

Catholics for Choice

Susan Quilliam

Writer, Broadcaster, Consultant
and Trainer, Cambridge, UK

Correspondence to

Ms Susan Quilliam;
susan@susanquilliam.com;
<http://www.susanquilliam.com>

Received 24 September 2014
Accepted 24 September 2014

WHO ARE YOU?

Catholics for Choice was founded in 1973 to serve as a voice for Catholics who believe that the Catholic tradition supports women's and men's moral and legal right to follow their consciences in matters of sexuality and reproductive health.

We promote public policies that advance sexual and reproductive health ethics from a values-based perspective, drawing on the Catholic social justice tradition and respect for the reproductive health care decisions made – in good conscience – by men and women around the world.

We aim to bring to legislators, media, academics, grassroots organisations and ordinary individuals a balanced viewpoint about Catholic teaching on issues related to contraception and abortion.

WHERE DO YOU WORK?

We are headquartered in Washington, DC, USA but work around the world as well as in the USA. We are supported by individual activists in the USA and also work with professionals, advocates, politicians and policymakers who attend our trainings, and with hundreds of partner groups in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America.

WHAT ORIGINALLY HAPPENED TO CREATE A NEED FOR THIS ORGANISATION? WHO ARE YOUR FOUNDERS? WHAT WERE THEIR MOTIVATIONS?

Catholics for Choice was begun by Joan Harriman, Patricia Fogarty McQuillan and Meta Mulcahy to be a voice for ordinary Catholics on sexual and reproductive health issues. These women were joined by feminist theologians Joseph O'Rourke and Rosemary Radford Redford, who worked to raise awareness of the traditional Catholic teaching that individual conscience is the final arbiter in moral decision-making.

This approach radically challenged assertions being made by the Catholic

hierarchy at the time. Back in 1973, a fierce battle raged over the legalising of abortion services in the USA, and the hierarchy lobbied vigorously to stop that legalisation. Our founders fought to advance the idea that a country's laws should not adhere to the religious and political hierarchies' definitions, and that legislators understand the Catholic 'church' is not an institution but is made up of individual members who should and do follow their conscience.

HOW DO YOU WORK?

Catholics for Choice sparks dialogue through public education, both domestically and internationally. For example, our Condoms4Life campaign is a worldwide public education effort to raise awareness about the effect of the bishops' ban on condoms. The campaign was launched on World AIDS Day 2001 with the display of billboards in stations and newspaper advertisements saying, "Banning Condoms Kills". The advertisements appeared initially in the USA, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, Kenya, Chile and Zimbabwe, in an effort to challenge the Vatican's lobbying against the availability and access to condoms in areas of the world most at risk.

Another recent advertisement, "What Catholics Believe About Birth Control", highlighted that the majority of Catholics support birth control methods banned by the Vatican – in fact, sexually active Catholic women are just as likely to have used some form of contraception banned by the Vatican as women in the general population (99%).

DO YOU MEET RESISTANCE?

Yes. In 2011, Condoms4Life brought the message to the pilgrims of World Youth Day and the people of Madrid, despite municipal authorities' efforts to ban an advertisement intended for buses and bus shelters. This censorship of the Condoms4Life campaign attracted worldwide media attention. Through nightly projections on city buildings, as well as



To cite: Quilliam S. *J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 2015;**41**:74–75.

posters and stickers distributed throughout the city, the life-giving message of Condoms4Life reached visitors and residents. In particular, youth advocates thanked Pope Benedict for his 2010 acknowledgement that condoms save lives.

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST RECENT CAMPAIGN?

Another example of our advertisements appeared in the *International New York Times* in 2014, in advance of President Obama’s visit to the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis. We ran an advertisement in the form of an open letter asking the president to consider the words of former President John F Kennedy:

“I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from any ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials....”

We wanted to remind President Obama that the Vatican’s rules on sex and sexuality, reproductive

health and family life still do not reflect the real lives of lay Catholics.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Who: Catholics for Choice
Where: 1436 U Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009-3997, USA
Website: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org>
Contact: Claire S Gould (Senior Communications Associate)
Tel: +1 202 986 6093
E-mail: media@catholicsforchoice.org

Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

Editor’s note This article is one in a series of occasional articles on key health organisations worldwide. The Journal would be pleased to hear from other organisations, particularly those based outside the UK, which would like to be similarly profiled.

FACULTY OF SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE MEMBERSHIP EXAMINATION

The Membership Examination (MFSRH) consists of:

Part 1 Single Best Answer paper (SBA)

The London-based examination is held annually in April and October. Applications for the **Friday 17 April 2015** examination must be received by **9 January 2015** and for the **Friday 16 October 2015** examination by **1 July 2015**. The syllabus for the Part 1 examination is on the Faculty website.

Evidence Based Commentary (EBC)

Candidates can view the released topic and candidate guidance notes for EBC on the Faculty website. There is an **absolute deadline** of **31 August 2015** to submit the EBC on this topic. You can submit an EBC before applying to enter the Part 1 examination.

Part 2 Examination (CRQ, EMQ, OSCE)

Applications for the MFSRH Part 2 to be held in London on **Thursday 18 June 2015** must be received by **9 January 2015**.

Further information and the Part 2 Syllabus are on the FSRH website. The qualification is subject to re-certification every 5 years. For the current MFSRH Examination Regulations, information on all components of the MFSRH examination and application forms, please visit the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare website: www.fsrh.org (**Examinations**) or e-mail Abigail Wright: abigail@fsrh.org

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor are welcome and generally should not exceed 600 words or cite more than five references. For comments on material published in the most recent issue of the Journal, correspondence should be received within 4 weeks of dispatch of that Journal to be in time for inclusion in the next issue. When submitting letters correspondents should include their job title(s) and their work affiliation(s)/contact address(es). A statement on competing interests should also be submitted for all letters. Letters may be submitted to the Journal Editor or to the Journal Editorial Office (details on the Editorial Board page).