of the movement, along with a host of other organizations that developed in states across the country. Though their successes were at times minimal and they had yet to recruit large numbers of supporters, these early right-to-lifers were already planning for the years to come and developing and perfecting the strategies that would form a movement that has lasted for nearly five decades. They were also slowly developing a vision for a broad-based movement that incorporated Americans of all religious faiths and political persuasions and stood up for the rights of the unborn, rights they believed were evident not only in divine law and in the Bible but also in the nation's founding documents.

In fostering this broad-based movement, right-to-lifers had already started debates about the nature of the movement that would carry over into the 1970s. These debates revolved around the demographics of right-to-life activism and the involvement of the Catholic Church hierarchy. While the Catholic Church hierarchy performed an important function as the facilitator and funding source for much of the early right-to-life action in the 1960s, ordinary Americans—of many religious faiths and denominations—were the main driving force that sustained the movement. They were the ones writing letters to their legislators, showing up at speaking events, debates, and public hearings, talking with their neighbors and coworkers about the issue, and organizing local right-to-life groups. It was ordinary people like Fred and Marjory Mecklenburg, Alice Hartle, Charles

Carroll, Ed Golden, and Marian Banducci who were pioneers of the national right-to-life movement and would be on the front lines of the abortion fight in the 1970s.

Perhaps most importantly, the right-to-lifers involved in abortion politics at the local and state level were practicing the rhetoric and strategies that would be the foundation for the right-to-life movement throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. They privileged local, grassroots action to mobilize support for their movement, organizing speakers, debates, and presentations to educate people, and emphasizing the impact ordinary Americans could make by opposing abortion. They tested out arguments to see what resonated with people, and they persisted in the belief that if Americans only knew the truth about abortion, as the right-to-lifers understood it, they would immediately and easily come to oppose abortion as well.

With these tactics, right-to-lifers in California, Minnesota, and New York, as well as in the Catholic Church, successfully turned individual opposition to abortion into organized and unrelenting grassroots action. Moreover, many right-to-lifers recognized the need to build on this local and state level activism to create a national right-to-life movement. In the early 1970s, that recognition would develop into a series of competing plans for what tactics to use in national politics and how right-to-lifers across the country could overcome their differences to work together. In all of this action and debate, the experience in the 1960s remained foundational. The lessons right-to-lifers had learned on the ground in their towns, cities, and state legislatures in the late 1960s would shape their activism in the 1970s and build the momentum necessary to enact a bold and aggressive strategy in state and national politics and to oppose abortion once it was legalized nationwide.

2.0 Battling it out in the States: The Movement Goes on the Offensive

Introduction

In April 1971, Michael Taylor, Executive Secretary for the NRLC, described an important shift that had taken place within the right-to-life movement in the last year. "Last Spring and Summer a consensus emerged from the Right to Life groups," he reported, "that we should go on the offensive, legislatively and otherwise."[139] Heartbeat International, an organization promoting alternatives to abortion, was also optimistic about this new attitude: "Good people have at last been aroused to counteract the destruction and dehumanization of human life. A wave of awakening sweeps across the country and beyond its borders."[140] After working to build up right-to-life organizations in towns and cities in many states in the late 1960s, activists in the early 1970s met the challenges they faced with renewed vigor and passion and more assertively promoted their agenda in state politics. They were not going to let abortion rights supporters win the repeal of abortion laws without a fight, and they would no longer use only defensive strategies to try to stop reform and repeal. Instead, the right-to-life movement developed a strong strategy to try to enact its own measures to protect the unborn and to convince new people to join the cause.

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[139] Michael Taylor to Representative William J. Rogers, April 12, 1971, Box 4, Folder 8, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as ACCL Records).

[140] Rita Marker, Heart Beat Newsletter, January 1972, Box 1, Folder 3, George Huntston Williams Papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Williams Papers).

It seemed the pivot in strategy worked. In the next two years, commentators were noting a shift in momentum and wondering if perhaps the "tide was turning."[141] As early as April 1971, MCCL took account of the progress made that year in several states and wondered "Is the Pendulum Swinging?" in favor of the right-to-lifers.[142] In December 1972, the Religious News Service asserted, "The pendulum of support in the nation seems to have swung, at least for the present, to the side of those 'opting for life.'"[143] What was responsible for this changing momentum? Right-to-lifer Joseph Stanton credited "the dedicated effort of individuals and small groups" in potentially shifting public opinion against abortion, despite the fact that these groups were often out-funded and out-organized by the abortion rights movement.[144] Americans United for Life (AUL), a small national organization that emerged during this time, agreed with Stanton's assessment, "The pro-abortionists have the foundations, we have the people."[145] According to these observers, grassroots organizing was paving the way for the success of the movement in the early 1970s and for its dynamic and more aggressive approach to local and state politics.

Thanks to their earlier work, at the start of 1970 the right-to-lifers had the basic apparatus for the movement in place. They did not yet have a strong national organization, but organizations in the states had been practicing and developing the strategies and rhetoric the movement would use in the early 1970s as it became more

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[141] William F. Buckley, Jr. "Tide May be Slowly Turning Against Abortion," *Ogdensburg Journal* (Ogdensburg, NY), August 6, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[142] MCCL, "Is the Pendulum Swinging?" MCCL Newsletter, April 1971, Box 2 Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Katherine Wood Taylor Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers).
[143] Religious News Service, "Has Abortion Tide Reversed?" *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), December 6, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[144] Joseph Stanton to Edward D. Lewis, February 7, 1972, Box 4, Folder 4, Williams Papers.
[145] George Huntston Williams to Friend of the Unborn, Americans United for Life fundraising letter, August 10, 1972, Box 5, Folder 4, Williams Papers.

assertively involved in state politics and started planning for a national organization. For example, in New York, local groups began holding Marches for Life. In Minnesota, MCCL continued to argue for positive solutions to abortion such as greater access to social services to help pregnant women. And in California, presentations of graphic abortion images and fetal development helped right-to-lifers mobilize new recruits into their organizations. In this chapter, I will continue tracing this grassroots organizing in California, New York, and Minnesota. But rather than examining the organizing efforts in each state individually, I will highlight how the pivot to an aggressive strategy took place across four main areas—in state politics, in the growth of interstate right-to-life networks, in outreach to new demographics, and in innovative framing of the abortion issue.

Starting in 1970, right-to-lifers in many states decided it was time to "get political," as the New York right-to-lifers put it, and boldly promote their legislative agenda. Consequently, their focus turned more fully to state politics. In New York, Minnesota, and California, right-to-lifers developed and deployed a new range of strategies to aggressively combat attempts at abortion reform. Some groups, especially in Minnesota and New York, became more aggressive in supporting right-to-life candidates and pushing for legislation that would restrict legal abortion to very narrow circumstances. These organizations also encouraged their individual members to be more involved in local and state politics in the party of their choosing. Some right-to-lifers even took to the streets and began using mass demonstrations and direct action to promote and push their political agenda. Prioritizing state politics quickly bore fruit, and

in New York, right-to-lifers nearly succeeded in repealing the 1970 law that had legalized abortion in their state.

As part of these increased efforts in state politics, right-to-life groups also spent more time developing connections with organizations in other states. Activists used these connections to continue to build up their political strategy. In the 1960s, right-to-lifers had been generally aware of each other's existence and eager for information on activism in other states. But in the early 1970s, right-to-life leaders began meeting at national conferences on abortion and also traveling to speak at events in other states. These leaders actively shared strategies that worked in their own states and helped each other formulate new plans of action. Furthermore, the state leaders began discussing the need for a stronger right-to-life presence in national politics. All in all, the movement's political playbook became much more developed and sophisticated in the early 1970s.

These shifts in strategy would not have been possible without new members, and during these years new allies, primarily women and young people, bolstered the cause and allowed right-to-life organizations to successfully implement their new political strategies. Women had always been a part of the movement but in the early 1970s, they began to take on new and more prominent roles in both leadership positions in established organizations as well as in starting their own groups. Marjory Mecklenburg became president of MCCL, while Rose Polito assumed leadership of the Right to Life League of Southern California. Women in New York started their own right-to-life groups and sustained local protests. And some women began to argue that pro-life feminism was possible and ultimately founded their own organization, Feminists for Life, in 1972. In addition to women assuming leadership roles, young people—high school and

college students—also became vital parts of right-to-life activism, forming their own organizations and bringing new strategies and energy to the movement. Women and young people brought a new dynamism to the movement along with innovative ideas for activism.

All of these changes in the movement took place at the same time as a reframing of the issue, which situated abortion in a broader societal framework. Abortion was not an isolated issue but a symptom of larger problems in society—the most pressing of which was the issue of violence and America's desensitization to it. One way right-to-lifers chose to combat this decline in values and the desensitization to the violence of abortion was through shock tactics such as using graphic images and descriptions of abortion. It was a controversial tactic but one that was responsible for mobilizing many new recruits in the early 1970s. Another group of activists took the connection of abortion to violence in a different direction. These right-to-lifers, some of them pacifists and feminists, began clearly connecting abortion to other life issues and especially to the violence of the Vietnam War. They developed a view that would eventually be articulated most clearly by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago in the early 1980s—the consistent ethic of life. The connection of abortion to violence and to a society desensitized to violence was at the heart of many arguments against abortion during this time. The shift in framing helped right-to-lifers justify and sustain their shift to a more aggressive form of politics in the states and helped them recruit new members to broaden their base of support.

If the abortion rights supporters had underestimated their opposition before, the actions of the right-to-lifers from 1970 to 1972 ended any such assumptions. By 1973, the

right-to-life movement was firmly established and, though abortion rights supporters tried, it could no longer be characterized as simply an extension of the Catholic Church hierarchy. The dynamism of the right-to-life political strategy during these years, their attempts to broaden their base of support, as well as their reframing of the abortion issue in terms of violence seemed to turn the momentum toward the right-to-lifers. During the early 1970s, NARAL even began producing literature specifically on its opposition and how to counter it. Yet, despite the pivot in strategy to a more aggressive posture and an abortion rights movement now on the defensive, the right-to-lifers would find that it was ultimately not enough. Nevertheless, the work they did in this period to broaden their membership base, develop a dynamic and diverse strategic repertoire, and turn their members into skilled political actors would prove tremendously advantageous following the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and as the right-to-lifers built a national movement and pursued a pro-life agenda in all three branches of the federal government.

2.1 State Politics: A Dynamic and Aggressive Approach

State politics had been an important aspect of right-to-life strategy in the 1960s. Catholic bishops weighed in on abortion legislation, groups kept track of candidates' voting records, and right-to-lifers spoke at hearings and inundated their legislators with letters opposing abortion legislation. Letter writing was an especially easy entry point into political activism—constituents could write a letter in their spare time from the comfort of their own home. Going into the 1970s, right-to-life organizations across the country decided to try something new: to be more active and aggressive in state politics and to encourage and train their members to do the same. It was a decisive and self-

conscious shift but one the right-to-lifers felt was necessary if they were going to be able to turn the tide on abortion reform. Now, organizations in states were asking more of their members. They were asking them to get involved in candidates' campaigns, become active in state political parties, and even show up at mass demonstrations to take part in direct action.

Looking back on the 1960s, leaders in the movement acknowledged that they needed a new path forward. Following a legislative defeat in 1970, Ed Golden and other New York right-to-lifers lamented their political naiveté: "That's when we realized we'd been steamrollered. The people who had been conducting the campaign in favor of abortion had done their work in the corridors of the Legislature, and we hadn't. We'd been counting on education to win the issue, but now we knew we'd have to roll up our sleeves and really become political."[146] Thomas St. Martin, the new president of MCCL, also acknowledged that the movement was at "the end of the beginning" and "now entering a period of consolidation and growth."[147] That fall, while speaking at a conference in California, Marjory Mecklenburg echoed these sentiments, "We will never get anywhere solely on the educational front; we must be political."[148]

The right-to-lifers were responding in part to changes they perceived in the abortion rights movement. In the early 1970s, the pace of abortion reform accelerated, and as noted in Daniel Williams' book, the terms of the debate on the abortion rights side also seemed to change to emphasize the repeal of all antiabortion statutes rather than the

[146] New York State Right to Life Committee, "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Conference Program, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[147] Thomas St. Martin, MCCL Newsletter, June-July 1971, Box 2 Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[148] "Pro-life California Convention," Workshop Notes/Transcript, November 12-14, 1971, Box 512, Folder 12, Anthony C. Beilenson Papers (Collection 391), UCLA Special Library Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, (hereafter cited as Beilenson Papers).

reform of state laws. Moreover, many right-to-lifers were most disturbed by the push for what they termed "abortion on demand."[149] While some had been supportive of exceptions that allowed for abortion in very limited circumstances, most right-to-lifers were horrified to think a woman might be able to get an abortion at any time during pregnancy for any reason. They called such policies "abortion on demand" or "abortion by request." In the early 1970s, they warned people that this was the ultimate goal of reproductive rights' supporters.[150] Legislation in the states during this time confirmed their fears. In 1970, the New York legislature passed a liberal abortion law that legalized abortion, and women could get an abortion in the state even if they were not residents.[151] Hawaii had passed a similarly liberal bill though it only applied to residents of the state.[152] California too was considering an even more liberal measure than the 1967 Therapeutic Abortion Act. The right-to-lifers viewed these changes with dismay, and their fight took on a new sense of urgency and determination.

Their method to enact this shift in strategy remained firmly rooted in grassroots action—in the local and state right-to-life organizations that had emerged in the 1960s as well as in the many new groups that were being formed across the country. The Catholic Church argued that these local lay groups were the most effective and recommended that

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[149] Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-life Movement Before* Roe v. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 101. Williams describes in great detail how troubling this was for right-to-lifers. In fact, he contends that it was the push for "abortion on demand" that finally got evangelicals to notice the issue for the first time.

[150] "Catholic Bishops Re-Affirm Opposition to Easy Abortion," March 22, 1970, *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; Rochester Right to Life, "Abortion on Demand," Newspaper Advertisement, October 7, 1970, *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; Fred Mecklenburg, "Minnesota Should Seek Sexual Responsibility, Not 'Easier' Abortions," n.d. 1970 or 1971, Box 2 Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

[151] Timothy A. Byrnes, "The Cardinal and the Governor: The Politics of Abortion in New York State," in *The Catholic Church and the Politics of Abortion: A View from the States*, eds. Timothy A. Byrnes and Mary C. Segers (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 138.

[152] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 121; "Anti-Abortion Law Gains in Hawaii," *New York Times,* February 11, 1970.

they be established in every state in order to carry out the "day-to-day campaign" against abortion.[153] It was a sentiment echoed by many right-to-lifers across the country, and they immediately got to work making it a reality. From lobbying, to mass demonstrations, to direct action, and to activism at local and state party caucuses, right-to-lifers turned their passion for the abortion issue into savvy political activism in the early 1970s rooted in local right-to-life groups. After the movement in New York managed to get an antiabortion bill through the state legislature, journalist Fred Shapiro noted the divergence in strategy between the two sides of the debate. While the abortion rights supporters gave money to the cause, "the antiabortionists send campaign workers and canvassers."[154]

State politics and state political parties proved prime ground for mobilizing right-to-life activism. Right-to-lifers tried to gain influence in their state's party structures, and some political parties began to recognize the right-to-lifers as a potential voting bloc. The right-to-lifers also worked more intensely to elect pro-life candidates to their state legislatures. In New York, right-to-lifers were less focused on specific party affiliation and more concerned with where each individual candidate stood on the issue. They promised to back any candidate who opposed abortion, regardless of their positions on other issues.[155] Candidates responded by highlighting their stance on abortion. For example, Tom Hanna, a Republican candidate for the New York State Assembly, noted that he was "Your Only Right-to-Life Candidate" in a campaign ad that ran in a local

[153] James T. McHugh, "Abortion Report," April 7, 1970, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1970, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USCCB Records).
[154] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.
[155] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.

paper. The ad featured no other campaign issues aside from abortion.[156] Likewise, Harry M. O'Brien, a Democratic candidate for New York State Senate, assured voters that he was "unilaterally opposed to the present law," which had made abortion legal, and that he supported its repeal.[157] And Democratic candidate John E. Cheevers indicated he was resolute in his stand on abortion: "My personal conviction as to the value of life, both the born and those awaiting birth, transcends the possibility that my stand may cost me the election."[158] These candidates acknowledged just how central the abortion issue had become in New York politics.

In California, the state's political parties tried to woo voters based on the abortion issue. An article in *Commonweal* noted an unexpected episode at a few local Catholic churches in the state. In the fall of 1970, parishioners arrived at church to find "a battery of voting registrars seated at tables in front of the church."[159] The priest proceeded to preach a homily that day during which he asked all parishioners who were registered Democrats to switch "their registration to Republican to protest the adoption of an 'abortion on demand' plank" that had been added to the Democratic Party's platform at the recent state convention.[160] In the end, it seemed that the whole endeavor had been part of the state Republican Party's attempts to see if abortion could be an issue that would allow them to lure Catholic voters away from the Democrats. In fact, the state's Republican Party had sent voter registrars to fourteen Catholic churches that Sunday to

[156] Citizens Committee for Tom Hanna, Campaign Advertisement, *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), November 1, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[157] Carmen Viglucci, "The Senate," *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), October 25, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Lawrence T. King, "GOP and God," *Commonweal*, October 9, 1970, 38.
[160] Ibid.

see if the tactic might work.[161] Already, right-to-lifers were forming a new single-issue voting bloc and drawing the attention and interest of some state political parties.

In Minnesota, MCCL targeted the state's main political parties starting at the very grassroots level. In the 1960s, MCCL's leaders had made a point to keep records on where candidates stood on the abortion issue, though they left the voting and participation in party politics up to individual members' discretion. In an early 1970s' pivot in strategy, MCCL sought to "increase their voice in both the state's major political parties."[162] Its members did this first by targeting local precinct caucuses for the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), the state's Democratic Party, as well as the Republican Party. This was the most basic level of party politics in the state. Minnesota's political parties relied on this caucus-convention system to decide their party's platform, make candidate endorsements, and send delegates to the state and national conventions.[163] The local precinct caucus was where all eligible party voters could attend and take part in the process to decide the makeup and platform of the state party. Thus, MCCL encouraged all its members to attend their party's precinct caucuses in hopes of electing pro-life delegates to the state convention, proposing pro-life planks for the party platforms, and opposing any attempts to include planks that favored legal abortion.

MCCL succeeded in this shift in strategy by its meticulous approach to local party politics. The leadership sent detailed instructions to their members on how local precinct caucuses operated as well as regular notices in their newsletter about upcoming

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Christopher Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes: A History of Pro-life Activism in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District 1968-1981" (unpublished manuscript, 1981) Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, 3.
[163] Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes," 48; "Republican County Conventions," MCCL Newsletter, April 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; "Attend Precinct Caucus on February 22," MCCL Newsletter, January 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

caucuses.[164] In February 1972, MCCL contacted pro-life leaders across the state, urging them to take part in the precinct caucuses of the state's political parties. Their main goal for this round of caucuses was to elect delegates to take part in county and district conventions and to stop parties from accepting resolutions that supported legal abortion. They believed achieving these goals would "result in a strong pro-life voice being heard in both our political parties."[165] The mailing also included detailed step-by-step instructions on how to take part in a precinct caucus. MCCL urged its members to participate in the caucus of either party and, most importantly, to gather their friends and neighbors to do the same. MCCL hoped to reshape the parties from the ground up. The precinct caucuses also served as an entry point to get MCCL members further involved in right-to-life activism and politics at the local and state levels.

The efforts of MCCL in the early 1970s set up a battle within the state's parties that would play out over the next decade. Nowhere was it more contentious than in Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District, which covers Minneapolis as well as parts of several surrounding suburbs. In this district, MCCL-affiliated right-to-lifers seized the opportunity to fight for an antiabortion party platform and influence in the DFL, especially as Vietnam became less of a contentious issue within the state's party in the early 1970s and abortion began to take its place.[166] The right-to-lifers had enough influence in precinct caucuses that abortion featured prominently, alongside Vietnam and busing, at the 1972 DFL state convention.[167] And though the right-to-lifers were

[164] MCCL, "Republican County Conventions," MCCL Newsletter, April 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; "Attend Precinct Caucus on February 22," MCCL Newsletter, January 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; MCCL Public Policy Committee, "Fight Abortion," February 1972, Box 3, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[165] MCCL Public Policy Committee, Fight Abortion, February 1972, Box 3, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[166] Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes," 4.
[167] Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes," 48.

ultimately disappointed with the party platform developed at that convention, it did spur them on to further action and to continue fighting to make the DFL a pro-life party. In his history on the DFL and right-to-lifers in Minnesota, Christopher Anglim contended, "The strongest Pro-life group within a state Democratic Party was being born in small meetings throughout the state."[168] The MCCL turn to aggressive involvement in state party politics in the early 1970s laid the groundwork for right-to-lifers to organize and attempt to influence the party in the decade ahead, and MCCL's activists were pleased with the results. At the end of 1972, Alice Hartle, one of MCCL's founding members, reported, "We have seen our members demonstrate effective participation in professional and church organizations and in partisan politics from the precinct caucuses to the national convention…Our members have worked in their candidates' political campaigns…We have helped elect an overwhelmingly pro-life Legislature."[169] MCCL's efforts established the organization as a formidable force in state politics in the early 1970s and gave its members valuable experience in effective political strategy.

The fight within the state's political parties was only one of the ways right-to-lifers pivoted to a more aggressive strategy in state and local politics. In New York, right-to-life organizations led the way in this shift, thanks in large part to a plethora of smaller local groups that were popping up in the state in the early 1970s. When New York Right to Life held its first statewide caucus of right-to-life organizations, Ed Golden was impressed to find local groups already established across the state. These groups included a chapter organized by a college sociology professor in Plattsburgh in upstate New York, as well as a group from Brooklyn organized by Marie Bianco in the basement of her

[168] Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes," 59.
[169] Alice Hartle, "Proposed membership renewal newsletter story," December 27, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records

home "without any coordination with statewide Right to Life."[170] Members of such local groups were now taking concrete steps to be effective political actors and learning what it took to get what they wanted in local and state politics. They concerned themselves with "practical politics," as Celebrate Life, a group from Long Island, termed it. Practical politics meant encouraging ordinary New Yorkers to take up some sort of activism to support right to life politics, whether it was writing a letter, attending a protest, running ads in local media, or even visiting their assemblyman and senators every week during the 1972 legislative session.[171] According to Celebrate Life, right-to-lifers in the 1960s were hopelessly naive about the nature of politics.[172] In fact, they were a little too nice about the whole thing. But in the early 1970s, the right-to-lifers realized the need to get tough and to figure out "the pragmatism of politics."[173]

The pivot in strategy led to the development of an aggressive single-issue approach to counter abortion reform in New York politics. Ed Golden articulated this strategy in an interview with the *New York Times* in 1972:

> To our way of thinking, any legislator who doesn't respect human life and protect it at all stages…is unfit to sit as a representative, and we would look for a man to replace him, and it didn't matter to us whether he was Democrat, Republican or independent, or how he voted on any other issues.[174]

New York right-to-lifers focused solely on the abortion issue, and their only goal was repealing the state's liberal abortion law. They knew the fight to pass the law had been a close one and believed that they could reverse it by targeting lawmakers on this one issue

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[170] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.
[171] Celebrate Life Long Island, "Memorandum to: All Friends of the Unborn," March 3, 1972, Box 3, Folder 9, ACCL Records; Celebrate Life Committee, "Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[172] Celebrate Life Committee, "Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.

and by letting them know it was unacceptable to have any other position on abortion besides total opposition. Around the state, local groups focused on the repeal of the state law with a single-minded ferocity.[175] Ann O'Grady, who had started her own group in the Bronx, said, "We do most of our speaking in living rooms but we'll go wherever they'll have us, and we'll talk to anybody who'll listen."[176] In Rochester, the local group ran an ad in their Catholic diocesan paper, explaining that they were in the process of working to elect officials who would reverse New York's new abortion law. "This law passed the Assembly by one vote," they explained, "It can be changed by the same margin."[177] In Goshen, local right-to-lifers focused all their work on convincing their fellow citizens that the law needed to be repealed, planning speaking events, presentations of slideshows on abortion, as well as telephone and direct mail campaigns.[178] These right-to-lifers were willing to do whatever it took, talk with people about abortion in their homes, churches, or schools, and take the issue into the streets if need be.

Local town boards, city councils, and abortion clinics soon became a target for these newly political activists. Contentious debate over abortion clinics in local communities began during the early 1970s and would become a defining feature through the rest of the decade. On Long Island, townspeople showed up at a Huntington Town Board meeting and debated a local law to prohibit abortion in the town.[179] The local right-to-life group had begun pushing for the ordinance in November 1970 after abortion

[175] Of course this activity was not confined to New York alone. California and Minnesota, as well as other states, saw a spate of new organizations and right-to-life chapters during the early 1970s.
[176] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.
[177] Rochester Right to Life Committee, "Abortion on Demand," Newspaper Advertisement, *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), October 7, 1970, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[178] Tim Matz, "Abortion opponents say increasing their support," *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), April 23, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[179] "Opposition Grows to Abortion Clinic", *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), November 19, 1970, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

became legal in the state. The right-to-lifers also took the protest to the potential clinic site. A group of women showed up at the clinic, which was still under construction, with signs to show their opposition to any abortion clinic in their town. The local paper described the scene: "Many pushed baby strollers, others held preschoolers by the hand. Youngsters and adults alike carried signs with various slogans… 'No abortion factory in this town'… 'Jesus Loves the Little Children.'"[180] The following month, seven hundred people turned up at the town board hearing, and the board passed the measure 5-0, preventing the clinic from opening.[181] Similar protests were taking place in California as well, with members of the Right-to-Life League of Southern California showing up to picket an abortion clinic in Los Angeles. A few even got into a small scuffle with a woman there to show support for the clinic.[182]

These smaller protests signaled a turn to more confrontational politics among right-to-lifers at the state and local levels. Some right-to-lifers were no longer content to simply pursue legislative change by voting, getting involved in party politics, or supporting right-to-life candidates. Thus, state groups focused their energy on a new political tactic for the movement: direct action involving mass demonstrations, rallies, and even nonviolent civil disobedience in a few cases.[183] While the letter-writing campaigns continued, especially in New York and California, state groups also encouraged their members to take even more dramatic steps to fight against abortion. In

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[180] Ibid.
[181] "New Town Law Restricts Abortions to Hospitals," *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), December 10, 1970, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Town Board is Urged 'Ban Abortion Clinics'," *Suffolk County News* (Sayville, NY), January 7, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[182] Dorothy Townsend, "Pro and Con Marchers Scuffle at Closed Abortion Facility," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1970.
[183] I use direct action here to refer to tactics ranging from protests, rallies, and mass demonstrations to sit-ins and other forms of nonviolent civil disobedience. For an in-depth definition and discussion of direct action in the United States in the twentieth century, see James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996),

California, Kenneth Mitzner distributed a handbook to teach right-to-lifers how to organize demonstrations and protests in order to make the news and gain publicity for the movement.[184] Young people from Minnesota's Save Our Unwanted Life (SOUL) along with other young people of the National Youth Pro-life Coalition (NYPLC) burned their birth certificates—a tactic drawn directly from the antiwar movement's burning of draft cards.[185] This shift in strategy gave the movement its more aggressive and sometimes militant tinge during the early 1970s.

New York right-to-lifers embraced this style of politics wholeheartedly and proved especially effective at mass demonstrations and lobbying. Throughout 1970 and 1971, they sent thousands of people to Albany to protest the new law and to pressure legislators to support its repeal.[186] In April 1971, hundreds of people converged on Albany for a rally coordinated by local right-to-life groups in Long Island as well as upstate New York.[187] They carried signs reading "Abortion Law Equals Hitler's Ovens" and "100000+ Killed in New York."[188] Another rally a few weeks later drew more than two thousand people to the capitol to present petitions signed at a recent Right-to-Life Sunday in the state's Catholic churches.[189] Right-to-lifers also held public rallies and marches in New York City. In April 1972, they organized a March for Life in New York

[184] Kenneth Mitzner, "Demonstrations Against Abortion and Death Selection," Citizens Action Committee (Santa Ana, California), 1970 or 1971, Box 9, Folder 5, Williams Papers.
[185] Richard L. Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War," *The Historian* 68 (Fall 2006): 542.
[186] Robert D. McFadden, "Lobbying on Abortion Increases at Capitol," *New York Times*, May 8, 1972; Nora Clarke Sharkey, "Anti-abortion Rally draws over 2000," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), May 9, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[187] Untitled Photograph and caption, *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), April 14, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Nora Clare Sharkey, "Albany anti-abortion rally draws over 2000," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), May 9, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

City they claimed twenty thousand people attended.[190] The march was coordinated by a variety of local groups—Metropolitan Right to Life, the Long Island Coalition, Hudson Valley Right to Life, and Brooklyn Right to Life.[191] In Huntington, right-to-lifers organized protests at town board meetings and at abortion clinics themselves. Several even protested at a lecture by William Baird, a prominent reproductive rights advocate.[192]

New York was the perfect place to test these strategies out in the legislative process itself, especially given the recent law that had legalized abortion in the state. With these new confrontational measures—direct action, intense single-issue campaigning in state electoral politics, aggressive lobbying of state legislators, and unrelenting local activism—the right-to-lifers came close to repealing the 1970 law. Almost immediately after the measure passed that year, they got to work. They targeted any legislators who had voted in favor of the law and worked to elect right-to-life candidates instead. The New York State Right to Life Committee (NYRTL) recalled, "In the political arena, a legislator or candidate for public office had to pronounce respect for human life at all stages, despite infirmities, in order to obtain prolife support in the November election of 1970. Other issues were ignored."[193] Once a repeal bill was introduced in the legislature, called the Donovan-Crawford Act, NYRTL threw its full lobbying power behind it, making sure legislators were aware of the right-to-life support in the state. The Long Island group, Celebrate Life, put together a lobbying kit that they

[190] New York State Right to Life Committee, "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records; Joseph V. Bica to Friend of the Unborn, Spring 1972, Box 5, Folder 4, Williams Papers.
[191] New York State Right to Life Committee, Inc., "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records
[192] William Barber, "Audience Challenges Baird Talk," *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), September 2, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[193] New York State Right to Life Committee, Inc., "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

gave to anyone who visited Albany and urged their members to visit their legislators in person.[194] Their dogged pursuit of this strategy reaped impressive results. New York's right-to-lifers successfully defeated some candidates who refused to support their position, including Democrat George M. Michaels who had cast the decisive vote in favor of the 1970 law.[195] Republican Vincent R. Balletta, Jr., who had also voted in favor of the liberalized law, encountered "Abort Balletta" posters throughout his district and also lost his reelection bid.[196] Right-to-lifers also made sure "at least one RTL group was at the Capitol each working day" during the 1972 legislative session in order to keep on the pressure.[197] These activists reinforced this lobbying by making sure New Yorkers continued writing to their legislators and also by showing up to protests and rallies at the capitol in Albany—a physical reminder for the legislators of the right-to-life pressure on them. In the end, the Donovan-Crawford Act passed the state legislature though Governor Rockefeller immediately vetoed the bill as he had promised to do—a fact that right-to-lifers would hold against the man for years to come.[198] Still, the right-to-lifers celebrated their aggressive, single-issue lobbying and the work of many ordinary New Yorkers.

Indeed, the right-to-lifers saw the defeat as a near miss at a major legislative victory, and they recognized the great potential in their defeat—the strength and energy they had mobilized in order to come so close to repealing the abortion law. Their work

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[194] Celebrate Life, "Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records; New York State Right to Life Committee, Inc., "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[195] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' Has a Message for New York State Legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Untitled photograph and caption, *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), April 14, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; New York State Right to Life Committee, Inc., "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records; Celebrate Life, "Memorandum to: All Friends of the Unborn," March 3, 1972, Box 3, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[198] When Rockefeller was pitched as a possibility for Gerald Ford's vice president, right-to-lifers protested vociferously.

would serve as inspiration for right-to-lifers in other states, and several leaders were even invited to speak about their strategies and efforts in the state at the 1972 National Right to Life meeting in a panel on legislative strategies.[199] For right-to-lifers across the country, the success achieved in New York was monumental. Looking back, the NYRTL reflected, "The 1972 legislative victory highlighted the grassroots pro life movement in the state and will long be remembered as what *can be done*."[200] They framed the fight as the scrappy grassroots pro-lifers facing off against the elites in the state and in the abortion rights movement. Despite Rockefeller's almost immediate veto of the bill, right-to-life leaders in the state insisted, "We have just begun to fight."[201]

The groups in Minnesota, New York, and California had begun to see the benefits of their shift to a more aggressive political strategy in the states. They had turned a movement that had been small, mostly focused on education, and politically ineffective into a thriving movement built at the grassroots level that engaged in dynamic political strategies and had begun to diversify and grow its membership. These were welcome changes to the leaders who had started it all in the 1960s. In reflecting on MCCL's activism in the early 1970s, Marjory Mecklenburg praised MCCL and its members, "One of the greatest joys of working in the pro-life movement…is the bond that develops with your fellow crusaders. The understanding, warmth, and respect that grows between conservative and liberal, protestant, catholic, Jew, and agnostic, young and old, rich and poor, black and white."[202] For right-to-life leaders, the time was right to start thinking

[199] New York Right-to-lifers featured prominently at the 1972 National Right to Life Conference with State Senator James Donovan even invited to give the keynote address.
[200] New York State Right to Life, "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[201] Carmen Viglucci, "Pro-life Leaders: 'We Have Just Begun to Fight,'" *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), May 17, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[202] Marjory Mecklenburg to AUL Board, Early 1970s, Box 10, Folder 5, Williams Papers.

about expanding the movement—by fostering connections with their fellow activists across the country, encouraging the participation of new groups of people, and reframing and expanding their rhetoric around the abortion issue itself.

2.2 Building Interstate Right-to-life Networks

In addition to building up an aggressive and extensive repertoire of political strategies in state politics, right-to-lifers also created a stronger network between states, paving the way for a national right-to-life movement. Interactions between various state groups had taken place sporadically in the mid to late 1960s. Most often, right-to-life groups looked for news about what other groups were doing in their respective states. The NRLC facilitated this activity, providing state groups with news and information on right-to-life activities across the country; however, in the years immediately preceding *Roe v. Wade*, this interstate activity and organizing took on even more importance. For example, right-to-lifers began gathering each year at a national conference organized by the NRLC. These conferences also provided state groups a place to exchange ideas and strategies for creating right-to-life organizations and engaging in politics at the state level. In addition, prominent right-to-life leaders, such as Fred Mecklenburg of Minnesota and Charles Carroll of California, began traveling out-of-state and speaking to allies in other states much more frequently than they had in the 1960s. The increased emphasis on interstate cooperation served to tighten the bonds between activists around the country, helping state groups mobilize more people, develop new strategies, and eventually achieve enough coordination to begin discussing plans to form a national right-to-life organization.

In 1970, the NRLC held its first national conference in Chicago. Though sparsely attended, the conference soon became an important annual tradition for the movement and provided right-to-lifers a place to network, meet leaders from other states, and learn about various approaches to political activism. The conferences usually featured a keynote address by a prominent right-to-life leader as well as smaller panels and seminars where right-to-lifers could learn new strategies, view new pro-life films or slideshows, or learn about organizations that provided alternatives to abortion. There was also considerable discussion of the political situation across the country—updates on legislation, court cases, as well as national policy.[203] Thus, the conferences covered a broad range of topics, reflecting the diverse approaches to abortion among right-to-lifers during this time and the scope of strategies they were considering. For example, the 1972 conference featured a keynote address by Senator James Donovan, who sponsored the repeal bill in the New York State legislature, as well as panels on alternatives to abortion, pro-life feminism, state organizing strategies, and film presentations.[204] At these gatherings, conference organizers wanted right-to-lifers to have the opportunity for "in-depth discussions of organizational methods, fund raising, public relations, legislative strategies on state and federal levels, youth organization and high school education."[205]

Part of these conferences was explicitly about building a national network of right-to-life organizations. At the 1970 conference, the NRLC put together a directory of right-to-life groups that included updates on the legislative situation in each state. NRLC told the groups, "It is sent to you so that you will be able to see where there are situations

[203] NRLC, "National Meeting: Right to Life Movement," July 31-August 2, 1970, Conference Program, Box 4, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[204] NRLC, "Agenda: Third Annual Right to Life Committee Meeting," June 1972, Box 4, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[205] Pennsylvanians for Human Life, Untitled Memo, June 5, 1972, Box 4, Folder 10, ACCL Records.

similar to those in your own state, and will be able to contact directly those who are involved in the legislative campaign."[206] The conference seminars provided further opportunity for fostering connections among right-to-lifers from around the country. These seminars often paired together prominent right-to-life leaders, allowing them to work together and get to know each other. At the 1972 conference, Paul Andreini of MCCL chaired the panel on "Developed Strategies" which also featured Joseph Lampe and Marjory Mecklenburg of MCCL as well as Jean Doyle of the Florida State Right to Life and Gloria Klein from a Michigan group. Other right-to-life groups and alternatives to abortion groups also held national conferences during these years that allowed right-to-lifers to meet other activists and continue their cooperative approach.[207]

As is evident from the conference set-up and their featured panel speakers, the conferences encouraged activists and organizations to share their strategies for state politics and for building state groups. The 1972 NRLC Conference included seminars on "State Organization: Developed Strategies" and "Basic Principles of State Organization." Delegates from MCCL as well as other states were able to explain what worked for their organization and how they had built up right-to-life activism in their home states. At the same conference, their counterparts from New York, including Ed Golden of the NYRTL and Senator James Donovan, led a seminar on "Legislative Strategies: Offensive Programs" meant to "outline key elements of the more complex and more difficult

[206] NRLC, Special Memo, February 27, 1970, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1970, USCCB Records.
[207] Alternatives to Abortion, 1st Annual AAI Academy, Conference Program, June 1972, Box 1, Folder 3, Williams Papers; Paul Marx, "Workshop for Marriage and Family Life Education," June 4-17, 1972, Box 10, Folder 1, Williams Papers; "Pro-life California Convention, Notes on the Conference, November 12-14, 1971, Box 512, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers; Pro-life Council of California, "First Annual Pro Life Convention," Conference Program, November 1971, Box 512, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers.

offensive legislative program."[208] The conferences promoted these successful groups as models to imitate in other places. The NRLC hoped that right-to-lifers could take what they learned at these panels and apply it in their own states, perhaps pursuing more assertive legislative strategies and implementing new political tactics based on the successful models tried out by other state groups.[209]

Connections made at the NRLC conventions soon carried over into regional action. Following one convention, MCCL proposed convening a regional meeting of right-to-lifers in the Midwest and reached out to activists in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Wisconsin. "Conversations with many of you at the National Right to Life meeting in Philadelphia revealed an interest in extending the cooperation between pro-life groups in our region…We in Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life would be very pleased to initiate and cooperate in such a venture," Marjory Mecklenburg and Joseph Lampe wrote to their fellow Midwesterners in the summer of 1972.[210] They were encouraged by the "overwhelmingly favorable" response to their suggestion.[211] MCCL asked each state to send five or six delegates to a meeting in Minneapolis in December where they could continue sharing ideas and talking over new strategies. In the upcoming year, when discussion within the movement turned to forming a national organization, MCCL would be a major proponent of this regional approach,

[208] NRLC, "Agenda: Third Annual National Right to Life Committee Meeting," Box 4, Folder 10, ACCL Records; NRLC, "Seminar Fact Sheet," June 1972, Box 4, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[209] Some groups would even put together manuals on right-to-life organizing, detailing the successful methods they had used in their states. MCCL, "State Pro Life Organization: A Possible Model Presented in Outline Format," Box 10, Folder 16, Williams Papers, Celebrate Life, "Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records; Valerie Vance Dillon, "In Defense of Life: A Handbook for Those Who Oppose the Destruction of the Unborn," New Jersey Right to Life Committee, December 1970, Box 3, Folder 14, ACCL Records.
[210] Marjory Mecklenburg and Joseph Lampe to Midwest Leader in the Pro-life Movement, July 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[211] Joseph Lampe to Midwest Leader in the Pro-life Movement, August 15, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

believing the NRLC should rely on regions to decide what strategies worked best in their part of the country.

These connections and conversations between right-to-lifers spurred discussion about the possibility of a truly independent national organization. The NRLC was doing good work but many activists felt that more needed to be done. They were also beginning to worry about the NRLC's overt connection to the Catholic hierarchy. It was still under the oversight of the Family Life Bureau of the USCC during this time. In July 1972, Marjory Mecklenburg and Joseph Lampe informed Father James McHugh and Michael Taylor, who were in charge of the NRLC, of MCCL's desire for a change in direction at the national level. They wrote, "Our conversations with you, with Fred [Mecklenburg] and with Right to Life activists in other states have convinced us that some steps toward independence should be taken at this time."[212] MCCL's leaders submitted a plan for a national organization in hopes that something might come out of these discussions with right-to-lifers in other states. Ed Golden of NYRTL would also take part in the discussions about the trajectory toward an independent NRLC. These discussions were ongoing throughout 1972, but *Roe v. Wade* would force the state leaders to make a decision and officially sever the NRLC's ties to the Catholic hierarchy, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. In the meantime, the networks of leaders and state organizations built in the early 1970s started to form the foundation for an independent national right-to-life movement, and it was through these activists' discussions that the plans for an independent NRLC took shape.

[212] Marjory Mecklenburg to James McHugh and Michael Taylor, July 11, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

In addition to the conferences where right-to-lifers gathered to meet each other and share ideas, many more right-to-life speakers began traveling around the country, offering their wisdom to fellow activists and speaking to local right-to-life groups or religious groups. For example, as of December 1971, Fred Mecklenburg had spoken about abortion in Washington, Illinois, Pennsylvania, North Dakota, and Wisconsin and was planning an upcoming trip to Canada.[213] Most prominent among these speakers were Jack and Barbara Willke of Ohio who traveled the country promoting their new book, *Handbook on Abortion*.[214] The book detailed fetal development and the methods of abortion through graphic descriptions and photographs. It was quickly becoming the premier tool for right-to-lifers in arguing that abortion was murder. Throughout the early 1970s, the Willkes traveled around the country speaking against abortion and promoting their book.[215] Many local groups enthusiastically adopted the book and encouraged their members to share it with friends and family. The NRLC also made plans to encourage its affiliate groups to use the book and distribute it in their local churches, schools, and libraries.[216] Activists now had a shared handbook to draw on, one that could make the rhetoric and strategies more uniform across the movement and strengthen ties between right-to-life groups.

