

Catholic Democrats seek room to differ with church stances: Rejecting a one-issue agenda

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Reviving a religious issue from the last presidential election, a coalition of 55 Catholic Democrats in the House of Representatives acknowledged the “moral leadership” of the Catholic Church but said they will remain “in disagreement with the church” on some issues, including abortion rights.

The “statement of principles” recalls the 2004 elections in which some Catholic politicians—especially Democratic senator John Kerry—were at odds with church leaders in their support of abortion rights.

Representative Rosa DeLauro (D., Conn.), who spearheaded formulation of the statement, said Catholic Democrats do not want to see Catholic faith defined solely by a “one-issue, very narrow right-wing agenda.

“This is about the whole notion that the Catholic purpose is not defined by one issue,” DeLauro said in an interview. “Instead of other people defining us, we needed to try to define ourselves.”

The statement is less confrontational than one issued in May 2004, in which 48 Catholic Democrats said threats by some bishops to deny communion to dissenting politicians were “deeply hurtful” and “counterproductive.”

The lawmakers said they want to work with church leaders on issues of poverty, health care and education under the “Catholic tradition . . . that promotes the common good, expresses a consistent moral framework for life and highlights the need to provide a collective safety net” for the needy.

The House members were in accord about the “undesirability of abortion” and promised to work to reduce the number of “unwanted pregnancies” and increase alternatives to abortion.

DeLauro said that the statement got the support of 55 of the 72 House Democrats who are Catholic, and that it evolved over months of discussions and “was not at all driven” by the upcoming midterm congressional elections.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, who is heading a bishops’ task force on how to respond to dissenting politicians, said February 28 that he is willing to continue informal discussions with Catholics in both parties.

Signing on to DeLauro’s statement were some Democrats who oppose abortion, such as Representative Bart Stupak of Michigan, as well as prominent abortion-rights supporters, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California. *-Religion News Service*