***“We accept your good faith only when the Constitution declares women free”[[1]](#footnote-1)*  
 Catholic Feminist Nuns in Support of the Equal Rights Amendment**

**Introduction**

This essay will analyze the political activity of Catholic feminist women religious since 1923, the first year the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in Congress. While their history is not often discussed, Catholic women have lobbied for the Equal Rights Amendment both publicly and privately for nearly one hundred years.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced nearly one hundred years ago in 1923 in Seneca Falls, New York by suffragist Alice Paul. Paul, a Quaker, fought for the Equal Rights Amendment for the rest of her long life. She was the founder and longtime leader of the National Woman’s Party (NWP), a feminist group that lobbied for most of the 20th century for constitutional gender equality. Alice Paul intentionally introduced the ERA, an amendment she wrote, in Seneca Falls 75 years after a women’s rights convention was held in that city. Paul continued to lobby for the ERA until she died in 1977. Notably, important feminists of faith, including the iconic Reverend Dr. Pauli Murray, spoke at her funeral.[[3]](#footnote-3)

  
 *Photo by the author*

The history of the Equal Rights Amendment has a surprising number of interesting associations with a wide range of politically active women of faith. Although the amendment was not proposed in her lifetime, there are fascinating connections to the political work and legacy of the famous Quaker suffragist Susan B. Anthony, who had lobbied tirelessly for women’s suffrage and the ERA was initially introduced in Congress by a nephew of Anthony.[[4]](#footnote-4) In its early years when the original ERA was championed by former suffragists such as Alice Paul[[5]](#footnote-5) and Crystal Eastman, one of the founders of the ACLU, it was rare to find a Catholic woman who publicly advocated for constitutional protection for women’s equality. For example, when Alice Paul was interviewed about her childhood, she mentioned everyone she knew when she was young was a Quaker and the only Catholics she knew were the Irish Catholics who were hired to work in her family’s home.[[6]](#footnote-6) Throughout much of its early history, most NWP leaders and organizers were protestant, not Catholic. In addition, many women in general were hesitant to support the passage of an ERA because of fear it would eliminate protective legislation that ensured vulnerable groups were only made to work the maximum number of hours, including for mothers, could work.

The ERA was introduced in every session of Congress starting in 1923 and through the early 1970s when it was finally passed by Congress. The text of the amendment by the 1970s was as follows:

**Text of the Equal Rights Amendment**

Section 1. Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.   
  
Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

**Dorothy Shipley Granger and St. Joan’s Society** By the 1940s, lay Catholic women were beginning to become publicly active in lobbying for the ERA. For example, Dorothy Shipley Granger was a member of St. Joan’s Society, an important feminist group for Catholic feminist women. St. Joan’s Society was an offshoot of St. Joan’s Alliance, a British organization founded during the era of the suffrage movement. Dr. Mary Sinclair Crawford was another Catholic feminist who publicly supported the ERA. She was a member of the National Woman’s Party and in 1945 she testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in support of the Amendment.[[7]](#footnote-7) Another notable Catholic feminist for the ERA was Elsie Graff who also worked with St. Joan’s Society. These Catholic feminists would send out cards such as the one below harkening back to Margaret Bryant, one of the first Catholic women to speak publicly in the Americas.

[[8]](#footnote-8) **Impact of Vatican II on women religious**

It would be difficult to overstate the profound impact of social changes within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s, especially as it relates to Vatican II, had on Catholic women religious. Before Vatican II, nuns were expected to be cloistered and wear a restrictive habit. According to Sister Maureen Fiedler, “Vatican II said the church is the people of God. The church is the laity, the church is everyone. And we all need to have a say in the future of the Church.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Fiedler took this idea to heart and for over fifty years worked to further rights for other women. As Mary J. Henold noted in her definitive book on Catholic feminism, Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement, “...women religious in perticular threw themselves into ERA work. By 1977 NCAN [National Coalition of American Nuns] alone had testified twice before the U.S. Congress and in twenty state legislatures.”[[10]](#footnote-10) So despite the ERA having enjoyed widespread political attention at the state level as well as expansive bipartisan support, why was it never ratified? It is the position of this paper that the answer to that important question can be directly connected to the growing political divide among Catholic feminist and antifeminist women.