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[213] MCCL, "Have Speech, Will Travel; Dr. Mecklenburg to Canada," MCCL Newsletter, December 1971, Box 2 Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[214] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 138, 142; Jack and Barbara Willke, *Handbook on Abortion* (Cincinnati, OH: Hayes Publishing Co., 1971).
[215] "First Annual Pro Life Convention," Conference Program, November 1971, Box 512, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers; Bob Grady, "Abortion a perilous method to solve ills, specialists say," *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), September 25, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; Charles Randisi, "The Opposition to Abortion From a Scientific View," *Courier Journal* (Rochester, NY), May 3, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Anti-Abortionist, Film to be Featured at 'U,' *Minneapolis Argus*, February 14, 1972, Reel 2, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Newspaper Clippings Microfilm Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN. (hereafter cited as MCCL Newspaper Clippings); "Willkes Speak to More than 700 Here," MCCL Newsletter, March 1972, Box 2 Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[216] "Handbook on Abortion: Ideas for its more effective use," No Date c. 1972-1973, Box 3, Folder 10, ACCL Records.

Right-to-life speakers like the Willkes not only educated people on fetal development and abortion, but they also promoted the shift to a more aggressive political strategy in their speaking events across the country. In 1971, Marjory Mecklenburg traveled to California for the Pro-life California Convention. At one point, as the attendees discussed various legislative and judicial activity in the state, Mecklenburg jumped in. "I've been sitting here getting increasingly more frustrated," she said, "I must speak out. You people have got to organize politically."[217] After detailing the steps MCCL had already taken in Minnesota on this front, she reiterated her main point, "We will never get anywhere solely on the educational front; we must be political."[218] The following year, Father Charles Carroll spoke to the National Youth Pro-life Coalition—a new youth pro-life group that was holding its first conference in Washington, D.C., and trying out some new political tactics.[219] He encouraged the young people to think about right-to-life activism in new and dynamic ways and to let their activism extend to other life issues as well. As is evident in these examples, the aggressive political shift happened on the ground in local and state groups but also spread along these new right-to-life networks.

As right-to-lifers met at national conferences, speakers crisscrossed the country speaking to different groups, and leaders developed manuals to train new organizations, the movement developed an extensive network of right-to-lifers and sustained an interstate dialogue about strategies for activism. The network of right-to-lifers also

[217] "Pro-life California Convention, Notes on the Conference, November 12-14, 1971, Box 512, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Patrick Joyce, "'Choose life,' speakers and singers tell youth in Washington, D.C. rally," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), February 17, 1972*;* Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties," 542-543. Father Carroll also spoke at an Abortion Alternatives International conference in Minnesota. Kay Lagried, "Pro-life movement to 'save one baby at a time' gains momentum," *The Catholic Northwest Progress,* June 30, 1972, Box 14, Folder 2, Williams Papers.

shaped the trajectory of the movement by accelerating discussions about the need for a strong national right-to-life organization. By the end of 1972, it was clear that the NRLC would become independent in the near future. The right-to-lifers just needed to decide what the newly incorporated organization would look like. The plans for a national organization would be further accelerated at the start of 1973 with the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*. But the connections formed between state right-to-life groups in the early 1970s laid the foundation for the new NRLC, and the network of state leaders ultimately hashed out exactly what the movement should look like in a series of contentious meetings in 1972 and 1973.

The right-to-life movement had managed a pivot in strategy and taken more direct and decisive action in state politics. Its activists were also building a network of state organizations, sharing ideas and strategy for becoming more effective political actors in state politics, and encouraging one another to adopt the more aggressive political approach. Strategy was important but the movement also needed to sustain this grassroots momentum with an enthusiastic and motivated base of support. While a number of factors contributed to sustaining and building their base, two factors were particularly important for right-to-lifers in the early 1970s. First, the movement garnered more support from new segments of the population, especially young people and women. Young people, particularly college students, and women not only joined existing groups but also started their own right-to-life groups during this time. Second, the movement started framing abortion as the most serious symptom of a violent and degenerating society. The shifting demographics of this coalition and new framing of the abortion issue

ultimately worked in mobilizing more people to take part in right-to-life activism and reshaped the movement for years to come.

2.3 Reaching Young People and Women

Building networks between state organizations and actively engaging in state politics were vital shifts in right-to-life activism in the early 1970s. Yet, the movement also benefited from the active engagement of new groups of people to broaden its base of support, a major goal of the right-to-life movement during this time. In the 1960s, the core activists were often white, middle-aged, usually Catholic men and women, though there were some liberal Protestants and Jews involved as well. In addition, the leaders of early groups were often male professionals or clergy, such as Dr. Fred Mecklenburg of MCCL, Father James McHugh of the NRLC, and the many diocesan priests who coordinated right-to-life activity around the country. In the early 1970s, two important groups joined the cause in unprecedented numbers: women and young people. Women not only formed their own groups, but also took on leadership roles in state and national organizations.[220] Young people formed right-to-life groups on their college campuses and drew inspiration from the antiwar and civil rights movements as they protested legal abortion.

The two groups became vital parts of the right-to-life movement, and Michael Taylor of the NRLC praised their addition to the movement, "Everyone agrees that we should continue to broaden the base of the Right to Life movement. Over this last year we have seen the emergence of such phenomena as Women's organizations, the Youth

[220] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 147. Williams has highlighted the role of women in leadership roles in the movement in the early 1970s.

Movement."[221] Through the mobilization of these two groups, the movement added new dimensions to its strategy and its arguments against abortion. Women and young people brought their own distinct strategies and rhetoric, adding complexity and diversity to right-to-life activism. These diverse approaches included anti-feminism, pro-life feminism, direct action tactics taken from the civil rights and antiwar movements, and a fervent religiosity.

Women had been involved in right-to-life organizing from its inception in the 1960s. Women like Alice Hartle and Marjory Mecklenburg in Minnesota, Ellen McCormack in New York, and the thousands of women who wrote to Senator Beilenson in California were pivotal in early efforts to fight against legalized abortion. Nevertheless, the right-to-life movement did not always utilize women to their full potential. As historian Daniel Williams has noted, as of the late 1960s, "the pro-life movement had not elected women to positions of leadership."[222] This would soon change as Marjory Mecklenburg became president of MCCL, Rose Polito took over the Right-to-Life League of Southern California, and countless other women also took on more prominent roles in their state groups. And as tension between right-to-life women and women in the abortion rights movement emerged, right-to-life activism provided an outlet for these women's political activity apart from the women's movement.

Women not only took on leadership roles within existing organizations but also started their own groups that became extensively involved in local and state right-to-life activity. In New York, Ellen McCormack and a few other women started a group called Women for the Unborn, just one example of the many local groups organized by women

[221] Michael Taylor to RTL Committees, "Report on the Meeting of the Board of Directors, NRLC, December 11, 1971," December 17, 1971, Box 10 Folder 16, Williams Papers.
[222] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 147.

during the early 1970s. Women for the Unborn was an especially important group, fostering activism and awareness of the abortion issue among women in New York. Their main strategy was advertising, and they took their work extremely seriously. Their early focus was on the *New York Times,* in which they wanted to run a sort of public relations campaign for the unborn.[223] McCormack explained that their work was meant to challenge common arguments in favor of abortion. She said those in favor of abortion used three main tropes to make their case. Abortion rights advocates presented the public with two villains—the Catholic Church and the back-alley butcher. These were the first two tropes. For the third trope, abortion rights supporters cast the women of America and those fighting for the rights of women as the heroes.[224] McCormack and Women for the Unborn alleged that all three of these tropes were false and must be combatted. In a move that would later become familiar nationwide through the work of people like Phyllis Schlafly and other anti-ERA activists, McCormack offered an alternative narrative to that of the abortion rights movement and the women's movement.[225] Women were not heroes because they supported legal abortion but because they defended unborn children. Women for the Unborn explicitly challenged the current feminist narratives. And they presented their members with concrete steps to take to combat the abortion rights narrative, including making contact with local media, planning marches, running advertisements, and asking for fair time on radio and television to present the right-to-life

[223] Women for the Unborn, "Advertising Campaign for Unborn Children," Spring 1972, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee 1972, USCCB Records.
[224] Ellen McCormack, "Who Speaks for the Unborn Child?" 1972, Box 3, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[225] Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Women's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 217.

case.[226] In doing so, Women for the Unborn offered women a way to get involved in right-to-life politics and organize to oppose abortion in their local communities.

Women for the Unborn viewed their work as vital and worked to make their voices heard both in the right-to-life movement as well as within the Catholic Church. In 1972, Diane Arrigan, the president of Women for the Unborn, wrote a letter to Bishop Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati.[227] Arrigan detailed how their group challenged the narrative offered by women who favored abortion by taking out advertisements in newspapers "to be an effective voice for unborn children."[228] At the end of the letter, Arrigan asked for a meeting with the bishops in order to inform them of her group's strategies and to encourage the bishops to take further action. The women feared that the bishops had been meeting with women to talk about the women's rights movement but were neglecting pro-life women.[229] Bishop Bernardin met with the group in the spring of 1972, and the women held nothing back, making a range of recommendations and demands. They told Bernardin that there needed to be a nationwide Right to Life Sunday, that on that Sunday there should be a special collection to fund right-to-life activism, and insisted that the other bishops needed to be informed about Women for the Unborn. In addition, they requested help with fundraising and also urged the bishops to add more education on abortion in Catholic schools as well as in CCD and adult education.[230] This

[226] Women for the Unborn, "Contents of Folder on Public Relations," No Date c.1971-1972, Box 3, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[227] Diane Arrigan to Bishop Bernardin, 1972, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee 1972, USCCB Records.
[228] Ibid.
[229] James McHugh to Father Kelly, "Meeting of Women for the Unborn and Bishop Bernardin," April 6, 1972, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee 1972, USCCB Records.
[230] Ibid.

was not an isolated incident.[231] Women were not just a fringe of the movement but were making vital contributions and demanding that their work be taken seriously. They viewed their activism as central to the right-to-life movement, and they pursued a range of initiatives—from running advertisements in newspaper and radio, to lobbying, to organizing and attending protests.

While Women for the Unborn positioned themselves as the direct opposition to the abortion rights and women's rights movements, some women began to connect their opposition to abortion to feminism, developing their own pro-life feminism and aligning themselves with the broader goals and ideals of the women's movement. These women argued that abortion was only another way for men to exploit women and control women's reproduction. Thus, they believed abortion was actually the antithesis of feminism. Pro-life feminists argued that abortion showed that society would only allow women to be equal if they conformed to the masculine ideal.[232] These new pro-life feminists pledged to fight both for the full equality of women as well as for the rights of the unborn.[233] Ultimately, some of them founded Feminists for Life in 1972, an organization that still exists today.

The arguments of pro-life feminists began to make a broader impact within the right-to-life movement. Their arguments were even featured at national conventions and were also distributed by some state groups. In an article circulated by MCCL and the NRLC, Sidney Callahan argued, "In my feminist view, every abortion represents an

[231] Daniel Williams has shown that similar incidents occurred in several parts of the country during this time. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 147-155.
[232] Gloria V. Heffernan, M.D., "Abortion Exploits Women," 1972, Feminists for Life handout, Box 10, Folder 7, ACCL Records; Sidney Callahan, "Feminist as Antiabortionist," April 7, 1972, reprinted from *National Catholic Reporter,* Feminists for Life handout, Box 10, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[233] Feminists for Life, Organizational Mission Statement, No Date c.1972, Box 10, Folder 7, ACCL Records.

abandonment of women and children…The spread of a distinctly masculine type of selfishness, aggression and uncommitted sexual freedom has also turned women away from children."[234] The 1972 NRLC conference included both a talk by Callahan as well as a separate seminar on women's rights, which featured more discussion of Callahan's talk as well as the women's rights amendment and the creation of organizations for pro-life women.[235] The pro-life feminist approach also had an impact on activism at the grassroots level. Groups like Save Our Unwanted Life (SOUL), an organization for pro-life college students, echoed their rhetoric about abortion as a sign that society had failed women. At one demonstration in 1972, SOUL's members explained that they protested because they did not want women to be "regarded as sex machines to be periodically vacuum-cleaned of hated parasites."[236]

The addition of pro-life feminism to the right-to-life repertoire was vastly important, especially when considered alongside the simultaneous involvement of women who were wary of or opposed to the feminist movement. Both approaches helped broaden the base of the movement and offer women another avenue of involvement in right-to-life activism. They also showed that there was room for opposing viewpoints in the broader movement at this time. Sidney Callahan, pro-life feminist, could be just as involved as Ellen McCormack, who was wary of feminism. In the early 1970s, the movement was no monolith but rather a mass of divergent strategies, rhetoric, and approaches to the

[234] Sidney Callahan, "Abortion: Abandoning women and Children," No Date c. 1970, Circulated by MCCL, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[235] NRLC, "Agenda: Third Annual National Right to Life Committee Meeting," June 16-18, 1972, Box 4, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[236] "Pro-life Forces Reduce Abortion March to a Hobble," MCCL Newsletter, May 1972, Box 2, MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

abortion issue. And women continued to be a vital pillar of right-to-life activism both within state and national organizations as well as in their local communities.

Young people proved to be another important source of dynamic energy and political activism for the movement during these years. Across the country, right-to-life groups formed at high schools and colleges. In some ways, this change was the byproduct of legwork done by right-to-lifers in the 1960s, who had often sent speakers to give educational presentations on the abortion issue to high school students and college campus groups. One of the most important youth groups was Save Our Unwanted Life (SOUL), which started at the University of Minnesota in 1971. SOUL would rise to national prominence, in a similar way as MCCL, and would help found the National Youth Pro-life Coalition (NYPLC). SOUL's members focused on educating their fellow college students on abortion and mobilizing them into right-to-life politics. They also started affiliate groups in other states, such as right-to-life youth groups in the Rochester area in New York.[237] College students and high school students in California could join Youth for Life, an organization similar to SOUL and also an affiliate of the NYPLC.[238] The young right-to-lifers were persistent in reaching out to their fellow young people, even if it meant spending their summers passing out pro-life literature at rock festivals or manning booths at local fairs.[239]

In many ways, the political activities of these young right-to-lifers drew on the antiwar, civil rights, and women's rights movements. They incorporated elements of

[237] New York State Right to Life Committee, "Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things," Convention Program, October 1973, Box 3, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[238] Right to Life League of Southern California, "Youth for Life Invites Members," Living Newsletter, April 1972, Box 3, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[239] "Minnesota's SOUL Unit Spends Busy Summer," MCCL Newsletter, August 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

nonviolent direct action and mass protests and also highlighted the work of people involved in those various movements. For example, during their Life Days program at the University of Minnesota in 1971, SOUL included Bud Philbrook on a panel on alternatives to abortion. The first line of his credentials: Conscientious Objector.[240] SOUL's members also engaged in various acts of protest, such as counter-picketing women's liberation protesters in December 1971 and organizing large rallies including one of over four hundred people at the state capitol in May 1972.[241] Moreover, the young people started making connections between abortion and war, feminism, and other causes. For young right-to-lifers, all these issues went hand-in-hand. For instance, SOUL mimicked the language of pro-life feminists.[242] And during their Life Days program in 1971, the group highlighted "positive alternatives to abortion" as well as "The Consistency of Respecting all Life."[243] At a fair for teenagers in April 1972, Youth for Life even set up a booth connecting abortion to environmental issues: "Attached to the colorful background were pictures of living babies in utero and healthy living animals as well as animals killed by environmental and human contamination and babies killed by abortion."[244] In linking a variety of issues to abortion, these young right-to-lifers were pioneers for what would later become the consistent ethic approach to the abortion issue.

Pro-life youth groups for high school students also formed during this time in both California and New York. These groups mostly worked within their own schools,

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[240] SOUL, "Life Days Program," May 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[241] MCCL, MCCL Newsletter, December 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; "Pro-Life Forces Reduce Abortion March to a Hobble," MCCL Newsletter, May 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; "SOUL Members Picket ACOG," MCCL Newsletter, May 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[242] "Pro-life Forces Reduce Abortion March to a Hobble," MCCL Newsletter, May 1972, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[243] SOUL, "Life Days Program," 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[244] Right to Life League of Southern California, "Pro-life Booth Pleases," Living Newsletter, April 1972, Box 3, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

educating fellow classmates on abortion. In New York, groups organized in Catholic high schools. One group, for example, focused on encouraging Catholic spirituality, and it argued that opposition to abortion was a central pillar to one's Catholic spirituality and identity. The students called themselves the Students for Prevention of Abortion (SFPA) and had formed in response to their bishop's call for the involvement of young people in the right-to-life movement in New York. Their main activities involved prayer and penance for the sins of abortion.[245] Students also raised money and used it to purchase copies of the *Handbook on Abortion*, send a donation to Women for the Unborn, and offer mass once a month for the repeal of the state's abortion law. Here, young people were trained to connect abortion to their spiritual practice and also learned important lessons about political activism and abortion in state politics. In California, high schools students could join the ranks of Youth for Life and also took part in letter-writing campaigns to their state legislators. Several reminded Senator Beilenson that they were "future voters."[246] All these activities initiated young people into political activism in their schools, local communities, and states.

The work of SOUL and other pro-life youth groups across the country culminated in the formation of the NYPLC and an annual national youth conference called Thanksgiving for Life. These conferences further educated young people on abortion and right-to-life politics and urged them to take action in their hometowns and home states. NYPLC held their first conference in Chicago in 1971. The theme of the conference was "Educate to Action," and the young people in attendance were encouraged to "return to

[245] Students for Prevention of Abortion, 1972, Box 3, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[246] Ruth Ann Netherscutt to Anthony Beilenson, April 27, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers; Luiza Mazulis to Anthony Beilenson, April 27, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers; Debbie Richter to Anthony Beilenson, April 27, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.

their youth groups and implement the programs and to proclaim to the country that there is no human life not worth living."[247] These conferences would be an important gathering place for young pro-lifers, and the movement, in turn, recognized the vital role the NYPLC could play in mobilizing young people and opposing abortion. In 1972, the rally featured Richard Neuhaus and Charles Carroll, who spoke against abortion, racism, euthanasia, and the Vietnam War.[248] At this conference, these young right-to-lifers would also draw on direct action tactics from the antiwar movement of the 1960s. Instead of burning draft cards, though, they burned their birth certificates in a symbolic protest of the evils of abortion.[249] In 1973, George Huntston Williams of the national group AUL spoke at that year's conference and emphasized the central role young people could play in the right-to-life movement. He told the young people in attendance, "In these crucial hours for mankind, let each of us be unafraid and unfailing in this noble and historic effort to restore in this land the right to continuing life of every human life, born and unborn."[250] In the upcoming years, NYPLC and SOUL would educate and mobilize young people into the movement, reaching countless college and high school students and encouraging dynamic direct action and political activism on behalf of the unborn.

Without mobilizing these new populations, the right-to-life movement might not have had the same success it did in the early 1970s. Women and young people brought new ideas and energy to the movement and offered new avenues for people to get involved in politics. Women especially accomplished much of the political work in the

[247] "Student Pro-life Group Sponsors 'Thanksgiving for Life' Conference," *Tribune-Press* (Chisholm, MN), December 7, 1971, Reel 2, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[248] Patrick Joyce, "'Choose life,' speakers and singers tell youth in Washington, D.C. rally," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), February 17, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[249] Hughes, 542.
[250] George H. Williams, Message to National Youth Pro-life Coalition Convention, November 23, 1973, Box 10, Folder 18, Williams Papers.

movement, working as lobbyists, running advertisements, and showing up for protests. Young people helped connect the movement to the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements, appropriating direct action tactics and rhetoric as well as recruiting new members. Furthermore, the work of both these demographics enriched right-to-life activism and enabled the shift to a more aggressive approach to state politics as well as adding their own new approaches. In mobilizing a broader right-to-life base, young people and women provided the grassroots support necessary to sustain the movement. They recruited new right-to-lifers and created a new generation of activists. Consequently, right-to-life organizations were no longer just for clergy or professionals but also for ordinary high school students, college students, and women who were approaching right-to-life activism in new, dynamic ways.

2.4 Reframing the Issue: Abortion and Violence in a Declining Society

While activists in state and local groups took quick action to mobilize new populations and turn the tide in state legislatures and political parties, there was also a broader reframing of the abortion issue taking place within the movement. This strategic reframing defined abortion in terms of violence—the violence plaguing society, the decline of societal values, and the desensitization of people to both these things. To right-to-lifers, abortion was the ultimate expression of this societal decline into violence. In 1971, MCCL itself indicted what it saw as a "pervasive climate of violence" in the United States.[251] Young people at the "Thanksgiving for Life" also noted this violence and argued that America was "a society that promotes peace and justice while tolerating the

[251] MCCL Newsletter, September 1971, Box 2 MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

violence of destroying the unborn child in the womb."[252] Others lamented that Americans had forgotten their core values, both religious and political.[253] Many right-to-lifers believed that because of this pervasive violence, Americans had been desensitized to violence itself, and this desensitization helped explain their ready acceptance of abortion, or so right-to-lifers argued.

The shift in the framing of the issue had a huge impact and enabled the turn toward an aggressive strategy in politics as well as in mobilizing new recruits. The reframing of rhetoric, and, in turn, strategy had two main parts. First, right-to-lifers began using graphic photographs and descriptions of fetal development and of the abortion procedure itself. Daniel Williams has described this "escalation" extensively and notes that in the early 1970s, thanks in large part to books such as the *Handbook on Abortion*, the movement started to emphasize the graphic nature of abortion and use pictures of fetal development and abortion in their publications and protests.[254] The second part of the shift was the connection made between abortion and the Vietnam War. These right-to-lifers argued that if a person opposed the Vietnam War they also must oppose abortion and vice versa. Both involved horrible acts of violence that destroyed innocent life. In both cases, the root of the issue was violence and American society's seemingly easy toleration of it. In the early 1970s, right-to-lifers decided to attack the problem of violence and abortion, and this major shift in rhetoric fit in perfectly with their more

[252] "Students Pro-life Group Sponsors 'Thanksgiving for Life' Conference," *Tribune-Press* (Chisholm, MN), December 7, 1971. Reel 2, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[253] R.M. Weldon to Anthony Beilenson, May 26, 1970, Box 514, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers; A.M. Sword to Anthony Beilenson, May 25, 1970, Box 514, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers; Maria Borgelt to Anthony Beilenson, June 22, 1970, Box 514, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers.
[254] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 134

aggressive political strategy during these years—a provocative and in-your-face approach to shock and offend people enough that they might come to oppose legal abortion.

The use of graphic images and descriptions was meant to evoke the humanity of the fetus and to convince people that abortion at any point of pregnancy was murder. Right-to-lifers hoped to wake people up from their desensitization to violence by shocking them with images of the violence and horrors of abortion.[255] Right-to-lifers had employed such shock tactics in the 1960s though only to a limited extent, such as when Dr. McKelvey brought the preserved fetus to the legislative hearing on abortion in Minnesota. But, for the most part, right-to-lifers stuck to arguments based on rights, the Bible, or warnings that abortion was one step removed from America becoming the next Nazi Germany. In the early 1970s, however, the use of graphic images and language became much more prolific at all levels of the movement. One of the clearest examples of this shift was the popularity of Jack and Barbara Willke's new book *Handbook on Abortion.*[256] The Willkes' book aimed to give people a clear explanation of abortion and fetal development, including sections on when life begins and methods of abortion.[257] Nationwide, the book became extremely popular among right-to-lifers and was promoted by the NRLC, many state right-to-life groups, and in the Willkes' many speaking events across the country.

Shock tactics and the use of graphic images and descriptions began to appear in all areas of the movement, from the grassroots to the national level and in major publications as well as in local protests. Writers described abortion as a "ghastly and

[255] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 134.
[256] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 138.
[257] Willke and Willke, *Handbook on Abortion,* 5-35.

murderous crime."[258] They related stories of experimentation on live fetuses or what they saw as the inhumane disposal of fetal remains.[259] Others played on tropes such as comparing abortion to Nazi Germany, reminding people of "the anti life smoke now rising from chimnies [sic] in hospitals in several states in our land of the free. It rises from the incinerated remains of thousands of embryonic Americans."[260] The New York bishops spoke out against their state's abortion law, charging that "some…have been heard to cry as they were dropped into surgical trash cans."[261] One source circulated in California was entitled "How a Child is Aborted" and included such details as "The child inside is cut into pieces and pulled or scooped out limb by limb" and "At about five months, or shortly after, the child is capable of making feeble cries. They make them when they're being destroyed sometimes."[262] Right-to-lifers not only used graphic images and descriptions in their literature but also in their protests. Graphic displays turned up in a storefront display in Seneca, New York, courtesy of the Finger Lakes Right to Life Committee, which set off a flurry of debate in the local newspaper.[263] And in one memorable protest, members of Celebrate Life, the Long Island Right to Life Committee, and Women for the Unborn showed up at William Baird's lecture on birth control and abortion. Eugene McCabe, a local father, attended the lecture "dressed in a death mask and black shroud" with a sign that read "Abortion is Murder." During the lecture, he "occasionally squeezed the stomach of a doll he held on his lap. The toy cried

[258] Unknown author, "By What Authority is an unborn baby like this destroyed?" No Date c. early 1970s, Box 3, Folder Pro-life Groups, Taylor Papers.
[259] J. Alven Keguelmass, "Horror Story: The Fetus Merchants," No Date c. early 1970s, Box 3, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[260] JRS, Value of Life Committee, Press Release, October 21, 1970, Box 11, Folder 8, Williams Papers.
[261] "Anti-Abortion Charges by Bishops Attacked," *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* (Saranac Lake, NY), December 4, 1970, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[262] "How a Child is Aborted," April 10, 1970, *The Tidings,* Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.
[263] Rich Rappaport, "'Right-to-Life' Displays Propaganda on Seneca Street," *The Herald* (Seneca, NY), October 13, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

out 'Mama.'" Towards the end of the lecture, McCabe slowly dismembered the doll. Another woman, Mary Jane Tobin, brought three jars with her that she claimed held the remains of "aborted babies" to give to Baird, which she did during the lecture to the great consternation of many in the audience.[264] Clearly, using shock tactics was no longer taboo but rather a favored strategy at all levels of the movement.

While these tactics angered many opponents, they proved effective on the ground. In interviews of right-to-lifers in California, conducted by sociologist Kristin Luker in the 1980s, several activists described how they became involved in right-to-life activism in the early 1970s only after seeing slideshows or presentations on fetal development and abortion, often in their local churches. One activist recalled attending a pro-life presentation at her church in 1972, "when I saw those slides, that was it…I knew I had to get involved. It just convinced me that I couldn't be apathetic."[265] Likewise, another activist remembered attending lectures on abortion methods: "I heard doctors speaking on all methods, and I hadn't known the methods and that they were painful methods."[266] The lasting impact of the *Handbook on Abortion* is also indicative of the success of shock tactics. Right-to-lifers rushed to purchase it, distribute it to local libraries, and relied on it for years to come. According to Daniel Williams, "by 1972, [the Willkes] were speaking to a combined total of 70,000 people a year and giving 150 radio and television interviews."[267] To improve their effectiveness, the use of images and presentations on abortion was often tied to calls for political action. For example, in August 1971, Eleanor

[264] William Barber, "Audience Challenges Baird Talk," *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), September 2, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[265] Kristen Luker, Interview with Mrs. Vaughn, Kristin Luker Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereafter cited as Luker Papers).
[266] Kristin Luker, Interview with Mrs. Singer, Luker Papers.
[267] Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn,* 138.

Tener, a leader of the local group Long Island Right to Life, traveled to upstate New York to present slides showing "fetal development and the results of abortion."[268] She ended her speech calling on local right-to-lifers to "wage a terrible fight" against New York's abortion law. The use of graphic images and graphic descriptions of abortion might have seemed tasteless to opponents, but right-to-lifers loved them. They felt the presentations and publications on abortion methods and fetal development showed the human cost of abortion. And they believed that confronting people in this way was the most effective means to mobilize people and turn them into right-to-life activists.

The impact of the shock tactics was also evident in constituent letters as graphic images and descriptions and the rhetoric of violence began appearing in the many right-to-life letters sent to politicians. While the letters to Senator Beilenson in the late 1960s had characterized abortion as murder, only a few referenced graphic descriptions of abortion. By the early 1970s, letters routinely referenced these things. Dale Berven of Pleasanton, California, relayed the impact of fetal images on her own opinion: "I read Lennart Nilsson's photographic work A Child is Born and couldn't help but feel that human life is present from the moment of conception."[269] Vivienne Devlin of Santa Barbara sent Beilenson a copy of the graphic article "How a Child is Aborted."[270] Ann Bilpusch of Buena Park also sent an article describing the grisly details of abortion: "Sometimes it manages a pathetic cry like a kitten; then after a few minutes it dies an asphyxial death and lies coldly in a stainless steel bowl."[271] Reverend Ira Howden, a Baptist minister from Martinez, California, called abortion the "wholesale and mass

[268] "L.I. 'Life' Officer attends local meet," *Press-Republican* (Plattsburg, NY), August 10, 1971, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[269] Dale Berven to Anthony Beilenson, April 19, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.
[270] Vievienne Devlin to Anthony Beilenson, No Date c. 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.
[271] Ann B. Bilspusch to Anthony Beilenson, June 8, 1970, Box 514, Folder 12, Beilenson Papers.

slaughter of innocent little lives."[272] Still another letter expressed horror at the supposed plan of an abortion clinic in London "to sell live fetuses."[273] For right-to-lifers, the rhetoric and images they received from the right-to-life movement were not just stories or photographs but real events and real children. For them, it further proved that abortion killed an innocent person, that abortion was the most egregious form of murder, and that society did not care.

For other right-to-lifers, the issue of abortion and violence resonated only when they connected abortion with other "life issues," as they called them. These activists invoked the Vietnam War and abortion as the most compelling current examples of the violence plaguing society. People like Gordon Zahn, Sidney Callahan, and the young people of SOUL and the NYPLC wondered how right-to-lifers could oppose abortion yet ignore the killings in Vietnam. This connection between abortion, violence, and other life issues was the very start of what would become the consistent ethic of life, articulated most forcefully by Bishop Joseph Bernardin and others in the early 1980s. And though the activists in the early 1970s were not yet using the language of the consistent ethic of life, they were formulating and articulating its main tenets—that calling oneself pro-life entailed concern for a broad range of life issues, from abortion to capital punishment to war. Father Charles Carroll, an Episcopal priest, summed up this early view of the consistent ethic in a speech at a conference on alternatives to abortion. He wondered, "Can we be involved in the abortion debate if we're not involved in the debate for civil rights throughout the world, if we're not involved in the struggle for social justice among men? Can we be selective in our witness and choose to witness in here but deny out

[272] Reverend Ira L. Howden to Anthony Beilenson, May 5, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.
[273] Mrs. Kathleen Krueger to Anthony Beilenson, May 26, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.

there?"[274] These right-to-lifers were beginning to understand that their opposition to abortion was inseparable from these other issues. Gordon Zahn articulated the antiwar, pro-life position most forcefully. In an article for *Commonweal*, he argued:

> In the past, I have criticized 'establishment' Christians…for their hypersensitivity to the evil of killing the unborn and their almost total disregard of the evil of 'post-natal' abortion in the form of the wholesale destruction of human life in war. The argument works both ways and with equal force: those of us who oppose war cannot be any less concerned about the destruction of life in the womb.[275]

The violence of war and the violence of abortion were inseparable. Both involved the destruction of innocent human life and, therefore, right-to-lifers had to oppose both.

Vietnam loomed especially large in their imaginations in these years. It was a refrain critics of right-to-lifers had already picked up. If right-to-lifers opposed abortion, why did they not also oppose the war in Vietnam? Some right-to-lifers began to ask the same question, connecting the violence they saw and opposed in abortion to the violence of the conflict in Vietnam. Some of these activists had been opposed to the war in Vietnam all along and found their way into the right-to-life movement following their activism in the antiwar movement.[276] To them, their opposition to the war led directly and logically to their involvement in right-to-life activism. In a critique of abortion combining feminism, right-to-life activism, and a critique of the war, Sidney Callahan's asserted that the current iteration of feminism only meant that women would "be able to shoot babies and napalm civilians."[277] William Hunt asked, "How can you oppose the war in Vietnam

[274] Kay Lagried, "Pro-life movement to 'save one baby at a time' gains momentum," June 30, 1972, Box 14, Folder 2, Williams Papers.
[275] Gordon Zahn, "A Religious Pacifist Looks at Abortion," *Commonweal*, May 28, 1971, 279.
[276] Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes," 11; Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates," 545.
[277] Sidney Callahan, "Abortion: Abandoning women and Children," No Date c. 1970, Circulated by MCCL, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

and be non-committal or permissive about such evident violence right here at home?"[278] The national group, Americans United for Life, also compared abortion to violence against Vietnamese children: "A baby destroyed by salt solution injected into the womb is burned to death just as surely as a Vietnamese infant destroyed by napalm dumped onto his home."[279] Many constituent letters compared the killing in Vietnam to the act of abortion. The killing in Vietnam was bad, but the violence of abortion was "10x worse…because it is on the most innocent life in the world."[280] The subject also featured prominently at the NYPLC's rally in 1972 where Richard Neuhaus, a founder of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam, noted the similarities between the Vietnam War and abortion, and Charles Carroll criticized President Nixon who he said, "rightly reverences life in the womb, but not in Vietnam."[281] The violence of the Vietnam War and the violence of abortion were the same in these right-to-lifers' minds and reflected troubling societal attitudes about violence. Most importantly, both demanded action and active opposition from Americans.

For both the right-to-lifers using graphic images and those developing a consistent ethic of life, the easy acceptance of abortion was related to a decline of morality in society as a whole. Right-to-lifers painted a dismal picture of the state of the world. John Falls, an Episcopalian doctor from Minnesota, argued, "The society which encourages optional destruction of its offspring is not liberal, progressive or enlightened. It is instead

[278] MCCL Newsletter, December 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[279] Americans United for Life, "Statement of Americans United for Life from Meeting in Washington, D.C.," November 20, 1971, Box 5, Folder 4, Williams Papers.
[280] Ken McKenzie to Anthony Beilenson, June 15, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers; Joseph M. Stem to Anthony Beilenson, March 22, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers; Marilou M. Cole to Anthony Beilenson, May 22, 1970, Box 514, Folder 11, Beilenson Papers.
[281] Patrick Joyce, "'Choose life,' speakers and singers tell youth in Washington, D.C. rally," *North Country Catholic* (Ogdensburg, NY), September 17, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

hedonistic, self-centered and sick."[282] Still for others, the violence of abortion signaled a darker, more apocalyptic turn. MCCL laid out this position in their newsletter in September 1971:

> Daily, we are confronted by the obvious physical violence of war, racial discrimination, police repression, and hooliganism, and there is the less obvious, but equally real, violence of mass propaganda, psychological manipulation, bureaucratic regimentation, economic exploitation, and social or economic competition. Tragically, however, many people cannot, or will not, admit the obvious kinship between abortion and these other manifestations of dehumanizing violence.[283]

Abortion was the most serious symptom of a larger problem, that of "dehumanizing violence" in society and people's desensitization to it. In a sermon at a local Episcopal church in 1971, Thomas St. Martin, the president of MCCL, also argued that abortion signified the degradation of society and its violent turn. He told the congregation, "The welfare of society is an issue because of the social deterioration which is likely to occur when human life is cheapened. Abortion is a violent and ugly practice which, like war, tramples on civilized sensibilities."[284] Explaining abortion in such terms made the fight against abortion take on a new importance. Right-to-lifers fought to save babies but also to save society from its own violence. Abortion was not just a legal or legislative matter but also an issue of reshaping the foundational values of American society.

Though they approached the issue in a variety of ways, in the early 1970s right-to-lifers hewed to the common theme of abortion as a violent and gruesome act—one that showed that there were serious issues at the core of American society. Whether they approached the issue from the point of view of pro-life feminism, pacifism, liberal human

[282] John L. Falls, "An Episcopalian Doctor Speaks Against Abortion," 1971, Box 3, Folder Religious Groups, Taylor Papers.
[283] MCCL Newsletter, September 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[284] Thomas St. Martin, Sermon, No Date c. 1970-1971, Box 3, Folder 7, ACCL Records.

rights, or the recognition of the graphic methods of abortion, right-to-lifers agreed that violence and the desensitization to it were some of the foundational issues in the trend toward legalizing abortion. Despite their varied arguments against abortion, what mattered most to right-to-lifers was one's commitment to the belief that abortion was murder and the willingness to take action in the local community or state to stop it. Articulating their arguments in such a way might have angered and disturbed their opponents but it paid off for the right-to-lifers. It convinced a variety of people to join the movement, helping to broaden their base of support. And it gave the right-to-lifers new strategies and rhetoric that provided a foundation upon which to build and strengthened their aggressive strategies in state politics.

Conclusion

By the early 1970s, the right-to-life movement seemed to be moving in a positive direction. Right-to-lifers had lost the fight in New York and in a few other states but the narrow losses only bolstered their resolve to keep fighting abortion. In all of this, the right-to-lifers had managed to build a dynamic and diverse movement on the ground in a number of states. At its core, this movement was about grassroots action, mobilizing individuals to join organizations and fight against abortion in their towns, cities, and states. The abortion issue and the dynamic grassroots activism of the movement resonated with all sorts of people—women, college students, high school students, lawyers, doctors, and professionals, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Many of them worked out of their own homes to develop political strategies and to encourage their friends and neighbors to take action. Instead of low-cost and low-risk activism, such as the letter-writing campaigns of the 1960s, right-to-lifers now fully engaged in political

activism in state politics. They lobbied their state legislatures, worked on candidates' campaigns, showed up at mass demonstrations, protested at town board meetings, ran graphic advertisements on abortion, and burned their birth certificates.

Thus, when the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the movement was primed for action, having already mobilized ordinary Americans, turned them into savvy political operatives, and developed an arsenal of strategies to use to fight legalized abortion. Right-to-lifers had also articulated a worldview that placed violence and abortion at the center of the societal decline they believed America was experiencing. Building on the strategies they had developed on the ground fighting abortion in the states as well as on the network they had built of experienced activists across the country, right-to-lifers were ready to respond quickly and decisively to fight legalized abortion at the national level. They were also ready to mobilize the new energy unleashed after *Roe v. Wade*.

The aggressive pivot in strategy did not succeed in the short term, but it paved the way for a quick and aggressive response in the immediate wake of *Roe v. Wade*. The most important step here was the decision to make the NRLC fully independent of the Catholic Church. This transition was facilitated by the discussions that had already been going on among state groups as well as the energetic base of support these organizations had built in their home states, a base that they had mobilized and educated to be bold political actors. By 1972, MCCL boasted several thousand members. New York Right to Life had somewhere between fifty and seventy affiliated right-to-life groups across the state.[285] In the wake of *Roe,* many more would join and be influenced by those who had

[285] Fred C. Shapiro, "'Right to Life' has message for New York State legislators," *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.

already spent the 1960s and early part of the 1970s opposing abortion. The New York right-to-lifers were right in their 1973 assessment of the movement.[286] They had only just begun to fight.

[286] Carmen Viglucci, "Pro-life Leaders: 'We Have Just Begun to Fight,'" *Courier-Journal* (Rochester, NY), May 17, 1972, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

3.0 Black Monday: The Right-to-Life Movement and the Aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*

Introduction

Near the end of 1972, Dr. Robert Koshnick sent a dire warning to Lawrence Lader, the president of NARAL, about right-to-life activism in Minnesota. As the Supreme Court considered several cases related to abortion, Koshnick carefully observed MCCL, and he did not like what he saw. He warned Lader: "The opposition here has indicated: 1) it expects an unfavorable ruling from the Supreme Court; 2) it is planning an allout [sic] push for a Constitutional Amendment to achieve their goals."[287] Though it was just a small aside in a letter otherwise devoted to NARAL's work in Minnesota and North Dakota, Koshnick's words were a prescient and ominous warning. The right-to-lifers thought the Supreme Court would rule against them and legalize abortion. This should have been good news for NARAL, but, as Koshnick indicated, the right-to-lifers did not plan on accepting the ruling. Instead, they were already gearing up for an all-out assault on legal abortion.

In 1973, Koshnick's prediction proved correct. On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court handed down two decisions that legalized abortion nationwide—*Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. Though the scope of the decisions shocked some right-to-lifers, many others had been aware of the possibility that abortion might become legal in all fifty states, given the changes in public opinion on abortion since the 1960s and several pending federal court cases. And, just as Koshnick had warned, state leaders like Marjory

[287] Robert A. Koshnick to Lawrence Lader, December 1, 1972, Carton 3, Folder MN 1972, National Abortion Rights Action League Records, 1968-1976, MC 313, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as NARAL Records).

Mecklenburg and Alice Hartle of Minnesota and Ed Golden of New York had planned for this contingency, anticipating that a major legislative or judicial decision might come down against them. Thus, while the Supreme Court's decision took some right-to-lifers by surprise, for others in the movement, it was no surprise at all. Thanks to their planning in 1971 and 1972, right-to-lifers quickly overcame their shock and dismay at the Court's decision and resumed their fight against abortion, orienting their message more strongly toward all Americans and reorienting strategies they had developed for state politics toward the national political scene.

In this chapter, I will explain how the movement prepared for the possibility of legal abortion nationwide in the year before *Roe v. Wade*, reacted to the Supreme Court decisions in 1973, and tumultuously transformed into a national political crusade throughout that year and into early 1974. In 1972, some state leaders had begun discussing plans to form their own national right-to-life organization, and they hoped to make the NRLC fully independent of the Catholic Church. Right-to-lifers had already developed an effective and aggressive strategy at the local and state levels, and now the movement's leaders thought they could accomplish even more in national politics. Some also believed the movement should be preparing in case abortion became legal nationwide. Thanks to these efforts in the early 1970s, right-to-lifers were in good shape to respond to *Roe v. Wade* and to begin to reorient their aggressive state and local approaches to the national arena. And they were able to do so quickly, thanks largely to the grassroots energy of the movement and to talented and experienced state leaders like the Mecklenburgs, Alice Hartle, Ed Golden and others. By the end of 1973, the movement had a national organization—the newly independent NRLC—and a plan in

place for achieving their ultimate goal: a human life amendment that would reverse *Roe v. Wade*. Right-to-lifers accomplished all this even as they continued to expand their activities in their local towns and states.

