

McCurry says president's faith outreach needed now as much as ever: An opportunity to mobilize across the theological spectrum

News in the [February 24, 2009](#) issue

Religious Democrats were “hibernating” until the 2008 election season, when the party’s candidates—including Barack Obama—made religion central to their campaigns, according to former White House press secretary Mike McCurry.

And now President Obama must continue his outreach to people of faith if he is to end the Iraq War, reduce the number of abortions and halt climate change, among other difficult issues, said McCurry, President Clinton’s chief spokesperson from 1995 to 1998.

“Yes, [part of] that effort will be a response mechanism to the religious right,” McCurry said during a talk January 19 at Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. “But it’s short-sighted if it’s only that. It will miss the opportunity . . . to mobilize people across the theological and religious spectrum to tackle problems.”

The brief talk by McCurry, a United Methodist, was part of a four-day event called “Be the Change” that was tied to the inauguration and hosted by Washington-area United Methodist congregations. Other UMC groups held social justice workshops, public prayer services and inauguration viewings.

McCurry, now working at a Washington communications consulting firm, has long challenged fellow Democrats to connect with voters by discussing their faith.

The Clinton White House was filled with religious people, including Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s chief of staff, who hosted weekly visits from his rabbi to study the Torah, and George Stephanopoulos, the son of an Orthodox priest.

Yet there was little talk about how faith impacted policy, McCurry said. "There was no community in the White House in the 1990s where we could go and share our faith," said the onetime press spokesperson.

McCurry said his church community in suburban Maryland provided "sanctuary from the storm" during a particularly rough period when Congress voted to impeach Clinton for perjury and obstruction of justice. "Without that community, I would not have been able to stay for four years as press secretary," he said. -*Religion News Service*