**Political Divisions Among Catholic Women**

Despite the difficulties of getting the amendment passed in Congress, the ERA enjoyed wide, bipartisan support during presidential administrations through the 1970s. According to the Congressional Research Service, “...by 1970, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy Lyndon Johnson, and Nixon were all on record as having endorsed an equal rights amendment.”[[11]](#footnote-11) In addition to presidential support, the ERA also saw bipartisan support from their wives as well as First Ladies Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford and Rosalyn Carter all supported constitutional gender equality.[[12]](#footnote-12) Despite this support, part of the reason the ERA was never ultimately ratified was because of a growing conflict between politically active Catholic women. One of the divisive events of the 1970s that led to a greater split between these women was the 1977 Houston Women’s Conference funded by the U.S. government. The conference was extensively documented and presided over by Congresswoman Bella Abzug.[[13]](#footnote-13) There were many references to the history of the women’s movement at the conference, one of which was a “Relay for the ERA” that year that traveled from Seneca Falls to Houston.[[14]](#footnote-14)According to the National Archives, this conference was the “...culmination of the radical feminist movement.”[[15]](#footnote-15) It was that spirit of radical feminism that helped contributed to a political divide among Catholic women.

As Historian Marjorie Spruill extensively documented in her brilliant book on the Houston Women’s Conference, Divided We Stand, many pro-life women felt represented by Phyllis Schlafly who organized a gathering of conservative women, many of them Catholic, outside of the conference. Her campaign, STOP ERA, also had a booth inside the conference.[[16]](#footnote-16) Women inside the conference were divided over the ERA despite the fact that it was included as a plank as part of the National Plan of Action issued by the conference. As scholars Doreen J. Matingly and Jessica L. Nare have noted in their article, *“A Rainbow of Women”: Diversity and Unity at the 1977 U.C. International Women’s Year Conference*, the conference did not lead to significant feminist political reform either independently organized nor spearheaded by the U.S. government. They write, “the Carter administration failed to create an enduring government body to oversee the implementation of the Plan of Action, and the Reagan administration was even less amenable to feminist goals.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

The story of Sister Jacinta Mann from Pennsylvania as well as Sister Margaret Traxler highlight the diverse views of politically active Catholic religious women during this time. Sister Jacinta was openly pro-life and often worked with Traxler.[[18]](#footnote-18) She was affiliated with St. Joan’s Alliance as well as the more radical feminist group, National Coalition of American Nuns. In 1970, a pivotal year for ERA activism, Sister Margaret Traxler testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee in Congress in support of the proposed amendment.[[19]](#footnote-19) In Traxler made a direct argument in favor of the amendment saying in her testimony,

“Finally, I should like to remind the committee that further delay and subterfuge are simply intolerable. We accept your good faith only when the Constitution declares women free. Only when we are assured by our Constitution that there will be no discrimination based on race, or creed, or sex, can we believe in the good faith of men of America. Until that day we are forced to doubt.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

By 1972 Congress had passed the ERA and sent it to the states for ratification. As the amendment made it’s way through state legislatures, Sister Margaret Traxler continued to lobby for the it as well as many other feminist issues throughout the next several decades.

**Christian Feminism vs. Catholic Feminism in the 1970s: The Case of Bette Hillemeier**

Despite the prevalence of outspoken politically active feminist nuns throughout the 1970s, many conservative Catholic women rejected the label of feminist and self identified as Christian feminists.[[21]](#footnote-21) One of the lay women who personified this divide between Catholic feminist nuns and Christian feminists was the president of the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), Bette Hillemeier from Minnesota. Hillemeier identified as a Christian feminist and took over the leadership of the more conservative NCCW at a time where Catholic feminist nuns were outspoken in favor of issues such as women’s ordination, the legalization of abortion and support for the Equal Rights Amendment. As reported in the Minneapolis Star in 1978, one year after the Houston Women’s Conference, Hillemeier spoke about this political division, saying “Some nuns favor ERA because they feel its passage will improve chances for ordination of women as deacons and priests…The NCCW appears to be a threat to some nuns while some women in the NCCW feel threatened by the religious women…”[[22]](#footnote-22) When Hillemeier ascended to the leadership of the NCCW instead of unifying Catholic women as she publicly stated she would try to do, they ended up even more divided after her term was up. Before the Houston Women’s Conference, Hillemeier had attended a Minnesota Women’s Planning Meeting in June 1977. According to the Minneapolis Star, “[Hillemeier] was disappointed that some anti-abortion women left the convention Saturday night: “Some of us missed the only opportunity we’ll ever have to look each other face to face, and talk of things we should hear. In the future, Hillemeier said, “I’m going to work to see that my women look harder at the concerns of other women. We’ve been too parochial; we have to speak to the issues which concern our daughters and young women; those are issues that mothers need to know.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Hillemeier aimed to bridge the growing divide between two ideologically divergent groups of Christian, particularly Catholic, women and was ultimately unsuccessful. The press covered this extensively. For example, in a 1979 *Washington Post* article it was noted Christan feminists attended ERA events with signs reading “Christ was the first feminist” while others at the very same gathering were arguing the ERA went against God.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