Despite this intense activity in the states both before and after *Roe*, the literature has too often focused solely on the idea of backlash to *Roe v. Wade* as the impetus for the right-to-life movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Along with the narrative of backlash to *Roe*, many scholars have also privileged the idea of a more generalized conservative backlash at the heart of their narratives of both the right-to-life movement and the Religious Right. Scholars like Kristin Luker and Robert O. Self have argued that right-to-lifers were reacting against the new ideas of the sexual revolution and the women's movement, whether it was defending idealized notions of motherhood or of the traditional family. Either way, these arguments contend that *Roe* woke American conservatives up and spurred them to political action.[288] Conservative evangelical leaders themselves tell a similar origin story—their horror at legalized abortion caused them to become involved in political activism for the very first time.[289] Moreover, these narratives suggest some sort of unified conservative backlash to *Roe v. Wade,* presenting the movement as if it were a conservative monolith.[290] However, conservative backlash to *Roe v. Wade* helps explain only one small aspect of the movement in the wake of the Supreme Court decisions.

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[288] Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 1; Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 340-343, 349.

[289] Randall Balmer has shown that for many of these evangelical leaders the real impetus to political activism was backlash against desegregation. Randall Balmer, "The Real Origins of the Religious Right," *Politico.com,* May 27, 2014, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133 (accessed July 25, 2017).

[290] For example, Robert Self characterizes the right-to-life movement as an example of "breadwinner conservatism," a backlash to the social movements of the 1960s. Self, *All in the Family,* 5-6.

First, the conservative backlash narrative does not fit because, as I have shown in the previous two chapters, the movement was already on firm footing by the end of 1972, with many of its most enduring strategies and rhetoric already in place. More specifically, in the two years leading up to *Roe v. Wade,* right-to-lifers were anticipating the legalization of abortion in all fifty states and preparing strategies should they need to combat legal abortion nationwide. Certainly some right-to-lifers were reacting against the excesses they perceived in the sexual revolution of the 1960s and among abortion rights supporters—they had been doing so since the end of the 1960s. But *Roe* itself was not the impetus for the movement's political awakening; rather it simply served to accelerate the plans for a national strategy that right-to-lifers had already been considering. In the early 1970s, state leaders not only crafted a strong political strategy but were also planning how they might implement that strategy and push a pro-life agenda at the national level. The clearest examples of this early pivot to a nationwide strategy were the formation of an independent NRLC and the decision to pursue a human life amendment. As early as 1970, right-to-lifers in the states were lobbying for an independent NRLC, one that was not a subdivision of the Catholic Church's Family Life Bureau, and was not funded entirely by the Catholic Church, and by the end of 1972, the official decision had been made to reorganize the NRLC within a matter of months. Right-to-lifers were also discussing the idea of pursuing a human life amendment in the years before *Roe*, and this strategy quickly became their prime focus in 1973.

Second, in the wake of *Roe v. Wade,* there was no unified conservative backlash because the right-to-life movement itself was in no way unified. This was no monolithic movement but one made up of religiously and politically diverse people who agreed that

abortion was wrong but disagreed on almost everything else. In fact, in 1973 and 1974, latent tension between Protestants and Catholics in the movement erupted into a sometimes vicious fight between Catholic and Protestant leaders of the movement, many of whom were now in leadership positions in the new NRLC. Liberal Protestant activists fought with the Catholic hierarchy, while Catholics defended their role in right-to-life politics. NRLC's leaders could not agree on the image, organization, and strategy of the movement. In addition, the right-to-lifers could not even convince evangelical Christians, who would later be some of their most stalwart conservative allies, to join the movement, despite a determined outreach campaign targeting evangelicals in 1973 and 1974. When we look closely at the inner workings of the right-to-life movement in the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade,* the conservative backlash narrative breaks down. Different factions of right-to-lifers barely agreed with or even tolerated one another, and the NRLC was failing to bring conservative allies into the fold.

In spite of the disarray in the new NRLC, the movement at the state and local level persisted, and this grassroots energy and mobilization sustained and propelled the movement in the wake of *Roe*. Led by state groups and leaders who had honed their strategies in their states and local communities, the movement now shifted gears. State leaders reoriented their approach and capitalized on the grassroots energy they had built in the early 1970s. They also used the new momentum after *Roe v. Wade* to get people on the ground excited about new national strategies in right-to-life politics. Because they had a network of state groups in place, had trained and experienced state leaders and local activists, and had practiced a wide range of strategies at the local and state levels, right-to-lifers were able to pivot easily to the national arena and connect the grassroots work

being done in the states to the bigger picture, encouraging and empowering local activists to stay committed to the movement and engaged in local and state politics.

3.1 Developing a National Strategy Before *Roe v. Wade*

As 1972 progressed, right-to-life leaders lauded achievements in their states and towns and dreamed of what they could accomplish in the upcoming years.[291] They had a lot to be happy about. State groups continued to grow and were proving quite effective in state politics. National right-to-life conferences were attracting more attention and building stronger networks of activists across the country. New groups of people were becoming interested in joining the movement. Nevertheless, even as the leaders celebrated their progress in the states, they also began to consider what the movement might accomplish with a unified, nationwide strategy and to plan for various contingencies should their efforts fail in the states. Some sensed that public opinion was turning against them and might affect court cases or legislation in the future. Others wondered if they should start pursuing a human life amendment to be added to the Constitution to keep abortion illegal, a tactic that could settle the debate once and for all. Still others argued that the best path forward was a stronger national right-to-life organization that was actively engaged in promoting the movement's agenda in national politics. The significance of this foresight and planning among the national leadership and state groups in the years preceding *Roe* is that it laid the groundwork for a quick and decisive pivot to a unified national strategy after the Supreme Court's decision in January 1973. Thus, while *Roe* initially shocked much of the general public, the core leadership

[291] Michael Taylor to Representative William J. Rogers, April 12, 1971, Box 4, Folder 8, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as ACCL Records); Rita Marker, Heart Beat Newsletter, January 1972, Box 1, Folder 3, George Huntston Williams Papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Williams Papers).

quickly set out to enact the plans they already had in place for this exact contingency and focus grassroots energy on their new strategies for national politics.

With grassroots organizing on firm footing by 1971, state right-to-life leaders began lobbying for a stronger national organization that could fight against legalized abortion at the national level and more effectively coordinate activity between the states. The NRLC during the late 1960s and early 1970s had served mostly to consolidate and distribute information on abortion politics and right-to-life activities in the states, but it was not overtly active in national politics. Moreover, the NRLC was still part of the Catholic Church, a branch of the Family Life Bureau of the NCCB. The Family Life Bureau even continued to fund and staff the NRLC.[292] This close connection to the Catholic Church was becoming a concern among right-to-lifers as they fought stereotypes that the Catholic hierarchy was solely responsible for their activism in the states. It was also problematic as the movement tried to broaden its base of support among non-Catholics.

As early as August 1970, following the first NRLC convention, right-to-lifers were requesting an independent national organization.[293] Their calls only increased in the next two years, thanks in part to the growing network fostered by state leaders and national right-to-life conferences.[294] In July 1972, following discussions at yet another NRLC convention, Marjory Mecklenburg wrote a letter to Father James McHugh and Michael Taylor of the NRLC informing them of "a growing desire to build a more

[292] Robert N. Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-life Movement Prior to *Roe v. Wade," The Catholic Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (July 2011): 548.
[293] Marjory Mecklenburg, Untitled Handwritten Notes, n.d. circa 1972-1973, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[294] Marjory Mecklenburg, Untitled Handwritten Notes, n.d. circa 1972-1973, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

independent, increasingly effective, representative national pro-life organization."[295] She indicated that there had been ongoing discussions about this possibility and now was the time to develop and execute a plan for a national organization. State leaders recognized the need for the movement to do more to promote its agenda in national politics, and Mecklenburg insisted the NRLC take action as soon as possible, arguing, "some steps toward independence should be taken at this time."[296] The topic had been discussed in detail at the convention in Philadelphia that summer, and many groups had expressed interest in developing and submitting plans for a national organization.[297] The NRLC itself as well as the NCCB also supported the decision.

But Mecklenburg and her fellow MCCL members were not content to simply meet to discuss the possibility of a reorganized NRLC. Along with her letter to McHugh and Taylor, Mecklenburg submitted a detailed plan for a national organization that she and several other Minnesota leaders had developed. Their main goals for the movement were clear: "that the pro-life movement have an effective national voice in public policy, that this voice reflect insofar as possible the consensus of the various state organizations…that the national pro-life organization be funded independently, that the state pro-life organizations cooperate to effectively accomplish these ends while at the same time maintaining freedom of action for the state organizations."[298] MCCL wanted a national organization that would have strength and influence in national politics, lobbying for the pro-life agenda at the highest levels of government while also representing the

[295] Marjory Mecklenburg to Father James McHugh and Michael Taylor, July 11, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Though ultimately MCCL was the only group that followed through and submitted a plan for a national right-to-life organization. Michael Taylor to Board of Directors, National Right to Life Committee, Pro-Life Leaders, December 1, 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[298] Paul H. Andreini, Marjory Mecklenburg, and Joseph A. Lampe, "A Tentative Plan for a National Pro-life Organization," July 8, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

movement as it existed at the grassroots level. Their plan was based in state and regional right-to-life groups, with a "national house of delegates" that would meet annually and serve as "a grass roots representative body."[299] But, for MCCL, the very foundation of the national organization was a "coalition of pro-life groups" that were already in place in each state.[300] With this plan in mind, MCCL continued to insist that right-to-life leaders gather as soon as possible to finally organize a new national group.

Discussions continued through the summer and fall. Finally, in November 1972, Michael Taylor, the Executive Secretary of NRLC, sent a letter to the NRLC Board of Directors as well as other pro-life leaders calling for a meeting to discuss the national organization. These leaders would leave strategy, legislation, and education off the table to channel all their energy into developing a plan for forming a more effective national organization. And they would pool their years of experience in organizing in their states, towns, and churches to try to agree on a suitable set up for the new group. Taylor summed up the plan, "Undoubtedly in the last 11 months Right to Life Organizations have continued to grow in strength and experience, on both the state and the national levels. So as to best utilize this gathered experience at the upcoming meeting the agenda will be limited to only national organization."[301] He invited all interested pro-lifers to attend and asked them to consider what a national organization should look like, what resources it would need, and what the timeframe could and should be for forming such a group.

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[299] Paul H. Andreini, Marjory Mecklenburg, and Joseph A. Lampe, "A Tentative Plan for a National Pro-life Organization," July 8, 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Michael Taylor to Board of Directors, National Right to Life Committee, Pro-life Leaders, November 1, 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

The main plan for the meeting was to spend time discussing these issues as well as the two specific plans for a national organization—one submitted by MCCL and the other by Taylor himself. Taylor proposed a loose organizational structure that would allow more autonomy for grassroots groups and eschew the tight national organization and "representative association" of the MCCL plan.[302] Taylor's plan also highlighted two new concerns. First, the current NRLC was having trouble keeping up with the burgeoning right-to-life movement in the states. Because of this, Taylor thought a looser confederation of state groups would be more effective and successful. Second was the issue of "democratic participation." As Taylor put it, "There is the fear…that after a substantial amount of work on the local or state level the whole pro-life cause will 'go down the tube' on the national level. To help offset this possibility the local and state organizations want input/control vis-a-vis the national organization."[303] The central issue, then, was to promote national activism but not at the expense of the vital work being done at the state and local levels. At the December meeting, the state leaders and current NRLC leaders would have to decide how to make the NRLC as effective as possible while also balancing the concerns of state groups which were in the midst of aggressive campaigns against abortion reform in their respective states.

Before the NRLC and other right-to-life leaders met in Washington, D.C., to discuss these plans, there was already some disagreement on how best to proceed.[304] It was still unclear whether the national organization would be a reorganized NRLC or a brand new group. In a November 1972 letter following Taylor's call for the December

[302] Judy Fink, Meeting Notes, December 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[303] Michael Taylor to Board of Directors, National Right to Life Committee, Pro-Life Leaders, December 1, 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[304] Marjory Mecklenburg to Friends, November 21, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

meeting, Marjory Mecklenburg seemed to think the right-to-life movement might need a brand new organization with the NRLC continuing to serve as an advisor and information-gatherer.[305] Joseph Lampe of MCCL worried that Father McHugh and Michael Taylor were ignoring the months of discussions on the new organization, but he was determined to see the creation of a new national organization. "The November 1st letter gives the impression…that the status quo is to be maintained. Of course we all know that is not going to happen," Lampe insisted, "I look forward to working with you and other right to life activists in creating a bigger and better National Right to Life Committee."[306] Despite these tensions and questions lingering in the background, the state leaders and NRLC staff gathered in Washington, D.C., agreeing at the very least that they needed to take some steps toward a stronger national organization.

They met on December 9th and spent the entire day discussing both plans for national organizations and their potential problems. Paul Andreini presented MCCL's plan, arguing that they believed there had been "apparent consensus at the June, 1972 National Right to Life Convention in Philadelphia that a definite plan for broadening the base of pro-life activities was needed…to stimulate idea exchange as well as increase political effectiveness."[307] He believed the MCCL plan reflected that consensus. Taylor then presented the NRLC plan, which he argued allowed for more flexibility and growth of grassroots right-to-life organizations. Throughout this discussion, various leaders expressed a range of concerns with forming a new national organization. Jack Willke was concerned about the NRLC's connection to the Family Life Bureau. He worried about

[305] Marjory Mecklenburg to MCCL, November 21, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[306] Joseph A. Lampe to Michael Taylor and James McHugh, November 7, 1972, Box 11, Folder 12, ACCL Records.
[307] Judy Fink, Meeting Notes, December 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

"continued 'Catholic' labeling of Right to Life groups by opposition" should the national group keep the same name. Juan Ryan, then president of the NRLC, stressed that they should not stifle the grassroots momentum of the national movement and argued that any national organization needed to encourage continued grassroots activism.[308] After much discussion, the group moved to discuss finding a compromise between the two plans, recognizing the urgency of reaching a decision that day. They all agreed that the new NRLC needed to be doing more in politics, needed to hire more people, and needed to expand if it were to be successful, but beyond those things they could not agree on what form the organization should take.

After a full day of deliberation, including a lunch hour discussion where Michael Taylor, Paul Andreini, Marjory Mecklenburg, Judy Fink, Father McHugh, and a few others hammered out the final details of the compromise, the group finally reached a decision: "that the NRLC Board of Directors legally constitute itself as soon as possible, but no later than April, 1973."[309] They would solicit state groups to become members of the new NRLC and to contribute money to help get the organization off the ground. The movement would have an independent national organization in just a matter of months. Thus, when *Roe* surprised some others just a month later, it simply motivated the NRLC and its affiliates to expedite the process of fully incorporating the new NRLC, making it completely independent. The new NRLC was vital in coordinating activity at the grassroots level and in national politics, allowing the movement to continue its effective activism and to mobilize behind new national strategies.

[308] Judy Fink, Meeting Notes, December 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[309] Judy Fink, Meeting Notes, December 1972, Box 4, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

In addition to planning for the national organization, right-to-lifers also began considering bigger solutions to the abortion issue that could be pursued at the national level—in particular, they began to discuss the possibility of pursuing some sort of constitutional amendment that would state that life began at conception and make abortion illegal in all fifty states. This discussion of national strategy and the human life amendment was another sign that right-to-lifers were starting to think about what it might look like to push for their agenda not only in the states but in national politics as well. Though their main focus remained on local and state politics, many right-to-lifers in the early 1970s had begun paying attention to what was happening in federal policy and in the federal court system, especially as the courts considered various cases related to abortion.[310] There was a sense that while the local and state right-to-life activity was valuable, the movement needed to do more. It was in this context that the idea for a human life amendment started gaining traction in 1971 and 1972.

Some right-to-lifers were initially wary and saw no pressing need for a human life amendment. They believed that the political strategy in the states was more effective and sufficient for achieving the movement's goals and that shifting direction to pursue a constitutional amendment would be too difficult and a waste of time and resources. The Westchester Right-to-life newsletter in June 1972 described the growing push for a human life amendment, noting that "some Right to Life Groups have advocated a constitutional amendment to safeguard the rights of the unborn." But that same newsletter

[310] Westchester Right-to-Life Committee, "Public Opinion and the Federal Courts," June 1972, Box 3, Folder 8, ACCL Records; Pennsylvanians for Human Life, Newsletter, April 1972, Box 3, Folder 8, ACCL Records; NRLC, National Meeting: Right to Life Movement, August 1970, Box 4, Folder 7, ACCL Records; Martin F. McKernan, Jr., Legal Report, July 1970, Box 4, Folder 7, ACCL Records; MCCL, Newsletter, May 1971, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Katherine Wood Taylor Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers); NRLC, Newsletter, March 1971, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1971, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USCCB Records).

pointed out that "achievement of a constitutional amendment is a long, drawn out process," indicating their hesitance about pursuing such an amendment at that time.[311] And when Robert Gallagher of New York proposed the idea of a human life amendment to the NRLC and the NCCB that summer, both the NRLC and NCCB rejected it.[312] The Legal Advisory Board at the NRLC convention even voted against the proposal 28-2. McHugh justified the reaction against Gallagher's proposal with a similar hesitance as the Westchester right-to-lifers: "Our position then is that legally the amendment is not a present necessity, and politically it is an unwise course to embark on at this time."[313] At this point, the movement's leaders did not see a human life amendment as a feasible or prudent course of action, especially given the success they were having in the states. Thus, they made the strategic decision that the movement's resources would reap more benefits if spent in other areas of state politics.

Despite this initial hesitance about using the amendment as a national strategy, right-to-lifers quickly supported a human life amendment in the wake of *Roe v. Wade.* In fact, it became the central strategy at the national level for years to come. In this way, the discussions about the amendment in 1971 and 1972 were vital. Pursuing a human life amendment was in the movement's arsenal of strategies prior to *Roe v. Wade* and shows that, in the early 1970s, right-to-lifers were already considering a pivot to a national strategy to combat legalized abortion. Given that they had already planned for such a contingency and were discussing the amendment both among the bishops and state leaders and in the movement more broadly, right-to-lifers immediately mobilized to

[311] Westchester Right-to-Life Committee, Newsletter, June 1972, Box 3, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[312] James T. McHugh to Archbishop Luigi Raimondi, June 23, 1972, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1972, USCCB Records.
[313] James T. McHugh to Archbishop Luigi Raimondi, June 23, 1972, Box 79, Folder Abortion 1972, USCCB Records.

support a human life amendment after *Roe*. In fact, the human life amendment garnered support at all levels of the movement, from grassroots activists to the Catholic bishops to Congressmen.

The early 1970s were pivotal years for the movement. Even as right-to-lifers worked fervently at the state level to oppose new abortion reform and promote their own agenda in their home states, they were already considering the ways they might engage in national politics and promote a pro-life agenda nationwide. And there was already a sense among some right-to-lifers that judicial decisions could, and probably would, go against them in the coming years. In order to plan for such a contingency, right-to-lifers worked to build an effective and independent national organization and to develop new strategies that they could use in national politics. For MCCL and its members, who were working on extensive plans for a national organization and were one of the most formidable state right-to-life groups, their planning for various contingencies was so impressive that their opponents took note. It was why Dr. Koshnick felt the need to warn NARAL about MCCL's actions.[314] Abortion rights supporters hoped a Supreme Court decision in favor of legal abortion would put the issue to rest, but right-to-lifers in the states were not so willing to let the issue go and were already planning to continue the fight in all three branches of the federal government if need be. By the end of 1972, the right-to-life movement was ready to take its activism to the national stage. It put right-to-lifers in the perfect position to respond to the Supreme Court's decision at the start of 1973, to continue their mobilization efforts in the states, and to pivot their aggressive strategy toward national politics in an attempt to enact their agenda in all fifty states.

[314] Robert A. Koshnick to Lawrence Lader, December 1, 1972, Carton 3, Folder MN 1972, NARAL Records.

3.2 Black Monday: *Roe v. Wade* and its Immediate Aftermath

January 22, 1973, would live on in the right-to-life imagination as "Black Monday." For most right-to-lifers, the scope of the decision was a shock—some even called it a "bolt from the blue."[315] Many had anticipated that it was a possibility but few had imagined a decision that would immediately make abortion legal in all fifty states. Yet, the movement only entered crisis mode briefly before returning to the political strategy and legislative agenda that they had developed in the early 1970s. The right-to-lifers in the states, who already had several years of experience in politics, immediately got back to work. As before, grassroots politics was the mainstay of the movement in the weeks and months after *Roe*. The momentum right-to-lifers had built in the early 1970s propelled state groups to continue their political activism and education campaigns. These groups kept the abortion issue in the public spotlight, educated people about the issue and about their activism, and encouraged their members to become even more involved in state and national politics. State leaders also agitated for decisive action to fully incorporate the NRLC in the weeks after *Roe*. Rather than settling the abortion debate once and for all, as abortion rights supporters hoped, *Roe v. Wade* encouraged right-to-lifers in the states to take the strategies and networks they had developed in the 1960s and 1970s and turn their attention to national politics.

State groups took the lead in urging people to take action and respond to the Supreme Court decision. As they had done in the early 1970s, these groups continued their push to make right-to-lifers politically active. Less than two months after *Roe,* MCCL held a public meeting on March 12, 1973, to discuss what MCCL could do to counter legalized abortion. Fred and Marjory Mecklenburg offered critiques of the court's

[315] Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 137.

decision as well as plans of action, including outreach and education, encouraging the development of more family planning and sex education programs, as well as working toward a constitutional amendment.[316] Marjory Mecklenburg offered a number of concrete steps Minnesotans could take, including speaking to professional groups or even friends and family, writing their members of Congress, protesting at hospitals, and supporting the new national organization. According to one observer, she ended on a determined note: "I cannot promise you that we will win, but I think we will."[317] Later that year, Celebrate Life and Women for the Unborn, two local New York groups, released a Practical Politics Kit, hoping to help right-to-lifers across the country respond to *Roe.* They implored activists to become even more involved in politics than they already were: "The necessity of political activity has become painfully evident since the Supreme Court decision of January 22, 1973."[318] For both these groups, the answer to *Roe* was relying on strategies they had tried in the last few years, encouraging people to be politically engaged but with more urgent attention to what could be accomplished in national politics.

Other local groups worked to keep abortion on the agenda and in the public spotlight, continuing the flurry of local activity that had characterized the movement in the early 1970s but now with a renewed determination. Students at Wadhams Hall Seminary-College in upstate New York erected a large billboard on their campus along a local highway, reading "Help save life, protect the unborn."[319] In an article covering the

[316] Larry Lee, "Following is an Edited Report on an MCCL Meeting Attended by Larry Lee," March 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[317] Larry Lee, "Following is an Edited Report on an MCCL Meeting Attended by Larry Lee," March 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[318] Celebrate Life, "Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[319] "Anti-abortion Sign Erected at Wadhams Hall," *Ogdensburg Journal* (Ogdensburg, NY), March 1, 1973, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

new sign the students acknowledged that this action was directly related to *Roe v. Wade* and that they had "greatly increased their efforts toward promoting the right to life of all human beings since the Court's decision."[320] Students at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, defended their right to organize and protested after their signs were torn down in the fall of 1973. One of the group's members wrote to the school newspaper defending their fight against abortion: "These students who oppose abortion and are willing to join together and fight have what it takes in today's world—guts to stand up for the rights of the forgotten, shoved aside, unspoken for and defenseless on in our society: the unborn."[321] In Minnesota, MCCL continued its work with little interruption. At their March 1973 annual meeting, MCCL members reelected Marjory Mecklenburg as president, along with three other women, keeping their leadership the same as it had been for 1972 and indicating a desire to stick with a tried and tested trajectory.[322] Meanwhile, California right-to-lifers made plans to make major inroads in state politics and spent over $60,000 on pro-life educational material such as films, booklets, and posters to distribute across the state.[323]

Many groups were buoyed by jumps in membership following *Roe v. Wade*. Joseph Lampe of MCCL noted that the group's membership had increased to fifteen thousand after *Roe*, an almost 50 percent increase.[324] MCCL was also able to finally pay off its debts in March 1973 thanks to a wave of donations.[325] The group's leaders also

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[320] Ibid.
[321] Carole Allwien, Letter to the Editor, *The Griffin* (Canisius College, Buffalo, NY), November 5, 1973, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.
[322] MCCL, Newsletter, March-April 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[323] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro-life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[324] Randy Furst, "Abortion foes, friends work on—as does Clinic," *The Minneapolis Star*, July 23, 1973, Box 3, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[325] MCCL, Newsletter, March-April 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.

noted higher attendance at their public events, such as when a huge crowd—over six hundred people—showed up to the Mecklenburgs' presentation in March 1973.[326] SOUL, too, was optimistic about activism after *Roe* and looked to "establish as large a membership as possible and to develop new leaders at all levels."[327] Following *Roe,* the group was able to hire Doug Dahl to work full-time as the SOUL coordinator, traveling across the region to recruit college and high school students for pro-life activism. Near the end of 1973 he reported that there was "a tremendous upsurge of interest" among young people, and SOUL continued to expand and start new chapters throughout the state.[328] In California, right-to-lifers welcomed nearly seven hundred people to their state convention in 1973.[329] And a record number of activists turned out for the NRLC convention in June 1973—nearly fifteen hundred pro-lifers from across the country.[330]

Even as local groups worked to sustain the grassroots momentum of the movement and keep the abortion issue in the public spotlight, questions lingered about the status of the national right-to-life organization. The Catholic Church and the NRLC reacted quickly and decisively to shift their pro-life work to the national scene and expedite plans for the NRLC's official separation from the Catholic Church, but activity soon stalled. *Roe v. Wade* had sparked much discussion among the Catholic bishops almost immediately with responses targeted toward lay Catholics and the general American public. Several bishops and cardinals released official statements denouncing the decision as one of the gravest mistakes ever made by the court. John Cardinal Krol

[326] Larry Lee, "Following is an Edited Report on an MCCL Meeting Attended by Larry Lee," March 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[327] SOUL, Newsletter, October 25, 1973, Folder 2, Save Our Unwanted Life, Inc. Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as SOUL Records).
[328] SOUL, Newsletter, November 29, 1973, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[329] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro Life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[330] NRLC, Untitled Press Release, June 11, 1973, Box 6, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

remarked, "It is hard to think of any decision in the 200 years of our history which has had more disastrous implications for our stability as a civilized society."[331] The bishops also reminded lay Catholics that they were obligated to obey church law over secular law. The NCCB Committee for Pro-life Affairs warned the nation, "Although as a result of the Court decision abortion may be legally permissible, it is still morally wrong, and no Court opinion can change the law of God prohibiting the taking of innocent human life."[332] By January 25, the bishops were already discussing their plans of action for responding to *Roe v. Wade*.[333] One of the first things on their agenda was making the NRLC officially independent of the Catholic Church. But though McHugh and the NCCB were supportive of the decision to make the NRLC independent of the Family Life Bureau, they now expressed some hesitance about rushing into it too quickly before adequate plans were in place.[334]

While Catholic Church officials expressed support for the NRLC's move to full independence, it was state right-to-life leaders that actually executed the plan when it seemed McHugh and church officials might try to stall the process. On February 11 and again a month later in March, a group of leaders gathered in Chicago to discuss strategy and the response to *Roe*. The meeting agenda included four main items: Supreme Court,

[331] Cardinal Krol, "Telegram sent to all Bishops," January 22, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973, USCCB Records.
[332] "Bishops' Committee Urges Total Rejection of Supreme Court Judgment on Abortion," Press Release, January 24, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973, USCCB Records.
[333] Russell Shaw to Father Rausch, "Anti-abortion activities following Supreme Court ruling," January 25, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities, USCCB Records.
[334] James T. McHugh to Cardinal Cody, "Additional Items for Your Information," February 12, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973 USCCB Records.

State Legislative Efforts, a Constitutional Amendment, and national organization.[335] Several prominent state leaders attended the meeting, including Marjory Mecklenburg, as well as fellow MCCL members Alice Hartle, Joseph Lampe, Fred Mecklenburg, and Paul Andreini. Ed Golden, president of New York State Right to Life, Diane Arrigan of Women for the Unborn, and Rose Polito, president of the Right to Life League of Southern California, were also at the meetings. After discussing the national organization, the leaders decided to "expedite" the incorporation of the NRLC, which had stalled in recent weeks, and planned to ask state groups to help with the initial funding of the new group.[336] McHugh was not happy with this decision and expressed concern that the state leaders were rushing it too quickly. A day after the February 11 meeting, he informed Cardinal Cody, "Some of the people in Minnesota, Chicago and Western Pennsylvania have decided to hurry things a bit."[337] McHugh also worried that these right-to-lifers were too focused on a human life amendment. He suggested that the bishops should be careful in their dealings with the new organization and should try to diversify their pro-life activity rather than only supporting the NRLC.[338] But the state leaders were determined to make the NRLC independent and make it effective in national politics, regardless of what McHugh and the NCCB thought. With the push from these right-to-lifers in the weeks immediately following *Roe*, the NRLC would soon be fully incorporated with a new Board of Directors and a new office in Washington, D.C.

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[335] Agenda, Ad Hoc National Right to Life Strategy Meeting, February 11, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records; NRLC, Minutes, National Right to Life Committee Board of Directors Meeting, March 11, 1973, Box 5, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[336] Minutes, Ad Hoc National Right to Life Strategy Meeting, February 11, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[337] James T. McHugh to Cardinal Cody, "Additional Items for Your Information," February 12, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973, USCCB Records.
[338] Ibid.

The ongoing grassroots activity, the increase in membership, and the steps taken toward a national organization led many right-to-lifers to an unwavering and optimistic stance in the immediate aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*. Six months after the court's decision Randy Furst of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* interviewed Joseph Lampe of MCCL. Furst observed their determination firsthand, commenting "Lampe is optimistic, though he says the law won't be changed overnight."[339] Similarly, at their 1973 state convention, California pro-lifers discussed how the NRLC was "optimistic about getting a constitutional amendment within a couple of years" and planned what Californians could do in their state to help make that happen.[340] And by the end of 1973, some abortion rights supporters felt that legalized abortion was already "severely threatened" by the right-to-life campaign.[341] Thanks to the groundwork from their early 1970s activism, right-to-lifers, both the leaders of the movement and activists on the ground, were able to quickly take action to oppose abortion both in their local communities and increasingly at the national level, sustaining their grassroots activism, even increasing its intensity, and turning their attention to national politics.

3.3 Forming a National Movement

With the ongoing grassroots support for the movement assured, the leaders of state groups needed to figure out how to combat abortion in national politics, particularly

[339] Randy Furst, "Abortion foes, friends work on—as does Clinic," *The Minneapolis Star*, July 23, 1973, Box 3, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[340] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro Life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[341] Graci Mastalli, "Right to abortion threatened in legislatures," *The Griffin* (Canisius College, Buffalo, NY), December 7, 1973, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; April Renee Heiler to Lawrence Lader, May 20, 1973, Carton 4, Folder January-September 1973, NARAL Records; Roxanne Olivo to Emily Moore, October 1, 1973, Carton 4 Folder October-December 1973, NARAL Records; Jean L. King, "The Abortion Decision Endangered," *Michigan State News,* April 1973, Box 2, Folder 27, NARAL Records; Richard Schwartz to NARAL Members, "The need for an effective program to stop the Constitutional Amendment from being approved by Congress," October 1973, NARAL Records.

in Congress and in electoral politics. These leaders also had to connect that national strategy to the grassroots activism in their towns and states and get right-to-lifers excited about what the movement might accomplish in national politics. They undertook this project through 1973 and into the first part of 1974. The first, and most urgent, issue to address was the lack of any powerful, unified national organization that could unite right-to-life efforts across the country. Though the movement's leaders had agreed to make the NRLC independent at the end of 1972, they had not yet executed their plan. Judy Fink, a leader from Pennsylvania, recognized the challenge they faced here: "Wide divergences in political views characterize our 'constituency'; theological interpretations show some variances, and methodology in implementing prolife action programs varies widely not only from state to state but from group to group."[342] Building a national coalition of such divergent people and groups would not be easy, though the majority of right-to-lifers felt it was an absolute necessity.[343] Then there was the question of strategy once the national organization was in place. Ultimately, passing a human life amendment became the movement's prime focus at the national level and took on particular urgency as right-to-lifers saw it as the only way to fully reverse the Supreme Court's decisions.

In the months following *Roe,* many state leaders as well as Father McHugh and other Catholic Church officials focused much of their attention on organizing the new NRLC. As discussed earlier, following *Roe v. Wade,* McHugh cautioned right-to-lifers about rushing too quickly to make the NRLC independent. Nevertheless, a core group of

[342] Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc. "Activation of Intergroup Liaison Committee," September 7, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[343] There were a few small national organizations that had proved ineffective or uninterested in national politics—Americans United for Life and the NRLC were probably the most prominent. AUL focused more on legal matters and education, and the NRLC still served mostly has an advisor for state groups and as a repository for information on various right-to-life activities around the country. Neither had been particularly effective in national politics.

leaders insisted that the new NRLC must be organized as soon as possible.[344] One thing both sides agreed on was that the new organization must not quash grassroots organizing in the states. Judy Fink detailed their struggles in getting a national movement off the ground,

> One central thrust has been to direct the thinking of the Executive Committee members toward a constant awareness of the prolife organizations springing up like mushrooms in every state in the nation. All of us have been heavily involved with our own state's organizations, and have had to shift to 'thinking national' almost overnight.[345]

Other right-to-life leaders worried about the logistics of running the NRLC. Rose Polito, president of the Right to Life League of Southern California, worried that funding might not be sufficient for the new group, and she was also concerned about maintaining the NLRC's relationship with the NCCB. Like McHugh, she worried about rushing along too quickly. "Without clarification of these problems," she informed another state leader, "I feel the venture is doomed to failure at the outset."[346]

At the National Right to Life Convention in Detroit in the summer of 1973, the first major gathering of pro-life activists from across the country since *Roe v. Wade*, this new organization finally came together. As in years previous, state leaders gathered to discuss the state of the movement as well as new strategies. Most importantly, the activists finalized details of the new NRLC and elected a new Executive Committee and Executive Director so they could start setting up the NRLC's new national office in

[344] James McHugh to Cardinal Cody, "Additional Items for Your Information, February 12, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973, USCCB Records; Rose Polito to Edwin C. Becker, March 1, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[345] Judy Fink to Pennsylvania Right to Life Leaders, "Participation in NRLC; initial director's report," September 12, 1973, Box 5, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[346] Rose Polito to Edwin C. Becker, March 1, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.

Washington, D.C., and decide on strategies to implement.[347] The decision was a quick and easy one to make, with little fanfare—unsurprising given that these right-to-lifers had been discussing the new organization for nearly a year and planning to make the split from the Family Life Bureau official for over six months. When asked about the new NRLC by a reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune,* Joseph Lampe simply commented, "The panic is over now and we are at work again."[348] Here, too, state leaders took the lead, and the new group got to work quickly, joining in the frenzy of activity already taking place at the state and local levels. Ed Golden, leader of New York State Right to Life, was elected president of the new organization, and Marjory Mecklenburg was chosen to be the chairman of its Board of Directors. The NRLC also organized a number of committees, perhaps none more important than the Intergroup Liaison Committee, whose job was to reach out to other groups and organizations that might be interested in joining the movement.[349] The new NRLC's first newsletter in November 1973 brimmed with news of right-to-life activism across the country, from human life amendments introduced in Congress to a pro-life rally attended by thirty thousand people in St. Louis to the next NYPLC conference.[350]

With the NRLC now in place, the other important item on the right-to-life agenda was what national strategy to pursue. A human life amendment soon became the movement's prime focus—both in the NRLC and at the grassroots level. The idea for a human life amendment had been one of the contingencies right-to-lifers considered in

[347] "NRLC, Inc. puts it all together," *National Right to Life News*, November 1973, Box 10, Folder 17, Williams Papers.
[348] Clifford D. Simak, "'Panic' over, national pro-life movement reorganizing," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 13, 1973, Box 10, Folder 17, Williams Papers.
[349] Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc. "Activation of Intergroup Liaison Committee," September 7, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[350] *National Right to Life News*, November 1973, Box 10, Folder 17, Williams Papers.

1971 and 1972, and now they urgently worked to get one passed in Congress. And though they could have left this strategy to the politicians, lobbyists, or the new NRLC, right-to-life leaders instead focused on connecting grassroots activism to supporting the amendment. Through 1973 and into 1974, state groups, the NRLC, and the Catholic Church channeled the majority of their time and energy into passing some sort of human life amendment and convincing people on the ground that this was the best strategy to pursue.[351]

On the ground, the process of building grassroots support for a constitutional amendment banning abortion closely resembled the aggressive strategies that had been part of the right-to-life agenda for the last few years. State groups reoriented these strategies toward national politics and the human life amendment. For example, California right-to-lifers continued tracking the stances of their state representatives on the abortion issue and also mounted a massive educational and letter writing campaign in support of a human life amendment, which closely resembled the ways right-to-lifers first got Californians involved in activism in the late 1960s.[352] In Minnesota, this meant continuing the emphasis on electoral politics and working in both state parties in hopes of influencing state as well as national party politics. MCCL placed such enormous weight on participation in state politics that at the start of 1974 its newsletter told MCCL members that attending a precinct caucus was "the most important thing you can do for

[351] Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc. "Activation of Intergroup Liaison Committee," September 7, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[352] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro Life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records; Gilbert Durand to Bishop James S. Rausch, April 9, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities April-June 1973, USCCB Records; Mary Bush, Pro-life Political Action Committee, to Timothy Cardinal Manning, July 21, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities July-August 1973, USCCB Records.

the pro-life cause during 1974."[353] The group's ultimate goal and the path to achieving it were clear. As one New York group put it: "To pass a Human Life Amendment by creating enough 'people pressure' regarding the Life issue that the individual legislator will feel compelled to vote Pro-Life."[354]

Thus, the reorientation toward the national political process was not an abstract strategy, disconnected from activity in states and local communities. Rather, it was firmly rooted in grassroots action. Across the country, local and state groups remained the centers for right-to-life politics, and now they were the center of activity for the push for a human life amendment. Local groups took this role seriously, providing effective and smart leadership for local activists. Celebrate Life and Women for the Unborn encouraged them to prepare for the fight in national politics and reminded right-to-lifers of their role in returning "America to the land where all God-given human life is respected and protected equally."[355] Their Practical Politics Kit made the connection plain for right-to-lifers in New York and across the country. The group laid out a number of ways people could get involved in politics, including writing letters to their members of Congress, visiting Congressional offices, bringing educational material to their legislators and staff, and putting pressure on potential presidential candidates eyeing a run in 1976. A human life amendment was the ultimate target of these activities. The group provided clear explanations of how bills went through Congress and detailed instructions on how to initiate a letter-writing campaign specifically to lobby legislators

[353] "Do You Want a Human Life Amendment? Attend Your Precinct Caucus on Feb. 26," MCCL Newsletter, February 1974, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[354] Celebrate Life Committee, " Practical Politics Kit," November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[355] Ibid.

for a human life amendment.[356] Here, again, they reoriented a strategy they had developed in the 1960s and early 1970s and now targeted it toward national politics. In addition to literature dealing explicitly with political strategies, updates also regularly appeared in these groups' newsletters, making sure local right-to-lifers knew what was going on in Congress and in other states as they tried to work for a Constitutional amendment.[357]

Right-to-lifers in California and Minnesota also used grassroots political activism to support the fight for a human life amendment. For example, when MCCL encouraged its members to take part in precinct caucuses in February 1974, the group connected participation in local caucuses to working toward a human life amendment. As MCCL noted, "…if we are to make any progress toward the passage of an amendment to protect all human life, we must work through the political process. That process begins with the caucus—and success at the caucus begins with you."[358] As California groups geared up to work for a constitutional amendment that the NRLC supported, they emphasized the need for state groups to work together and looked to other states for inspiration: "A unified effort for the constitutional amendment is vital. We hope to use ideas from other states, adapted to California's situation."[359] Existing state groups worked to get their members on the ground excited about and engaged in the fight for a human life amendment.

Likewise, young people in the movement also pivoted their activism to support the human life amendment. At the NYPLC youth convention in 1973, young pro-lifers

[356] Celebrate Life Committee, Action Supplement to Practical Politics Kit, November 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[357] MCCL, Newsletter, March-April 1973, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[358] Ibid.
[359] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro Life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.

attended a seminar on the human life amendment led by their lobbyist, Tom Mooney, as well as Dennis Horan, a law professor who was also advising the Catholic Church and the NRLC on the human life amendment. Young pro-lifers were encouraged to stay active and vigilant in politics, and Mooney "detailed the kind of grassroots organization necessary to put a pro-life amendment into effect."[360] In early 1974, SOUL became involved in the political process as well and encouraged their young members to attend their precinct caucuses.[361] Tad Jude, a SOUL member who was also a representative in the state house, reiterated the importance of electoral politics to SOUL members. He wrote, "I feel it is the responsibility of citizens who are interested in their community and the conditions with which they live to become active in the political party he most identifies with. This is the place where we can grab a hold of our public officials and communicate to them the public interest."[362]

The grassroots approach reaped benefits for the movement, and the human life amendment strategy resonated with people on the ground. One man from California, Gilbert Durand, started a campaign to get "20/25 million Americans affirming their love of life."[363] He proposed sending an "action package" to nearly thirty thousand Catholic groups in order to foster a "unified, nation-wide, efficient and economical program to effect Constitutional reform."[364] A local Minnesota pro-lifer created his own list of easy political activities that citizens could take part in—the very first suggested action on his list was contacting elected officials to let them know about grassroots support for a

[360] SOUL, Newsletter, November 29, 1973, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[361] SOUL, Newsletter, January 3, 1974, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[362] SOUL, Newsletter, February 1974, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[363] Gilbert Durand to James Rausch, April 9, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities April-June 1973, USCCB Records.
[364] Ibid.

human life amendment. He plainly laid out the high stakes in the abortion fight and the individual responsibility of right-to-lifers, as he understood them: "If I do nothing, I deserve the harsh condemnation history now accords the Germans for not opposing Hitler's barbaric treatment of Jewish people."[365] Minnesotans also responded to MCCL and SOUL. In May 1973, about 250 people showed up in the small town of Marshall to hear several speakers at a pro-life rally organized by the local chapter of MCCL. Their Congressional representative, John Zwach, emphasized his strong support for a human life amendment, saying such a measure was "the most important thing before the country."[366] MCCL and SOUL members also turned out in large numbers for the February 1974 caucuses. Following the caucuses, MCCL celebrated its success: "Pro-lifers turned out in record numbers for the February 26 caucus across the state…Before the caucuses, the MCCL office and the DFL and GOP Pro-life Committees were deluged with requests for information and offers to help further the pro-life cause."[367] Clearly, state groups succeeded in getting people excited about the human life amendment and engaged in the political process, and the amendment remained a popular topic of conversation at various pro-life gatherings throughout 1973 and 1974.[368]

Despite the grassroots energy surrounding the passage of a human life amendment, the task itself was not an easy one and in the years to come, it would prove

[365] Hal Sweet, "I don't like the Anti-life decision of the Supreme Court, rendered on January 22, 1973, But what can I do about it?" January 28, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[366] Steven London, "U.S. Rep. Zwach predicts passage of a new anti-abortion amendment," May 7, 1973, Reel 3, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Newspaper Clippings Microfilm Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN. (hereafter cited as MCCL Newspaper Clippings).
[367] MCCL, Newsletter, March 1974, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers.
[368] California Pro-life Council, "Minutes of Business Session, Pro Life Convention, Fresno, September 30, 1973," September 30, 1973, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records; NRLC, "Resolution #8," July 10, 1973, Box 4, Folder 13, ACCL Records; Nellie Gray to Board of Directors, NRLC, "A Human Life Amendment," December 8, 1973, Box 5, Folder 12, ACCL Records; NRLC, Untitled Press Release, Spring 1973, Box 6, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

divisive as right-to-life leaders such as Marjory Mecklenburg questioned the effectiveness of focusing so single-mindedly on an amendment, while other right-to-lifers became increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of change. Many amendments were proposed in 1973 and 1974 but few gained much traction in Congress, despite some "very nice 'pro-life' people" who were picketing Congressional members' offices everyday.[369] And even in 1973 and 1974, right-to-lifers could not agree on what type of amendment to support. Some supported a human life amendment that would make abortion totally illegal. Others supported an amendment that would allow a few exceptions for legal abortion. Still others believed the best option was some sort of states' rights amendment that would allow each state to decide the abortion question on its own. For example, in early February 1973, after Ed Golden asked Robert Bryn to analyze both these options for him, Bryn concluded, "a mandatory amendment, which repudiates the jurisprudence of *Wade* in its entirety, is, it seems to me, the only safe and acceptable answer to *Wade*."[370] While shortly after *Roe*, Russell Shaw, who had worked with the bishops and the NRLC for several years, warned, "There is no evidence of such a consensus on abortion…it seems more likely that the majority view is more or less pro-abortion…This suggests that a major effort on the part of the Church to secure such an amendment would result in failure."[371] His recommendation was that they pursue legislative efforts in the states in order to mitigate the damage done by *Roe v. Wade.* However, despite disagreements on the human life amendment, right-to-lifers kept it as

[369] Rick Casey, "Congress faces abortion battle," August 3, 1973, *National Catholic Reporter*, Box 3, Folders 10-11, ACCL Records.
[370] Robert Byrn to Ed Golden, February 16, 1973, Box 4, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[371] Russell Shaw to Father Rausch, "Anti-abortion activities following Supreme Court ruling," January 25, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-February 1973, USCCB Records.

their prime national focus for the next several years and successfully used it to generate and sustain grassroots support.

In the year following *Roe v. Wade,* the right-to-life movement quickly pivoted their focus to national politics and a national strategy largely thanks to the legwork done in the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*. And just as it had been in the early 1970s, grassroots action was the mainstay of the movement as right-to-lifers made this transition. As state leaders worked to form a new national organization, state groups continued much of the work they had already been doing in the early 1970s. They were also the ones who worked to mobilize grassroots support for a human life amendment. It was this grassroots support that would sustain the right-to-life movement as the new NRLC encountered some of the biggest obstacles it had yet faced, struggling to unite the broad coalition of right-to-life groups into a unified national crusade.

3.4 The NRLC in Disarray

Almost as soon as the NRLC became independent, it encountered two big problems that threatened to derail the movement. First, Protestants and Catholics in leadership positions in the NRLC faced off against one another. For much of 1973 and 1974, intense arguments over the nature of the movement embroiled some of its core leaders, particularly as the right-to-lifers tried to figure out the place of religion in the movement and how to develop the "broad-based" coalition that the leadership all claimed they wanted. In a movement that still had a Catholic majority, Protestant leaders worried that the Catholic Church hierarchy's large share of influence in right-to-life politics might overshadow and overpower non-Catholic voices and opinions. They also argued that if the public face of the movement were overtly Catholic, it would play into stereotypes that

the movement was only for Catholics and might alienate potential non-Catholic allies. As the Protestant leaders expressed these concerns, lay Catholics as well as Church officials defended their role in right-to-life politics and sometimes accused the Protestant leaders of anti-Catholic bias. Second, the NRLC implemented plans to reach out to various religious groups to build a broad-based movement, but failed in its attempts to recruit one of its main targets, evangelical Christians. Both these examples highlight the fact that, rather than a monolithically conservative movement in the wake of *Roe*, the right-to-life movement in the mid-1970s was rife with tension and disagreements, made up of a diverse group of people with differing opinions about the nature of the movement and struggling to recruit new allies.[372]

At the center of all of this tension was the goal of a "broad-based" movement, which most right-to-life leaders wholeheartedly supported. Such rhetoric had been common within the movement throughout the early 1970s. It usually applied to religious affiliation and the right-to-lifers' belief that people from America's big three religions—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—could unite around opposing abortion. From the early 1970s, many right-to-lifers in a number of different organizations had reiterated visions for a broad-based movement. In 1972, Dr. Joseph Stanton told members of Americans United for Life that he had "pleaded for a broad-based committee organized regardless of race, creed or color, that would seek out the broad area of general agreement among men

[372] Neil Young deals with this episode extensively in his recent book, *We Gather Together.* He frames the fight in the NRLC as a failure to achieve conservative ecumenism. I think the situation is more complicated than that characterization since building any sort of conservative ecumenism was not on the right-to-life agenda at this point. In the year or two following *Roe,* the battle was largely between liberal Protestants in the movement and their Catholic counterparts (both liberal and conservative). Neil Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 118-137.

of good will in opposing the attack on life."[373] He professed his confidence that such an organization was the only way to achieve success and overcome in-fighting. In December 1971, Michael Taylor, Executive Secretary of the NRLC, wrote about a broad-based coalition as if there were consensus about it amongst most right-to-lifers. He noted, "Despite a successful 1971, it is apparent that the challenges of the pro-life cause will continue for many years. Everyone agrees that we should continue to broaden the base of the Right to Life movement."[374] Here too was the belief that building a broad-based movement was the only way forward. This approach was not just a matter of reaching more people but also of developing the strongest and most effective strategy. In early 1974, Marjory Mecklenburg stated this position decisively: "The strongest possible kind of organization is one composed of concerned citizens rather than separate organizations of concerned Catholics or concerned Baptists…Acting from a broad base an organization multiplies its appeal and its possibility to be an effective voice."[375]

As it worked toward a more broad-based movement in 1973, the NRLC tried to make plans to mitigate any potential areas of conflict between the religious groups and denominations the group hoped might join the cause. After reconstituting the NRLC, its new leaders formed the Intergroup Liaison Committee to deal with reaching out to other organizations and religious groups and promoting the creation of a broad-based coalition. One of the committee's tasks was to "under take an analysis of potential ideological conflicts within the larger prolife movement, and attempt to head off clashes that could

[373] Joseph R. Stanton, M.D. Memo to AUL Board, January 28, 1972, Box 6, Folder 4, Williams Papers.
[374] Michael Taylor to Right to Life Committees, Friends, "Report on the Meeting of the Board of Directors, National Right to Life Committee, December 11, 1971," December 17, 1971, Box 10, Folder 16, Williams Papers.
[375] Marjory Mecklenburg, "Don't Misinterpret," *The Catholic Bulletin,* 1974, Box 35, Folder 4, ACCL Records.

be destructive by identifying them in advance if possible."[376] Its other role was reaching out to various denominations and religious groups. The NRLC planned to bolster the movement's ever-increasing religious diversity, broadening its base of support and bringing new religious groups into the movement to boost its numbers.

Yet in organizing the Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC's leadership failed to consider the problems brewing within their own ranks. The tension among the new leadership team became apparent following *Roe v. Wade* and reached its zenith in the second half of 1973. Issues of leadership, organizational style, fundraising, varying stances on birth control, and other issues plagued the movement into 1974. The leadership of the Catholic hierarchy was another big issue. Though the NRLC was now officially independent from the Catholic Church, some of the Protestant leaders worried the Catholic Church might try to undermine their new organization. As early as June 1973, Edward Hannify received reports from the 1973 NRLC convention and observed, "Unfortunately, the right-to-life movement is now split and divided probably beyond remedy."[377] Though he blamed the issue of birth control for the division, these problems ultimately boiled down to a fierce disagreement between Catholic and Protestant leaders—both of whom felt their position and influence in the movement were being threatened.

Shortly after the NRLC was incorporated, disagreements emerged in the executive committee. Initially it was over leadership and funding, but it quickly devolved into a disagreement between Catholics and Protestants. Warren Schaller, an Episcopalian

[376] Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc. "Activation of Intergroup Liaison Committee," September 7, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[377] Edward B. Hanify to Charles J. Tobin, June 22, 1973, Box 62, Folder NCCB: Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities July-August 1973, USCCB Records.

minister from Minnesota, had been chosen to be the executive director of the NRLC, in charge of running the new office in Washington, D.C. According to Mecklenburg, despite hiring Schaller, McHugh continued to work against him, seeking instead to propose a new candidate of his own choosing for executive director.[378] She also worried that McHugh was dividing the executive committee into factions—those who supported him and those who did not. Mecklenburg noted that this carried over into the treatment Schaller was receiving in Washington, D.C. "Warren has been in D.C. two weeks; was hired some time ago—still has no signed contract—and has been treated like a leper by Ed [Golden] and Mike [Taylor]," she informed a friend in September 1973.[379] She also sent along a list of handwritten questions, the first of which was "Can the Catholic Church as an institution work with an ecumenical, independent organization without controlling it, or seeking to control it?"[380] Mecklenburg feared the issue with Schaller was not that he was unqualified for the position but that he was a Protestant, and Catholics like McHugh, Golden, and Taylor would not cede control of the NRLC to him.

This quickly became a dominant theme among the most influential Protestants in the NRLC. The Protestant leadership, including Marjory Mecklenburg, a Methodist, Judy Fink, a Baptist, and Warren Schaller, an Episcopalian, wanted to know if Protestants would only be non-Catholic fronts in the movement or if they would be given real leadership roles in the NRLC. As the reconstituted NRLC took shape, Judy Fink complained that the group's newly formed Policy Committee only consisted of Catholic males—"Since the prolife movement must be broad-based and pluralistic if it is to grow and remain healthy, I feel that it is a serious mistake for a Committee of this importance

[378] Marjory Mecklenburg to Martin Ryan Haley, September 3, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[379] Marjory Mecklenburg to Martin Ryan Haley, September 3, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[380] Marjory Mecklenburg to Martin Ryan Haley, September 3, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.

to not seat any individuals except male Roman Catholics."[381] She warned her Catholic colleagues that changes would have to take place. Marjory Mecklenburg believed the problems went beyond the make up of the committees and feared that the Catholic hierarchy wanted to retain a large level of influence in the movement. She said that she felt "the institutional Catholic church appears to be locked into a power struggle with us for control of the organization, the position and the movement."[382] She also relayed the following anecdote:

> One of Fr. McHugh's confidants recently proposed to a Protestant on the executive committee that if the Catholic church could come up with 20 million dollars and could guarantee they could win an amendment, would the Protestants be willing to be window dressing—no rocking the boat?[383]

Mecklenburg wondered if it were even possible for the Catholic Church to work with an independent organization and if Protestants would ever truly share equal responsibility or if they would have to form their own independent, Protestant right-to-life groups. Others agreed with her. In July 1973, Paul Andreini, a fellow MCCL member, told Mecklenburg that they should be careful. "We should not be used by the Catholic Church, but we must use Catholic organizations," he advised.[384] Protestant leaders faced a conundrum. While working with McHugh and his supporters might be frustrating, the Protestant leaders could not risk breaking off ties with their most important allies.

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[381] Judy Fink, "Composition of Policy Committee" Memo to Professor Joseph Witherspoon, July 1, 1973, Box 5, Folder 7, ACCL Records. In a meeting later that week, Fink again brought up the issue, asking the NRLC Executive Committee to consider seating Protestants and Jews on the Public Policy Committee. Minutes of Conference Call Meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Right to Life Committee, July 5, 1973, Box 5, Folder 7, ACCL Records.

[382] Marjory Mecklenburg, Memo to Martin Ryan Healy, September 3, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.

[383] Marjory Mecklenburg, Memo to Martin Ryan Healy, September 3, 1973, Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.

[384] Paul Andreini to Marjory Mecklenburg, July 2, 1973, Box 7, Folder 2, ACCL Records; Other right-to-life leaders also sounded the alarm. In November 1973, Frances Frech, a state right-to-life leader in Missouri, warned Marjory Mecklenburg of attempts by the NCCB to influence (or even retake control of) the NRLC by means of Ed Golden gaining more power. Frances Frech to Marjory Mecklenbrug, November 29, 1973, Box 5, Folder 11, ACCL Records.

But some of the leaders in the NRLC believed the tension was due to core differences between the two sides—differences that might be irreconcilable. In observing the battle for control, Schaller commented that he believed it was about fundamental differences between Catholics and Protestants, the ways they viewed authority and lay people. He wrote,

> It's a Protestant thing, you see, that authority rests in the people of God…It is hard for the RC hierarchy, or those who relate well to them, to be comfortable with such a system—it is dynamic and moving but not uniform and predictable… If you don't understand why I say that it is now just about irreversible that the RTL movement is a RC movement, and why it will be impossible for Protestants to participate in any meaningful way in NRLC.[385]

Marjory Mecklenburg too pointed to these fundamental differences. Before a meeting of the new NRLC Executive Committee in August 1973, she warned the other committee members of her concerns: "It is not clear to me whether radically varying philosophies—one based on control, certainty, conservatism and desire for uniformity, and another which is more free wheeling, based on openness, involvement of all comers and encouragement of individual initiative—can co-exist in the leadership of an organization."[386] Though she did not explicitly name Protestants and Catholics, her meaning was clear. Both Mecklenburg and Schaller spoke in coded terms about the Catholic influence in the movement, characterizing the Catholic Church as authoritarian and controlling, too rigid to effectively lead a right-to-life movement based on a broad coalition of Americans.

Unsurprisingly, the Protestant leadership's strong critiques offended some Catholics in the NRLC. Randy Engel countered the Protestants' claims, writing that

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[385] Warren Schaller, Untitled Handwritten Notes, 1973, Box 4, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[386] Marjory Mecklenburg to Executive Committee, NRLC, August 16, 1973, Box 5, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

Mecklenburg used "her Protestantism as a battering ram to hit Catholics over the head and cow them into silence."[387] Similar to Mecklenburg, she questioned whether Protestants and Catholics could effectively work together to fight abortion. The NRLC, and Marjory Mecklenburg specifically, were also criticized in the conservative Catholic press, such as *The Wanderer.* The criticism was so great that one Catholic reader felt the need to write in and defend the NRLC and Mecklenburg though she herself did not agree with Mecklenburg's stance on birth control. The reader lamented, "For three years, I have patiently 'endured' the numerous broadsides of the conservative Catholic press toward NRLC…Perhaps it isn't perfect, but it should at least be given a chance."[388] Though Michael Taylor tried to calm the disagreements among NRLC Executive Committee members, emphasizing the "need for integrity" and their shared "personal sacrifice and plain anguish" for the cause, tensions still simmered and would ultimately cause Marjory Mecklenburg and Judy Fink, two of the main Protestant leaders in the NRLC, to start their own right-to-life organization in 1974.[389]

The NRLC tried to work through this tension by focusing again on strategy for the national movement and making some important compromises. The tension had a direct influence on right-to-life strategy in two main areas: the public image of the movement and the issue of birth control. With the issue of birth control, the NRLC tried to please both Catholics, some of whom wanted a policy that explicitly opposed birth control, and Protestants, many of whom wanted to actively promote contraception as an alternative to

[387] Randy Engel to Board of Directors, NRLC, "NRLC – Past, Present and Future," March 30, 1974, Box 8, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[388] Patricia Goodson, "In Defense of NRLC," letter to the editor, *The Wanderer,* Summer 1973, Box 3, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[389] Michael Taylor to Board of Directors, NRLC, Inc. "Current Operational policies of NRLC, Inc." October 24, 1973, Box 5, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

abortion. The tension over the public image of the movement was exacerbated as the Catholic bishops struggled to figure out their role in right-to-life politics now that the NRLC was independent. Again, both Catholics and Protestants in the NRLC agreed that they wanted a broad-based movement, but the Catholic Church leadership made several missteps during this time in their public activism, which further alienated some of their Protestant counterparts.

In one memorable instance in early 1974 the Senate held a hearing on pending abortion legislation but only four Catholic cardinals were invited to represent the religious opposition to abortion. Protestant right-to-lifers immediately expressed their dismay that no Protestant clergy or lay people were invited to represent the movement. Though the cardinals' testimony was strong, Warren Schaller worried it confirmed "in the public's mind, the 'truth' of the pro-abortion strategy, that abortion is a religious, and especially a Roman Catholic issue."[390] Jean Garton, a NRLC member and part of Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, also worried about the movement's image but blamed the press for framing it as a Catholic versus Protestant issue while pro-life Protestants and Jews were ignored.[391] The cardinals exacerbated the controversy by initially defending their decision to speak, arguing that they were not asking the government to abide by Catholic teaching but instead promoting precepts in the nation's founding documents and that they were representing all right-to-lifers.[392]

The testimony could have been a major pitfall for the movement but thankfully the NRLC and the Catholic Church had worked out a compromise and agreed that the

[390] Warren Schaller to NRLC Board of Directors, March 8, 1974, Box 8, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[391] "Pro-life Leader Says Senate Committee Set Up Catholic vs. Protestant 'Scenario,'" March 14, 1974, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-June 1974, USCCB Records.
[392] USCC, "Four American Cardinals Testify on Behalf of Pro-life Amendment," March 7, 1974, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-June 1974, USCCB Records.

right-to-life movement needed to be careful about its public image. The discussion surrounding the testimony reflected important changes in the NRLC since the start of 1974—a more sensitive and careful approach to religious differences in the movement. Starting in January 1974, the NRLC reshaped its own organizational policy and urged Catholics to be sensitive to Protestant involvement. Their Intergroup Liaison Committee gave advice to its Catholic members on dealing with Protestants: "Sit down and examine your terminology," they urged right-to-lifers, "Does it smack of Romanism…Learn some of the Protestant terms. Some are so simple and yet so foreign to Catholics."[393] The press had noted these changes as well. In February 1974, Marjory Mecklenburg met with members of the press on the behalf of the NRLC. She informed them, "We're very concerned about our image in the press," and emphasized that the movement included "Protestants and Jews and persons of little or no religious faith."[394] And after the testimony, the cardinals acknowledged the complaints of Protestant pro-lifers, and they too expressed concern about the invitation of the four cardinals as a way to continue portraying the right-to-life movement as thoroughly Catholic.[395] In the future, they would encourage greater visibility of Protestant right-to-lifers in Congressional hearings.[396]

The other major compromise between Protestants and Catholics in the movement was over birth control, and in 1973 and into 1974, the NRLC sought to clarify its position

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[393] Paulette Stander, "Establishing a Pro-life Group on an Inter-denominational Theme," January 2, 1974, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records. In the same mid-year report, Mary Ann Henry wrote an article solely devoted to Catholics learning to reach out to non-Catholics. Mary Ann Henry, "Reaching Non-Catholics: The Catholic Problem," January 2, 1974, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[394] David Kuhn, "Antiabortion lobby seeks new image," February 22, 1974, *Minneapolis Tribune,* Box 35, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[395] Russell Shaw, Memo to Bishop Rausch, "Criticism of cardinals' testimony—Conference response," March 18, 1974, Box 62, Folder NCCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities January-June 1974, USCCB Records.
[396] William Cox, Memo to Bishop James Rausch, "Bishops' Testimony Before House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights," March 4, 1976, Box 63, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Pro-life Activities March 1976, USCCB Records.

on contraceptives in order to avoid alienating potential Protestant allies. The NRLC would ultimately adopt a neutral stance on contraceptives. But this decision only came after Judy Fink's strong statements in favor of excluding opposition to birth control in their official organizational policy positions. Fink believed that the abortion rights movement would try to capitalize on the NRLC's opposition to contraceptives if they took such a stance. As one of the few evangelical leaders in the NRLC during this time, she was also sensitive to any strategy or policy that might alienate her fellow evangelicals and recognized the potential power of an alliance with the evangelical base. Thus, Fink quickly realized the threat posed by a policy of total opposition to contraception and alerted the other NRLC leaders that such a statement would "count out the participation of the 12 million Southern Baptists in the nation…the huge rapidly growing Independent, Fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Protestant groups…need I go on?"[397] The risk was too great—the NRLC had to remain neutral on birth control, largely to avoid alienating Protestants. If the movement was to be broad-based, as right-to-lifers claimed they wanted it to be, they could not take any action that risked alienating evangelical Christians.

Despite these important compromises and efforts to foster a broad-based right-to-life movement, the NRLC still struggled to recruit new religious groups and denominations. Most glaringly, the group could not get evangelical Christians to join the cause in any significant way, aside from a few activists, and all this despite a concerted recruitment campaign targeting evangelical denominations, pastors, and churches starting in 1973. This is significant because evangelicals would later be some of the movement's

[397] Judy Fink, "Policy Statement of NRLC Concerning 'birth control,' Memo to Ed Golden, Gloria Klein, Carolyn Gerster, et al. May 15, 1973. Box 4, Folder 12, ACCL Records.

staunchest conservative allies, and scholars often point to the involvement of evangelical Christians in the right-to-life movement as one of the prime indicators of conservative backlash against *Roe.*[398] But in the first few years after *Roe,* evangelicals were conspicuously absent from right-to-life activism. It was not an issue of awareness—evangelicals were aware of the changes taking place surrounding the abortion issue. For example, at Wheaton College's graduation ceremony in June 1973, C. Everett Koop spoke out against abortion in the strongest terms in his commencement address.[399] He warned the graduates, "The first thing to note is that the decision of the Supreme Court is on the opposite side of the fence from the traditional teachings of Judaism and Christianity throughout the ages."[400] He also advised them of their Christian responsibility to take political action to oppose abortion. But despite the awareness among evangelicals, they seemed hesitant to get involved in the movement.

It was also not for a lack of trying on the NRLC's part that evangelicals were missing from right-to-life activism. Following *Roe,* the NRLC made a concerted effort to bring evangelicals into the fold, and the right-to-lifers of the NRLC firmly believed that evangelical Protestants were their natural allies and already opposed to abortion, even if they did not know it yet. The belief came up again and again in meetings and correspondence in the 1970s. In early 1974, Fink argued, "There is a large and mostly silent prolife untapped constituency in the United States and they are ours to teach. We have only to do it."[401] In a meeting of the executive committee of the NRLC, the group

[398] Self, *All in the Family,* 5, 339; Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: MacMillan, 1994).
[399] C. Everett Koop, Commencement speech to Wheaton College, June 4, 1973, Box 16 Folder 4, Williams Papers.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Judith Fink, Midyear Report of the Intergroup Liaison Committee of National Right to Life Committee, Inc., January 1974, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

again agreed that the 25 million Baptists in the United States would "be prolife if fully informed."[402] This belief, in turn, shaped the group's strategy on the ground. For example, in discussing the Willkes' *Handbook on Abortion,* the NRLC urged right-to-lifers, "Church groups are frequently interested…Do not dismiss any specific church as automatically pro-abortion."[403] The group indicated that evangelical denominations such as Baptists, Church of Christ, and "most biblically oriented fundamentalist churches" might be the most receptive.[404] The NRLC was determined to bring evangelicals into the right-to-life movement, and it took decisive action in order to bring them on board.

The few evangelicals who were part of the movement and other Protestant right-to-lifers themselves spoke out, indicating that their denominations would be fruitful targets. Bob Holbrook, a Southern Baptist, noted, "The Protestant churches have 'grass-roots' support for pro-life but this support is neutralized by a failure to energize and mobilize."[405] His report urged immediate action—it had been less than a year since *Roe v. Wade* and right-to-lifers needed to work quickly to mobilize evangelical support. Another NRLC report noted that "Protestant Christians can, and must, be brought into the prolife movement…Those of us who are Protestants are keenly aware that not only do the vast majority of us reject the Supreme Court decision, we reject it on scriptural grounds."[406] Later on in the report, Fink again reiterated that evangelicals were ready and waiting—all pro-lifers needed to do was to reach out to them and work to educate them on pro-life issues. These evangelicals confirmed the right-to-life movement's contention that

[402] NRLC, "Minutes: NRLC Executive Committee Meeting," January 4-5, 1974, Box 7, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[403] "Handbook on Abortion: Ideas for its more effective use," n.d. circa 1972-1973, Box 3, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Robert Holbrook, Proposed Plan for Pro-life Ads in State Baptist Papers, January 2, 1974, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[406] Judy Fink, Alliance from NRLC Inc, with Protestant Judiciaries, 1973, Box 4, Folder 6, ACCL Records.

evangelicals were already on their side and that evangelical denominations could be a vital resource and recruiting ground for the movement.

The NRLC let this belief guide its strategy. Its Intergroup Liaison Committee spearheaded an ambitious campaign to recruit evangelicals. The group was supposed to focus on reaching out to other churches and organizations that might want to join the movement now that abortion was legal nationwide, but much of the committee's focus immediately turned to evangelical Protestants and their denominations, especially the Southern Baptists. Its members set their "first priority" as "building bridges with certain Protestant religious groups."[407] In January 1974, Fink prepared a report on the group's activities in 1973 and identified a number of recommendations the group intended to pursue if they could secure adequate funding. These included running advertisements in a variety of religious periodicals, holding workshops for clergy, and sending speakers to lead pro-life workshops at seminaries and Bible colleges. By the time the report was put together, the committee had already spoken with representatives from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, helped form Baptists for Life, met with the project director of Americans Against Abortion, a newly formed evangelical antiabortion group, and sent over three thousand letters to Southern Baptist pastors.[408] Even with this ambitious strategy, the NRLC still failed to recruit evangelicals in large numbers.

What was keeping evangelicals from joining the movement? Most right-to-life leaders credited the persistent stereotype that the movement was only for Catholics. Judy Fink noted this as the NRLC developed its outreach strategy. She wrote, "They [Protestants] tend to see the public battle as Roman Catholic originated and Roman

[407] NRLC, Intergroup Liaison Committee, 1973, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[408] Judith Fink, Midyear Report of the Intergroup Liaison Committee of National Right to Life Committee, Inc., January 1974, Box 6, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

Catholic dominated. They feel…'What role, if any, should I as a Protestant play in this?'"[409] Again, the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics was fundamental. It was not simply a matter of conflicting personalities among state leaders now trying to work together but also was about the very nature of the movement itself and its political trajectory. Though right-to-lifers worked to find acceptable compromises to create a broad-based coalition, the religion question would plague them through the rest of the decade.

Despite the lingering questions about the role of Catholics and Protestants and over the strategy the national movement should pursue, right-to-lifers came together on January 22, 1974, to mark the first anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, starting an annual tradition that has lasted to today. Though they could agree on little else, right-to-lifers at least agreed that *Roe v. Wade* was a terrible mistake, perhaps the most terrible mistake in American history. So they gathered in cities across the country to demonstrate "'mourning' for last year's infamous decision, with 'hope' that the decision will soon be reversed by Constitutional Amendment."[410] And despite the controversies within the NRLC, the movement was still a formidable force. As one journalist observed the events of the first March for Life in Washington, D.C., she warned, "Unless the Right to Life movement is recognized for the threat that it is, American women may find, in the not too

[409] Judy Fink, Alliance from NRLC Inc., with Protestant Judiciaries, 1973, Box 4, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[410] SOUL, Newsletter, February 1974, Folder 2, SOUL Records; MCCL, Newsletter, January 1974, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Taylor Papers; SOUL, Minutes of the December Third Twin City Metro SOUL Meeting, December 1973, Folder 1, SOUL Records; Marion K. Sanders, "Enemies of Abortion," *Harper's* Magazine, March 1974, Box 3, Folder Religion and Abortion, NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as NARAL MN Records).

distant future, that they have lost a war because they did not even realize it was being fought."[411]

Conclusion

The issue of religious differences among right-to-lifers would be an ongoing problem for the right-to-life movement in the 1970s, and it was initially unclear whether the abortion issue would be strong enough to unite such disparate groups of Americans. The movement had experienced several tumultuous years, from its successes in the early 1970s, to the blow delivered by the Supreme Court, to the tension splitting the movement as right-to-life leaders tried to make their way in national politics. Though *Roe v. Wade* provoked a powerful response among right-to-lifers on the ground, the movement still struggled to build a strong and united national coalition and did not yet have a clear message or image to unite all right-to-lifers.

This lack of unity in the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade* is important because it challenges some of the conventional narratives about the right-to-life movement and American politics in the 1970s. *Roe v. Wade* did not create the movement as we know it. Rather, *Roe v. Wade* forced right-to-lifers to make their pivot to national politics a little sooner than they planned, but as I have argued in this chapter, right-to-lifers had already been seriously considering ways to push the pro-life agenda in national politics since at least 1971. As they developed their national strategy, the NRLC and right-to-life leaders struggled to balance their new national endeavors with the existing grassroots movement in the states, where experienced grassroots organizers continued activism that had been going on for nearly six years in some places. Furthermore, the conservative backlash

[411] Marion K. Sanders, "Enemies of Abortion," *Harper's* Magazine, March 1974, Box 3, Folder Religion and Abortion, NARAL MN Records.

narrative cannot fully explain right-to-life organizing in the wake of *Roe*. As historian Mary Ziegler bluntly puts it, "The *Roe* decision did not create the New Right or the Religious Right."[412] Rather than a united conservative front, the movement in the wake of *Roe* was hopelessly divided. Right-to-lifers approached the issue in a variety of ways and represented many different political and religious affiliations. Most notably, liberal Protestants made up a core group of the leadership while the movement could barely convince any conservative evangelicals to join. The NRLC was determined to represent this wide swath of diverse Americans, and at least in 1973 and 1974, they were failing to do so.

In spite of the tension and disunity that had become apparent as the right-to-lifers tried to put together a national movement, leaders also realized they had tapped into an intense energy at the grassroots level. The group Women for the Unborn observed this intensity in 1973 and named it the key to right-to-life success:

> The Right to Life people are prepared to die…in the sense that they are willing to give so much of themselves in defense of the unborn…And this wonderful intensity and conviction – what our critics label 'fanaticism' but what I would prefer to call love – this will one day, in the not so distant future, give the pro-life movement a power that will be felt throughout the length of this land.[413]

Likewise, Judy Fink of the NRLC recognized grassroots action as the main strength of the movement. "If there is one major point that must not be lost sight of," she told her fellow Pennsylvanian right-to-lifers in the fall of 1973, "it is that the movement is <u>people</u> – people who may not always speak the same words in the same accents, or use identical

[412] Mary Ziegler, *After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 14.
[413] Women for the Unborn, 1973 Convention, Box 6, Folder 3, ACCL Records.

phraseology to describe why they abhor abortion."[414] Though at the national level, the movement struggled to forge a strong and united organization, on the ground people were excited and engaged in right-to-life activism.

With this focus on grassroots energy, right-to-lifers began looking confidently to the future, eager to expand their influence and make pro-life pressure felt in national politics. They even turned their attention to the next presidential election in 1976. By September 1973, the NRLC leaders already had a new goal in mind: "the unity of response is particularly essential if we are to present America with a Presidential candidate by 1976."[415] Not only would the right-to-lifers work determinedly for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, they would also accept nothing less than a pro-life president. Though they never got their human life amendment, the right-to-lifers did get their president, even if the NRLC prediction was four years off.

[414] Judy Fink to Pennsylvania Right-to-Life leaders, "Participation in NRLC; initial Director's reports," September 12, 1973, Box 5, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[415] D.J. Horan to Executive Committee, NRLC, "State Structures and Our Presidential Candidate in 1976," Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.

4.0 The Possibilities and Pitfalls of a Broad-based Movement

Introduction

Though the NRLC had faced serious internal divisions in the immediate wake of *Roe v. Wade,* its leadership had managed to mostly overcome their disagreements by the end of 1974. In fact, from 1974 to 1979, the movement experienced a period of vibrant growth and action. To outside observers, it seemed the movement might finally be coming of age. *Christianity Today* described right-to-lifers as "…maturing. No longer can they be dismissed as a group of cold-hearted Catholics simply taking orders from the Pope."[416] Another reporter noted a new, more moderate approach as these activists learned to play politics in Washington, D.C.: "Confrontation has given way to reasoned debate…disunity among national right-to-life groups has diminished sharply, leaving in its wake a common goal and a combined effort."[417]

After tense disagreements had almost derailed the national movement before it even started, right-to-lifers now put even more priority on building a broad-based constituency and avoiding anything that might divide their ranks. They worked to mitigate differences between Protestants and Catholics, Republicans and Democrats, family planning advocates and opponents of contraception, and any other activists who disagreed with one another on tactics or strategy. Right-to-lifers were an odd group,

[416] Christianity Today, February 14, 1975, Box 2, Folder 1, George Huntston Williams Papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Williams Papers).
[417] Walter Taylor, "Anti-abortion Lobby Quiets Down and Gains Friends," September 16, 1975, Box 9, Folder 14, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as ACCL Records).

consisting of "Birchers…anti bussers and anti-sex education in the school supporters, put-prayer-back-into-the-schools proponents, as well as radic-libs, civil libertarians, anti-war activists, and not-so-traditional Catholics, Protestants, and Jews."[418] Nevertheless, the movement held itself together in the mid to late 1970s and used this diversity in its ranks to implement an aggressive and multifaceted strategy on the ground, in Congress, and in the White House. That is not to say that the right-to-lifers did not face any issues of disagreement among themselves. They still had to deal with much "chaotic, squabbling, and uncontrolled movement" and "tough partisan politicking."[419] Yet these activists persisted, fostering a movement that was truly broad-based while developing diverse political strategies from local politics to the upper levels of federal government.

The scholarly literature tends to overlook this period in right-to-life organizing in favor of focusing on the 1980 presidential election and the rise of the New Right and the Religious Right. Scholars usually point to the early 1980s as the right-to-life movement in its prime, due to a convergence of several factors.[420] Ronald Reagan was the first pro-life president, a major victory for right-to-lifers who had been working to elect a pro-life president since the mid-1970s. They hoped his election would bring them closer to a human life amendment that would make abortion illegal once again. In the 1980s, the New Right had also embraced the abortion issue as part of its agenda to the delight of

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[418] John Matthews, "From Apple's Way to the Radic-Libs, Right-to-Lifers Cannot Be Stereotyped," *Washington Star News,* June 9, 1974, Box 7, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[419] Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, LifeLetter #9, June 24, 1974, Box 7, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[420] Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: MacMillan, 1994); Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 374-375; The recent works of Mary Ziegler and Daniel Williams are starting to reframe this discussion. Mary Ziegler, *After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Daniel Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-life Movement Before* Roe v. Wade (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

some right-to-lifers and the consternation of others. Regardless, it put abortion firmly on the Republican agenda. And conservative evangelical Christians, whom right-to-lifers had been working to reach since 1973, were joining the movement in droves. In light of these factors, many scholars see the 1980s as the zenith of pro-life power.

Though the right-to-life movement was undoubtedly powerful in the 1980s, in this chapter I argue that, during the period between 1974 and 1979, it was at the height of its strength. It was closest to fulfilling its goals of creating a broad-based coalition and had perhaps the broadest and most diverse support it would ever enjoy in American society. On the eve of the formation of the New Right and the Religious Right, the movement also had yet to see the stark polarization that would later characterize it. In the 1980s, many right-to-lifers took a more hardline conservative stance on abortion, and more liberal and left-wing pro-lifers found themselves relegated to the margins. But in the mid to late 1970s, there was still room for all these activists in right-to-life politics, and right-to-lifers pursued an array of political strategies—from lobbying for a human life amendment to pushing for greater access to contraception to staging sit-ins at abortion clinics. These five years of organizing were the closest right-to-life leaders would get to the broad-based movement that they so desired, and the coalition they had created was strong.

Though there are many examples of this broad pro-life umbrella in the late 1970s, in this chapter, I highlight four main examples of the dynamism, diversity, and strength of the movement during these years. First, Marjory Mecklenburg and Judy Fink split from the NRLC and formed their own organization, American Citizens Concerned for Life (ACCL). Though the split between the two organizations might seem like a further

sign of discord, it in fact allowed the movement to survive and eased the tension within its leadership. Most importantly, it allowed right-to-life leaders to broaden their legislative agenda. The NRLC continued to focus on securing a human life amendment, while the ACCL focused on pursuing alternatives to abortion legislation, which included protections for pregnant women in the workplace and increased funding for family planning initiatives, among other legislation. Thus, the right-to-life movement had a bigger legislative impact in these years.

Second, during the 1976 election, right-to-lifers pursued their agenda in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Neither party had yet taken a definitive stand on abortion; thus, pro-lifers saw opportunities to promote their agenda in both parties. They urged pro-lifers to get involved in the political party of their choosing and to relentlessly push the abortion issue in state and local races as well as in Congressional races. The right-to-lifers also worked aggressively to make abortion a central issue in the 1976 presidential election. They dogged Carter in particular, greeting him with protests as he campaigned across the country and demanding he take a stronger stance on abortion. In addition, one New York pro-lifer, Ellen McCormack, decided to launch her own presidential campaign as the Democratic pro-life candidate. By staying away from political endorsements and allowing right-to-lifers to be involved in whatever political party they chose, right-to-lifers succeeded in making the abortion issue central in the 1976 election cycle and in making their movement a powerful voting bloc.

Third, right-to-lifers worked proactively during these years to avoid polarization and discord, both within their own ranks and between the movement and the rest of society. They needed to avoid any sort of polarization or dissension in order to strengthen

their coalition. These efforts took in place in different ways surrounding the issues of religion, race, politics, and strategy. After being almost torn apart over religious tension in 1973 and 1974, the movement's leaders worked hard to promote religious unity and emphasize that a person of any religion could join the cause. Though they had vehemently disagreed with some Catholic leaders after *Roe,* Marjory Mecklenburg and other Protestant leaders now expressed strong support for the Catholic Church. Following the split between the ACCL and NRLC, the groups' leaders also made it clear that they respected and accepted a wide range of strategies in right-to-life politics. Though they might disagree on strategy, right-to-lifers could still work together. National organizations allowed space and flexibility for grassroots activism, doing their best not to stifle the grassroots energy that was a crucial strength of the movement and to show that their cause was for all Americans.

Finally, while the NRLC and ACCL pursued traditional political strategies, some grassroots activists began trying out nonviolent direct action at abortion clinics. These right-to-lifers embraced strategies of the civil rights and antiwar movements. They began showing up at abortion clinics, forcing their way inside, and attempting to take over and shut down the clinics. Others began picketing clinics regularly. And while some leaders expressed concern about this new dramatic turn in tactics and its implications for the movement's image, for the most part they were supportive, allowing these grassroots activists to implement this new strategy and giving it positive coverage in their main periodicals. The embrace of this bold new initiative further broadened the movement's strategy in politics, especially at the grassroots level, and attracted a range of new activists.

In the second half of the 1970s, right-to-lifers came the closest to achieving their broad-based movement. Their coalition now encompassed an extensive range of individuals and groups, from Republicans to Democrats, members of Congress to direct action advocates on the ground, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews from conservative to liberal. Their strategy was just as broad. Activists occupied clinics, picketed presidential candidates, testified in Congress, worked with the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the labor movement to protect women in the workplace, and traveled across the South starting new, local right-to-life groups. One of the reasons right-to-lifers were able to reach so many people and initiate such bold and broad strategies was timing—the small window before the rise of the Religious Right. In this liminal moment, the right-to-life movement was able to pursue an aggressive political agenda at both the state and national level while courting supporters across the political and religious spectrums. But, increasingly, some right-to-lifers took a more hardline stance, chanting "No Compromise!" at rallies and demanding uniformity in strategy and beliefs, threatening the broad-based movement right-to-life leaders had so carefully crafted.

4.1 The ACCL and NRLC Split

Throughout 1973 and 1974, the NRLC faced serious challenges, as its top leaders clashed over the issue of religion and strategy. Ultimately, the tension was too great, and though leaders in the organization worked to compromise and negotiate with one another, by mid 1974 Marjory Mecklenburg and Judy Fink, as well as a few other NRLC leaders, decided they could no longer work in the group. In August 1974, they split from that organization to form a new national pro-life group, American Citizens Concerned for Life (ACCL), which they hoped could fill in gaps in strategy and programs the NRLC

refused to consider. Though it might seem counterintuitive that a split in this main organization would strengthen the movement, the split between the NRLC and ACCL provided a release for the tension between right-to-life leaders like Marjory Mecklenburg, Judy Fink, Edward Golden, Randy Engel, and James McHugh. Furthermore, the separation helped broaden the scope of right-to-life strategy in national politics since it allowed the NRLC to continue its work toward a human life amendment while the ACCL pursued new legislative initiatives promoting alternatives to abortion.

Following nearly a year of disagreements among the NRLC Board of Directors, Mecklenburg tendered her resignation to the NRLC in August 1974. In a letter to the board, she framed her decision as driven by a desire to focus more time and money on state organization.[421] The following day, Judy Fink sent her letter of resignation to Mildred Jefferson. Fink was more direct in explaining her departure. She expressed regret that the NRLC had not made much progress on its programs or been able "to make NRLC more than a Washington, D.C., lobbying office for political activities."[422] Along with Fink and Mecklenburg, Joseph Lampe, Warren Schaller, and Father William Hunt also left to start ACCL.[423] While the NRLC remained steadfastly committed to passing a human life amendment, ACCL decided to expand its strategic repertoire to include a massive push for alternatives to abortion legislation. Though ACCL included support for a human life amendment in the group's organizational goals, its members spent most of their time and energy working toward alternatives to abortion legislation to promote family planning, adoption, maternal health insurance, and better workplace protections

[421] Marjory Mecklenburg to the Board of Directors of NRLC, August 19, 1974, Box 8, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[422] Judy Fink to Mildred Jefferson, August 20, 1974, Box 8, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[423] Mildred Jefferson to Fellow Board Member, August 28, 1974, Box 8, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

for pregnant women, a strategy ACCL leaders saw as "less militant than the National Right to Life Committee and more persuasive."[424]

At the same time, both Fink and Mecklenburg reiterated their strong support for the NRLC and their respect for the NRLC's approach to politics. Neither felt that the formation of ACCL weakened or fragmented the movement in any way, but rather they believed that having two separate national organizations would allow right-to-lifers to make even more progress. Fink explained to her former colleagues in October 1974 that the "factionalism" that had plagued the movement for the previous year was preventing them from making any progress at all.[425] She emphasized ACCL's belief that this split was the best option and that right-to-lifers should welcome myriad approaches to politics to try to achieve their goals: "It is my own strong conviction that only if we recognize that the pro life movement 'belongs' to no one group or organization but is composed, as it grows, of several groupings of people who should interact with each other will it succeed."[426] Like Mecklenburg, she made it clear that ACCL was "quite willing" to continue working with the NRLC.[427] Mecklenburg too emphasized that the work of ACCL would complement, rather than detract from, NRLC's strategy and would be more focused on "developing alternatives and finding solutions to social problems."[428] ACCL hoped to forge a path through the middle ground, working with right-to-lifers as well as others to develop and promote alternatives to abortion.