While the Houston Women’s Conference was considered a major success by many liberal and more radical feminist groups, some Christian feminists found many of the issues discussed divisive and offputting. Historians such as Marjorie Spruill have noted that this conference ultimately led to the creation of two women’s movements-one liberal and one conservative. Some Christain feminists such as Hillemeier felt the conference was attempting to cover too much ground in too short of a time. According to Hillemeier, “...the Houston conference tackled too much when it “tried to solve all women’s concerns in three days.” The conference should not have handled the issues of lesbian rights….”[[25]](#footnote-25) Hillemeier left the Houston Women’s Conference feeling as though there were too many issues to discuss in too short of time. Instead of feeling resolution and solidarity amongst women, Hillemeier reported an increase in feelings of political polarization in the aftermath of the conference. She also cited the right-to-work law as an example and added that she would like to see other laws passed on an individual basis, such as improvement in the inheritance tax statues to eliminate discrimination against women.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The growth of Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum after the Houston Women’s Conference also contributed to a growing divide among Catholic women who were increasingly interested in more conservative women’s issues.[[27]](#footnote-27)

**Catholics Act for ERA**

Despite this growing divide, Catholic feminist women continued to mobilize politically on behalf of the ERA. One of the major lobbying groups organized by a Catholic feminist nun was Catholics Act for ERA. It was first organized in the 1970s by Sister Maureen Fiedler and her political partner, lawyer Elizabeth Alexander. Susan B. Anthony[[28]](#footnote-28), a grand niece of the famous suffragist who had converted to catholicism[[29]](#footnote-29), was the first member of this organization. Anthony, who was also an outspoken supporter of women in recovery from alcoholism, testified before Congress as a representative of Catholics Act for ERA in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1978.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Sister Maureen Fielder was deeply committed to her church and she viewed sexism as a social sin which is what led to the founding of this organization. She and Alexander took great care to make sure people understood the ERA was an issue of constitutionally enforced gender equality, rather than an amendment that protected abortion. This was an important distinction, as during this era there was heavy marketing by conservative Catholic organizations such as Eagle Forum conflating the two. Alexander frequently spoke against this pairing and was quoted in the 1980s saying, “Persons concerned with the protection of fetal life can and do support the ERA with integrity and enthusiasm.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

Both Fielder and Alexander were politically savvy and trained in the law. Alexander was a lawyer and Fielder had studied under Dr. Jeanne Kirkpatrick while she was a student at Georgetown University. Feidler earned a Ph.D. in political science from Georgetown in 1977. She made a point of thanking Dr. Kirkpatrick in her notable work on women’s ordination titled, *Are Catholics Ready*?[[32]](#footnote-32) [[33]](#footnote-33) She had also been inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. As reported by Lawrence Leder, Fiedler said, “The death of King called me to act for justice, to put my body where my words had been”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Fielder was clear in her belief that the Catholic Church was opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment because it would have raised questions about gender inequality within the Roman Catholic Church. Lawrence Leder reported that during the height of the ERA battle, Fielder said “Not only is the church anti-woman, but if the bishops had come out for ERA, they would have had to come out for equality everywhere.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Leder also noted that Fiedler was often approached by Catholic women who talked to her about feminism. As Fiedler said, “Wherever I went, I met Catholic women who told me how sexism had alienated them from the church.”[[36]](#footnote-36)  
**Actions organized by Catholics Act for ERA[[37]](#footnote-37)**

Activists from the organization Catholics Act for ERA undertook a number of different political actions throughout the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s and were especially hard at work in the state of Illinois as part of a broader push for ratification. In addition to their activity in Illinois in 1978, the group campaigned in Missouri, Nevada and Florida that year. They also campaigned for the extension of the ERA as part of a larger group of Catholic activists who showed up to a March on Washington event on July 9, 1978.

One of the most interesting direct-action campaigns was their public protest at the Republican Party Convention in the summer of 1980 after the party removed support for the ERA from its platform. Over 12,000 people participated in this large protest. They continued to protest the policies of Ronald Reagan throughout 1981. That year Catholics Act for ERA organized a prayer vigil when the president attended his weekly service on Sunday in Washington, D.C. on January 18, 1981. They continued to put pressure on Reagan that year as Catholics Act for ERA held a public vigil in front of the White House in 1981 to call attention to the need for an ERA.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**Men Affiliated with Catholics Act for ERA**

Catholics Act for ERA made it a point to include support from men in their marketing materials as well as in their political organizing. Two of the men who were frequently mentioned by this group as supporting the ERA were Father William R. Callagan, SJ who was affiliated with Priests for Equality and Father Theodore Hesburgh, President of Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. Father Ted, as the latter was lovingly called, made it clear that in his mind the ERA would not protect abortion rights, a growing concern among Catholics while the group was organizing. Hesburgh was quoted as saying, “When people hear I am for the ERA, they think right away I’m for abortion. A lot of people read this into it. I separate the two, as they should be, and I have no difficulty supporting the ERA.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

The organization Catholics Act for ERA was grounded in faith and as part of this commitment, they held a prayer service for equal rights at the Palmer House in Chicago, IL in 1978.[[40]](#footnote-40) At this prayer service, congregants sang a hymn for equality and offered a feminist prayer for the faithful that included the following prayer, “For the women and men who have struggled for equality, that their persistence might be answered with justice, for this we pray. For the American Bishops that they might understand the gospel call to equality and endorse the Equal Rights Amendment, for this we pray.”[[41]](#footnote-41) This prayer service offered a place of solidarity with Priests for Equality, as that organization was an active participant at this sacred event.

**Fast for Justice**

One of the major direct-action events involving a member of Catholics Act for ERA[[42]](#footnote-42) was a 1982 fast in the state of Illinois. Starting on May 18, 1982, seven women began a fast in support of the Equal Rights Amendment, including Sonia Johnson who had been famously excommunicated from her Mormon Church due to her support for women’s rights.[[43]](#footnote-43) Sister Maureen Fiedler was also among the women who fasted. Fielder’s participation was extensively covered in the press and in books about this event and through her interviews she made it clear the Fast was not a hunger strike or a protest, but was “...an attempt to bring together whatever energy we can to focus on this problem.”[[44]](#footnote-44) The fasting women received political and emotional support from comedian and political activist Dick Gregory who had personal experience with fasting for social justice issues.[[45]](#footnote-45) Gregory fasted himself for five days without food or water during the ERA fast in a show of solidarity of support for the women.[[46]](#footnote-46)

During this fast, STOP-ERA members bullied the women who were fasting and employed tactics intended to make them break their fast. According to ERA historian Sharon Whitney, “Stop-ERA volunteers ate candy bars in front of the fasting women. They printed bumper stickers which said: *They need to lose weight anyway*.[[47]](#footnote-47) Despite the opposition, Sister Maureen Fiedler persevered and continued to fast. Fiedler noted that the fast contributed to support from 23 bishops who called upon their legislators to support the ERA.[[48]](#footnote-48) Bishops were quoted as saying, “I’d sin if I did not support.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Fielder made it clear to the press that part of her intent in participating in the fast was to garner support for the ERA among Catholic bishops. In 1982 she said, “I have offered a lot of my own fasting in order that bishops would be open enough to support it.”[[50]](#footnote-50) The support she enjoyed from Bishops was short lived however, as they increasingly moved away from supporting the ERA.

The fast lasted for 37 days and the women sat under a banner that read “hungering for justice.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Their commitment was clear to passersby who saw them sit in the rotunda of the Capitol building in Springfield. Many observed the women were willing to die for their cause.[[52]](#footnote-52) Sister Maureen Fiedler stated, “We demonstrated that seven very ordinary women can do extraordinary things. We know the fast has increased a sense of unity and power among women around the country."[[53]](#footnote-53) She also called out President Reagan and blamed him for his lack of support for women’s rights. She referred to Reagan as the “greatest enemy” of women in the United States.”[[54]](#footnote-54) There was great discontent with politicians of both parties by many women, as they felt let down by the Carter administration as well as the new Reagan administration. One women’s rights activist during this time referred to the two political parties as “ickle and pickle at the ballot box.”[[55]](#footnote-55) That sentiment captures how many other women felt during this time.

Despite the ultimate failure of the fast, Maureen Fielder refused to let politicians blocking constitutional gender equality slow her down. She campaigned nationally for the ERA as part of her work with Catholics Act for ERA and often cited statistics showing widespread support for the ERA among Catholic voters. In 1982 she stated, “The polls show that 63 percent of Catholics are in favor of ERA-and that’s the same percentage as the American population as a whole.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Fielder was persistent in trying to get Catholics to support her cause. One of the strategies she employed to broaden her membership was to recruit lay Catholics.[[57]](#footnote-57) For example, Dolly Pomerleau and Bill Callahan[[58]](#footnote-58) who co-founded the Quixote Center, were both outspoken in support of Catholics Act for ERA.[[59]](#footnote-59) Dolly Pomerleau was a lay Catholic and Callahan was a former priest. They worked with Sister Maureen after she joined the Quixote Center as a co-leader in September of 1976.[[60]](#footnote-60) Fiedler and Pomerleau published a notable study of women in the Catholic church in 1978 titled, *Are Catholics Ready*?[[61]](#footnote-61) Pomerleau believed in nonviolent direct action in favor of ratifying the ERA. In 1980 she chained herself to the doors of the Republican National Committee when the political party took the ERA out of its platform.[[62]](#footnote-62) According to Sister Maureen Feidler, “The group was there for a full day in the hot sun, attracting a wide range of onlookers, including Republican women inside the building, many of whom were at their windows, pointedly expressing support for the action with hand signals, flag waving and the like.”[[63]](#footnote-63) The three organizers had a very long political partnership fighting for a variety of social justice issues.