The NRLC accepted this decision as graciously as it could, though some NRLC members were critical of the new group. Writing to the board the week after Fink and

[424] Marjory Mecklenburg to George H. Williams, October 24, 1974, Box 2, Folder 1, Williams Papers.
[425] Judy Fink to NRLC, October 5, 1974, Box 8, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Judy Fink to NRLC, October 5, 1974, Box 8, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[428] Ibid.

Mecklenburg resigned, Mildred Jefferson lamented the tension in their organization but emphasized that "the noble cause we represent must always be paramount—beyond individual egos or personal ambitions."[429] Jefferson also reassured the board members that Mecklenburg had assured her that ACCL would not try to compete with the NRLC. Similarly, when asked about the new ACCL, Ray White, NRLC's new executive director, acknowledged that the NRLC and ACCL might sometimes be "opposite each other" on strategy but insisted that he welcomed ACCL's formation and contributions to the right-to-life movement.[430] The two organizations would now have to find a way to work together to overcome the disagreements that had torn the NRLC apart during its first year of independence.

Coverage of the incident in the press described a slightly less amicable split and cited a number of different reasons for the creation of ACCL, from religion to strategy to the human life amendment to personality clashes.[431] One prominent theme was tensions between "hard-liners" or "conservatives" and moderates in the movement. In part, these stories reported, Mecklenburg, Fink, and other ACCL leaders feared that the NRLC had been taken over by a "'conservative' part of the pro-life army," a faction that did not embrace the same vision for a broad-based movement and took a more hardline approach on issues such as birth control and strategy.[432] Several newspaper articles called the split a "departure of moderates" from the NRLC, which the new ACCL saw as too "politically

[429] Mildred Jefferson to Fellow Board Member, August 28, 1974, Box 8, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[430] Carlton Sherwood, "Conflicts Lead to Forming of New Right-to-Life Unit," *Catholic Star Herald (*Camden, NJ*),* August 30, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Albert Kovacs to Pennsylvanians for Human Life Board of Directors, "Bayh Hearing on August 21, 1974," August 22, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

conservative, religiously fundamentalist and sexually puritan."[433] Though the media coverage of the split suggested a weakening right-to-life coalition, both the NRLC and ACCL downplayed the departure of the leaders who left to start ACCL. Mecklenburg and Fink continued to argue that the work of the ACCL would complement what the NRLC was already doing. Fink, for example, insisted that ACCL was looking forward to working together with NRLC in "broadening the base of the movement" as well as expanding the movement's "sphere of influence."[434]

Despite Fink's reassurance, the formation of ACCL heralded a major departure in strategy from the NRLC with much greater emphasis on "positive solutions" to the issue of abortion beyond a single-minded focus on a human life amendment. ACCL's reasoning for this shift in strategy relates back to the understanding of the abortion issue outlined in Chapter 2—the issue of violence in American society. Emphasizing this view of abortion as the ultimate sign of society's violent decline, ACCL argued that the best solutions were nonviolent ones, what it called alternatives to abortion or positive solutions. Much of ACCL's approach built upon the work Marjory Mecklenburg had already done with MCCL since the early 1970s when she first encouraged the group to support alternatives for abortion.[435] During 1974, for example, MCCL leadership was still articulating that abortion and violence in society were inextricably linked. They viewed abortion as "a violent, destructive attempt to solve problems" and pushed for "positive solutions" like adoption, better family planning, and solving larger economic issues that

[433] Susan Fogg, "Abortion opponents part ways," *Newark Star Ledger* (Newark, NJ), September 29, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[434] Judy Fink to NRLC Board of Directors, October 5, 1974, Box 8, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[435] MCCL, Newsletter, August 28, 1970, Box 2, Folder MCCL 1968-1973, Katherine Wood Taylor Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers).

might push women to consider abortion.[436] Mecklenburg then took this rhetoric and strategy and incorporated it into ACCL.

To highlight this aspect of its organization, ACCL emphasized that it was pro-life rather than antiabortion. For ACCL leaders, this was an important distinction. When Warren Schaller announced the formation of ACCL in August 1974, he had highlighted the group's goals to implement "nonviolent solutions for the problems of women and children" and to "meet the increasing needs of the rapidly expanding pro-life movement."[437] And a few years later, Marjory Mecklenburg detailed ACCL's stance: "We are not just against abortion, but truly are for alternatives to abortion, for non-violent solutions to social and economic problems, and for strengthening of the family."[438] For Mecklenburg, ACCL's approach was more flexible and allowed right-to-lifers to build a truly broad-based coalition. ACCL's leaders welcomed other right-to-lifers who shared this vision, and as they built up ACCL, Mecklenburg, Fink, and Schaller highlighted the coalition they were working with which included "antiwar pacifists, feminists and blacks" all while emphasizing that the group's focus would be on alternatives to abortion.[439]

As they went their separate way from the NRLC, ACCL and its members developed a robust pro-life agenda supporting alternatives to abortion including birth control and family planning, special "life support centers" for pregnant women, and legal protections for women in the workplace. Family planning initiatives were especially

[436] MCCL, Communicating the Pro-life Viewpoint on Abortion and Questions and Answers on Abortion, May 1974, Box 11, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[437] ACCL, Press Release, August 21, 1974, Box 16, Folder 10, ACCL Records.
[438] Marjory Mecklenburg to Donald Brouillard, March 22, 1977, Box 15, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[439] Susan Fogg, "Abortion opponents part ways," *Newark Star Ledger* (Newark, NJ), September 29, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

central to ACCL's mission and had also been part of the impetus for Fink and Mecklenburg to form the group in the first place. In 1974, the NRLC had decided to take a neutral stance on contraceptives, in part because of its strong Catholic base and also because of a desire to appeal to Catholics, Protestants, and others who might have widely varied stances on contraception. Fink and Mecklenburg had played a central role in pushing for the neutral policy, but ultimately they decided they wanted to do more. Furthermore, despite the NRLC's neutrality on the issue and "countless others" who shared her view in the movement, Mecklenburg's strong stance in favor of family planning and birth control had made her a frequent target of criticism among some NRLC members and others in the movement.[440] Given her treatment, she worried that other right-to-lifers who were in favor of birth control might also feel out of place.[441] Now that ACCL was its own entity, right-to-lifers who supported contraception as a solution to the abortion issue had their own right-to-life organization.

ACCL was committed to birth control as a viable alternative to abortion and wanted the freedom to support legislation to make contraception more accessible. For ACCL's leaders, it was vital that there was room for this approach in order to allow the movement to continue to broaden its base and strategic initiatives. Marjory Mecklenburg had defended right-to-lifers such as herself in a letter to a friend in April 1974 following Randy Engel's criticism of her leadership in the NRLC.[442] She worried about activists totally opposed to birth control because it limited the movement's approaches to strategy. "I do not consider my husband or myself or the countless others who share our views as

[440] Randy Engel to Board of Directors, NRLC, "NRLC – Past, Present and Future," March 30, 1974, Box 8, Folder 4, ACCL Records; Marjory Mecklenburg to Gerald Martinez, April 12, 1974, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[441] Marjory Mecklenburg to Gerald Martinez, April 12, 1974, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[442] Ibid.

second class members of this movement," she wrote, "We are just as opposed to abortion as you and Randy [Engel] are and I dare say people like us are necessary to attract the mainstream of American to this position."[443] Clearly, Mecklenburg and other ACCL members believed their support of birth control would extend the movement's base of support and also help reduce the number of abortions. They pushed their agenda here in a number of ways. In addition to supporting family planning legislation introduced by Senator Birch Bayh (D-IN), ACCL reached out to Senator Ted Kennedy in 1975 to express the group's support for birth control and its agreement with him that any human life amendment should not limit access to contraception.[444] The group also publicly supported improving sex education and family planning initiatives for the nation's teenagers and young adults. In a letter to the editor in September 1979, for instance, Mecklenburg pushed for better sex education, including educating young people about contraceptive use.[445] In fact, she argued that "prevention programs" should be the "highest priority."[446]

In addition to promoting greater access to and education about birth control, ACCL's members supported initiatives that would improve the material conditions of pregnant women. They did not want women to be forced to choose abortion because of any economic or social pressure. Mecklenburg summed up the group's stance in June 1975:

> We need to ask what are the conditions of life which confront women who are troubled by an unintended pregnancy but who do not choose abortion…What is society's duty to them and to the children they will bear?...have these women

[443] Marjory Mecklenburg to Gerald Martinez, April 12, 1974, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[444] Marjory Mecklenburg to Ted Kennedy, April 23, 1975, Box 35, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[445] Marjory Mecklenburg, Letter to the Editor, September 14, 1979, Box 15, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[446] Ibid.

> been largely ignored by the public sector and much of the private sector, and been pushed into the background or eliminated totally from the abortion debate?[447]

She strongly defended the rights of pregnant women and their unborn children and even called pregnant women "a disadvantaged class suffering a special kind of discrimination."[448] This strong stance led ACCL to support legislation that would provide resources for pregnant women as well as protect their right to health insurance coverage. In 1975, ACCL supported a variety of legislative initiatives introduced by Senator Bayh, which included the Life Support Centers Act of 1975, the Equity in Health Insurance Act, funding for maternal and child health services as well as funding for family planning and adoption services.[449] And in 1977, Marjory Mecklenburg testified on behalf of ACCL before a Senate committee in support of the Opportunities for Adoption Act of 1977, which she saw as a "constructive alternative" to abortion.[450]

Along with supporting government programs and resources for pregnant women, ACCL also sought more protections for women in the workplace and opposed any discrimination against pregnant women or mothers in the labor force. In 1977, the organization became involved in a case in which a woman had lost her insurance benefits once her employer found out about her pregnancy. In cooperation with "a broad-based coalition of labor, human rights, and women's groups," ACCL supported legislation that would require companies to offer pregnancy benefits in their insurance plans.[451] ACCL sent one of its members, Jacqueline Nolan-Haley, to testify on its behalf at a Senate

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[447] Marjory Mecklenburg, "Statement of Marjory Mecklenburg, President, American Citizens Concerned For Life, Inc., before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments," June 19, 1975, Box 2, Folder 1, Williams Papers.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Fact sheet on Alternatives to Abortion package, 1975, Box 3, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[450] Marjory Mecklenburg, "Statement of Marjory Mecklenburg, President, American Citizens Concerned for Life," May 12, 1977, Box 27, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[451] ACCL, Press Release, April 29, 1977, Box 27, Folder 4, ACCL Records.

committee hearing on the bill, where she explained why a right-to-life organization would care about job discrimination against pregnant women: "When a woman is faced with losing her income for several weeks…or perhaps losing her job because of pregnancy, her decision to abort cannot be said to be the product of free choice but of economic coercion."[452] Job discrimination remained a concern for ACCL, and in 1979, the organization again became involved in a case in which a firefighter in Iowa lost her job because she needed to breastfeed her baby.[453] Again working with a number of other organizations, ACCL helped pass a law that protected women from discrimination based on pregnancy and motherhood. In their endeavors to improve the workplace conditions for pregnant women and mothers, ACCL's activists hoped to solve economic problems that might force women to choose abortion.

In all of this, ACCL showed its willingness to compromise on many points and forge a middle ground on the abortion issue, something that set the group apart from the hardline stances taken by many other right-to-lifers. While the human life amendment was still one of their stated, official goals, ACCL's members were willing to work in the meantime on issues that other right-to-lifers ignored and to compromise in order to get what they wanted. For instance, the legislation for Life Support Centers also included funding for abortion referral services.[454] For many activists, this would have been a point of no compromise and the end of their support for the legislation, but ACCL decided to support it anyway. The group believed that, despite the funding for abortion referral services, in the long term the legislation would help reduce the number of abortions. Mecklenburg explained this position to a donor in May 1977, "None of the legislation we

[452] ACCL, Press Release, April 29, 1977, Box 27, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[453] Joseph A. Lampe, Letter to the Editor, February 8, 1979, Box 15, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[454] Marjory Mecklenburg to Mrs. James R. Hartzell, May 25, 1977, Box 16, Folder 1, ACCL Records.

work on will save all babies from abortion but it will save some."[455] To another right-to-lifer, she explained that ACCL's goal was to "save as many babies as possible each day" even if that meant compromising with those who supported abortion rights.[456] ACCL focused on reducing the number of abortions through any legislative means necessary, and the group's willingness to compromise was increasingly important as more and more right-to-lifers were trumpeting a new message of "No compromise."[457]

This middle-of-the-road approach garnered ACCL some interesting allies outside the right-to-life movement. At various points, ACCL engaged in dialogue with different women's groups, such as during the International Women's Year Conference in 1977 and with NOW in 1979.[458] Mecklenburg and ACCL reasoned that since both groups supported legislation to protect pregnant workers, they could find common ground on other issues as well.[459] In addition, ACCL worked on legislation with both Republicans and Democrats. Whether it was working with Senator Ted Kennedy, Senator Birch Bayh, or President Ford, ACCL was willing to work with any politician with whom they could find some common ground, regardless of their political affiliation. In fact, ACCL, and Marjory Mecklenburg in particular, gained a reputation for being able to build bridges with liberal members of Congress when it came to alternatives to abortion legislation.[460] And when working on legislation regarding protections for pregnant women in the

[455] Marjory Mecklenburg to Furgencio Segura, May 27, 1977, Box 16, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[456] Marjory Mecklenburg to Mrs. James R. Hartzell, May 25, 1977, Box 16, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[457] Arlene Doyle, "No Compromise on the Human Life Amendment," January 20, 1976, Box 10, Folder 8, ACCL Records; Peggy Moen, "Willkes Trace Philosophical, Historical Roots of Abortion," *The Wanderer*, December 2, 1976, Box 25, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[458] ACCL, ACCL Update, March 1979, Box 28, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[459] ACCL, "Statement for February 15, 1979 National Dialogue on Abortion," February 14, 1979, Box 4, Folder 15, John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI (hereafter cited as Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers).
[460] Georgine A. Alt, MCCL President, to MCCL Leaders, "ACCL Support of Child and Family Services Act of 1975," December 15, 1975, Box 12, Folder 14, ACCL Records.

workplace, ACCL even reached out to the labor movement in hopes of gaining new allies.[461] Its willingness to work with these allies outside, and sometimes at odds with, the right-to-life movement was vital. From 1975 on, more and more right-to-lifers argued that compromise on the abortion issue was unacceptable and that any work supporting alternatives to abortion was merely a distraction from the human life amendment.[462] Nevertheless, ACCL persevered in its work, arguing that pro-life groups who showed "concern for the fetus only" ignored "their responsibility for the born child, the family and the mother's problems."[463]

In the end, ACCL made alternatives to abortion a central part of right-to-life strategy in the late 1970s, and Fink and Mecklenburg celebrated the course they had charted. In October 1978, Fink gushed to Mecklenburg about ACCL, "Anyhow, the enormity of this really overwhelms me. I'm terribly excited and thrilled by it, because you realize that this was what we left NRLC for? To 'do both'—work on legal protection and alternatives? Looks like we're winning our fight before NRLC wins theirs."[464] Most importantly, ACCL held space in the movement for right-to-lifers who were more moderate and willing to compromise, and they argued that their work was categorically different than other activism. In Mecklenburg's opinion, the difference was clear. "We do not burn; we do not have hit lists; nor do we participate in any partisan political activity," she informed John Mitchell in 1979, "We do not condemn people who may have different ethical or moral views; on the contrary, we work with them and have often

[461] Marjory Mecklenburg to Peter J. Benzoni, May 28, 1975, Box 15, Folder 13, ACCL Records.
[462] Arlene Doyle, "No Compromise on the Human Life Amendment," January 20, 1976, Box 10, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[463] Marjory Mecklenburg to John Mitchell, October 2, 1979, Box 15, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[464] Judy Fink to Marjory Mecklenburg, October 20, 1978, Box 15, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

found them to be effective allies."[465] ACCL helped find a middle ground for the right-to-life movement and the rest of American society, working on solutions its members believed would reduce the number of abortions and also have the support of the majority of Americans. The group's work had such an impact that even the Carter administration took notice and considered appointing Mecklenburg to a position for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.[466]

In the meantime, the NRLC also secured some impressive achievements. The organization continued its work for a human life amendment and succeeded in making the amendment the litmus test for politicians who wanted right-to-life support in the 1976 elections. The NRLC also organized an aggressive campaign to make abortion the central issue of that election cycle. By 1976, its annual budget had grown to $400,000 and was projected to soon top $500,000.[467] The group's monthly publication, *The National Right to Life News*, was the prime pro-life publication for right-to-lifers across the country. Perhaps its greatest achievement in the late 1970s was the Hyde Amendment, which prohibited federal funding for abortions and which the NRLC called a "giant step" toward ending legal abortion.[468]

Though the split between the NRLC and ACCL had the potential to weaken the right-to-life movement, it actually allowed right-to-lifers to diversify their political strategy. The NRLC pursued the human life amendment and kept abortion on the nation's agenda while ACCL forged new paths in pursuing alternatives to abortion legislation and

[465] Marjory Mecklenburg to John Mitchell, October 2, 1979, Box 15, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[466] "Carter Health Program Seeks to Hire Abortion Foe," *New York Times*, February 8, 1979, Box 35, Folder 8, ACCL Records. They initially appointed her but then let her go after backlash from reproductive rights supporters.
[467] Arlene Doyle, "Do You Need Permission to Save an Unborn Baby?" Pamphlet, 1977, Box 11, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[468] Janet Grant, "Congress passes ban on federally funded abortions," *National Right to Life News*, October 1976, Box 11, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

reaching out to new allies outside the movement. And despite some disagreements on strategy, right-to-lifers of the NRLC and ACCL continued to work together, gathering together each year for the March for Life and the NRLC Convention.[469] With the combined efforts of the NRLC and ACCL in national politics and in Congress, as well as the support of grassroots activists in the states, the movement initiated a broad legislative strategy, attacking abortion on a number of fronts and continuing the work to broaden their base of support and reach out to all Americans.

4.2 The 1976 Presidential Election

In the early 1970s, the right-to-life movement developed a bold political strategy that had carried over into national politics following *Roe v. Wade.* This strategy involved research and surveys on politicians' stances on abortion, relentless lobbying efforts at both the state and national levels, and a sustained grassroots mobilization on the abortion issue. Right-to-lifers in the states could be quickly mobilized to show up at their local town council meetings, at the state capitol, or at their Congress member's office in Washington, D.C. In the wake of *Roe,* the movement had successfully channeled this grassroots approach into supporting a human life amendment. But now the movement had a bigger target—the presidency—as the campaigns for the 1976 election cycle began. Its leadership had been focused on this presidential election since at least 1974.[470] And in the states, leaders had worked steadfastly since the early 1970s to get pro-lifers actively engaged in party politics. Now they pressured both major parties to pay attention to their movement and to adopt a right-to-life plank in their party platforms. They also worked

[469] NRLC, National Right to Life Convention'75 Strength through Unity, Conference Program, 1975, Box 10, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[470] D.J. Horan to Executive Committee, NRLC, "State Structures and Our Presidential Candidate in 1976," Box 4, Folder 15, ACCL Records.

insistently with both Democrats and Republicans to push the parties in a pro-life direction. Right-to-lifers wanted to make abortion the main election issue for candidates, both political parties, potential right-to-life allies, and ultimately, for all voters. Most of all, right-to-lifers urged each presidential candidate to be pro-life, picketing Carter on the campaign trail, pushing Ford to take a stronger stand against abortion, and even running their own pro-life candidate. The 1976 election presented a major opportunity in both political parties, in the White House, and with new groups of voters.

The right-to-lifers had been testing their strength and influence in national politics for several years and had already turned their attention to the current administration. Almost as soon as Ford became president after Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974, right-to-lifers began to pressure him on his stance on abortion and on his choice for vice president.[471] Their denunciation of his pick for vice president was their boldest foray into presidential politics yet. When Ford became president, he chose Nelson Rockefeller as his nominee for the now vacant office of the vice president and submitted him to Congress for confirmation, in accordance with the recently adopted Twenty-fifth Amendment.[472] But right-to-lifers, especially those who got their start in activism in New York, were holding a grudge against Rockefeller, the former governor of that state; indeed, they saw him as their enemy. Their animus was due to Rockefeller's 1972 veto of a bill that would have overturned legal abortion in New York. This veto by Rockefeller, then governor of the state, drew immense opposition from right-to-lifers across the country. Now the NRLC, the Catholic Church, and other right-to-lifers argued that he

[471] NRLC to President Ford, August 15, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records
[472] The Twenty-fifth Amendment, which had been added to the Constitution in 1967, provided the procedure for filling vacancies in the office of the vice president. The President nominated a candidate for vice president who then had to be confirmed by both Houses of Congress.

was an "unacceptable" choice for vice president, due to his past record on abortion.[473] Ed Golden, who had led New York State Right-to-Life during Rockefeller's tenure as governor, testified on behalf of the NRLC at a hearing on Rockefeller's confirmation. He called on the senators to reject Rockefeller in favor of a candidate who "embraces the principle of human life as sacred."[474] And prior to Rockefeller's confirmation, members of the Senate Rules Committee told reporters they were receiving thousands of letters opposing his nomination.[475] Right-to-lifers believed they deserved a say in presidential politics and were already drawing a hard line for future presidents and vice presidents—they must be pro-life if they expected to get the support of the movement.

Of course, right-to-lifers employed a similar strategy in the 1974 Congressional midterm elections as well. Their approach for the 1974 midterms was focused on single-issue voting; they would vigorously support any pro-life candidate, regardless of the candidate's partisan affiliation, and fiercely criticize any candidate who was pro-choice or who refused to take a decisive stand on the abortion issue. They even reprimanded pro-life politicians who dared endorse a candidate that supported abortion rights. For example, in 1974, right-to-lifers attacked Senator James L. Buckley, who had been one of their staunchest allies in Congress, for his support of a pro-choice Republican in a

[473] NRLC to President Ford, August 15, 1974, Box 7, Folder 9, ACCL Records; Ed Golden, "Testimony by Edward J. Golden Before the Senate Rules Committee in Connection with the Rockefeller Confirmation Hearings," 1974, Box 8, Folder 9, ACCL Records; "Anti-Rockefeller Mail Heavy," *Washington Post*, October 2, 1974, Box 8, Folder 11, ACCL Records; John Cardinal Cody to Senator Howard Cannon, November 22, 1974, Box 62, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee October-December 1974, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USCCB Records); Robert Lynch, NCHLA, to Senator Howard Cannon, October 7, 1974, Box 67, Folder NCHLA 1973-74, USCCB Records.
[474] Ed Golden, Testimony by Edward J. Golden Before the Senate Rules Committee in Connection with the Rockefeller Confirmation Hearings," 1974, Box 8, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[475] "Anti-Rockefeller Mail Heavy," *Washington Post*, October 2, 1974, Box 8, Folder 11, ACCL Records.

congressional race in Ohio.[476] It was prominent pro-lifer and NRLC member Jack Willke's home district and had long been a Republican stronghold. Willke strongly supported the Democrat, a pro-life candidate. Furthermore, he criticized the Republican Party and Senator Buckley for endorsing the Republican candidate, a supporter of reproductive rights. Willke was dismayed that Buckley "waffled and dodged and hedged" when pro-lifers asked about his support for the candidate.[477] He even asserted that abortion mattered more than the Watergate scandal in this election.[478] The message was clear: no matter a politician's party affiliation or previous stances on abortion legislation, he or she must be pro-life and support pro-life candidates in order to get the support of the movement. Already, many activists were showing their unwillingness to compromise and their devotion to single-issue voting in national elections. Following the 1974 midterms, right-to-lifers were pleased with the results of this strategy and of their efforts in electoral politics. Ray White, Executive Director of the NRLC, expressed his relief at the election results: "Our overall picture is one of optimism. Right-to-Life people have had effects on the political scene that may never be fully assessed."[479] In 1976, the right-to-lifers hoped to build on this success and elect more pro-life members of Congress and perhaps a pro-life president.

The first thing right-to-lifers did in 1976 was work to make abortion the main election issue. They wanted to ensure that politicians paid attention to the movement and felt pressured to take a firm right-to-life stance. This task required the work of right-to-lifers in the national movement as well as state and local activists. State activists worked

[476] Jack Willke to Marjory Mecklenburg, February 27, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[477] Jack Willke to Marjory Mecklenburg, February 27, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[478] Jack Willke to Marjory Mecklenburg, February 27, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[479] Ray White, Statement, December 4, 1974, Box 8, Folder 13, ACCL Records.

to organize in each Congressional district so that every member of Congress was made aware of the abortion issue, from the 1974 midterm elections and into 1976.[480] Local groups like Celebrate Life in New York kept their members up-to-date on the latest political news. Celebrate Life also updated its Practical Politics Kit to keep right-to-lifers aware of the latest legislative and political strategies.[481] As the 1976 campaigns began, these right-to-lifers were ready to make abortion a central election issue and keep it in the news. The Catholic bishops played a major role in pressuring Carter and Ford to take strong stances against abortion. They met with both candidates, explaining the Catholic Church's concerns about abortion and encouraging them to adopt a pro-life stance.[482] Likewise, the NRLC and ACCL also raised awareness about abortion with the Ford and Carter campaigns. Marjory Mecklenburg even began working for the Ford campaign, collecting information on right-to-life groups across the country and giving advice for how Ford should talk about abortion if it came up in the debates.[483] She continued to push his campaign to engage with right-to-lifers and address the abortion issue. For the NRLC and other right-to-lifers, the central theme for the 1976 elections was "No life-no vote!" signaling their firm stance on abortion and their unwillingness to compromise.[484] All this

[480] Ray L. White, "National Right to Life Proposed Congressional District Organization," 1974, Box 9, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[481] Celebrate Life Committee, Practical Politics Kit and Actions Supplement, June 1975, Box 9, Folder 13, ACCL Records.
[482] Bishop James Rausch to The Files, "Meeting with Congressman Andrew Young," July 20, 1976, Box 63, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-September 1976, USCCB Records; Bishop James Rausch to The Files, "Developments Subsequent to the Andrew Young breakfast," August 9, 1976, Box 63, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-September 1976, USCCB Records; Gerald Ford to Joseph Bernardin, September 10, 1976, Box 63, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-September 1976, USCCB Records; "The Abortion Issue: Carter and bishops at odds," *Clarion Herald* (New Orleans, LA), Box 44, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[483] Thomas May to Marjory Mecklenburg, October 20, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, President Ford Committee Records; Marjory Mecklenburg to Stu Spencer, "Presidential Debates/Suggestions," September 21, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, President Ford Committee Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as Ford Committee Records).
[484] NRLC, "No Life—No Vote!!!", November 1, 1976, Box 10, Folder 11, ACCL Records.

work paid off. Already by October 1975, reporters at the *Washington Star* noted that the right-to-lifers were "emerging as the single most vocal and identifiable one-issue bloc" in the 1976 election.[485] By the start of 1976, the NRLC was happy with the media's reporting on the movement. Ray White believed that right-to-lifers had succeeded in making abortion "the hottest political issue in the '76 campaign" and in causing the presidential candidates to "quake with concern over the abortion issue."[486]

State groups and the NRLC also continued the essential work of vetting all political candidates in both parties and assessing each candidate's stance on right-to-life issues. They then provided their members, and any other interested parties, with extensive reports in order to guide their voting. These groups generally had official policies against endorsing specific candidates and claimed that their candidate surveys were simply to educate voters and help them make an informed choice. Nevertheless, over the course of the election cycle, many of these groups made decisive statements about how right-to-lifers should be voting. The issue they focused on in the 1976 election was the human life amendment. It now served as a litmus test for all political candidates. For example, MCCL used it to differentiate between the Republican candidates for the open Senate seat in Minnesota in 1976. The defining feature of the candidate endorsed by the party, Jerry Brekke, was that he "refused" to support a human life amendment despite the fact that he claimed to be pro-life.[487] Though MCCL still maintained that it did not want to make an endorsement of any candidates, in this instance the group made it clear that the human life amendment had to be the deciding factor. NRLC focused on the

[485] Jack W. Germond and James R. Dickenson, "Abortion Issue: Loud and Strong," *Washington Star*, October 26, 1975, Box 9, Folder 14, ACCL Records.
[486] Ray L. White to Board of Directors and Friends, February 5, 1976, Box 10, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[487] MCCL, MCCL Newsletter, July-August 1976, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.

presidential candidates for each party, informing its members in multiple mailings about where each candidate stood on abortion and on the human life amendment.[488] And in September 1976, the leaders of the NRLC, NYPLC, the Christian Action Council, and Americans Against Abortion met in Oklahoma to discuss pro-life strategy in the upcoming election and concluded, "The committed Pro-life voter cannot in conscience vote for a candidate who will not endorse a Human Life Amendment."[489] By the start of 1976, the right-to-lifers' focus had narrowed to Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.

Carter drew most of their ire for his more moderate stance on abortion.[490] Though Carter professed to be personally pro-life and promised to do what he could to "discourage abortion," neither Carter nor his running mate, Walter Mondale, supported any type of human life amendment.[491] Because of this, pro-lifers did not support Carter and Mondale, even as the two tried to distance themselves from the Democratic Party's platform supporting abortion rights.[492] Moreover, some right-to-lifers feared Carter and many Democrats were hostile to the movement. Fran Watson described the cold treatment right-to-lifers had received from Carter's campaign at the Democratic National Convention in July 1976. She argued, "The pro-life movement cannot support Jimmy Carter" because "it was Jimmy Carter and his representatives who forced the Democratic Party to go on record as endorsing abortion."[493] These activists grew so upset with Carter

[488] NRLC, "The Presidential Candidates—Where Do They Stand?" October 18, 1976, Box 44, Folder 6, ACCL Records; Carolyn Gerster to Board of Directors, "Presidential Candidates," December 30, 1975, Box 10, Folder 5, ACCL Records; Mildred Jefferson to Board of Directors, "Candidates for Presidential Nomination," October 29, 1975, Box 10, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[489] Americans Against Abortion, Press Release, September 9, 1976, Box 46, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[490] Robert F. Greene, "The Greene Sheet: A Pro-life Report," 1975? Box 9, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[491] Francis Graham Lee, "Catholic Political Leaders and Abortion: A House Divided?" *Our Sunday Visitor*, August 29, 1976, Box 46, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[492] Leo LaLonde to Fellow Pro-life Leaders, September 10, 1976, Box 12, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[493] Fran Watson to Friend of the Right to Life, August 10, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records.

and Mondale that as the presidential election neared some began picketing Carter's campaign stops across the country from Pennsylvania to Minnesota to Missouri.[494] They hoped to pressure Carter to take a firmer stance against abortion and perhaps come around to supporting a human life amendment. Archbishop Joseph Bernardin spoke for most right-to-lifers when he challenged Carter, "Personal opposition is not enough."[495]

Ford did not escape criticism either, though he ultimately became the best option for many in the movement. For many Republican right-to-lifers, Ford was actually their second choice; Ronald Reagan had been their first. Right-to-lifers liked that Reagan took a bold stand against abortion, in contrast to Ford's more centrist approach.[496] Unlike Reagan, Ford was already in a little trouble with the right-to-lifers for choosing Rockefeller to be his vice president.[497] And his stance on the human life amendment was also problematic. Ford favored a states' rights amendment, as right-to-lifers called it, which would allow states to decide the abortion issue for themselves. The NRLC, ACCL, and other right-to-lifers had already made it clear that they would accept nothing less than a human life amendment that added constitutional protection for the unborn. But when Ford received the nomination, most Republican pro-lifers fell in line, despite Ford's faults on abortion. They argued that Ford was the best option because he was at least somewhat sympathetic to their cause. Ford supported such endeavors as the Hyde

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[494] MCCL, Flyer, September 1976, Box 12, Folder 4, ACCL Records; Al McConagha, "Abortion issue is nagging Carter's campaign," 1976, Box 46, Folder 2, ACCL Records; Richard K. Weil, Jr., "Abortion Opponents to Picket Carter at Hotel," September 1976, Post-Dispatch (Kansas City?), Box 44, Folder 6, ACCL Records.

[495] "Flare Up Over Abortion," *Time* magazine, September 13, 1976, Box 44, Folder 6, ACCL Records.

[496] The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, Lifeletter #6, April 6, 1976, Box 1, Folder 1, David R. Gergen Files, 1974-1979, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as Gergen Files); "Gov. Reagan Decries Dehumanization of the Unborn," May-June 1975, MCCL Newsletter, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records; Carolyn Gerster to NRLC Board of Directors, "Presidential Candidates," December 30, 1975, Box 10, Folder 5, ACCL Records.

[497] In December 1975, four hundred pro-lifers even showed up to picket Rockefeller's visit to their state. "400 pro-lifers picket Rocky in St. Cloud," MCCL Newsletter, December 1975, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.

Amendment, which restricted federal funding for abortion, and had also chosen Bob Dole, who had a proven right-to-life record, to be his running mate.[498] When Marjory Mecklenburg joined the Ford campaign, she defended his stance on abortion: "If candidate 'A' represents our viewpoint more nearly than candidate 'B,' then we should work for candidate 'A.'"[499] Ford was not the perfect pro-life candidate but he was close enough.

For some right-to-lifers, however, neither Ford nor Carter was an acceptable choice, and they decided to support their own candidate, New York right-to-lifer Ellen McCormack. McCormack was a seasoned activist and had been a leader of the group Women for the Unborn. She had spent years writing and speaking against abortion, publishing many editorials denouncing abortion as well as the women's rights movement. In 1976, she decided to run in the Democratic primary because none of the candidates were pro-life enough in her opinion, and she wanted to challenge the "feminist power" that had hijacked the Democratic Party.[500] McCormack also feared that if the right-to-lifers did not run a pro-life candidate, the Democratic Party would continue to ignore them and Congress itself might not act on the abortion issue for another four years.[501] Now she decided to try to win the Democratic nomination, running a campaign centered on her right-to-life beliefs. In part, her campaign was another way to bring attention to the abortion issue in the election cycle—McCormack and her supporters hoped to raise

[498] "Ford makes a point of supporting Hyde provision in veto message," November 1976, *National Right to Life News*, Box 11, Folder 2, ACCL Records; "Bishops 'Not Entirely Satisfied'with Ford on Abortion, *The Wanderer,* September 23, 1976, Box 46, Folder 5, ACCL Records; Delaware County Voters for Life, "Pro-life Ballot," 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records; Virginia Society for Human Life, "Voting Pro-life," September 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records.
[499] Patrick Riley, "Pro-life Leader Marjory Mecklenburg Joins Ford-Dole Campaign Committee," October 10, 1976, Box 12, Folder 14, ACCL Records.
[500] "Support Your Pro-life Presidential Candidate!" Advertisement in March for Life Program, January 1976, Box 10, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[501] "Mrs. McCormack Endorsed for President," 1976, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records.

enough money to produce a series of pro-life commercials.[502] Though she did not gain widespread support, sending only seven delegates to the Democratic National Convention that July, her supporters were pleased with her showing in the primary.[503] McCormack was encouraged enough with her results in 1976 that in 1980 she would decide to enter the presidential race again.[504]

As the 1976 election neared, the movement's attention turned to each of the major parties and their platforms. There was still a sense among right-to-lifers that they had a role to play in both parties, and in 1976 right-to-lifers demanded decisive statements opposing abortion or, if they could not achieve that, wanted to prevent the parties from adding any platform planks supporting abortion rights. They faced challenges at both national conventions that summer. Ellen McCormack and her contingent continued to press the pro-life issue at the Democratic National Convention in July.[505] Activists also made their presence felt at the Republican National Convention that summer, to the chagrin of some Republicans. At least one attendee quipped, "This is still a Protestant country," after the party adopted a plank sympathetic to right-to-lifers.[506] Though Republicans did not explicitly endorse a human life amendment, they did adopt a plank at the convention stating that they wanted more "public dialogue on abortion" and that they

[502] "Support Your Pro-life Presidential Candidate!" Advertisement in March for Life Program, January 1976, Box 10, Folder 8, ACCL Records; Fran Watson to Friend of the Right to Life, August 10, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records.
[503] "Ellen McCormack delegates set for Democratic Convention," *National Right to Life News*, July 1976, Box 11, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[504] Robert Cetrulo to Friend of Life, September 17, 1980, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[505] "Ellen McCormack delegates set for Democratic Convention," *National Right to Life News*, July 1976, Box 11, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[506] Patricia Scharber Lefevere, "'Conservative' GOP convention defends rights selectively—fetuses have them, hungry don't," 1976, Box 45, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

supported the work of right-to-lifers.[507] Democrats, on the other hand, resisted right-to-life pleas. They said they respected the complex nature of the abortion debate but did not support a human life amendment.[508] Though right-to-lifers did not get the definitive statements they wanted from either party, they had succeeded in making abortion an issue that both parties were forced to address.

While working frantically to influence Ford, Carter, and both parties, right-to-lifers also saw the election as an opportunity to reach new allies, especially evangelicals. The movement had previously tried, and failed, in its outreach efforts to evangelicals in 1973 and 1974 but they remained undeterred. In fact, the 1976 election renewed right-to-lifers' efforts to recruit them. Despite the fact that Carter was an evangelical himself, the movement thought evangelicals might reject him based on his views on abortion. Evangelical right-to-lifers also helped make abortion a campaign issue, reminding their fellow evangelicals as well as both Ford and Carter that evangelicals viewed legalized abortion as a grave problem. Eugene Linse of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod sent out a letter to all pastors in his denomination with a not-so-subtle suggestion that only one candidate was in line with "the Judeo-Christian heritage" when it came to abortion.[509] The Christian Action Council, a new evangelical pro-life group, sought a meeting with President Ford to discuss the abortion issue in light of the upcoming election, reminding him of the "vast numbers of biblical Protestants…who are deeply distressed by the

[507] Republican Party Platform, August 16, 1976, Campaign material, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records. Right-to-lifers were pleased with the platform and even credited Ronald Reagan with helping it pass. The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, Lifeletter #12, August 23, 1976, Box 1, Folder 1, Gergen Files.
[508] Robert J. O'Keefe, "Abortion Plank Bewailed," July 15, 1976, Box 45, Folder 7, ACCL Records; "Bernardin Hits Abortion Plank," July 4, 1976, Box 1, Folder 1, Gergen Files.
[509] Eugene Linse to Pastor, October 25, 1976, Box 45, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

present Court-mandated, taxpayer-funded policy of mass extermination of the unborn."[510] And Marjory Mecklenburg, who had joined Ford's campaign officially, warned the Ford Campaign that Southern Baptists were paying attention to the abortion issue and that the campaign should highlight the candidates' divergent stances on abortion in upcoming debates.[511] The right-to-lifers' rhetoric seemed to have some effect as they kept the abortion issue and evangelicals in the spotlight throughout the campaign. A *Washington Post* article described President Ford's use of the abortion issue to try to woo evangelicals, even as it noted that evangelical support for Carter was slipping.[512] Right-to-lifers did not believe that Carter's evangelical faith would automatically give him the evangelical vote. They were confident that evangelicals already recognized the seriousness of the abortion issue and would vote accordingly. Though previous attempts at reaching evangelicals had failed, the 1976 election provided a new and exciting opportunity for right-to-lifers to continue expanding their movement among evangelicals.

The 1976 election presented pro-lifers with a new chance to broaden the base of their movement and make a big impact. Throughout 1975 and into 1976, the movement pushed its agenda in both major political parties as well as with their new evangelical allies. Right-to-lifers demanded the presidential candidates acknowledge the abortion issue and take a stand. Moreover, the human life amendment emerged as the litmus test, which the movement used to decide which candidates it could support and to guide right-to-life voting across the country. Right-to-lifers put so much stock in this election that they even had their own candidate in the race, Ellen McCormack. While they did not get

[510] Harold O.J. Brown, Letter to James Barker, October 15, 1976, Box 46, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[511] Marjory Mecklenburg, Memo to Stu Spencer, "Presidential Debates – Suggestions on Abortion Issue," October 21, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records.
[512] Myra MacPherson, "Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter: Many Evangelicals Having Second Thoughts about Carter," *The Washington Post*, September 27, 1976, Box C25, Folder 1, Ford Committee Records.

the pro-life president they wanted, right-to-lifers made abortion an issue that both parties had to pay attention to, broadened their base of support, and set the stage for abortion to be a central issue in subsequent elections.

4.3 Attempting to Avoid Polarization

One of the highest priorities for the movement during this time was avoiding polarization that might tear it apart, alienate potential allies, or turn American society against its agenda. Many right-to-lifers believed their vision for a broad-based coalition was the best way to avoid such fracture. As far as these activists were concerned, involvement in the movement was still open to any person who expressed a concern for life and opposed abortion, regardless of their politics, religious affiliation, or preferred strategy. Because of this commitment to the broad-based ideal, right-to-lifers continued to work together to understand and cooperate even if they might disagree with each other over strategy, ideology, or politics. In the mid to late 1970s, right-to-lifers tried to present a united front. Ruth Karim described the uniqueness of the movement as she saw it, "I have seen the pro-abortion forces completely baffled by the joyous fellowship so evident at pro-life gatherings…The NRLC can function effectively only if we put aside all pettiness and accept ourselves and each other as hand picked by God to do a job."[513] In fact, right-to-lifers saw their unity and diversity as a major strength during the late 1970s. Because of their determination in these years to avoid fractures along political, religious, strategic, and racial fault lines, right-to-lifers fostered a truly broad-based coalition and welcomed a diverse group of activists with differing approaches to politics, strategy, and religion, representing their broadest array of the American population.