Despite utilizing direct action tactics such as fasting and chaining themselves to buildings, Catholic feminist women were ultimately unsuccessful in achieving their goal of constitutional equality for women. According to women’s rights activist Zoe Ann Nicholson, who participated in the 1982 fast alongside Sister Maureen Fiedler, “[she] made a prophetic statement when the Fast ended on June 23, 1982. She predicted that if the ERA does not pass now, we won’t see it again, perhaps in this century.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Sister Maureen was correct as the ERA did not pass before the end of the 20th Century and as of August 2024 has yet to be ratified.

In Nicholson’s memoir of the fast titled *The Hungry Heart*, which includes the journal she wrote while she was fasting, she “never expected organized religion to be a component in this, but they are really coming to our aid. Catholics for the ERA and the Illinois Religious Committee are arranging almost everything for us. I had expected that there would be rituals, candles and talk of the Goddess. Probably the public would disapprove of that and would feel excluded. Maybe this is much better.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Nicholson, like many others, was surprised to find support for the ERA amongst practicing Catholics.  
  
**Recruiting Catholic Nuns: Making the Case for the ERA to the RSCJ**

In the late 1970s, Catholics Act for ERA appealed to the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ), an order of Catholic women religious, for financial support for their political activity on behalf of the ERA. Sr. Maureen Fiedler and Elizabeth Alexander, national co-chairs of Catholics Act for ERA, asked for specific funding from the RSCJ Passover Committee.[[66]](#footnote-66) In their appeal, they were complimentary towards the Society for their sympathy to social justice issues. Although it was not widely promoted by its members, the order also signed on to support the publication of Fiedler and Dolly Pomerleau’s study of women’s rights in the church titled *Are Catholics Ready*?[[67]](#footnote-67)

Many RSCJ quietly lent their support for the Equal Rights Amendment. Support within the order was not public but many sisters added their individual voice to this struggle for constitutional gender equality. For example, Sister Judith Cagney, RSCJ supported the ERA and went on record with her support in the 1978 congressional hearings for an extension.[[68]](#footnote-68) More radical feminist sisters such as Sr. Maureen Fiedler appealed to the order for more support, but many politically active RSCJ were focused on other socially acceptable issues by the more conservative Catholic bishops such as immigration, human rights concerns in Nicaragua and combating poverty.

Catholics Act for ERA directly lobbied the RSCJ for financial support for their dwindling budget and appealed directly to Kate McDonald, RSCJ and Maggie Fisher, RSCJ.[[69]](#footnote-69)[[70]](#footnote-70) Maggie Fisher’s name appeared on a list of supporters of Catholics Act for ERA that was sent out to “Friend[s] of Equality” and signed by Susan B. Anthony, first member of the organization.[[71]](#footnote-71) Anthony signed it “Failure is Impossible,” referencing the iconic quote from her famous aunt. Fisher also so-signed a letter alongside Sr. Kathleen Keating, SSJ, which said, “Catholics Act for ERA brought Catholic support for the Equal Rights Amendment alive in Illinois. Efficiently organized, highly visible in the media, perpetually active, this group was extremely effective in mobilizing grassroots Catholics behind the ERA.”

Mary O’Callaghan, RSCJ was another supporter of Catholics Act for ERA through the organization National Sisters Network.[[72]](#footnote-72) Faine McMullen, RSCJ, another Catholic feminist who supported the ERA, earned a master’s degree in history from Manhattanville College and is mentioned in several documents related to political activity on behalf of the amendment.[[73]](#footnote-73) She was involved in a variety of feminist causes and even served on the Board of Catholics Act for ERA.[[74]](#footnote-74) Although many individual members of the RSCJ order were personally supportive of the amendment, most of the leadership was not.

**Backlash Against Catholic Feminism**

Despite persistent effort by these feminist sisters, the ERA failed to pass the 38 states needed to ratify the Amendment in 1982. Although religious groups had organized for the ERA for well over a decade, ultimately their campaign fell short of mobilizing their general membership. According to ERA historian Sharon Whitney, “...while an organization called the Religious committee for the Equal Rights Amendment attracted nineteen member groups from different faiths, observers noted that equal rights for women was not as important to religious activists as equal rights for racial minorities had been in the 1960s.”[[75]](#footnote-75) It is notable that many of these women religious have passed away and their obituaries often reference their work for women’s rights but almost never their involvement with the Equal Rights Amendment. Perhaps that is because the ERA never passed. It could also be since the mid-1980s during an era that was often referred to feminists as a backlash, the ERA when discussed in relation to Catholicism, is almost always mentioned in relation to anti-feminist conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly.  **Modern Day Revival**

In the 21st century, there are many feminist groups lobbying to ratify the ERA and using their faith as a central organizing tool. Groups such as Justice Revival[[76]](#footnote-76) and Generation Ratify[[77]](#footnote-77) are mobilizing young activists to put pressure on the U.S. government to have the archivist added the ERA to the Constitution. After Virginia ratified the amendment in January 2020 pressure has been building. Hashtags such as #FaithforERA have appeared on social media in a modern day attempt to organize people of faith for the Equal Rights Amendment. Many Catholic women religious, including three RSCJ, have signed a public statement organized by New Ways Ministry opposing discrimination against LGBT people and discrimination based on sexual orientation.[[78]](#footnote-78) Sisters such as Mary Hunyaday, RSCJ, have spoken out publicly against discrimination based on sex and have continued a long line of feminist women religious who have bravely challenged misogyny within the magisterium in a nearly one hundred year campaign for constitutional gender equality.

**Appendix 1**

***Catholic Groups Supporting the ERA***

* Catholics Act for ERA
* Catholic Women for the ERA
* Chicago Catholic Women
* Justice Revival[[79]](#footnote-79)
* Las Hermanas[[80]](#footnote-80)
* Leadership Conference of Women Religious
* National Coalition of American Nuns
* National Assembly of Women Religious
* NETWORK[[81]](#footnote-81) [[82]](#footnote-82)
* Priests for Equality
* Quixote Center[[83]](#footnote-83)
* Sisters of Loretto-Loretto Community[[84]](#footnote-84)
* Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet[[85]](#footnote-85)
* St. Joan’s Alliance[[86]](#footnote-86)
* Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC)

**Appendix 2**

***List of men, including many Catholics, who supported the Equal Rights Amendment***

* Alan Alda[[87]](#footnote-87) [[88]](#footnote-88)
* Senator Birch Bayh[[89]](#footnote-89)
* Rev. Joseph Blitz[[90]](#footnote-90)
* Bishop Carles Buswell[[91]](#footnote-91)
* Archbishop James V. Casey[[92]](#footnote-92)
* Bishop Maurice Dingman[[93]](#footnote-93)
* Bishop John Dougherty
* Bishop Caroll Dozier[[94]](#footnote-94)
* Monsignor John J. Egan[[95]](#footnote-95)
* George Evans[[96]](#footnote-96)
* Bishop Joseph Frances[[97]](#footnote-97)
* George A. Fulcher[[98]](#footnote-98)
* Senator Mike Gravel[[99]](#footnote-99)
* Thomas Gumbleton[[100]](#footnote-100)
* Joseph Grossman[[101]](#footnote-101)
* Richard Hanifen[[102]](#footnote-102)
* Senator Gary Hart[[103]](#footnote-103)
* Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC[[104]](#footnote-104)[[105]](#footnote-105)
* Joseph Hogan[[106]](#footnote-106)
* Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen[[107]](#footnote-107)
* James Jennings[[108]](#footnote-108)
* Senator Ted Kennedy[[109]](#footnote-109) [[110]](#footnote-110)
* Senator Patrick Leahy[[111]](#footnote-111)
* Norman Lear[[112]](#footnote-112)
* Bishop McAuliffe[[113]](#footnote-113)
* Senator Eugene McCarthy[[114]](#footnote-114)
* Senator George McGovern[[115]](#footnote-115)
* Amedee Proulx[[116]](#footnote-116)
* Tony Randall[[117]](#footnote-117)
* Peter Rosazza[[118]](#footnote-118)
* Reverend William Ryan[[119]](#footnote-119)
* Richard J. Sklba[[120]](#footnote-120)
* Joseph M. Sullivan[[121]](#footnote-121)
* Bishop Walter Sullivan[[122]](#footnote-122)
* Archbishop Rembert Weakland[[123]](#footnote-123)