[513] Ruth Karim to NRLC, February 20, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

In politics, the movement embraced activists from both the left and the right of the political spectrum, forming an odd coalition that spanned vast differences. Left-wing right-to-lifers became particularly active during these years. These activists often approached the abortion issue as it related to their activism in the antiwar, antinuclear, or labor movements, forging important connections between abortion and other issues. In 1978, for example, the Catholic Peace Fellowship, an antiwar group formed in response to the Vietnam War, held its annual conference with the theme, "Nuclear Disarmament and Right to Life," to discuss the connections between the two movements.[514] The main event of the conference was Daniel Berrigan's keynote address on "The Christian Community's Responsibility for Human Life: A Critique."[515] Here the peace movement and antinuclear activism converged with the right-to-life movement, and left-wing right-to-lifers saw a natural partnership in their causes.

Other groups of left-wing activists followed a similar trajectory in the second half of the 1970s. In 1979, Juli Loesch, who had been extensively involved in the antiwar and nuclear disarmament movements, founded Pro-lifers for Survival. The group grew out of her involvement in leftist politics in the 1960s and 1970s—her work with the United Farm Workers, Pax Christi, and Mobilization for Survival. Loesch was also an outspoken feminist, arguing that activists could support both the Equal Rights Amendment as well as the right-to-life movement.[516] She described Pro-lifers for Survival as providing opportunities for those people who shared a deep concern for abortion and for the issues

[514] Catholic Peace Fellowship, "Nuclear Disarmament and the Right to Life," 1978, Bo 4, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[515] New England Catholic Peace Fellowship, "Nuclear Disarmament and Right to Life: A Day for Dialogue," April 1, 1978, Box 2, Folder 100, Abortion Action Coalition Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, Boston, MA, (hereafter cited as AAC Papers).
[516] Juli Loesch, "Pro-life, Pro-E.R.A." *America*, December 9, 1978, Folder 2, Save Our Unwanted Life, Inc. Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as SOUL Records).

of war and nuclear weapons: pro-lifers who were upset that their movement ignored the issue of nuclear weapons and "peacenik/antinukers" who were upset that theirs too often supported abortion rights.[517] SOUL, the organization of college pro-lifers founded in the early 1970s, also took a decidedly left turn in its politics. In September 1975, its newsletter featured articles on the United Farm Workers, pro-life feminism, and direct action, and by the end of the 1970s the group's members were distributing literature on feminism and nuclear war in addition to their right-to-life work.[518] These groups, like the Catholic Peace Fellowship, Pro-lifers for Survival, and SOUL, served to further broaden the base of the movement and incorporate new ideas and approaches to abortion. They also show that right-to-life activism during these years was not confined to one side of the political spectrum or to either of the major political parties.

At the same time, the movement also attracted new members whose politics were decidedly conservative. Perhaps most notably, a strong anti-feminist cohort developed, opposing many of the policies of the Democrats as well as the Equal Rights Amendment. Phyllis Schlafly emerged during these years as an outspoken critic of feminism and the ERA. She had been building a conservative campaign against the ERA since the early 1970s, connecting the ERA and feminism to abortion. In the mid-1970s, she became even more vocal about her concerns. She warned right-to-lifers, "The women's libbers expect E.R.A. to be the constitutional means to assure and make permanent their goal of

[517] Juli Loesch, "Introducing: Prolifers for Survival!" 1979, Box 1, Folder 7, Juli Loesch Wiley Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (hereafter cited as Loesch Wiley Papers).
[518] SOUL, Newsletter, September 1975, Folder 2, SOUL Records; Juli Loesch, "Pro-life, Pro-E.R.A." *America*, December 9, 1978, Folder 2, SOUL Records; Sidney Callahan, "Feminist as Antiabortionist," *Chicago Times*, 1977, Folder 2, SOUL Records.

unlimited abortion on demand."[519] Her views gained traction in the movement. At the 1976 National Right to Life Convention, she chaired a panel titled "What's Wrong with ERA?"[520] Ellen McCormack, the right-to-life presidential candidate, also warned that the ERA was dangerous for the movement.[521] These conservative voices would become even more prominent over the next several years as Schlafly and other activists continued connecting their opposition of abortion to anti-feminism and other conservative aims. But in the mid to late 1970s, they existed alongside more moderate, liberal, and even left-wing right-to-lifers. From Phyllis Schlafly to Juli Loesch, activists during this time approached the abortion issue in widely divergent ways, and the movement continued to welcome right-to-lifers of all political persuasions.

In addition to its work in politics, the movement also turned its attention to racial fault lines in American society and attempted to attract more African Americans to the cause. Right-to-lifers had long tried to connect issues of race and abortion, either linking the fight against legal abortion to the fight for civil rights or arguing that abortion disproportionately affected minorities.[522] They pushed this message even more in the mid to late 1970s. Again, their goal was a broad-based coalition that avoided any sort of polarization—be it religious, political, or racial. By addressing the issue of race, right-to-lifers were making an argument that their movement represented all Americans, even though it had involved mostly white Americans thus far. There were only a few

[519] Phyllis Schlafly, "E.R.A.'s Assist to Abortion," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, December 1974, Box 25, Folder 1, ACCL Records; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 225.
[520] NRLC, National Right to Life Convention '76," Program, 1976, Box 11, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[521] Ellen McCormack, "The Equal Rights Amendment and Abortion," July 17, 1975, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[522] Robert Greene, The Greene Sheet, December 7, 1973, Box 6, Folder 11, ACCL Records. Greene, NRLC's Executive Director, devoted most of his monthly newsletter to the issues of race, abortion, and poverty.

prominent African American right-to-life leaders in the 1970s, such as Mildred Jefferson, who was president of the NRLC, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Erma Craven, a social worker and longtime MCCL member.[523] Right-to-lifers wanted to do better.

The most consistent message the movement sent to African Americans was that abortion was genocide for minority communities. In 1976, Michael Novak pointed to the abortion statistics for 1975 and asked, "Who now defends the rights of unborn black children?"[524] ACCL kept a copy of the article in its records with the word "GENOCIDE" scrawled across the top. The issue of race also came up in discussions of federal funding for abortion. When California said it would use state money to fill the funding gap following the Hyde Amendment's restriction of federal funding for abortion, the California Pro-life Council condemned the decision and a state senator called it "waging a war of genocide against Latins, Blacks, and Indians."[525] The genocide trope was an old right-to-life favorite. Activists had been making comparisons between Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and abortion in America since the late 1960s, but in the late 1970s they targeted that language toward minority groups in the United States. By framing the issue of abortion and race in such strong terms, the right-to-lifers cast their movement as the true defender of minority rights in America. In their opinion, right-to-lifers were, after all, defending minorities from genocide. At the 1976 NRLC convention, Erma Craven and two colleagues even led a panel that called the movement the "cornerstone of the

[523] Mildred F. Jefferson, M.D., "Testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution at Hearings on the report 'The State of Civil Rights: 1977' of the United States Commission on Civil Rights," March 6, 1978, Box 23, Folder 4, ACCL Records; The Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, "How We Respect Life is the Overriding Moral Issue…" *National Right to Life News*, January 1977, Box 23, Folder 3, ACCL Records; Erma Craven, "Black Genocide," SOUL newsletter, February 1976, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[524] Michael Novak, "How placidly they accept aborting so many black babies," *The Washington Star*, November 14, 1976, Box 10, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[525] "California using genocide," *National Right to Life News*, October 1977, Box 11, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

minorities struggle for human rights."[526] Though white Catholics and Protestants had dominated the movement up to this point, right-to-lifers now tried to convince minorities in the nation that they were the ones who truly cared about minority rights. Right-to-lifers hoped abortion could be an issue that would transcend racial divisions and overcome the polarization between white and black Americans.

The focus on avoiding political and racial discord was reaching new groups and reinvigorating right-to-life activism, but as before, religion remained a sensitive subject. Right-to-lifers did not want a movement that was only for Catholics or only for Protestants but one that welcomed Americans of any religion. To mitigate any religious divisions, some leaders suggested they avoid framing abortion as a religious issue altogether—a strategy dating back to the late 1960s. In February 1974, as the NRLC discussed the best tactics for having religious leaders testify at legislative hearings, Warren Schaller advised, "Abortion is not an issue to be discussed in terms of religious heritage or moral background and training. We are talking about a human value which should be guaranteed by the Constitution."[527] Still, many right-to-lifers were concerned about how the media depicted the movement as a religious crusade and wanted to challenge this portrayal. They feared it could polarize the movement from the rest of American society. As ACCL's leaders noted in their Executive Meeting in April 1975, "Rightly or wrongly, the words 'life' and 'Right to Life' now mean in the public mind political activist, religious sectarianism. They shouldn't, but they do."[528] Combating these stereotypes and being mindful about the role of religion in the movement would be a recurring theme for right-to-lifers through the end of the decade. It gave the movement

[526] NRLC, National Right to Life Convention '76," Program, 1976, Box 11, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[527] Warren Schaller to NRLC Board of Directors, February 15, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[528] Executive Meeting Minutes, April 11, 1975, Box 4, Folder 6, ACCL Records.

another opportunity to fight polarization along religious lines and to continue building a broad-based coalition.

Because of previous disagreements over religion and their ongoing desire to diversify their base of support, both the NRLC and ACCL were anxious to make sure Americans of all religions felt welcome in the movement. In a drastic shift from religious tension in the aftermath of *Roe,* they even began using religion to present a united front. Both groups believed religion could bring Americans together in opposition to abortion. Shortly after its formation in 1974, ACCL organized the first National Prayer Breakfast for Life in Washington, D.C., and it quickly became an annual tradition. After two successful events, Marjory Mecklenburg described its impact, "It…fills the need of movement members to express their concern in spiritual terms…In addition, it has provided an effective vehicle to show religious unity in opposition to unregulated abortion and to demonstrate a pro-life philosophy encompassing a broad range of concerns."[529] The NRLC, for its part, continued its outreach to new religious groups. In 1974, the NRLC began an extensive campaign within two conservative Protestant denominations—the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention.[530] And though its prime focus was on the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the NRLC also hoped to reach out to all Lutherans by making contact with local Lutheran pastors. In these endeavors, the NRLC and ACCL firmly insisted that the vast majority of Americans in the country's three main faiths—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—were

[529] Marjory Mecklenburg to Members of ACCL Advisory Board, March 26, 1976, Box 2, Folder 1, Williams Papers.
[530] NRLC, Minutes National Right to Life Committee Executive Committee Meeting," January 4-5, 1974, Box 7, Folder 10, ACCL Records.

united in opposition to "permissive pro-abortion positions."[531] They believed that the abortion issue did not need to divide Americans along religious lines, and any American of any religious tradition could and should get involved in right-to-life politics.

Perhaps most indicative of this shift on religion and the desire to present a united front was the reaction from Marjory Mecklenburg and other Protestant leaders when the press and abortion rights supporters again attacked Catholic involvement in the right-to-life movement. Where there had been tension and harsh criticism of the Catholic Church in 1973 and 1974, Mecklenburg and other Protestants now defended their Catholic colleagues. When a religious abortion rights group, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), issued a statement, which indicted the Catholic Church for its support of the movement and involvement in politics in the fall of 1977, Mecklenburg and a few other prominent Protestant right-to-lifers stepped up and issued their own statement challenging RCAR and defending the Catholic Church. They wrote,

> In our judgment abortion is not, as the signers of 'A Call to Concern' intimate, a religious issue. Rather it is a moral question, and a moral question upon which religious groups, such as the Roman Catholic hierarchy, have a right to speak. It is, we believe, most unfortunate that the 'Call to Concern' seeks to associate opposition to abortion and to the use of public funds for abortion with the teaching of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. We view this as an instance of demagoguery and, alas, a latent anti-Romanism.[532]

Though in 1973 and 1974, some of these Protestant right-to-lifers had been critical of Catholics in the movement, they now defended the Catholic hierarchy. Mecklenburg

[531] Warren Schaller, "The Overwhelming Majority of Non-Catholic religious Organizations in the United States Do Not Support Permissive Abortion," Box 8, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[532] A Cause for Concern, October 1977, Box 8, Folder 11, Williams Papers.

strongly rejected attempts to "polarize" Americans as she saw it and instead argued for unity among right-to-lifers.[533]

Work to broaden the movement and overcome religious divides also took place at the grassroots level. At the 1975 MCCL convention, the group highlighted the involvement of Protestants, featuring Charles Carroll, an Episcopal priest, Calvin Eichhorst, a Lutheran Minister, and Robert Holbrook, a Southern Baptist.[534] And its conference in 1976 featured a panel specifically addressing the issue of "Interdenominational Action."[535] That same year, MCCL's leaders launched an endeavor to support a human life amendment that incorporated this interdenominational cooperation.[536] This initiative, called Mission Possible, had them working closely with Southern evangelicals to set up right-to-life organizations throughout the region.[537] For example, in Alabama, the group made contact with Ray Dutton, a radio preacher and member of the Church of Christ. MCCL and Dutton worked together to organize a right-to-life conference in the state.[538] Dutton, like many others, believed that more people in Alabama would be actively opposed to abortion if they only heard the pro-life message.[539] Using Mission Possible funds, MCCL also gave a grant of $3000 to Baptists for Life as that group worked to pass an antiabortion resolution at the Southern Baptist

[533] ACCL, "Pro-life Leaders Urged Creative Problem Solving, Not Polarization," November 20, 1977, Box 28, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[534] MCCL, Protestant Leaders Headline MCCL Convention in St. Cloud. October 24, 1975, Box 12, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[535] MCCL, Agenda, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, 5th Annual State Convention, 1976, Box 12, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[536] MCCL, "Mission Possible: A Human Life Amendment," 1976, Box 12, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[537] Joseph Lampe to Robert Lynch and William Cox, August 12, 1974, Box 11, Folder 15, ACCL Records.
[538] "MCCL helps spread the word to pro-lifers in Alabama," MCCL Newsletter, May 1976, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.
[539] Ibid.

Convention annual meeting.[540] MCCL had managed to raise $14,000 total, which they planned to use in several southern states, and the group hoped to enact its plan of spreading the pro-life message to a neglected region by working with contacts they had made in the Church of Christ and in the Southern Baptist Convention.[541] MCCL continued to support right-to-lifers in the South for the next several years.[542] Like its national counterparts, MCCL worked to expand the movement and build a broader religious coalition. The group's work paid off, and the movement started to build momentum among evangelicals, a group with which it had previously had little success.

Even as right-to-lifers worked to overcome their political, religious, and racial differences, they also had to avoid polarization over divergences in strategy. Activists approached the abortion issue in myriad ways and proposed many different solutions. Even the decision over whether to promote alternatives to abortion versus the human life amendment threatened to polarize right-to-lifers during these years. For example, while ACCL worked steadfastly on alternatives to abortion legislation, the NRLC worried that alternatives to abortion might be a distraction from working toward the human life amendment. At the end of October 1975, the NRLC circulated a memo to its Board members and warned them, "It seems that 'alternatives for abortion' is fast becoming a smoke screen for obscuring our real objective which is to secure a Human Life Amendment."[543] Arlene Doyle of Women for the Unborn also worried that alternatives to abortion might become a "substitute" for the human life amendment. Like many other

[540] "Baptists Reject Easy Abortion," MCCL Newsletter, August-September 1976, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.
[541] Peggy O'Keefe, "MCCL mission to make South pro-life called possible with money, education," *The Catholic Bulletin*, March 26, 1976, Box 12, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[542] Darla St. Martin to MCCL Chapter Leader, January 12, 1977, Box 13, Folder 6, ACCL Records.
[543] Memo to NRLC Board of Directors and Others, October 29, 1975, Box 1, Folder 5, Williams Papers.

right-to-lifers, she was becoming increasingly convinced that the only option for the movement was "No Compromise!"[544]

Though this tension threatened to break the movement into divergent factions, right-to-life leaders managed to maintain some measure of unity, thanks to their shared goals of broadening the movement and avoiding polarization. They used annual events, such as the March for Life on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and the National Right to Life Convention to encourage engagement with right-to-lifers who might advocate different strategies. For example, even after Marjory Mecklenburg split from the NRLC to start ACCL, she was still invited to participate in the National Right to Life Convention. Not only did she participate, but the NRLC also invited her to once again lead a workshop on organizing in the states.[545] And even though NRLC leaders had misgivings about the alternatives-to-abortion approach, they still welcomed workshops on that strategy at the conventions. In fact, the National Right to Life Conventions in these years showed right-to-lifers that a range of approaches were allowed and welcomed in the movement, from pro-life feminism to alternatives to abortion to opposing the ERA to using science and medicine to argue against abortion to direct action and protest to voting and lobbying.[546] The breadth of theses strategic approaches was impressive and allowed room for the diverse group of activists the movement represented.

Right-to-lifers' work toward avoiding polarization—whether it be political, strategic, racial, or religious—was meant not only to unify the movement but also to

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[544] Arlene Doyle, "No Compromise on the Human Life Amendment," January 30, 1976, Box 10, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[545] NRLC, Convention Program, 1975, Box 10, Folder 6, ACCL Records; NRLC, National Right to Life Convention '76," 1976, Box 11, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[546] NRLC, Convention Program, 1975, Box 10, Folder 6, ACCL Records; NRLC, National Right to Life Convention '76," 1976, Box 11, Folder 1, ACCL Records; John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, Untitled Sit-in History, n.d., Box 2, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.

broaden its appeal. Right-to-lifers resisted characterizations of the movement as something "fringe" or only for "fanatics." As they had done in years previously, activists continued to emphasize the broad-based nature of their growing coalition. Moreover, right-to-lifers argued that they could speak for all Americans and that their views were representative of mainstream and foundational American views on rights and freedom. Even SOUL used some of the same rhetoric. At its convention in 1975, the keynote speaker, Marg Wolters, blamed legalized abortion on "a free-wheeling vocal minority," implying that the majority of Americans opposed abortion. And the title of her address itself—"The Spirit of 1776"—evoked the idea that the pro-lifers were now embracing the same sort of spirit and values as the American Revolution, taking part in a truly American endeavor.[547] Whether it was polarization over politics, religion, race, or strategy, the right-to-lifers worked for unity and tried to make sure there was room for any American in the movement. And even as late as August 1979, Marjory Mecklenburg remained firmly committed to a broad-based movement that had room for liberals and conservatives, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Mormons.[548] Right-to-lifers' answer to polarization and division was to work harder to represent the majority of Americans they claimed supported their cause and to welcome any person who opposed legal abortion, no matter their religion, race, or political beliefs.

4.4 A New Strategy: Nonviolent Direct Action

While the leaders of the national movement worked to find a balance between pursuing a human life amendment, working for smaller, more incremental measures to promote alternatives to abortion, and avoiding political and religious polarization in the

[547] Marg Wolters, "The Spirit of 1776," Keynote address, August 2, 1975, Box 4, Folder 1, ACCL Records.
[548] Marjory Mecklenburg, Letter to the Editor, *St. Cloud Visitor*, August 28, 1979, Box 15, Folder 6, ACCL Records.

movement, activists in many local communities were trying out a new tactic, nonviolent direct action at abortion clinics, which was a radical departure for the movement. Grassroots political activity had always been central in right-to-life organizing, and national organizations like ACCL and the NRLC acknowledged the power and influence of grassroots activists. Robert Greene, the Executive Director of the NRLC, called them "effective agents for change" who "deserve to have a piece of the action."[549] Moreover, he acknowledged their role in developing their own strategies: "I think they are capable of analyzing the forces at work in their community, state and nation which account for the level of anti-life activity which now must be changed."[550] Nonviolent direct action had the potential to test this resolve. There was some sense, at least at the national level, that the movement was settling down, learning the ways politics worked in Washington, D.C., and softening its fanaticism. In September 1975, one reporter noted this change: "The techniques and tactics of the anti-abortion 'lobby' in Congress have changed dramatically in the recent past…In most cases, confrontation has given way to reasoned debate."[551] In the media's estimation, the movement was channeling its energy into appropriate political avenues, focusing on lobbying, legislation, and electoral politics. But in the late 1970s, some grassroots activists assessed the situation in their communities and decided the best strategy to stop abortion was to go to the clinics in their towns and use nonviolent direct action to shut them down.

Direct action was not a completely novel tactic for the movement. Some early right-to-lifers had previous experience with direct action in the civil rights and antiwar

[549] Robert Greene, "1973 Midyear Report," January 1974, Box 6, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[550] Robert Greene, "1973 Midyear Report," January 1974, Box 6, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[551] Walter Taylor, "Anti-abortion Lobby Quiets Down and Gains Friends," September 16, 1975, Box 9, Folder 14, ACCL Records.

movements, and a few groups even organized protests and picketed abortion clinics in the early 1970s before *Roe v. Wade*. In these early years, young people were primarily responsible for the direct action protests. For example, SOUL had attempted an early form of sidewalk counseling—confronting women as they entered clinics—in 1972 in St. Paul, Minnesota.[552] And at the NYPLC convention in 1972, the young right-to-lifers copied an antiwar movement tactic, burning their birth certificates rather than their draft cards in protest of legalized abortion.[553] In fact, the antiwar movement not only inspired their tactics but also their slogans and songs. Even in the late 1970s, right-to-lifers using direct action sang antiwar songs tailored to right-to-life activism, from "Give Life a Chance" to "Where Have All the Children Gone?"[554] Various direct action protests continued throughout the early to mid 1970s. But starting in 1975 and 1976, these actions escalated across the country, and by 1977 there was a noticeable uptick in incidents at clinics as well as new direct action groups forming across the country. Right-to-lifers continued picketing at clinics but also started entering clinics and staging sit-ins, hoping to shut down the clinics for as long as they could. This shift started a trend that would grow in the 1980s to include a plethora of direct action organizations and massive demonstrations organized by groups like Operation Rescue into the early 1990s.

Grassroots action drove this shift in strategy, as local right-to-life leaders began organizing more protests at clinics in their communities and attracted the attention of young right-to-lifers and activists in other causes. As with early 1970s direct action,

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[552] The Abortion Counseling Service of Minnesota, Press Release, June 24, 1972, Box 3, Folder Press Releases, NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as NARAL MN Records).
[553] Richard L. Hughes, "Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War," *The Historian* 68 (Fall 2006): 542.
[554] George Yourishin, Press Release, July 10, 1977, Box 10, Folder 9, ACCL Records.

many of these activists were young people. For example, SOUL, which had previously engaged in some direct action protests, began sit-ins at clinics in 1976.[555] Young right-to-lifers also started the group People Expressing a Concern for Everyone (PEACE), which had branches across the country.[556] Others found their way into right-to-life direct action from the antiwar movement or other activism.[557] In recalling the start of the sit-in movement, John O'Keefe, who had been a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, said that the right-to-lifers wanted to "imitate" the success of the peace movement in using direct action to get the media's attention.[558] O'Keefe quickly emerged as an early leader of these new direct action activists and in the 1980s would be a national leader of the direct action wing of the movement. These young activists soon gained the attention of the media and the rest of the right-to-life movement.

The activists argued that their actions were just, and they were willing to risk arrest and trial because they felt their sit-ins at clinics had a direct impact in saving unborn babies. At first, many of them were simply trying to get the attention of the media and the public, to make sure people kept paying attention to the abortion issue. But then the direct action activists realized they could use their sit-ins to persuade or prevent women from getting abortions.[559] This realization strengthened their resolve. When the Chicago branch of PEACE released a statement to the press following a sit-in, they explained the dual purpose of their protest, saying that they had "gathered…to stop

[555] "January 22," SOUL Newsletter, February 1976, Folder 2, SOUL Records.
[556] John Rowan, "Pro-lifers Sit In at Abortion Clinic," January 27, 1978, Box 2, Folder 1, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[557] John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe's history of the sit-in movement describes several of these individuals and how the early use of direct action came from observations of the success of the peace movement in using such tactics. John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, Untitled histories, n.d. circa early 1980s, Box 2, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe papers.
[558] John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, Untitled histories, n.d. circa early 1980s, Box 2, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe papers.
[559] Ibid.

abortions from taking place" and "to bring to public attention that abortion is an act of killing and cannot be tolerated."[560] In March 1977, the *National Right to Life News*, the movement's main publication, featured a long article on the new direct action protests—an opinion piece by John O'Keefe. In the piece, O'Keefe pled with right-to-lifers to support direct action, arguing that more needed to be done to "change the pro-abortion stance of our country."[561] He believed sit-ins would help pro-lifers show the humanity of the unborn. More than that, he critiqued the right-to-lifers' current comfort and isolation. To O'Keefe, direct action was a way for the movement to expand and "no longer be an insulated minority preaching self-righteously and indignantly from a safe distance."[562]

These direct action protests varied across the country and pushed the boundaries of right-to-life activism. Though right-to-lifers still picketed, their favorite form of direct action was the sit-in. Typically a group of activists would enter a clinic, often passing out pro-life tracts to the women waiting or working there. Most often, they would simply occupy the waiting room, but at some sit-ins the activists would enter exam rooms, sometimes even chaining themselves to any equipment in the room.[563] And then they would wait for the police to show up and arrest them, all the while trying to convince the clinic workers and patients of the evils of abortion. The escalation of tactics was clear. In Minnesota in 1974, a small group of activists, including activists from MCCL and SOUL, held silent demonstrations and handed out pro-life literature outside a clinic in St. Paul.[564]

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[560] PEACE, "Release to the Press," March 11, 1978, Box 4, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[561] John O'Keefe. "Sit-ins give 'honest picture' of pro-life struggle," *National Right to Life News,* March 1977, Box 11, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Robert Suro, "12 antiabortion protesters arrested at medical center," *Chicago Tribune,* March 12, 1978, Box 4, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers; Joe Scheidler to Mary, March 13, 1978, Box 4, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers; Joe Scheidler to Dave Gaetano, March 13, 1978, Box 4, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[564] William Hunt to Pat Goodson, April 29, 1974, Box 8, Folder 5, ACCL Records.

The following year, about one hundred SOUL members actually entered the clinic, staging a sit-in in the reception area until the police showed up to remove them.[565] Similar protests occurred across the country. John O'Keefe kept a record of nearly twenty different sit-ins from 1976 to 1979, ranging from Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland to Massachusetts and Connecticut to New York to California.[566] His list did not include the protests also being conducted by SOUL and PEACE in various parts of the Midwest.

Though the NRLC, ACCL, and other groups had been trying to downplay the image of fanaticism in the movement, they did not seem to have any problem with the sit-ins at abortion clinics. The protests received extensive media coverage, as the direct action activists had hoped, and the *National Right to Life News* and other pro-life newsletters reported on pickets and sit-ins across the country.[567] Some leaders were wary of this turn to direct action and civil disobedience. Joseph Stanton thought right-to-lifers should first "exhaust every constitutional means before acts of civil disobedience become the last refuge of a movement without hope."[568] Yet, the movement's major national publication, *National Right to Life News*, continued to regularly run stories about direct action protests and even allowed one group to solicit donations to pay for their legal fees.[569] Most of the coverage was very favorable. The publication not only documented the protests themselves but also the trials of protestors, highlighting how these right-to-lifers spoke out for the unborn even as they faced jail time or fines. The NRLC also

[565] MCCL, MCCL Newsletter, February 1976, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.
[566] John O'Keefe, "Sit-In Info," 1976-1979, Box 4, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[567] Joseph McKenna, "Reporter leaves the sidelines, joins demonstration at clinic," *National Right to Life News,* April 1977, Box 11, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[568] Joseph R. Stanton, March 1, 1977, Box 4, Folder 7, Williams Papers.
[569] "Unborn's personhood to be argued at trial of Cleveland protestors," *National Right to Life News,* December 1976, Box 11, Folder 2, ACCL Records.

invited some of these activists to hold a workshop on nonviolent direct action at the National Right to Life Convention in 1978.[570] While the NRLC and ACCL did not explicitly endorse direct action, their coverage of the protests as well as the involvement of direct action activists at the annual convention suggested their tacit approval.

The sit-ins at clinics persisted with the blessing of the rest of the movement and highlighted the wide range of accepted strategies during this time. All this in spite of the fears of NOW and NARAL, who noted a serious uptick in violence at clinics in the same years that direct action began—bomb threats, arson, and vandalism being the most common issues.[571] The right-to-lifers spoke out against violence at clinics but did not condemn nonviolent direct action in any way. After a fire damaged a clinic in St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, Joseph Stanton lamented the violence but also defended direct action: "It may have been an upset pro-lifer pushed beyond the point of endurance. We can never condone such actions, but more and more deeply distressed citizens are considering civil disobedience as the ultimate personal act to save even one life."[572] Overall, right-to-life leaders and the movement as a whole welcomed the direct action activists despite the fact that their tactics pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable and legal and despite concerns about the effect of these tactics on the movement's public image.

Conclusion

[570] John O'Keefe, Untitled History of Sit-in Movement, n.d. early 1980s, Box 2, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[571] NARAL in particular started documenting instances of violence from 1977 on. See records in Box 31, Folder 12, National Abortion Rights Action League, Additional Records, 1967-2004, MC 714, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
[572] Joseph R. Stanton to George Devlin, Arthur Dyck, and others, March 1, 1977, Box 4, Folder 7, Williams Papers.

Since the early 1970s, the right-to-lifers had organized themselves around a core principle about the nature of their effort—the idea of a broad-based movement. They had not always lived up to this ideal, especially in the fraught aftermath of *Roe v. Wade,* but it had been their central organizing ethos: the sense that abortion was such an abhorrent crime that all Americans—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or atheist, Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative—would naturally oppose it. Over and over again, right-to-lifers argued that their pro-life stance was the true American stance, in line with the founding documents, rights, and values of the nation, and that despite *Roe v. Wade*, the majority of Americans still opposed abortion. Ed Golden made this belief explicit: "The actual numbers of membership reflect that we do in fact represent what we feel to be the majority of the people in the United States."[573] This push for a broad-based movement led right-to-lifers to actively fight against polarization within their ranks as well as between the movement and the rest of society. They fought stereotypes that their movement was "fringe" or "fanatic" or "a dangerous and mindless mob," and continued their efforts of outreach to a broad range of Americans.[574] Right-to-lifers asserted that all "decent citizens" must be willing to become active politically and confront the evils of abortion.[575]

In the late 1970s, right-to-lifers came the closest to achieving the broad-based movement they so desired. They finally made an impact in national elections, making their presence felt in both political parties and on the campaign trail. The NRLC continued lobbying Congress for a human life amendment, and though the organization

[573] Ed Golden, Statement Concerning the National Right to Life Committee, 1974, Box 8, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[574] Warren Schaller to NRLC Board of Directors, February 15, 1974, Box 8, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[575] Families for Life, "Visit Congress," 1974, Box 7, Folder 1, ACCL Records.

did not get its amendment banning abortion, it did help secure the Hyde Amendment, which prohibited federal funding for abortions. ACCL, meanwhile, worked to support alternatives to abortion and made important new connections in Congress, the labor movement, and in the women's movement. Catholics and Protestants found ways to work together and use religion to build unity. The movement also did not give up on evangelicals but continued its determined outreach efforts. And on the ground, grassroots activists developed a bold strategy—clinic sit-ins—to gain wider publicity for the movement and perhaps even save some babies. These successes buoyed the movement and helped it "sustain the kind of long term action that is necessary for success" as MCCL president Leo LaLonde described it.[576] The movement now represented a broad range of Americans, black and white, Catholic and Protestant, Republican and Democrat, as it worked more aggressively to achieve its goals, setting an "ambitious agenda for 1980 and beyond" with the help of its "single-minded, fiercely dedicated supporters."[577]

In January 1979, the right-to-lifers had their biggest turnout yet for the annual March for Life as nearly sixty thousand people converged on Washington, D.C. Yet one chant, in particular, seemed to be the new favorite refrain: "No compromise!"[578] It was becoming increasingly common among right-to-lifers. Whether calling their opponents "baby killers" or staking a campaign strategy of "No Life—no vote!" or chanting "No compromise!" at rallies, right-to-lifers were beginning to draw an even starker boundary

[576] Leo LaLonde to MCCL members, August 24, 1977, Box 12, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[577] John Herbers, "Right-to-life movement prepares for 1980 election," *Minneapolis Star*, November 27, 1978, Box 43, Folder 7, ACCL Records.
[578] B.D. Cohen and Judy Mann, "Abortion Passions Rise on Both Sides." *Washington Post*, January 23, 1979, Box 35, Folder 5, ACCL records.

around what they saw as the true pro-life position.[579] The position was far removed from that of Marjory Mecklenburg and ACCL who tried to stake their place in a middle ground that was slowly but surely shrinking.

Because of this emerging hardline approach, the right-to-life movement itself was starting to show signs of fracture, despite several years of fostering a truly broad-based coalition comprised of diverse individuals and groups with diverse approaches and strategies. Dr. Fred Mecklenburg had warned right-to-lifers that they needed to be careful and remain flexible and willing to compromise—with each other and with their opponents. "The 'all-or-nothing', 'no compromise ever' rhetoric may stir the masses at the pro-life rallies," he wrote, "but realistically if those are the only two choices we will give our legislative leaders, it seems more likely that we will be left with nothing."[580] Yet by 1979, even Fred Mecklenburg, who had been a stalwart right-to-life supporter and activist since he became MCCL's first president in 1968, found himself on the opposite side from MCCL.[581] During debates over family planning legislation and funding in Minnesota, MCCL's Executive Director David O'Steen sent around a memo listing Mecklenburg on the "pro-abortion" side because he had testified in opposition to a bill that would have severely restricted family planning funding in the state, a bill that MCCL supported.[582] Despite Mecklenburg's earlier warnings, it seemed the middle ground on the abortion issue was quickly disappearing.

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[579] B.D. Cohen and Judy Mann, "Abortion Passions Rise on Both Sides." *Washington Post*, January 23, 1979, Box 35, Folder 5, ACCL records; NRLC, "No Life—No Vote!!!" November 1, 1976, Box 10, Folder 11, ACCL Records.
[580] Fred Mecklenburg, "Building Bridges instead of Walls," 1977, Box 24, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[581] David O'Steen to MCCL Leaders, Special Contacts, March 16, 1979, Box 24, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[582] Ibid.

Opportunities for dialogue with those outside the movement also seemed to be fading away. In a somewhat surprising move, NOW had called for a day of discussion with the pro-life movement at the start of 1979. ACCL and a few other right-to-life groups accepted the invitation, hoping to find some middle ground on the abortion issue upon which they could all agree.[583] After a day of dialogue, the groups held a press conference to express the concerns they shared for women, especially poor women and young women they felt were most vulnerable. But as NOW's Eleanor Smeal spoke to the press, PEACE activists interrupted her, carrying the body of an aborted fetus, weeping, and proclaiming to the room: "We weep for her and all innocent children killed through abortion."[584] Despite apologies for the incident from several right-to-life groups, the damage was done. The middle ground on the abortion issue was almost completely gone, and as John O'Keefe later recalled, "The dialogue between prolife and pro-abortion leaders was aborted that day, and buried at an unsuccessful follow-up meeting two months later."[585]

[583]ACCL, "Statement for February 15, 1979 National Dialogue on Abortion," February 14, 1979, Box 4, Folder 15, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[584] Mary O'Malley and Nancy Hackle, "For One Shining Moment," 1979, Box 4, Folder 15, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers. This is the firsthand account of the incident by two of the activists involved.
[585] John O'Keefe, Untitled History of Sit-ins, n.d. Box 2, Folder 2, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.

5.0 Right-to-Life Resistance to the New Right in the Age of Reagan

Introduction

On the campaign trail in February 1980, presidential candidate Ronald Reagan admitted he had made a big "mistake" during his time as governor of California.[586] The mistake he referred to? Signing California's liberal abortion law in 1967. But Reagan promised that as president he would support strict regulations for abortion, including a human life amendment. This was just the rhetoric that pro-lifers had longed to hear from a presidential candidate, and that November, they helped elect Reagan to the presidency. His victory signaled the rise of a new powerful player in American politics—what journalists and scholars called the New Right. For many pro-lifers, the victory of Ronald Reagan and, by extension, the New Right was a sign of new and exciting times for their movement, and some activists saw the New Right as a potentially powerful ally in the fight against legalized abortion. Believing that a human life amendment was now within their reach, right-to-lifers looked to put pressure on Reagan and the new Republicans elected to Congress and to hold them accountable to their campaign promises. As MCCL members recognized in their March for Life in St. Paul just days after Reagan's inauguration, the 1980s would be the "Decade for Life."[587]

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[586] "Reagan Affirms Anti-abortion Stand," February 7, 1980, *New York Times*, Box 249, Folder 2, Anthony C. Beilenson Papers (Collection 391), UCLA Special Library Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, (hereafter cited as Beilenson Papers).

[587] "'The 80's—Decade for Life' is Capitol rally theme," MCCL Newsletter, January 1981, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletter 1981-1982, Katherine Wood Taylor Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers).

Yet not all right-to-lifers were so optimistic. In the fall of 1980, Marjory Mecklenburg alerted ACCL members to the growth of the New Right and its "close association" with the right-to-life movement. The situation was so dire that she believed ACCL must shift its focus to "capture the leadership and direct pro-life energies toward positive activities."[588] Likewise, Monsignor George Higgins warned Catholics that the New Right was the "antithesis" of what the right-to-life movement and the Catholic Church stood for.[589] The influence of the New Right immediately alarmed many right-to-lifers, but these activists would not give up without fighting for their cause and for their vision of a broad-based movement. A clash between the two sides was imminent as the conservative right-to-lifers basked in their victory, embraced an alliance with the New Right, and renewed efforts for a human life amendment while a coalition of centrists, liberals, and left-wing right-to-lifers as well as Catholic Church officials tried to prevent right-wing politics from completely dominating the abortion debate.

The conservative turn in the antiabortion movement has been covered extensively in the scholarly literature. By the early 1990s, sociologist Dallas Blanchard explained the clear connection between right-to-life activism and the New Right and Religious Right.[590] Historian Daniel Williams has documented the role of abortion in cementing the allegiance of the Religious Right to the Republican Party.[591] J. Brooks Flippen describes the role the abortion issue played in turning evangelical voters against Jimmy Carter and

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[588] Marjory Mecklenburg to Friend, Fall 1981, Box 74, Folder 2, George Gilmary Higgins Papers, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Higgins Papers).
[589] Marjory Mecklenburg to Friend, Fall 1981, Box 74, Folder 2, Higgins Papers; George G. Higgins, "The Prolife Movement and the New Right," *America*, September 13, 1980, Box 23, Folder 2, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc., Records, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as ACCL Records).
[590] Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).
[591] Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 130-131.

the Democratic Party.[592] And Robert O. Self explained the emergence of "breadwinner conservatism" in the 1970s, which connected the abortion issue and backlash to the 1960s rights revolutions and contributed to the shift toward conservatism in American politics.[593] There are many other similar studies, and the connection between abortion and conservative politics since the early 1980s is clear.

At the same time, this alliance between conservative politics and religion and the right-to-life movement was not inevitable. In fact, some right-to-lifers actively resisted it. Unfortunately, their history has been generally ignored. Most literature on the movement during the 1980s tends to overemphasize the role of the New Right and portrays right-to-lifers as monolithically conservative.[594] There is such a proliferation of such studies that it can seem as if all right-to-lifers agreed that an alliance with the New Right was positive progress for the movement. However, during the early 1980s, an important contingent of right-to-lifers, many of whom had been involved in the movement for close to a decade, were still fighting for a broad-based movement and believed that an alliance with the New Right jeopardized this goal by excluding liberals and the left from the cause. This chapter recovers the story of those right-to-lifers who opposed, and at times actively fought against, the conservative turn in politics. Rather than passively accept the new alliance with conservative politics and religion, these activists decided to fight for their

[592] J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of the Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 22.
[593] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).
[594] Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)*;* Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*; Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right*; Neil Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); James Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

vision of a broad-based movement, to stake their claim in right-to-life politics, and to challenge the ascendancy of the New Right.

Members of the Catholic Church hierarchy, pro-life moderates and liberals in groups like ACCL, and activists of the pro-life left led the resistance. This coalition worked together to maintain the right-to-life movement's broad-based identity and contested the New Right's growing involvement in politics. Within the Catholic Church, church officials as well as lay Catholics pointed out the ways New Right policies clashed with church teaching, monitored New Right activity in various right-to-life organizations, and opposed the New Right in the legislative arena. Liberal and moderate right-to-lifers, such as those in ACCL, were in an even tougher fight. They faced battles on two fronts: fending off the New Right as well as staking their place in the Democratic Party and among their fellow liberals. Increasingly through the 1980s, they tried to remind people on both sides of the political spectrum that pro-life Democrats and liberals still existed and still mattered. Confronting conservatives on their own turf, the pro-life left challenged the notion that opposing abortion was an issue for conservatives alone, and they pushed for a pro-life agenda that included issues of concern for the left, from nuclear disarmament to capital punishment to the ERA. The ACCL and other pro-life moderates, the pro-life left, and the Catholic Church tried to defend their cause against the conservative onslaught, but, as the 1980s progressed and political divisions crystallized, they found themselves and their vision for a broad-based movement increasingly alienated from other right-to-lifers.

Telling the story of this dissenting corps of right-to-life activists is vital because it reminds us that the 1980s was not a time of monolithic, conservative triumphalism and

that the rise of the New Right and the Religious Right was not inevitable. Up to the 1980s, the abortion issue was not a conservative issue alone, and even in the right-to-life movement, traditionally seen as a bastion of support for the New Right, a large cohort of right-to-lifers vehemently resisted the link between abortion and conservative religion and politics. Of course, some conservative Americans had quickly rallied around the issue but they opposed abortion alongside moderate, liberal, and left-wing right-to-lifers. Moreover, right-to-life leaders who had created a diverse and complex movement by the mid-1970s—a movement they argued was made for all Americans, regardless of their political affiliation or religious beliefs—fought to preserve the broad-based coalition they had spent over a decade building. Yet despite their ardent attempts, by the mid-1980s the broad-based movement had mostly fallen apart and right-to-life politics and the right-wing political agenda became even more inextricably linked.

5.1 Conservative Politics in the Right-to-Life Movement

Conservatives had been part of the movement for a long time, but had never been the majority or dominant voice. At times, Republicans had tried to poach right-to-life voters from the Democratic Party. For example, in 1970, California's Republican Party sent voter registrars to a number of Catholic churches in hopes of getting right-to-lifers to change their party affiliation.[595] Right-to-lifers had also been members of conservative groups like the John Birch Society, and some held conservative stances on a range of social issues. Even the letters that flooded Senator Beilenson's office in the late 1960s already contained some conservative strains of argument about abortion and its causes, namely that the push for liberal abortion laws exemplified the decline of traditional values. As one constituent lamented, Beilenson's abortion bill threatened "the God-

[595] Lawrence T. King, "GOP and God," *Commonweal*, October 9, 1970, 38.

fearing, God-loving land our founders intended it to be."[596] Some leaders in the movement also helped advance these arguments. Father Paul Marx of Minnesota, who had long been a conservative voice in right-to-life politics, wrote frequently about the importance of traditional family values. By 1980, he was blaming abortion on "the growth of secular humanism, Godlessness, weakness of the churches."[597] But until the 1980s, these conservative voices remained marginal—just a few voices among many other diverse approaches to the cause.