**Appendix 3**

***List of Catholic Sisters Who Supported the Equal Rights Amendment***

* Sister Margaret Brennan[[124]](#footnote-124)
* Sister Thomas Aquinas Carroll,A.S.M.
* Sister Judith Cagney, RSCJ[[125]](#footnote-125)
* Sister Elizabeth Carroll[[126]](#footnote-126)
* Sister Carol Coston, O.P., co-founder of NETWORK[[127]](#footnote-127) [[128]](#footnote-128)
* Sister Louise Dempsey, CSJP[[129]](#footnote-129)
* Sister Mary Dooley, SSJ
* Sister Helen Duggan, administrator from the Adrian Dominican order[[130]](#footnote-130)
* Sister Maureen Fielder, Catholics Act for ERA
* Sister Paula Fox, OSF
* Sister Ann Gormly
* Sister Jeannine Grammick, SSND[[131]](#footnote-131)
* Sister Katherine Gray, SNJM
* Sister Theresa Higgins, CSJ
* Sister Marie G. Hungerman, IHM
* Sister Theresa Kane[[132]](#footnote-132)
* Sister Kathleen Keating
* Sister Marureen Kelleher[[133]](#footnote-133)
* Sister Andrea Lee[[134]](#footnote-134)
* Sister Ann Neale, GNSH[[135]](#footnote-135)
* Sister Merle Nolde, OSB
* Sister Sean O’Reilly[[136]](#footnote-136)
* Sister Barbara Peterson, SCN
* Sister Mary A. Polworth, SSJ
* Sister Donna Quinn[[137]](#footnote-137)
* Sister Carolyn Royal, teacher[[138]](#footnote-138)
* Sister Joanne Sturzl, PBVM
* Sister Frances Marie Thrailhill, OSU
* Sister Mary Daniel Turner, SND
* Sister Mary Luke Tobin. S.L., Church Women United[[139]](#footnote-139)
* Sister Marjorie Tuite
* Sister Arlene Violet[[140]](#footnote-140)
* Sister Helen Volkomener, SP
* Sister Janice Waters, SND de N
* Sister Lynn Marie Wellig, PBVM
* Sister Helen Wright, SND de N

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2. See Appendix 3 for a list of nuns who supported the ERA [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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14. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A picture of the booth is available at this link <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/stop-era-booth> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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25. “Catholic Women” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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27. It is important to note that Phyllis Schlafly, one of the leading opponents of the ERA, was also Catholic. She was educated at a Sacred Heart School in St. Louis. Her mother worked in the library on the weekends as a second job to pay her tuition, <https://time.com/4483234/phyllis-schlafly-parenting/> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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31. Russell Chandler, "ERA Position Brings Rift among Religious Women," *The Daily News* (Lebanon, PA), September 9, 1980, accessed April 15, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Pomerleau and Feidler, "Are Catholics'' [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The recent Hulu TV series about this era titled Mrs. America presents a Hollywood version of Kirpatrick’s selection to the cabinet by Ronald Reagan after his 1980 election. Slate has interesting analysis about what is fact and what is fiction on that show: <https://slate.com/culture/2020/05/mrs-america-finale-accuracy-fact-fiction-reagan.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Lawrence Lader, *Politics, Power, and the Church: The Catholic Crisis and Its Challenge to American Pluralism* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lader, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
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42. Although there were numerous groups of Catholic women who lobbied on behalf of the ERA, many Catholics opposed this amendment. Groups opposed to the ERA included the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters of America and the National Council of Catholic Women. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sonia Johnson was a longtime activist for the ERA, a vocal supporter of the women’s liberation movement and ran for president for the Citizens Party in 1984 <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1984/08/12/138342.html?pageNumber=23> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Zoe Ann Nicholson, *The Hungry Heart: A Woman's Fast for Justice* ( Lune Soleil Press, 2019), 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
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56. Jeanne Pugh, "Nun Visits Suncoast Seeking Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment," *Tampa Bay Times*, February 6, 1982 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In addition to Catholics Act for ERA, there were many other Catholic feminist groups during the 1970s and 1980s that supported the ERA. One of these groups was known as Catholic Women for the ERA. In 1974, this group conducted a direct action in front of Saint Peter in Chains Cathedral. A comprehensive list is available at the end of this paper in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Callahan also founded the organization Priests for Equality which often worked with Catholics Act for ERA [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Maureen Fiedler, "Dolly Pomerleau: a pioneer in the work of justice," National Catholic Reporter, last modified July 31, 2018, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/ncr-today/dolly-pomerleau-pioneer-work-justice. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
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73. <https://rscj.org/about/memoriam/faine-mcmullen-rscj> [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
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75. Whitney, *The Equal*, 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. <https://justicerevival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Justice-Revival-ERA-Policy-Brief-Final-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. <https://www.generationratify.org/get-involved> [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Sister Joan Gannon, Sister Diane Roche and Sister Irma Dillard signed this statement to express their support for LGBT rights <https://www.newwaysministry.org/homeforall/> [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. <https://www.eracoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Amicus-Brief-Filed.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Equal Rights Amendment Extension: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-fifth Congress, Second Session, on S.J. Res. 134, Joint Resolution Extending the Deadline for the Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.: Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee on the Constitution* (1978), page 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. <https://www.eracoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Amicus-Brief-Filed.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. NETWORK took a longstanding position in favor of the ERA and many of the women religious who belonged to this social justice lobbying group were in public support [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. <https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/Mss/QC/QC-series5-sc.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. <https://www.eracoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Amicus-Brief-Filed.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Whitney, *The Equal*, 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. <https://outsider.com/entertainment/mash-alan-alda-once-revealed-noble-cause-would-drop-everything-work-1978-interview/> [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. "Priest Fights for Justice," *News-Journal* (Mansfield, OH), December 31, 1983, accessed April 15, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Lawrence Lader, *Politics, Power, and the Church: The Catholic Crisis and Its Challenge to American Pluralism* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> Mike Gravel had a sister who was a nun named Marguerite Gravel, CSC. She belongs to the Holy Cross order and her photo can be found on page 4 of this link: <https://www.sistersofholycross.org/uploads/files/news-TEL-A-CROSS-Spring-2021.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Father Theodore Hesburgh, as he was known, was the longtime president of Notre Dame University. He was quoted as saying, “We should celebrate life and equality. We should pass the ERA. When people hear I’m for the ERA, they think I’m for abortion. I separate the two, as they should be, and have no difficulty supporting the ERA.” "The Equal Rights Amendment: Catholics Act for ERA," Alexander Street, accessed April 14, 2022, https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000676804. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1918873_1918869_1918881,00.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Bishop McAuliffe testified in support of the ERA on January 15, 1980 in front of the Missouri State Senate <https://www.sturdyroots.org/file/voices-of-change/equal-rights-amendment/testimony-of-bishop-michael-f-mcauliffe.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Senator McCarthy introduced the ERA in the Senate in 1967 *Equal Rights 1970: Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, Second Session, on S.J. Res. 61 and S.J. Res. 231, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States Relative to Equal Rights for Men and Women: Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary*, 91st, 1st Session 349-52 (1970) (statement of Sister Margaret Traxler). <https://books.google.com/books?id=V2hykWQS_dEC&dq=sister+margaret+traxler+testify+congress+equal+rights+amendment&source=gbs_navlinks_s>. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/134/cosponsors?s=1&r=18&overview=closed#tabs> [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/02/One-of-23-Roman-Catholic-bishops-listed-by-Equal/1234391838400/> [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Sister Margaret Brennan served as general superior of the Monroe congregation of Sisters from 1966-1976 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/brennan-remembered-wonderful-gift-whole-church> and <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. *Equal Rights Amendment Extension: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-fifth Congress, Second Session, on S.J. Res. 134, Joint Resolution Extending the Deadline for the Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.: Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee on the Constitution* (1978), Page 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/obituaries/2005/11/28/Obituary-Sister-Elizabeth-Betty-Carroll-Teacher-former-college-leader-and-advocate-for-women/stories/200511280200> [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0126/1489752.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Carol Coston became the first Catholic nun to win the Presidential Citizens Medal when she was honored by President Bill Clinton in 2001 for her work on behalf of the poor and for her activism for women <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/01/09/beyond-the-call-of-civic-duty/4f5cc4a0-1782-4b54-9167-371643be9920/> [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. "Inviting Members of Catholics Act for ERA," Series 5, Box 1, Folder 3, QUIXOTE CENTER RECORDS PROGRAMS, CATHOLICS ACT FOR ERA, 1978-1984, UNDATED, Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. "Two Florida Nuns to Campaign for Equal Rights Amendment," *The Daily Sentinel*, February 9, 1974, accessed April 14, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. "Inviting Members of Catholics Act for ERA," Series 5, Box 1, Folder 3, QUIXOTE CENTER RECORDS PROGRAMS, CATHOLICS ACT FOR ERA, 1978-1984, UNDATED, Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Russell Chandler, "ERA Position Brings Rift among Religious Women," *The Daily News* (Lebanon, PA), September 9, 1980, accessed April 15, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Sister Maureen Kelleher, a member of NETWORK, who also belonged to the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary order, lobbied for the congressional extension in 1978."Catholic Views on ERA Extension Varies," *The Catholic Advance*, August 24, 1978, accessed April 14, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. "County Women Lobby in D.C. for ERA," *Centre Daily Times* (State College, PA), September 22, 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. "Catholics Act for ERA Board Members," Series 5, Box 1, Folder 3, QUIXOTE CENTER RECORDS PROGRAMS, CATHOLICS ACT FOR ERA, 1978-1984, UNDATED, Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Sister Sean O’Reilly was also an attorney and was known to wear a button stating, “Another nun for ERA.” [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/respect-and-listen-your-elders> [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. "Two Florida Nuns to Campaign for Equal Rights Amendment," *The Daily Sentinel*, February 9, 1974, accessed April 14, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Sr. Mary Luke Tobin was a long time advocate for women’s rights who also served as an observer in Rome during the Second Vatican Council <https://www.lorettocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/women.movement.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Lawrence Lader, *Politics, Power, and the Church: The Catholic Crisis and Its Challenge to American Pluralism* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)