By the late 1970s, conservative momentum was already building in the movement. In 1976, many right-to-lifers enthusiastically supported Reagan in his primary campaign. They liked that he supported a human life amendment, took a strong stance against abortion, unlike Ford's more "moderate" approach, and forced the Republican Party to seriously debate the issue.[598] For some liberal right-to-lifers, this was an early warning sign. Reagan's supporters in the movement were a vocal enough contingent that Msgr. Charles Owen Rice felt the need to denounce them in an article for the *Pittsburgh Catholic.*[599] Rice had earned a reputation as a labor priest and a radical after several decades of activism, defined by his strong support of unions and the labor movement, advocacy for civil rights, and opposition to the Vietnam War.[600] In addition to this long

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[596] Dorothy Messina to Mr. Haberman (local editor), March 1967, Box 78, Folder 2, Beilenson Papers.
[597] "Father Marx: Long Fight; Education is Best Weapon," October 1981, *About Issues*, Box 2, Folder 7, George Huntston Williams Papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Williams Papers).
[598] The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, Lifeletter #6, April 6, 1976, Box 1, Folder 1, David R. Gergen Files, 1974-1979, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as Gergen Files); "Gov. Reagan Decries Dehumanization of the Unborn," May-June 1975, MCCL Newsletter, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records; Carolyn Gerster to NRLC Board of Directors, "Presidential Candidates," December 30, 1975, Box 10, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[599] Msgr. Charles Owen Rice, "Pro-lifers Err," August 6, 1976, *Pittsburgh Catholic,* Box 74, Folder 1, Higgins Papers.
[600] Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Charles McCollester, "In Memoriam: Charles

tenure of activism, Rice fervently opposed abortion. Moreover, he "was not one to pull punches," as historian Kenneth Heineman explained, especially when he confronted "hypocritical behavior among Catholics."[601] Rice was disturbed as he witnessed right-to-lifers trying to link their opposition to abortion to conservative causes.[602] Addressing Reagan's pro-life supporters, specifically, he castigated pro-life groups who took too partisan a stand on the abortion issue and who risked alienating potential allies. He even called "pro-life right-wingers" a "liability" for the rest of the movement.[603] However, his warning had little impact, and Rice became increasingly "disenchanted" with right-to-lifers.[604]

By 1979, reporters in the country's major newspapers and magazines were noting the New Right's affinity for the abortion issue and wondering if it was using the issue to build its political base. In 1979, reporter Jon Margolis wondered "Should it be called Life for the Right?" instead of the right-to-life movement.[605] Janet Gallagher, a writer for the left-wing *Workshop in Nonviolence (WIN)* magazine, observed that the New Right was trying to build a "pro-family base."[606] And James Wall, a writer for *Christian Century*, a mainline Protestant magazine, worried that the New Right exploited the issue of abortion

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Owen Rice, Labor Priest," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies,* 73, no. 1, (2006): 102-104.

[601] Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal,* 75.

[602] Patrick J. McGeever, *Rev. Charles Owen Rice: Apostle of Contradiction* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1989), 233.

[603] Msgr. Charles Owen Rice, "Pro-lifers Err," August 6, 1976, *Pittsburgh Catholic,* Box 74, Folder 1, Higgins Papers.

[604] McGeever, *Rev. Charles Owen Rice,* 233.

[605] Jon Margolis, "Should it be called Life for the Right?" *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1979, Folder 6, Box 15, Williams Papers; Risen and Thomas, *The Wrath of Angels*, 128; Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 119.

[606] Janet Gallagher, "Abortion Rights: Critical Issue for Women's Freedom," *WIN* Magazine, March 8, 1979, Abortion Action Coalition Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, Boston, (hereafter cited as AAC Papers).

to "emotionally bludgeon" voters into supporting its candidates.[607] New, explicitly conservative right-to-life groups also emerged during this time and made it their mission to target any liberal politicians who supported abortion. At least one even developed a "hit list" with their top targets, including Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, Robert Byrd of West Virginia, and number of others.[608] Most of the targets, though not all, were liberal Democrats.

With Reagan's election in 1980, many right-to-lifers were hopeful about what could be accomplished for the cause. Some of them even started calling 1980 the "Year of Life."[609] In addition to Reagan's election, the Supreme Court upheld the Hyde Amendment, which had banned federal funding for abortions. Moreover, right-to-lifers helped elect a pro-life majority to the Senate.[610] Reagan, however, was their crowning achievement. He was the first presidential candidate who supported a human life amendment to the Constitution and had been a longtime favorite for right-to-lifers.[611] By the mid-1970s, news of Reagan's opposition to abortion and his support for a human life amendment had filtered in to the movement's periodicals.[612] A 1975 article in MCCL's newsletter, for example, quoted Reagan extensively. In that article, he made several

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[607] James M. Wall, "The New Right Exploits Abortion," *Christian Century*, July 30-August 6, 1980.
[608] Don Campbell, "Kennedy tops pro-life 'hit list,'" *Daily Times* (St. Cloud, MN), January 9, 1981, Reel 10, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Newspaper Clippings Microfilm Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN. (hereafter cited as MCCL Newspaper Clippings).
[609] Philip D. Moran to Directors, Members, Friends of MCFL, January 22, 1981, Box 10, Folder 3, Williams Papers.
[610] Debra Stone, "Anti-abortion forces happy with election," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), November 9, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[611] Right-to-lifers from Southern California even tell the story of how they convinced Reagan, when he was governor, to never sign an abortion bill again. Right to Life League of Southern California, "Right to Life League of Southern California History," http://rtllsc.org/life/About%20Us/history.php (accessed March 1, 2017); Alice Hartle, "GOP to Focus on Abortion," *National Right to Life News*, September 1976, Box 44, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[612] The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, Lifeletter #6, April 6, 1976, Box 1, Folder 1, Gergen Files; "Gov. Reagan Decries Dehumanization of the Unborn," May-June 1975, MCCL Newsletter, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records; Carolyn Gerster to NRLC Board of Directors, "Presidential Candidates," December 30, 1975, Box 10, Folder 5, ACCL Records.

strong pro-life statements, such as, "There is a subtle, but nonetheless effective, move afoot to dehumanize babies…It is time to say to all the world: we are not talking a slug or a snail…We are talking about a real, live baby."[613] These statements seemed indicate that Reagan had taken a decisive stand against abortion.

This sentiment did not go unnoticed by right-to-lifers and garnered their support for his campaign for the Republican nomination in 1976.[614] When he ran in 1980 with a similar platform opposing abortion, right-to-lifers were ready to support him again. His previous opposition to abortion was a huge factor for them. "If presidential candidates are jumping on the pro-life bandwagon, that's fine with me," Marvin Truit, a pro-lifer from St. Joseph, Minnesota, wrote to his local newspaper, "But let's get the facts straight."[615] Truit then went on to highlight Reagan's consistent opposition to abortion since the mid-1970s, referencing articles on Reagan he had seen in periodicals like the *National Right to Life News.* Because of this consistent opposition since the middle of the decade, Truit argued that Reagan would be the ideal candidate for pro-lifers. Reagan also won their favor because he promised to uphold the Republican Party's platform, which took a decisive stand against legalized abortion and against federal funding for abortion.[616] But right-to-lifers were not going to sit idly by. They were ready to ensure Reagan fulfilled his campaign promises and supported right-to-life initiatives. Just a few weeks after the election, Patrick Trueman, writing for the *National Right-to-Life News*, urged right-to-

[613] "Gov. Reagan Decries Dehumanization of the Unborn," May-June 1975, MCCL Newsletter, Box 12, Folder 16, ACCL Records.
[614] Alice Hartle, "GOP to Focus on Abortion," *National Right to Life News*, September 1976, Box 44, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[615] Marvin Truit, Letter to the Editor, August 22, 1979, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[616] Terence Cardinal Cooke to Ronald Reagan, August 26, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USCCB Records).

lifers to "hold [Reagan's] and the Senate's feet to the fire now that the election is over."[617]

If Reagan was their crowning achievement, the human life amendment remained pro-lifers' prime goal, and now they thought it might be within reach. Not only had they elected a pro-life president, but they had also helped elect many new pro-life members of Congress. As "an enthusiastic Sandy Faucher" reported, "It wasn't only Ronald Reagan, we had a gain of 10 (U.S.) Senate seats."[618] Faucher also indicated that right-to-lifers hoped they could get a human life amendment from the House to the Senate by 1983. Jack Willke, now president of the NRLC, said he too hoped Reagan would push for a human life amendment and nominate "'pro-life' justices to the U.S. Supreme Court."[619] And Reagan himself seemed supportive. Though he did not attend the March for Life in 1981, despite expressing a desire to do so, his Secretary of Health and Human Services spoke to the crowd and promised his agency would do all it could to promote right-to-life policies. Reagan made sure to meet with leaders of the movement the day of the march to discuss a human life amendment.[620] The simple fact of having Reagan in the White House buoyed right-to-lifers, with one MCCL member commenting, "Finally we are

[617] Patrick Trueman, "Respect for Life: Essential for Judicial Appointments," November 24, 1980, *National Right to Life News*, Box 10, Folder 17, Williams Papers.
[618] Debra Stone, "Anti-abortion forces happy with election," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), November 9, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[619] Gregor W. Pinney, "Abortion foes expect political gains," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 9, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[620] "Schweiker tells pro-lifers of anti-abortion intent," *People's Press* (Owatonna, MN), January 23, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; "President Ronald Reagan's Schedule," January 22, 1981, Box 1, Folder 1/22/81, Presidential Briefing Papers, Ronald Reagan Library, https://reaganlibrary.gov/digital-library/presidential-briefing-papers.

being heard."[621] Right-to-lifers believed that they now had a strong ally in the White House and that their human life amendment might soon become a reality.

Not only were conservative right-to-lifers making their presence felt in national politics but also in their local communities and right-to-life groups. In Minnesota, for example, letters containing conservative arguments against abortion appeared more frequently in local newspapers, decrying the moral and religious decline of America caused by abortion.[622] Fran Wood of Jordan, Minnesota, responded to a letter to the editor favoring abortion rights in August 1979. She connected the abortion issue to a loss of Christian principles in the country and declared her support for a human life amendment. "Satan is waiting hungrily for this blessed nation of God to fall into his hands," she lamented, "We should be working to uphold our godly principles and restoring those that have been lost."[623] Local evangelical pastor, Reverend LaVern Swanson, wrote a column wondering if America was heading for God's judgment because of abortion: "Will we as a nation have to be judged as guilty before the Highest Court in heaven, for our careless disregard for the lives of the unborn?"[624] Conservative rhetoric started to appear in local papers in New York as well. From critiques of Planned Parenthood to laments over the decline of "traditional Judeo-Christian philosophy" to charges that abortion rights supporters might be inspired "by the devil, by misguided

[621] Debra Stone, "Anti-abortion forces happy with election," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), November 9, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[622] Mike Wood, Letter to the Editor, *The Independent* (Jordan, MN), June 7, 1979, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Phyllis Schlafly, "Abortion: A political as well as moral issue," May 21, 1980, *Daily Transcript* (Little Falls, MN), Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper clippings.
[623] Fran Wood, Letter to the Editor, August 3, 1979, *The Independent* (Jordan, MN), Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[624] LaVern Swanson, "The abortion issue," October 27, 1979, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

liberals, by deluded clergy or just by ignorance," New York's conservative right-to-lifers echoed similar concerns and linked abortion to conservative politics and religion.[625]

This was a distinct departure from much of the rhetoric the movement had previously used. Whereas in the early to mid-1970s, right-to-lifers tended to see abortion as a sign of the problem of violence in American society, now there was a firmer assertion that the problem was a decline in morality and the abandonment of Judeo-Christian norms. Moreover, right-to-lifers connected abortion to a range of conservative concerns. For instance, Minnesotan David Michael Crowser listed abortion as his first grievance but then went on to name a litany of conservative causes—welfare reform, opposition to the ERA, school prayer, "celebrating Christmas without Christ."[626] In his letter, he also hinted that the rejection of Christian values was the root cause of all these problems. Similarly, another concerned parent named secular humanism and the loss of religion as the main threat. She warned, "It [secular humanism] openly denies the existence of a Creator…and embraces complete sexual freedom, abortion, homosexuality, suicide and euthanasia."[627] Here again the connection between abortion and other conservative social concerns was clear. For many of these people, abortion was no longer a single issue but was intricately connected to a number of other conservative causes—conservative causes that happened to be espoused by the New Right as well.

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[625] Loretta Hogan, Letter to the Editor, *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), June 6, 1980, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; John R. Boule, Letter to the Editor, *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), June 13, 1980, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; Ron Fey, Letter to the Editor, *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), November 25, 1980, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org. Fey was also one of the leaders of the local right-to-group, Champlain Valley Right to Life.

[626] David Michael Crowser, Letter to the Editor, *Thief River Falls Times* (Thief River Falls, MN), November 17, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

[627] Elisabeth Fueller, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Journal* (International Falls, MN), December 15, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

Local right-to-life groups also saw a turn toward conservatism in their ranks. In Minnesota, when MCCL urged its members to attend a White House Conference on Families organized near the end of the Carter administration, the group ended up unleashing a pro-life, pro-family contingent. Officials had expected about three hundred people but more than nine hundred turned up, and the pro-lifers ended up gaining control of the discussion at the conference.[628] While the pro-lifers said they were worried about a number of issues, "the core of the current family problem, most agreed, was the legalized killing of babies still in their mother's womb."[629] Now, the contingent concluded, "It's time we as pro-family people fight back."[630] The shift was also evident in MCCL advertisements. Whereas early ads had often connected abortion to fundamental American values and rights, such as an advertisement proudly displaying excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, in 1980 a local MCCL chapter released a stark advertisement bearing a single Biblical warning: "I set before you life or death…choose life then that you and your descendants may live."[631] In California, the pro-family rhetoric was also apparent. Catholics United for Life, a conservative Catholic group, explained that it fought to save "Christian family life."[632] Another group highlighted Reagan's article for the *Human Life Review* in 1983 in which the president had compared abortion to slavery. That same group also lauded Reagan's designation of 1983 as "The

[628] Peg Meier, "Antiabortion faction controls parley," *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 20, 1980, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[629] "Pro-family, pro-life: trying to regain the status quo," *Echo Press* (Alexandria, MN), January 30, 1980, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[630] Ibid.
[631] MCCL Chapters Rockville-Cold Spring Richmond, January 17, 1980, *Record* (Cold Springs, MN), Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[632] Dennis Musk, Catholics United for Life newsletter, July 1983, Box 8, Folder 1, John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI (hereafter cited as Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers).

Year of the Bible."[633] Thus, local right-to-life groups helped promote the conservative worldview, which saw abortion as a sign of society's moral decline and the dangerous influence of secular humanism.

A clear example of this shift in the understanding of abortion at the grassroots level was the growing popularity of evangelical Francis Schaeffer and his documentaries *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* and *How Should We Then Live?* These documentaries, and their accompanying books, described the horrors of abortion and the dangerous moral decay of society.[634] Most importantly, they urged Christians to take action to stop abortion, arguing that Christians could no longer remain passive but must vigorously oppose abortion in society and in politics. In 1979 and into the early 1980s, churches and right-to-life groups across the country hosted screenings of these films and publicized Schaeffer's work. In November 1980, MCCL sponsored a film series featuring the documentary *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, which was attended by over two hundred people.[635] After the documentary, audience members reported that they believed "the lack of cohesiveness in family life" had led to the rise in abortions in America. In Honeoye Falls in western New York, the series was shown at the local middle school. Local newspaper called the documentary "stunning" and "a classic of our times."[636] The film series was also shown in a number of evangelical churches throughout

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[633] Pro-Family Forum, California Newsletter, May/June 1983, Carton 1, Kristin Luker Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereafter cited as Luker Papers).
[634] Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1979); Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1976).
[635] Janie McFarland, "Pro-life Program Audience Diverse," *Post-Bulletin* (Rochester, MN), November 11, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[636] "Film Series to Examine Status of Human Race," *Honeoye Falls Times* (Honeoye Falls, NY), February 26, 1981, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Church Showing Film," *North Creek News Enterprise* (North Creek, NY), May 3, 1979, NYS http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Cron to speak at Lake Placid church," *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), November 9, 1979, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Human Rights

the state.[637] A few years later, in September 1983, Schaeffer even traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota, to speak at an event sponsored by Citizens for Community Action, a local right-to-life group. In his speech, he encouraged these activists to continue their work to resist Planned Parenthood in their neighborhood. The group's president, John Healy, reported that Schaeffer reminded them, "Day to day, we must assert our values…We must continue to shape our history, or be judged accordingly."[638] Once more, Schaeffer delivered a bold message. Abortion was a threat to traditional social and moral values, and right-to-lifers must act decisively and boldly to preserve their "Judeo-Christian heritage."

Clearly, conservative rhetoric resonated with people on the ground and with right-to-lifers in particular. Because of this, some activists looked to work with the New Right to achieve a human life amendment. As right-to-lifers built an alliance with the New Right and promoted a conservative approach to abortion, some also fought attempts by their fellow right-to-lifers to rein them in. In fact, they challenged attempts to broaden right-to-life concern or to link it to any "liberal" causes. Even as the Catholic Church, moderate right-to-lifers, and the pro-life left sought to expand the scope of the movement and connect abortion to issues like capital punishment, conservative activists argued that such an approach would dilute their effectiveness and detract from the fight against abortion. One article, written by Virginia Evers, exemplifies this position in many

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film at JFK School," *The Brewster Standard* (Brewster, NY), October 9, 1980, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

[637] "Church Showing Film," *North Creek News Enterprise* (North Creek, NY), May 3, 1979, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Documentary Showing," *The Long-Islander* (Huntington, NY), July 17, 1980, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org; "Richfield Bible Church shows special film," *The Freeman's Journal* (Cooperstown, NY), April 25, 1984, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org.

[638] John D. Healy, Jr., "History: Will we repeat it?" November, 1983, Citizens for Community Action, Box 129.I.12 7B, Folder CCA Action, Citizens for Community Action Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

ways.[639] In September 1983, she wrote a vitriolic critique of right-to-lifers involved in the peace and nuclear disarmament movements. She argued that the pro-life movement should not link abortion to those causes because "those who really have the best interest of the pro-life cause at heart do not wear any other hat while spreading the pro-life message."[640] Never mind the fact that she was writing for an organization with close ties to the New Right and its accompanying political initiatives. Conservative right-to-lifers reacted in a similar way when Joseph Cardinal Bernardin began promoting the consistent ethic of life in 1983. Phyllis Schlafly called it "very divisive," and a right-to-life group in Chicago protested the bishops' meeting in the city that year due to the bishops' attempts to connect abortion to nuclear disarmament. [641] At the protest, these right-to-lifers even distributed the article Reagan had recently written for the pro-life periodical *The Human Life Review*, in which he reflected on the tenth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and explained the importance of opposing abortion.[642] This move on the part of the protesters at the bishops' meeting signaled which leader the activists thought had the correct view on abortion.

In addition to rebuffing attempts to broaden the movement, conservative right-to-lifers also defended the New Right, Reagan, and other right-wing politicians. In one instance, a Catholic Church report surfaced that was critical of Reagan and other

[639] Virginia Evers, "Real Babies and Phantom Bombs" *American Life Lobby About Issues*, September 1983, Box 3, Folder 1, Williams Papers.
[640] Edward M. Bryce to Daniel Hoye, April 28, 1982, Box 64, NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-June 1982, USCCB Records.
[641] Marjorie Hyer, "Bernardin Views Pro-life Issues as 'Seamless Garment,'" *Washington Post*, December 10, 1983.
[642] Ronald Reagan, "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation," *The Human Life Review*, February 3, 1983; Pro-life Action League, *Action News* Newsletter, June 1983, Box 8, Folder 1, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.

conservative politicians for their "inaction" on the abortion issue.[643] Henry Hyde, who had been a stalwart pro-life politician, quickly sent a letter to Cardinal Krol calling the report "slanderous" and asking Krol, "When will we Catholics stop insulting those who help us?"[644] His message was clear. The New Right could be a powerful ally in the fight against abortion, and Catholics and other right-to-lifers should embrace conservatives as friends rather than alienate or challenge them. Similarly, when Msgr. George Higgins wrote a scathing critique of the New Right, pro-lifers protested his characterization of their work and defended their alliance with the New Right. Patricia M. Glienna asserted that the movement "should be doing everything possible to end the killing as quickly as possible."[645] A political alliance with the New Right was fine if it meant a faster end to legal abortion. Like Hyde, Glienna defended the right-to-life alliance with the New Right because such an alliance might advance their agenda.

Already by 1980, stories of the New Right and conservative right-to-lifers were overshadowing the work of any other activists in the movement. Furthermore, by the mid-1980s, conservative right-to-lifers were defending the New Right as a valuable ally, while challenging their fellow right-to-lifers who believed otherwise. Despite this vocal support for Reagan and the New Right, some right-to-lifers were determined to counter the conservative rhetoric and political activity in their movement. From the start, these right-to-lifers had grave concerns about an alliance with the New Right and worked urgently to combat its influence and maintain the broad-based right-to-life coalition of the 1970s.

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[643] Richard Doerflinger to Pro-life and Respect Life Coordinators, September 17, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[644] Henry Hyde to John Cardinal Krol, September 24, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[645] Patricia M. Glienna, Letter to the Editor, February 8, 1980, Box 366, Folder 1, Higgins Papers.

5.2 The Catholic Church and the Consistent Ethic of Life

Among some of the first right-to-lifers to oppose the New Right and its involvement in the movement were some members of the Catholic Church. In publications as well as private correspondence, church officials and lay Catholics expressed concern about the new and close association between the New Right and some right-to-life groups and about the proliferation of conservative rhetoric among right-to-lifers. They urged a cautious approach in dealing with right-wing political activists. At the same time, some church officials began working on strategies to directly counter the right-wing approach to the abortion issue. In the early 1980s, the bishops began tracking the involvement of right-to-life groups in right-wing politics and pushed back against some of the New Right's legislative agenda. And in addition to reemphasizing their 1975 Pastoral Plan, which situated abortion amongst a number of life issues, church officials like Cardinal Bernardin also started publicly supporting the consistent ethic of life. In doing so, Catholics directly opposed some of the defining policies of the New Right and challenged the connection of abortion to the New Right agenda. The Church, however, was in a difficult position, trying to promote church teachings on a broad range of life issues without upsetting the hardline right-to-lifers. Michele Magar, writing for *Conscience* magazine in 1981, observed this complexity: "In 1973, the Catholic hierarchy clearly perceived abortion as an issue on which it could not lose. Now it seems that there is no way to win."[646] Depending on the course of action, the Church risked becoming "alienated from many of its own members."[647] Yet, the bishops and many lay Catholics knew that abortion would be a paramount issue in the 1980s and believed that despite the

[646] Michele Magar, "Abortion Politics and the American Catholic Church," Conscience, July 1981, Box 3, Folder Religious Groups, Taylor Papers.
[647] Ibid.

complex and difficult situation they must carefully emphasize "the pro-life values we espouse."[648]

Since 1975, the bishops had been focusing their pro-life initiatives on parish education and outreach as outlined in their 1975 Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities. The plan had focused on local dioceses and parishes with three main initiatives: an education program for the general public, an intensive program for priests, religious, and all "church-sponsored or identifiably Catholic organizations" with an emphasis on pastoral care and counseling, and legislative efforts to push for a human life amendment and other legislation that might limit abortions.[649] The bishops also organized special programs in parishes, such as the Respect Life initiative, which they had been facilitating since 1972 and which they hoped would promote "internal consistency in the pro-life commitment."[650] This program encouraged local parishes to devote a month each year to various life issues, educating parishioners on church teachings and reminding them of the importance the church placed on these issues.[651] Abortion was always included but the programs also featured teachings on people with disabilities, the elderly, and the death penalty, among other issues.

Though there had been earlier warnings from right-to-lifers about right-wing politics, the concern over the New Right grew during the 1980 election cycle. Some church officials were cautiously optimistic about Reagan, such as Cardinal Cooke who

[648] Terence Cardinal Cooke to Your Excellency, April 14, 1980, Box 66, Folder Mailings-Bishops 1980, USCCB Records.
[649] "A Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities," December 4, 1975, *Origins,* Box 1, Luker Papers.
[650] Ibid.
[651] NCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Pro-life Activities, "Respect Life Program Themes, 1972-1981," September 1981, Box 67, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Respect Life 1980-1989, USCCB Records.

had praised Reagan and the Republican Party's platform.[652] Others, however, were less hopeful. Msgr. George Higgins started to worry about the changes he saw in the movement, and in May 1980, he wrote a short piece on the "New Right connection" and warned that many pro-life Catholics were "being manipulated in the political chess game of the right wing."[653] A few months later, Higgins issued an even more serious warning, publishing an article in *America* magazine that warned Catholic pro-lifers about the dangers of an alliance with the New Right and of ignoring the influence of right-wing politics in the movement. He directed his warning to both church officials as well as lay Catholics. Higgins had two main concerns. First, he argued that the New Right's policies "almost without exception, contradict official positions of the church."[654] According to Higgins, on issues from gun control to capital punishment to welfare reform, the New Right was diametrically opposed to the official stance of the Church. Second, Higgins worried that a close alliance with the New Right on abortion would turn it into a hyper-partisan issue. He believed the movement should oppose any efforts to make abortion a partisan issue and should instead try to hold the middle ground. "Those of us concerned about the pro life cause would do well to scrutinize more closely this apparent attempt to transform prolife sentiment into a right-wing political movement," he wrote, "One of the worst things that could happen to the right-to-life movement is to be taken over by ideologues of the right or the left."[655] But he feared that some right-to-lifers were too

[652] Terence Cardinal Cooke to Ronald Reagan, August 26, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, USCCB Records. Cooke also wrote a letter to Carter in which he was critical of the DNC platform.
[653] George Higgins, "The New Right Connection," The Yardstick, May 12, 1980, Box 366, Folder 2, Higgins Papers; John J. O'Brien, "George G. Higgins and the 'Yardstick' Columns," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 19, no. 4, Fall 2001: 87-101.
[654] George Higgins, "The Pro-life Movement and the New Right," *America,* September 13, 1980, Box 23, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[655] Ibid.

anxious for any sort of help in fighting against abortion that they did not bother considering the dangers posed by an alliance with the New Right and did not worry that working with the New Right could turn the pro-life movement into a right-wing cause.

In addition to Higgins' public warnings, the bishops also received a private report on the New Right and its connections to pro-life activism. In February 1980, Greg Denier, who was affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and had been keeping track of developments in the New Right and right-to-life movement, sent his report to Msgr. Francis Lally of the United States Catholic Conference. Lally then circulated the report to several others including Russell Shaw, a longtime right-to-life expert for the USCC, as well as Bishop Thomas Kelly, who was the General Secretary of the NCCB. Denier's report was grim, and he argued that the New Right had already "been able to establish the political agenda for the entire right-to-life movement."[656] He believed it was an orchestrated attempt by New Right activists such as Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie to "co-opt" the cause to support right-wing political candidates. And he warned church officials: "The end result of this strategy will be to turn a basically positive pro-life movement into part of an essentially anti-life right-wing resurgence."[657] The report received a mixed response from church officials. Some agreed with his assessment while others wondered if the situation was as dire as Denier suggested. Shaw, for example, supported the overall premise of Denier's argument—that the New Right was making powerful inroads into the movement and that the Church should exercise

[656] Greg Denier to Msgr. Francis J. Lally, February 12, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-March 1980, USCCB Records.
[657] Ibid.

caution. At the same time, he placed some of the blame on the Democrats as well for holding "the right-to-life movement at arm's length (or worse)."[658]

The bishops and other church officials were not the only Catholics who were troubled about the New Right; other Catholics, both lay and religious, also expressed comparable concerns. Following the party conventions in the summer of 1980, several priests, religious, and lay people wrote to the bishops with concern over the Republican Party's platform. The NCCB had praised the Republican Party's stance on abortion and condemned Democrats. But some Catholics looked at the Republican platform and found equally troubling issues. Several wrote letters to Bishop Thomas Kelly. Sister Dolores Brinkel praised the NCCB for protesting the Democratic platform on abortion but she wondered, "I am sure that the NCCB has or will issue a statement concerning the Republican National Convention plank which support and promotes capital punishment."[659] Another layperson asked Kelly, "Does the NCCB see human life as sacred only at the pre-born stage?"[660] The woman, who identified herself as a 63-year-old widow and daily mass attendee, wanted to see an "equally strong condemnation" of the Republican Party's support for capital punishment.[661] Father Robert Schramm, who worked for a criminal advocacy group, also accused the bishops of being "inconsistent."[662] These Catholics on the ground demanded the bishops do something to

[658] Russell Shaw to Bishop Thomas Kelly, "'New right' and right to life," February 21, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-March 1980, USCCB Records.
[659] Sister Dolores Brinkel to Bishop Thomas Kelly, September 5, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, USCCB Records.
[660] Louella Farmer to Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, September 10, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, USCCB Records.
[661] Ibid.
[662] Father Robert Schramm to Bishop Thomas Kelly, September 9, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, USCCB Records.

stem the growing influence of the New Right and to challenge stances that contradicted church teaching.

Over the next few years, the Church responded in several different ways, reevaluating the 1975 Pastoral Plan and reshaping their right-to-life strategy. One of the first things the bishops did was to begin tracking the political affiliation of the main right-to-life organizations, noting which were unaffiliated and which ones were closely linked to right-wing politics. They also tracked the involvement of prominent Catholics with such groups. On March 5, 1980, for example, Russell Shaw informed Bishop Kelly that a few prominent Catholics were participating in a Family Forum featuring speakers like Jerry Falwell and other figures on the right. These Catholics included people like legal scholar, law professor, and author John T. Noonan, who had written several important works on contraception, abortion, and the Church.[663] Since the late 1960s, right-to-lifers and the NRLC had frequently relied on his advice and expertise. Shaw had initially thought to "dismiss" the Family Forum as "extremist enterprises unworthy of our attention."[664] But when he noticed Noonan and a few other Catholics on the event brochure, he concluded, "something is going on here, which has a bearing on matters of concern to NCCB/USCC."[665] And in the spring of 1982, Edward Bryce compiled a list of national pro-life organizations for the Bishops' Committee for Pro-life Activities.[666] Bryce gave special designations to groups that were affiliated with right-wing politics.

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[663] Mark S. Massa, S.J., *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36; John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965); John T. Noonan, *How to Argue About Abortion* (New York: Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Human Life, 1974).
[664] Russell Shaw to Bishop Kelly, March 5, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-March 1980, USCCB Records.
[665] Ibid.
[666] Edward M. Bryce to Daniel Hoye, April 28, 1982, Box 64, NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-June 1982, USCCB Records.

These designations ranged from "de facto preference—conservative Republican" to "linked with New Right Conservative Republicans." And he seemed to pay particular attention to political affiliation on the right—the only other designations for groups were "neutral" or "bipartisan."[667] Overall, the bishops urged extreme caution in dealing with explicitly partisan groups.[668] The bishops had reason to be suspicious. Aside from their support for policies that violated church teachings, some of these groups had been openly antagonistic to the Catholic Church. In the summer of 1980, the Life Amendment Political Action Committee (LAPAC), a right-wing group, threatened to sue the Church because some Catholic parishes had prohibited them from distributing literature in their parking lots.[669] In the early 1980s, the Church recognized the New Right and its affiliate right-to-life groups as a potential threat not only to the Catholic Church but also to the right-to-life movement itself, and they took action to educate themselves and other Catholics on the exact threat posed by the New Right.

In 1981 and 1982, the Catholic Church also pushed back against the New Right's legislative agenda when, in the course of a debate over several proposed human life amendments, the bishops chose to support the Hatch amendment rather than the Helms amendment. This choice had huge ramifications, and the debate over which amendment to support caused fierce debate and division in the movement. The Helms amendment was controversial because it linked an amendment stating that life began at conception to a few other New Right issues, including judicial oversight in school prayer cases. By

[667] Edward M. Bryce to Daniel Hoye, April 28, 1982, Box 64, NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-June 1982, USCCB Records.
[668] Rev. Edward M. Bryce to Msgr. Daniel J. Hoye, October 25, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records; Msgr. Daniel Hoye to Archbishop Pio Laghi, October 27, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[669] Wilfred R. Caron to Ordinaries and Diocesan Attorneys, July 15, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee April-December 1980, USCCB Records.

contrast, the Hatch amendment would return jurisdiction over abortion to the states, though many right-to-lifers felt it did not go far enough.[670] When the Catholic bishops chose not to support the Helms amendment, it caused uproar in the movement, and by July 1982, Martin Haley warned Cardinal Cooke that the movement was "as fragmented as they were eleven months ago and perhaps more so."[671] But the bishops stuck with their decision and did not give in to pressure to support the New Right's legislative attempt to restrict abortion. They firmly believed that Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) made a mistake in linking his abortion amendment to other New Right concerns, saying it "prevented unified pro-life support."[672] Moreover, they criticized Reagan and other Republican senators for using the disagreements in the right-to-life movement over which amendment to support as an excuse to not do anything at all.[673] This episode with the Helms and Hatch amendments was just one example of how the bishops were critical of the New Right's legislative agenda and willing to push back against it, even if it meant upsetting their fellow right-to-lifers.

Perhaps most importantly, the bishops started more explicitly promoting the idea of the consistent ethic of life, a view that emphasized consistency on all life issues including abortion but also issues like capital punishment, nuclear disarmament, and war. Right-to-lifers had been developing this idea since the early 1970s, as discussed in Chapter 2. In recognizing the issue of violence as the root cause for abortion, many right-to-lifers adopted a stance of consistent opposition to all violence in society whether it be

[670] Russell Shaw, "Washington," September 21, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[671] Martin Haley to Terence Cardinal Cooke, July 19, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[672] Richard Doerflinger to Pro-Life and Respect Life Coordinators, State Catholic Conference Directors, September 17, 1982, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee July-December 1982, USCCB Records.
[673] Ibid.

war or capital punishment or abortion. The Church's own Respect Life programs for parishes had been subtly promoting the consistent ethic since the mid-1970s.[674] Covering issues from abortion to gun control to euthanasia to the nuclear arms race, the annual Respect Life programs worked to remind Catholics that the Church cared about a range of life issues, not just abortion.[675] But in the early 1980s, there was a sense that more needed to be done.

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin was a leader on this front and publicly promoted the consistent ethic of life. In 1983 and 1984, Bernardin helped convince the bishops to more explicitly support this approach. During a speech at Fordham University in 1983, Bernardin first explained his understanding of the consistent ethic and how it related to church teaching. He argued that the consistent ethic approach was necessary because "success on any one of the issues threatening life requires a concern for the broader attitude in society about respect for human life."[676] And he urged people to combine all these life issues into one "seamless garment."[677] Bernardin's idea gained traction with Catholics as well as other right-to-life activists, and the idea cropped up in several different religious periodicals, including *Commonweal,* a lay Catholic journal, and *Sojourners*, a progressive evangelical magazine. At least one commentator noted that the consistent ethic was meant to challenge the New Right. In an article for *Commonweal*, reporter David Carlin argued that the ethic was intended to situate abortion within a "liberal or progressive framework of political thinking, and to rescue it from the

[674] NCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Pro-life Activities, "Respect Life Program Themes, 1972-1981," September 1981, Box 67, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee Respect Life 1980-1989, USCCB Records.
[675] Ibid.
[676] Joseph Bernardin, "A Consistent Life Ethic: An American-Catholic Dialogue," in *Consistent Ethic of Life: Assessing its Reception and Relevance*, edited by Thomas G. Fuechtmann (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1988), 11.
[677] Ibid.

conservative or right-wing ideology within which it is frequently found."[678] The church leadership also seemed to support Bernardin's work and promoted the consistent life project. In 1984, he was even appointed the chairman of the Bishop's Pro-life Committee.[679] And he promised to make sure the church embraced this "broader attitude" and remained "a pro-life church."[680]

As Bernardin continued his public campaign for the consistent ethic, the idea gained ground in the right-to-life movement. Despite the continued ascendancy of the New Right, Bernardin expressed optimism that the consistent ethic was resonating with many people. He explained, "Thank God, I now sense a rising tide of outrage…Many people have had enough—enough of abortion on demand, enough of the arms race and the threat of nuclear holocaust, enough of terrorism, assaults on human rights, and all the rest."[681] He was not wrong—his rhetoric about the consistent ethic of life had an almost immediate impact on many pro-lifers who had been speaking about consistency and searching for the right rhetoric to describe how their stance differed from that of the New Right. References to Bernardin's speech soon appeared in the publications of left-wing pro-lifers and became ubiquitous in their rhetoric. For example, in 1984, Jim Wallis, a progressive evangelical and leader of Sojourners, used Bernardin's language in a critique of Reagan's theology. He wished more people would listen to Bernardin rather than Reagan as he believed Bernardin was "much saner" and had "better theology."[682] For many right-to-lifers, promoting the consistent ethic of life helped them clearly articulate

[678] David R. Carlin, Jr. "Patchy Garment: How many votes has Bernardin?" *Commonweal*, August 10, 1984.
[679] Father Richard P. McBrien, "It's OK to be liberal and against abortion," February 2, 1984, *Catholics Today Magazine*, Box 44, Folder 3, ACCL Records.
[680] Ibid.
[681] Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, "The Truth in Christ," January 20, 1984, *Chicago Catholic,* Box 66, Folder Mailings-Bishops 1984, USCCB Records.
[682] Jim Wallis, "The President's Pulpit," *Sojourners*, September 1984.

why they opposed the New Right and what set them apart as truly pro-life rather than just antiabortion.

In myriad ways, the Catholic Church challenged the New Right's newfound influence in right-to-life politics—or at the very least cautioned Catholic right-to-lifers about seeking alliances with the New Right on the abortion issue. Church officials issued public warnings about the New Right, and the bishops began tracking organizations that were directly linked with right-wing politics. The bishops also challenged the New Right's legislative agenda, even though it risked dividing the right-to-life movement. Moreover, they rethought their approach to educating Catholics and the public about the Church's teachings on various life issues. While the Respect Life program continued in parishes, trying to show lay Catholics the interconnectedness of abortion with a number of other issues, the bishops also took more decisive steps to highlight other life issues. In both their pastoral letter of 1983, "The Challenge of Peace," which focused on the issue of nuclear weapons, as well as in Cardinal Bernardin's public campaign to promote the consistent ethic of life, the bishops helped expand the scope of right-to-life activism. With all of these initiatives, the Catholic Church promoted an alternative approach to politics and sought to directly counteract efforts by the New Right to link abortion to its other right-wing causes.

5.3 Right-to-life Moderates and the Shrinking Middle Ground

While the Catholic Church cautioned right-to-lifers about the influence of the New Right, moderate activists in the movement—some who considered themselves liberals or centrists or Democrats—also sounded the alarm. Here a mix of individual activists, state and national right-to-life groups, and liberal politicians tried to hold the

center on the abortion issue and find workable solutions that could appeal to both the right and the left of the political spectrum. This was a challenging task—not only were they facing off with conservative activists but also with liberals and Democrats who supported abortion rights. Nevertheless, ACCL and its members, MCCL, some members of the NRLC, and other right-to-life moderates on the ground continued promoting a middle-of-the-road approach to politics. They fought against the New Right as well as to keep their place in the Democratic Party, asserting to both sides that they could be both liberal and opponents of legalized abortion. Since the 1960s, many of these moderate pro-lifers had focused their energy on building a broad-based right-to-life movement made up of all sorts of Americans—it was what they believed was the best and most effective strategy. Now, as they fought to defend this vision, these activists watched as right-wing right-to-lifers became an increasingly vocal part of the movement and as opposition to abortion became firmly wedded to this new conservative politics.

At the same time as Catholic leaders were warning people about the growing influence of right-wing politics in the right-to-life movement, ACCL's leaders were also growing concerned, and they quickly decided to help lead the fight against the New Right among moderate right-to-lifers. The organization had to proceed carefully—its official policy dictated that the group stay out of partisan politics.[683] But ACCL's leaders had similar concerns as the Catholic Church. Following Msgr. Higgins' piece in *America* in September 1980, Marjory Mecklenburg praised Higgins' analysis. In a letter to him the month after its publication, Mecklenburg noted that ACCL's leaders were also worried about the influence of right-wing politics, but they were hopeful that it might motivate liberals and moderates to become even more involved in right-to-life politics.

[683] Marjory Mecklenburg to James Kelly, Fall 1980, Box 23, Folder 5, ACCL records.

Mecklenburg wrote, "We expect that increased awareness of the right-wing, anti-abortion political alliance will stimulate thoughtful people to realize that centrist and liberal pro-life activity must be sharply increased."[684] She believed that a strong moderate right-to-life group was the only way to keep people from being "hooked into the right-wing organizations and political activity."[685] According to Mecklenburg, ACCL was the best solution as it was "the only effective national centrist group with ties both left and right," but to succeed the group must "increase influence and visibility."[686] ACCL's members were more convinced than ever that the New Right was dangerous, threatened their bipartisan approach, and must be countered by any means necessary.

Following Higgins' warnings about "the danger of this new political alliance," Mecklenburg and the ACCL got to work trying to increase their membership and educate pro-lifers about the dangers of right-wing politics in the movement. While the Catholic Church emphasized and promoted church teachings, ACCL worked to promote bipartisan strategies and to mobilize moderates. In a letter to the group's members following the publication of Higgins' article in *America*, Mecklenburg articulated their plan for challenging the New Right takeover of right-to-life politics. The plan was simple—stick to the strategy that ACCL had embraced since its founding. Thus, its leaders decided they would continue to promote alternatives to abortion, which they believed would help women and children and advertise their reasonable approach. Mecklenburg explained, "For six years we have quietly and effectively worked to improve the quality of life and the legal protection offered vulnerable human beings." They would now continue to

[684] Marjory Mecklenburg to Msgr. George Higgins, October 10, 1980, Box 74, Folder 1, Higgins Papers.
[685] Ibid.
[686] Ibid.

execute that plan with "consistency, professionalism and cooperative approach."[687] Mecklenburg emphasized this consistency and reasonableness when she wrote to researcher James Kelly in the fall of 1980 and described ACCL as "intelligent and constructive" as well as "a credible voice in behind-the-scenes formation of public policy."[688] She hoped that these efforts and this unique approach would make a big impact not only in the right-to-life movement but also in American society as a whole. She wrote, "It will not be easy…to reframe the pro-life position so that it appeals to a broad majority. But our past success has taught us that it can be done…but only if we persuade—not pressure; educate—not intimidate; gather—not divide."[689] Mecklenburg and other ACCL members trusted the strategy that they had developed in the 1970s. By maintaining their professional, reasonable, and bipartisan approach, Mecklenburg believed that ACCL and its members could counter the New Right and protect their broad-based coalition.

One of ACCL's main goals, in addition to fostering a "reasonable" middle-of-the-road approach, was to try to attract more liberal or moderate activists. ACCL maintained that liberals should be welcomed into the pro-life movement by other right-to-lifers and enjoy full participation in the movement's organizations. In March 1980, Congressman Richard Nolan (D-MN) wrote a piece for the ACCL newsletter arguing that "'Pro-lifers' ought to be liberals."[690] He explained how the movement could benefit from it: "Growth should happen as committed liberals are welcomed into the pro-life movement. And

[687] Marjory Mecklenburg to ACCL friends, Probably late 1980 or early 1981, Box 74, Folder 2, Higgins Papers
[688] Marjory Mecklenburg to James Kelly, Fall 1980, Box 23, Folder 5, ACCL Records.
[689] Marjory Mecklenburg to ACCL friends, Probably late 1980 or early 1981, Box 74, Folder 2, Higgins Papers.
[690] Richard Nolan, "'Pro-lifers' ought to be liberals," *Daily Globe* (Worthington, MN), March 4, 1980, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

liberals should be welcomed, because pro-life…encompasses the same principles advanced by liberals since the time of Thomas Jefferson…Because I am for life I work to achieve a society with a decent quality of life for all."[691] He went on to argue that right-to-lifers must work with liberals as "allies" in the fight for life. ACCL also reached out to various Catholic officials they thought might be liberal allies in the fight against the New Right. Mecklenburg invited Msgr. Higgins to partner in this work and become an ACCL board member, though he was unable to accept her offer.[692] And ACCL member Ray DiBlasio reached out to Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, who *The Wanderer* had already labeled a "progressivist," in hopes that he might be interested in working with them.[693] ACCL and its members saw liberals as full allies in the fight against abortion and an important pillar in their broad-based movement.

Over the course of a few years, ACCL undertook a number of endeavors to promote their moderate approach and recruit new members. Its efforts were most intense in 1980 and 1981 in the lead up to and aftermath of Reagan's election. As Mecklenburg noted, "Our campaign to make visible and discover additional pro-life moderates and liberals has been sharply stepped-up."[694] ACCL worked to expand its mailing lists to try to reach new members and sent mailings to subscribers of the *National Catholic Reporter* and *US Catholic*.[695] The group also distributed Higgins' article, in hopes that it would make other right-to-lifers wary of the New Right.[696] But for the most part, its political

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[691] Ibid.
[692] Marjory Mecklenburg to George Higgins, November 4, 1980, Box 23, Folder 2, ACCL Records.
[693] Ray DiBlasio to Bishop James Malone, November 20, 1980, Box 64, Folder NCCB Ad Hoc Committee January-June 1981, USCCB Records.
[694] Marjory Mecklenburg to Mary and Michael McGillicuddy, July 25, 1980, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[695] Marjory Mecklenburg to Mary and Michael McGillicuddy, July 25, 1980, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records; Mary and Michael McGillicuddy to Gloria Ford, July 22, 1980, Box 23, Folder 8, ACCL Records.
[696] Marjory Mecklenburg, Letter to Friend, 1980, Box 74, Folder 2, Higgins Papers.

strategy seemed to remain the same. In a document listing ACCL's accomplishments from 1976 to 1981, there was no noticeable shift in strategy in the 1980s.[697] ACCL's members still testified in favor of legislation supporting adoption, programs to help with teen pregnancy, and other alternatives to abortion initiatives, promoted their cause in newspapers and magazines, and traveled the country speaking to right-to-life groups. Though in the early 1980s they worked to expand their mailing lists, reach new groups of people, and promote the work of liberals in right-to-life politics, when it came to their legislative agenda the ACCL and its members relied on the "reasonable" and "cooperative approach" that had helped them become successful in the 1970s.

ACCL was not the only major right-to-life group to challenge the New Right; even the NRLC was wary of the rightward shift in the movement. Since its separation from the Catholic Church in 1973, the NRLC had tried to avoid any specific partisan or sectarian affiliation. The New Right had proposed an alliance with them in the late 1970s but the NRLC had turned them down. Its leaders insisted abortion was an issue that cut across political affiliations and did not want to alienate any potential supporters.[698] Still, the NRLC faced its own internal divisions over the conservative approach to abortion. As with the dilemma faced by church officials, NRLC members dealt with disagreements over the Helms and Hatch amendments. Because of this tense debate, Jack Willke advised his organization and its affiliates to prioritize civility and cooperation with one another and to focus on their shared opposition to abortion. In 1982, he urged all NRLC

[697] ACCL, "Some Accomplishments of American Citizens Concerned for Life," 1981 Box 17, Folder 9, ACCL Records.
[698] Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 48; Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 63. Paul Weyrich, a strategist of the New Right, helped found The American Life League to connect the abortion issue to the New Right.

members to remember this goal even amidst intense debate over proposed legislation: "Let's all try to be less absolute, less dogmatic, more humble and really—really, let's pray. Actively support your preference but don't actively oppose another major pro-life legislative initiative. Our goal is to help babies, not the pro-abortionists."[699] The NRLC also faced off with a conservative Catholic pro-life group out of California, Catholics United for Life (CUL). When the NRLC canceled a CUL workshop at the national convention in 1982, CUL claimed that the NRLC was trying to "make the pro-life movement non-religious."[700] The organization struggled to remain nonsectarian and nonpartisan as many of its constituents shifted further to the right in both politics and religion. As president of the NRLC, Willke tried to head off any conflict between hardline, conservative right-to-lifers and their more moderate counterparts, emphasizing their shared goal of "helping babies."[701]

As the NRLC and ACCL tried to maintain a moderate approach at the national level, some state groups also helped sustain the broad-based movement—working both to expand the conversation around abortion as well as to maintain their influence in state political parties. MCCL and pro-life moderates in Minnesota provide a particularly helpful example as liberals and moderates had a long history of activism in MCCL and still had a large contingent of right-to-lifers involved in the state's Democratic Party in the 1980s. Thus, they were in a prime position to respond to Reagan's election and the rise of the New Right. MCCL made sure to offer a careful definition of single-issue voting to avoid hardline approaches to abortion. The definition emphasized that the group

[699] Jack Willke to NRLC, February 4, 1982, Box 25, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[700] Catholics United for Life, "Anti-Catholicism Again Strikes CUL," May 1982, Carton 1, Luker Papers; Rita Marie Cousins, "Dr. Willke Survives Challenge to His Presidency of NRLC," July 29, 1982, Box 25, Folder 4, ACCL Records.
[701] Jack Willke to NRLC, February 4, 1982, Box 25, Folder 4, ACCL Records.

cared for many issues including people with disabilities, the poor, and the elderly.[702] Leo LaLonde, MCCL's president, also reminded Minnesotans that MCCL was in favor of family planning initiatives. LaLonde said the group only opposed family planning funds that paid for abortions.[703] And even as many right-to-lifers and other conservatives turned against the ERA, Minnesota's Feminists for Life insisted that right-to-lifers should work for a human life amendment but never forget that they also had a "responsibility" to "form coalitions with existing groups that seek to give assistance to poor women, men, and children."[704] For these moderate right-to-lifers, supporting a human life amendment was vital, but it was not enough anymore. They insisted that the pro-life area of concern must be broader and that right-to-lifers must be willing to form new coalitions with other political groups.

MCCL continued to emphasize that the right-to-life movement was broad-based, encompassing right-to-lifers of all political persuasions. At its 1981 convention, for example, the group made a point to describe the conference as a gathering that would "draw together pro-lifers from totally disparate backgrounds, demonstrating the broad-based support the pro-life movement has gathered in recent years."[705] In state politics, MCCL and its members also continued supporting both Republican and Democratic politicians.[706] And in its own publications, MCCL highlighted a range of views, regularly reporting on the work of liberal and left-wing activists and promoting an alternative

[702] MCCL, "Their Lives—Single Issue?" MCCL Newsletter, October 1980, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletter 1980, Taylor Papers.
[703] Leo LaLonde, Letter to the Editor, *Minneapolis Star*, July 10, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[704] Judy Shea, Letter to the Editor, *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 8, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[705] "Convention headliners show movement's broad base," MCCL Newsletter, October 1981, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletters 1981-1982, Taylor Papers.
[706] Bill Salisbury, "Abortion foes sense victory," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), January 11, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

image of the movement. These included stories on Sojourners, a progressive evangelical organization, as well as highlighting the work of local groups like the Minnesota branch of Feminists for Life.[707]

While much of their energy was focused on mitigating the influence of the New Right, liberal right-to-lifers also clashed with their fellow liberals. In doing so, they challenged stereotypes that the right-to-life movement was only conservative and, as Democrats took a firmer stance in favor of abortion rights, these activists also argued that pro-lifers belonged in the Democratic Party. Following the 1980 election, a local right-to-lifer from Rice, Minnesota, responded to Senator George McGovern's new political group and his assertion that pro-lifers were all right-wing. The man pointed out that during the recent election right-to-lifers backed both liberals and conservatives—all that mattered was their stance on abortion, not their party affiliation.[708] Denis Wadley, who had long been involved in both the MCCL as well as progressive politics in Minnesota, also criticized liberals' stance on abortion. He argued that liberals needed to broaden their thinking on the abortion issue. As he talked about balancing the rights of women and the rights of the unborn, he wondered, "Isn't there room for a position that says both are victims, and the rights of both should be respected?"[709] Likewise, right-to-lifer Mary Joyce still insisted that a strategic alliance between the pro-life movement and the

[707] "Anti-violence group fears pro-life feminists," MCCL Newsletter, September 1981, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletter 1981-1982, Taylor Papers.
[708] James L. Tembrock, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Times* (St. Cloud, MN), November 17, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[709] Denis Wadley, "Liberals turn their backs on the rights of the unborn," *Minneapolis Star*, January 23, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

women's movement was possible and would be beneficial—arguing that they should work together to stop rape and abortion.[710]

The plight of right-to-lifers in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party in Minnesota provides an instructive case study. In general, pro-life Democrats were finding themselves in an increasingly precarious position and saw their place in the party quickly disappearing. But they tried to argue for their legitimacy in both the national party as well as in their respective state parties. This shift was particularly acute for pro-life Democrats in Minnesota, as they had always had a large and influential cohort in the DFL. In 1979 and 1980, for example, they maintained enough influence in at least one county to completely control the county party and elect pro-life DFL members to all the party offices for the county.[711] They also had one liberal Democratic representative, Rep. James Oberstar, who proved to them that at least some "liberal Democrats…seem to have no difficulty resisting pressure from pro-abortion coworkers and supporters."[712] And they were still a vocal group at the state conventions. At the state convention in 1980, some pro-lifers left feeling a guarded optimism: "They (prochoicers) put us in our place, but the important thing is we have a place."[713] These right-to-lifers pledged to stay in the party.[714]

Despite their optimism after the state convention, right-to-lifers in the DFL were already feeling the strain of trying to hold their place in the party. Several publicly

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[710] Mary Joyce, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Times* (St. Cloud, MN), November 20, 1980, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[711] "Anti-abortion forces gain control over DFL party regulars," *The Enterprise* (West Concord, MN), April 3, 1980, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[712] Alice Hartle, Letter to the Editor, *The Sentinel* (Sanborn, MN), July 26, 1979, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Alice Hartle, Letter to the Editor, *The Enterprise* (Edgerton, MN), July 25, 1979, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[713] "Shedding the 'one-issue' tag?" *Republican Eagle* (Redwing, MN), June 10, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[714] "DFL Unity," *Daily Dispatch* (Brainerd, MN), June 7, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

denounced the party's platform in 1980. During the 1980 election, pro-life DFL members also warned Carter that if he did not "make some overtures to the anti-abortion movement," they would "defect in droves to Ronald Reagan."[715] At least one member followed through on this threat. James Kraher of Crystal, Minnesota, wrote into his local paper to announce his abandonment of the party after being a member since 1938: "People, like me, who are 'pro-life'…have been invited to leave on all convention levels—congressional, state, and national."[716] Likewise, Judy Lee, who had been a delegate to the 1980 Democratic National Convention, lamented the Democratic Party's strong stance in favor of abortion rights. Unlike Kraher, she decided to remain a Democrat, though she described the frustration pro-life Democrats faced: "We gain nothing from candidates or platform positions and seemingly knock our heads against brick walls trying to be heard."[717] Carl Provost from Proctor, Minnesota, also wrote into the local paper, questioning his longtime membership in the party: "I and my family have always been Democrats but now I find my party has deserted a fundamental right…There are tens of thousands of pro-life Democrats across this nation—where do we go?"[718] It was a difficult position for these right-to-lifers who liked the party's platform, except on abortion. David LaFontaine, one of the DFL Pro-life Coordinators, summed up the feelings of many pro-life Democrats: "I view a Reagan presidency with real dread. But we've got to have something we can take back to our people. Just being a Democrat isn't

[715] Jim Shoop, "Abortion Politics," *Minneapolis Star*, May 16, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspapers Clippings.
[716] James A. Kraher, Letter to the Editor, *Golden Valley Post* (Golden Valley, MN), September 11, 1980, MCCL Newspaper Clippings, Reel 9.
[717] Judy Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Minneapolis Star*, September 9, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[718] Carl Provost, Letter to the Editor, *Herald and News Tribune* (Golden Valley, MN), September 10, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Bill McGuire, Letter to the Editor, *Times* (Crookston, MN), September 5, 1980, Reel 8, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

good enough anymore."[719] With the New Right ascendant and the Democratic Party more firmly supporting abortion rights, pro-life Democrats were caught in the middle. In Minnesota, these Democrats debated what to do—stay loyal to their party despite its views on abortion or support a candidate they viewed with dread. Neither option was appealing.

The 1980 Democratic National Convention further alienated the right-to-lifers. That year, MCCL sent a contingent of pro-life Democrats to the convention where they tried to prevent abortion rights platform planks from being adopted but with no success.[720] At the convention, MCCL member Carol Wold gave an impassioned speech about their place in the party. Wold was not only a member of MCCL's Board of Directors but also part of the DFL Pro-life Caucus. She lamented, "I am a Democrat. I am pro-life. Today my party is telling me that I cannot be both."[721] Wold warned the party that it risked alienating and losing the support of pro-life Democrats across the country. Despite Wold's warnings, the DNC approved a plank that reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade* and opposed any sort of human life amendment.[722] It confirmed right-to-lifers' fears that there would be no room for them going forward in the Democratic Party, despite their efforts to keep pro-life Democrats in the spotlight and remind their fellow Democrats that some of them opposed legalized abortion.

By the mid-1980s, the situation looked bleak for the moderate right-to-lifers. Carol Wold, who had spoken so boldly at the DNC in 1980, found herself in a now

[719] Jim Shoop, "Abortion Politics," *Minneapolis Star*, May 16, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspapers Clippings.
[720] "Pro-life DFLers take cause to national convention," MCCL Newsletter, October 1980, Box 10, Folder 6, Williams Papers.
[721] Carol Wold, "MCCL'er addresses delegates at Democratic Convention," MCCL Newsletter, October 1980, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletters 1980, Taylor Papers.
[722] "Pro-lifers Forced Out Says Minnesota Woman," *Evening Tribune* (Albert Lea, MN), August 12, 1980, Reel 9, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.

familiar position for these activists. "Despite her willingness to 'go along with the party,' Wold was seen as one who did not go far enough in appeasing the liberals to satisfy them," historian Christopher Anglim observed.[723] Yet at the same time she "was not 'pure' enough for many conservative pro-lifers."[724] In another blow for moderate right-to-lifers, ACCL's membership was dwindling, and the group had lost its main leader, Marjory Mecklenburg, who had stepped down to take a position in the Reagan administration dealing with the issue of teen pregnancy.[725]

The moderates in the right-to-life movement tried to challenge the New Right in national politics, in their state organizations, and in their local communities, but they never saw the influx of liberals into the movement that they had hoped for. Moreover, the moderate right-to-lifers failed to make the Democratic Party any more flexible in its stance on abortion. Instead, they found themselves alienated there as well. Though they never completely disappeared from the movement, the pro-life moderates no longer had the same sway as they had in the 1960s and 1970s when they could enthusiastically and vocally push for things like better contraceptive access and sex education or alternatives to abortion legislation. Now, they retreated and became a small, quiet minority in both the right-to-life movement and the Democratic Party.

5.4 The Pro-life Left and a Renewed Vision for Right-to-Life Activism

[723] Christopher Anglim, "Loaves and Fishes: A History of Pro-life Activism in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District 1968-1981" (unpublished manuscript, 1981) Minnesota Historical Library, St. Paul, MN, 154.
[724] Ibid.
[725] Lucy Dalgilsh, "Federal post for Mecklenburg worries abortion rights head," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), February 20, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Bill Peterson, "Abortion foes quietly gain U.S. policy role," *Minneapolis Star*, March 13, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; Edward M. Bryce to Bishop Thomas Kelly, January 28, 1981, Box 64, Folder Ad Hoc Committee January-June 1981, USCCB Records.

As the debate around abortion grew more divisive at the end of the 1970s, a coalition of pro-lifers with ties to left-wing activism became even more vocal and started attacking the New Right from a more radical perspective. These activists were a diverse group—feminists, college students, old antiwar activists, nuclear disarmament activists, Catholics, progressive evangelicals from groups like Sojourners, and more. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, such activists had been involved in the movement for years and had already founded organizations like Feminists for Life and Pro-lifers for Survival, names that highlighted the groups' feminist and antiwar roots. In the early 1980s, these right-to-lifers worked alongside the Catholic Church and pro-life moderates to oppose the New Right; however, unlike the Catholic Church and moderates, the pro-life left argued more decisively for a stance against abortion that embraced opposition to war, nuclear weapons, and capital punishment. It was a push for a radical consistency on anything that could be considered a life issue. And while ACCL and other moderates still argued that there was room for all right-to-lifers in the movement regardless of political affiliation, the pro-life left insisted that right-to-lifers must uphold a consistent stance on life issues and faced off directly with New Right and Religious Right figures from President Reagan to Jerry Falwell.

The pro-life left made the broadest claims of right-to-lifers who opposed the New Right. Most were unapologetic in their support for feminism, the peace movement, and nuclear disarmament. Juli Loesch of Prolifers for Survival stated, "As a civil-libertarian and a feminist, I support sexual and reproductive freedom. I also support, as a prior and more basic consideration, the right of everyone to live—and this includes the handicapped, the defective, the eccentric, the elderly, and children, regardless of their

dependency, at every stage in their development."[726] Others could not fathom the New Right approach to abortion. In Minnesota, the young people of SOUL expressed confusion over the position of conservative right-to-lifers who supported the New Right. Their Board of Directors explained: "SOUL cannot understand how anyone can be opposed to destruction through abortion, yet sanctify another legalized death through capital punishment, or justify nuclear proliferation and misuse, or condone drafting of our youth for a war over oil in the name of freedom."[727] To them, it seemed the New Right's policies were fundamentally anathema to a consistent right-to-life position.

The pro-life left not only confronted the New Right but also claimed that the right-to-life position was more in line with the aims of the left than it was with the project of the right. This claim was significant at a time when conservative right-to-lifers were situating abortion among a constellation of conservative issues while liberals and the left were taking firmer stances in favor of abortion rights. But the pro-life left remained convinced that opposition to abortion and other left-wing causes were naturally complementary. For example, when talking with fellow activists on the left, left-wing right-to-lifers used the Vietnam War to emphasize this continuity. In an article on the pro-life left for *Commonweal,* Mary Meehan observed, "To pro-lifers on the left, all of this brings back memories of Vietnam…They see little, if any, moral difference between killing a fetus in the womb with salt solution and killing a Vietnamese baby with napalm."[728] In interviews and articles, Loesch confirmed Meehan's observations and

[726] Mary Meehan, "The Other Right-to-Lifers," *Commonweal*, January 18, 1980.
[727] SOUL Board of Directors, Letter to the Editor, *The Catholic Bulletin* (St. Paul, MN), April 3, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspapers Clippings.
[728] Meehan, "The Other Right-to-Lifers."

constantly made the connection between opposing war and opposing abortion.[729] She claimed that she had come to realize that "abortion is war" and had adopted a pro-life stance "not despite, but *because of* my other commitments against violence and social injustice."[730] Just as Vietnam antiwar protests had played a vital role in shaping and strengthening the left in the 1960s, opposition to abortion coupled with opposition to the Vietnam War emboldened the pro-life left, encouraging these right-to-lifers to argue that opposition to abortion fit seamlessly among the larger projects of the left.

Why, then, were the majority of those on the left unwilling to make the same connection? Longtime antiwar activist Elizabeth McAlister argued that Vietnam made people numb to death and that American society had become "morally bankrupt."[731] In making this observation, McAlister drew on an extensive history of antiwar and antinuclear activism; she was opposed to the Vietnam War and had even been arrested as part of the "Harrisburg Seven" in 1971 for "conspiring to raid federal offices, to bomb government property, and to kidnap the presidential advisor Henry Kissinger."[732] She had married fellow activist Philip Berrigan, and she continued to be involved in left-wing religious movements such as the Plowshares Movement.[733] Now, McAlister recalled the lack of concern for the rising "body count" in Vietnam—how Americans treated the growing death toll there with "the same spirit as it measures the ball scores"—and she wondered why right-to-lifers were surprised when there was little outcry over legal

[729] Juli Loesch, "Anti-Abortion, Gospel Peace," *Sojourners***,** November 1980; "Abortion: A Question of Survival," *WIN* Magazine**,** Box 3, Folder 209, AAC Papers.
[730] Juli Loesch, Speech to Madison, WI, Right-to-Life Rally, January 22, 1984, Box 1, Folder 12, Juli Loesch Wiley Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (hereafter cited as Loesch Wiley Papers).
[731] Elizabeth McAlister, "The Concern is for Human Life," *Sojourners,* November 1980.
[732] William O'Rourke, *The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), xiii.
[733] Fred A. Wilcox, *Uncommon Martyrs: The Berrigans, the Catholic Left, and the Plowshares Movement* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1991).

abortion.[734] Something had gone terribly wrong in American society, and only a "re-valuing of human life" in all areas could fix it.[735] Because activists like McAlister and Loesch connected the Vietnam experience with a right-to-life stance, they believed they were the remnants of the true left that had remained morally viable. And they argued that the pro-life left could see the connections between these different life issues—abortion, war, nuclear weapons, and capital punishment—in ways that other activists could not.

Confident of the legitimacy of their position, left-wing right-to-lifers turned their attention to the right-to-life movement. Similar to Bernardin, the pro-life left's biggest point of contention with the New Right and conservative right-to-lifers was consistency, and the pro-life left pushed for a radical consistency on all life issues. They were concerned on two accounts: that other right-to-lifers viewed abortion as the single most important issue in American society and ignored other life issues and that they embraced the New Right platform completely and unquestioningly. A common criticism was that right-to-lifers focused so single-mindedly on abortion that they failed to take action on other issues and thus appeared callous. The pro-life left challenged this perceived indifference by publicly professing their own consistency on the issues of abortion, violence, and death. SOUL, for example, defended their organization and its consistency on life issues. "We cry loudly over violent deaths through abortion," SOUL member Rebecca Wodelak informed the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in 1981, "but protest equally when a prisoner is burned to death in an electric chair…We cannot accept the horrible poisoning, maiming death forced upon humans by abortion, euthanasia, war, uranium

[734] Elizabeth McAlister, "The Concern is for Human Life," *Sojourners,* November 1980.
[735] Ibid.

mining and nuclear radiation."[736] At other times, the pro-life left criticized the conservative right-to-life stance directly, calling out its many shortcomings.[737] Jim Wallis articulated this viewpoint in the November 1980 issue of *Sojourners*:

> Like many, we have often been put off by the anti-abortion movement. Its attitudes toward women and the poor, combined with its positive support for militarism and capital punishment, have been deeply offensive to us and have helped keep us away from the issue of abortion. Serious contradictions, along with the insensitivity of rhetoric and tactics of many in the pro-life movement, have alienated others from their cause.[738]

These were serious charges and, as Jim Wallis noted, had kept many potential right-to-life activists away from the movement. But the pro-life left pushed the issue, believing that the movement must confront the issue of consistency if it were to remain a viable and moral cause.

Very quickly, however, the pro-life left felt compelled to take further action. In 1980, Sojourners, the progressive evangelical group led by Wallis, dedicated an entire issue of its monthly magazine to coming out publicly in opposition to abortion. That issue of *Sojourners* was one of the best and most comprehensive statements of the pro-life left and helped bring together the Catholic left and the evangelical left. Though *Sojourners* was an evangelical magazine, many of the contributing authors were Catholics, including Juli Loesch, Daniel Berrigan, and Elizabeth McAlister. This issue of *Sojourners* also circulated throughout the rest of the movement. MCCL reported on its publication and noted Sojourners' "strong pro-life stance" as well as the ways the magazine issue

[736] Rebecca Wodelak, Letter to the Editor, *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), February 5, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings; SOUL Board of Directors, Letter to the Editor, *The Catholic Bulletin*, April 3, 1981, Reel 10, MCCL Newspaper Clippings.
[737] Meehan, "The Other Right-to-Lifers."
[738] Jim Wallis, "Coming Together on the Sanctity of Life," *Sojourners,* November 1980.

challenged the stereotype that "casts all pro-lifers as ultra-rightwingers."[739] MCCL also offered to provide copies of the magazine for any of its interested members. That issue of *Sojourners* set the tone for the pro-life left throughout the decade, definitively and publicly affirming their radical consistency on abortion and other life issues. Similarly, Prolifers for Survival picked up its publicity of right-to-life activities as well as other left-wing causes. In the early 1980s, its newsletter advertised the March for Life but also a conference for the Religious Left, a campaign by the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, and a member's work settling refugees in the United States.[740]

By the mid-1980s, the pro-life left was actively opposing the New Right, their wariness giving way to outright denunciation. Juli Loesch tried to meet conservative right-to-lifers on their own turf. Starting in January 1983, Loesch toured the South and visited local right-to-life groups to spread the pro-life left message. She persisted in explaining the need to oppose abortion, war, and nuclear weapons despite encountering "forceful pro-arms-race viewpoints," "folks from Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum," and the "regional head of the John Birch Society" along the way.[741] On the other hand, she was heartened to meet a few other progressive pro-lifers during her trip. Sojourners also enacted a bolder strategy. After much planning in the early 1980s, Wallis and the Sojourners organized a Peace Pentecost in the summer of 1985 to directly challenge Reagan and the New Right. The group marched around Washington, D.C. to "pray, sing, and engage in nonviolent civil disobedience."[742] They went to the White House, the State

[739] "Christian leftists group takes strong pro-life stance," MCCL Newsletter, April 1981, Box 2, Folder MCCL Newsletter 1981-1982, Taylor Papers.
[740] Prolifers for Survival, Newsletter, August-October 1982, Box 7, Folder 12, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers; Prolifers for Survival, Newsletter, January-March 1983, Box 8, Folder 1, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[741] "Mid-South Tour," PS Newsletter, January-March 1983, Box 8, Folder 1, Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers.
[742] Jim Wallis, "A Consistent Ethic of Life," *Sojourners*, July 1985.

Department, the Soviet Embassy, the South African Embassy, the Supreme Court, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The group chose those sites specifically to emphasize the group's radical consistency on life issues, from racism to abortion to war to capital punishment. In an article on the protest, Wallis was hopeful and optimistic about the emergence of a new conscience and respect for all human life among a variety of Christians.[743] Prominent conservative Jerry Falwell, meanwhile, blasted Wallis and the others, calling them "pseudo-evangelicals" and comparing Wallis to Hitler.[744] Wallis dismissed Falwell and argued instead that the time was right for the pro-life left to "reject the inconsistencies and polarities of the political Right, Left, and center."[745]

Through all these protests, trips, and speaking events, Reagan and the New Right remained the prime targets of the pro-life left. They did not trust Reagan's pro-life credentials or his appeals to religious Americans, and they believed the New Right's approach to abortion was fundamentally flawed. As Wallis explained, "an abundance of religious language does not a good theology make."[746] It was in this same article that Wallis argued that Cardinal Bernardin offered a "much saner" approach for the right-to-life movement. Along with the Catholic Church and the moderate right-to-lifers, the pro-life left tried desperately to keep right-wing politics from completely dominating the movement. By promoting a left-wing approach to abortion, reaching out to fellow right-to-lifers, and confronting New Right activists, the pro-life left mounted a strong challenge to the conservative right-to-lifers and hoped to reshape right-to-life activism. However, it

[743] Ibid.
[744] "200 Arrested in Washington Protests Called by Christian Activists," *New York Times*, May 29, 1985.
[745] Jim Wallis, "A Consistent Ethic of Life," *Sojourners*, July 1985.
[746] Jim Wallis, "The President's Pulpit," *Sojourners*, September 1984.

would not be enough, and they shared a similar fate as their moderate counterparts, marginalized in the right-to-life movement itself as well as within left-wing activism.

Conclusion

No matter how hard the Catholic Church, the moderates of ACCL and MCCL, or the pro-life left worked, there seemed to be no remaining middle ground when it came to the abortion issue, and, despite their passionate activism, right-to-lifers who opposed the New Right soon found little space left for them in right-to-life politics. David Carlin summed it up well in an article for *Commonweal:* "The liberals will disown you, since you can't be one of them without being a feminist, and you can't be a feminist without being pro-choice. And the conservatives won't receive you, since no matter how right you may be on the abortion question, you're still wrong, from their point of view, on a hundred and one other questions."[747] Thus, right-to-lifers opposed to the New Right retreated into the background or left the right-to-life movement altogether. Marjory Mecklenburg left ACCL and accepted a position in the Reagan administration working on issues like teen pregnancy. The NRLC persisted though it still tried to maintain its political neutrality. MCCL also survived though its pro-life contingency in the DFL struggled to make an impact.

Despite their failure in the mid-1980s, these right-to-lifers defended their nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and consistent approach to right-to-life activism, believing it was the best hope for their cause. After his run-in with Falwell in 1985, Wallis argued that their unique approach to life issues was "a position that knows no ideological boundaries and directly challenges the inconsistent morality of both the Right and the

[747] David R. Carlin, Jr. "Patchy Garment: How many votes has Bernardin?" *Commonweal*, August 10, 1984.

Left…The political conservatives and liberals each have their favorite causes and victims and ignore the cries of many of God's children. It must not be so with us."[748] Yet, in refusing to choose sides, these activists were relegated to the margins. The polarized political landscape of the 1980s left little room for them on the left or the right. Democrats took a hard line on abortion rights, and Republicans' embrace of the New Right made the party intolerable for the activists. And given these conditions, it was nearly impossible to hold together the broad-based right-to-life movement of the 1970s. By 1986, Sojourner Danny Collum concluded that they only had one option: "All we can do is speak and act faithfully."[749]

In spite of this resignation and their relative obscurity since then, right-to-lifers who resisted the New Right carved out an enduring, though little known, legacy, especially in their emphasis on consistency. The consistent ethic of life has been a recurring theme in right-to-life politics since the 1980s. In 1987, Prolifers for Survival helped organize the Seamless Garment Network based on Cardinal Bernardin's work promoting the consistent ethic of life. Sojourners also joined the network. It exists today as the organization Consistent Life with about two hundred member groups and is "committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism, capital punishment and euthanasia."[750]

The story of these right-to-lifers who resisted the New Right's interference in politics is important because it challenges more conventional views of Reagan-era America and the role of abortion in the rise of the New Right. Many scholars and the general public have seen abortion as one of the consummate conservative causes of the

[748] Jim Wallis, "A Consistent Ethic of Life," *Sojourners*, July 1985.
[749] Danny Collum, "The Big Picture," *Sojourners*, May 1986.
[750] Consistent Life, "Mission Statement," http://www.consistentlifenetwork.org.

1980s—the issue that rallied people to Ronald Reagan and the New Right; however, even in the early 1980s, at the height of the conservative ascendancy, the right-to-life movement was not monolithically conservative. Though some right-to-lifers readily embraced Reagan or cautiously began alliances with the New Right, many right-to-lifers did not, including key leaders of the movement. Members of the Catholic Church, moderate right-to-lifers in groups like ACCL, and left-wing activists fought back against the New Right's incursions into the right-to-life cause at the grassroots and state level as well as in national politics. These right-to-lifers not only resisted the New Right but saw the conservative stance on abortion and other life issues as fundamentally antithetical to the right-to-life movement. And they boldly asserted that abortion was not simply a conservative cause. Instead of allying with the New Right, they proposed alternative visions for right-to-life activism—a broad-based movement for all Americans that was consistent, nonpartisan, and nonsectarian, offering positive alternatives to abortion.

In spite of their frustrations in the early 1980s and their failure to rally large numbers of right-to-lifers to their cause, many of these right-to-lifers persisted in the belief that abortion was an issue that could transcend political polarization and rally all Americans to a common cause. And despite their failures, this coalition of diverse right-to-life activists still maintained that their broad-based approach was the best and most effective way to oppose abortion and sustain the movement. In 1984, Juli Loesch reiterated this optimism, the belief that their approach would win in the end and that their movement was for all people: "Society *can* be changed by people for whom 'Right and Left' are not as important as 'Right and Wrong.' People who will strain every muscle to

defend the right to life for everybody: man *and* woman…believer *and* unbeliever…white *and* black…American *and* Russian…born *and* unborn."[751]

[751] Juli Loesch, Speech to Madison, WI Right-to-Life Rally, January 22, 1984, Box 1, Folder 12, Loesch Wiley Papers.

CONCLUSION

In January 2018, thousands of right-to-lifers once again gathered in Washington, D.C., for their annual March for Life. In a first for any American president, Donald Trump spoke to the gathered crowd via live television broadcast. In his address, Trump praised the movement's "great citizens" who came to the march "from many backgrounds, many places."[752] He also promised that his administration would do even more to fight abortion, pledging, "Under my administration, we will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence, and that is the right to life."[753] In addition, Trump connected the abortion issue to religion and especially to the issue of religious freedom. He ended his speech by declaring his solidarity with the marchers and praising the work being done by right-to-lifers to protect "the gift of life itself": "That is why we march. That is why we pray. And that is why we declare that America's future will be filled with goodness, peace, joy, dignity, and life for every child of God."[754]

Many right-to-lifers lauded his speech. Dave Andrusko, writing for the NRLC, rejoiced, "Today was a glorious day for unborn children."[755] And Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life, praised Trump's remarks and enthusiasm for the cause:

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[752] Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to March for Life Participants and Pro-Life Leaders," January 19, 2018, Accessed February 9, 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-march-life-participants-pro-life-leaders.
[753] Ibid.
[754] Ibid.
[755] Dave Andrusko, "Trump tells March for Life, 'Under my administration, we will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence, and that is the right to life,'" January 19, 2018, *National Right to Life News Today* Accessed February 10, 2018, https://www.nationalrighttolifenews.org/news/2018/01/trump-tells-march-life-administration-will-always-defend-first-right-declaration-independence-right-life/#.Wn8s8yMrJdg.

"He seems so excited about it. I could sort of see it looking up at the jumbotron."[756] At a private gathering with leaders of the movement, Vice President Mike Pence reassured them, "Life is winning."[757] In a presidency that has been met with historically low approval ratings, Trump has won the overwhelming approval of those activists dedicated to fighting legal abortion. And his repeated overtures to the movement show that, despite consistent public support for legal abortion, the right-to-life movement still holds a powerful position in politics in the United States.[758]

In some ways, this recent March for Life was a familiar scene, and the imprint of earlier right-to-life activism still shapes the movement. The march itself has been a mainstay for these activists, their most important annual ritual since 1974. Trump's invocation of the Declaration of Independence harkened back to the rights-based approach favored by many right-to-lifers. The religious references throughout the speech were reminiscent of so many letters penned by right-to-lifers to their legislators since the 1960s. Trump even discussed maternity homes in his address, a nod to the alternatives-to-abortion approach to the issue. Clearly, right-to-lifers still draw on the playbook developed by their forebears in the 1960s and 1970s. To this day, they employ the rhetoric and strategies created by people like Alice Hartle and Ed Golden, Marjory Mecklenburg and Judy Fink, Bob Holbrook and Father James McHugh, and countless others who pioneered right-to-life activism in the 1960s and 1970s. But in many other ways, everything has changed.

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[756] Jeremy W. Peters, "Trump Tells Anti-Abortion Marchers 'We Are With You All the Way' and Shows It," *New York Times,* January 19, 2018, Accessed February 8, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/us/politics/trump-anti-abortion-marchers.html.
[757] Ibid.
[758] Most Americans continue to support legal abortion in most or all cases. Pew Research Center, "Public Opinion on Abortion," July 7, 2017, Accessed February 11, 2018, http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion.

Though Trump hailed activists from a variety of backgrounds, he spoke to a movement of increasingly monolithic politics and religion. Since the early 1980s, opposition to abortion has become confined to a smaller and less diverse segment of society, thanks in part to the marriage of conservative religion and politics to the right-to-life movement.[759] In fact, religiosity and political affiliation have become prime predictors of a person's stance on abortion.[760] For example, sixty-five percent of Republicans "say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases" while seventy-five percent of Democrats believe the reverse.[761] Indeed, opposition to abortion has been increasingly tied to the Republican Party since the 1980s.[762] And higher religiosity also correlates directly to greater opposition to abortion.[763] Highly religious, conservative Republicans, then, have become dominant in the movement.

This is a far cry from the broad-based coalition right-to-lifers set out to create in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s, a small group of men and women scattered across the United States became aware of the abortion issue as states started reforming or repealing their abortion statutes. Though many of these people had little political experience, they soon began building the local and state organizations that would form the bedrock of the right-to-life movement into the 1980s. They organized massive letter-writing campaigns, developed books, pamphlets, and other educational material, lobbied their state legislators, and recruited new activists in their local communities. This movement, though initially dominated by Catholics, soon realized that its best chance of

[759] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 389.
[760] Putnam and Campbell, 386, 393.
[761] Pew Research Center, "Public Opinion on Abortion," July 7, 2017, Accessed February 11, 2018, http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion.
[762] Putnam and Campbell, 393.
[763] Putnam and Campbell, 386-387.

success would be with a coalition made up of Americans from across the religious and political spectrums. It would increasingly diversify its membership throughout the 1970s as right-to-lifers fostered a vision for a broad-based movement.

In the early 1970s, these new groups made an aggressive pivot in state politics and mounted an ambitious campaign to oppose the abortion rights movement. Rather than simply reacting defensively against new reform or repeal measures, right-to-lifers decided to work to implement their own agenda at the state level. They sought firmer laws against abortion and began considering a human life amendment to the Constitution that would ban abortion nationwide. The activists enacted this pivot in strategy by becoming savvy political actors. They showed up for protests at their state capitols, hounded their legislators, protested at clinics that dared perform abortions, and infiltrated state Democratic and Republican parties. Right-to-lifers also reached out to new segments of the population, especially women and young people, in hopes of broadening their support and invigorating their activism. Moreover, they reframed abortion, connecting it to the problem of violence in society and creating rhetoric they hoped would compel all Americans to oppose abortion.

Thanks to these organizing efforts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, right-to-lifers responded quickly to *Roe v. Wade,* continuing their activism in the states and implementing a bold strategy in national politics. Because of their foresight and planning in the year preceding *Roe*, state leaders were able to react immediately, officially separating the NRLC from the Catholic Church and pushing legislators to consider a human life amendment. In this way, they hoped to reverse *Roe v. Wade* and make abortion illegal in most cases nationwide. At the same time, latent tension erupted

between Catholic and Protestant leaders of the NRLC. Through 1973 and into 1974, it seemed their broad-based movement might be in jeopardy, as these leaders struggled to reconcile their religious and political differences and agree upon their organization's policies and initiatives. In the wake of *Roe,* the movement also struggled to recruit some key allies—evangelical Christians.

But right-to-lifers persisted. In the second half of the 1970s, the movement's leaders overcame their differences and pursued a wide range of initiatives with renewed determination. In fact, in these years, the movement was the closest to achieving and enacting its vision for a broad-based movement. In state and national politics, both Democratic and Republican right-to-lifers found opportunities to push their agenda in their parties. Through these efforts, the movement tried to get both parties to recognize its political clout. Catholic and Protestant leaders learned to work together again, reached important compromises on strategy, and supported each other's initiatives. And right-to-lifers implemented an extensive repertoire of strategies, reflecting their own diverse approaches to the abortion issue. They pursued a human life amendment, worked to limit federal funding for abortion, lobbied Congress to enact legislation to help women and their families, fought to protect women's rights as workers, and employed nonviolent direct action to confront abortion at clinics themselves. There was a unique flexibility and dynamism in the movement during these years, and right-to-lifers celebrated their growing and eclectic movement.

But this coalition quickly came apart as American religion and politics became more fragmented and polarized. In the early 1980s, the movement was especially divided over how to respond to the New Right and Religious Right's overtures. On the one hand,

some right-to-lifers saw a potentially fruitful partnership—one that would allow them to finally achieve their legislative goals and reverse *Roe v. Wade.* On the other hand, a cohort of activists—primarily made up of Catholics, pro-life moderates, and the pro-life left—feared that an alliance with the Religious Right would jeopardize the broad-based movement they had been building for over a decade. Despite the latter's efforts to preserve the movement of the 1970s, the right-to-life movement would be even more tied to conservative religion and the Republican Party over the course of the decade.

The marriage of the abortion issue and conservative politics and religion still looms large in histories of the last few decades. And in the popular imagination, Americans—both liberal and conservative—think of the right-to-life movement as the consummate conservative cause, one of the main issues that has defined the Religious Right and conservative politics today. But it did not start out that way. Indeed, the story is much more complex. In the 1960s and 1970s, right-to-lifers thought they were creating a broad-based movement in society. They tried to craft a movement built by and for all Americans, regardless of their political or religious affiliation. Right-to-lifers argued that a movement that welcomed people from these different backgrounds and with varied approaches to the abortion issue would be the strongest and most effective force for combatting legal abortion. And they believed that opposition to abortion could be the issue that would transcend political and religious boundaries in the United States. In the 1970s their broad-based movement briefly flourished. Despite this coalition's failure, its activists proved the powerful resonance that the abortion issue would have in American society and politics—so powerful that it compelled thousands of ordinary Americans to become politically active and create a movement that still endures.

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