News



Tim and Steph Busch receive the Pontifical North American College Rector's Award in 2016. (Courtesy of Napa Institute)



by Dan Morris-Young

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Despite ties to some of Pope Francis' harshest critics, high-profile Catholic activist-philanthropist Tim Busch insists he supports the pope and applauds him for recent promulgation of far-reaching new church laws on investigating charges of sex abuse and abuse of authority.

Co-founder and public face of the Napa Institute, Busch said that featuring papal foe Cardinal Raymond Burke at the organization's ninth annual summer gathering in July does not equate with charges "on several occasions" that the institute promotes "some sort of master plot to overthrow the papacy."

Founded in 2010, the Napa Institute promotes rigorous orthodoxy, networking between affluent Catholics and various apostolates, and sacramental participation.

An anti-Francis agenda "is the furthest from the truth. This is not our goal or our interest. We support Pope Francis," Busch said during an hourlong May 28 phone interview during which he:

- Enthusiastically endorsed *Vos estis lux mundi* ("You are the light of the world"), the apostolic letter that took effect June 1 mandating that priests and religious order members worldwide report suspicions of abuse or its cover-up, and authorizing metropolitan archbishops to investigate those charges;
- Called on church authorities to employ those new laws to the situation of Archbishop John Nienstedt, who resigned as head of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese four years ago amid charges of covering up clerical sex abuse incidents and rumors of personal transgressions;
- Repeated his public call for Washington's new archbishop, Wilton Gregory, to either confirm the archdiocese is cooperating in the Vatican investigation of laicized former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick or launch its own investigation;
- Denied advance knowledge of, or any role in, helping author the controversial letter by former U.S. nuncio Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò that charged malfeasance by Francis and other churchmen in oversight of McCarrick;
- Decried ad hominem attacks on him and others, urging civil discourse and open dialogue;
- Strongly advocated free market capitalism as a tool for raising people out of poverty, questioned minimum wage increases, and cautioned against labor union abuses;
- Underscored previous calls on the U.S. bishops to extend provisions of their Charter on the Protection of Children and Young People to bishops and religious

superiors and to deeply incorporate lay involvement in that oversight process;
- Denied that his $15 million gift to what is now the Busch School of Business at the Catholic University of America — the largest donation in the D.C. university's history — was intended to leverage the university's direction;
- Said he appreciates the spiritual direction of Opus Dei priests, considers himself an Opus Dei cooperator, and often consults the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

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Asked if establishing Burke as a major presenter at the July 24-28 Napa Institute gathering at his elegant Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa, California, was tantamount to endorsing the cardinal's controversial critiques and challenges of Francis, Busch said Burke "is a serious theologian" and "recognized by many Catholics as someone that they would pay attention to."

It will be Burke's first appearance at an institute event, added Busch, who has known the cardinal for about a decade and considers him a friend.

Other cardinals who have taken part in Napa events include William Levada, James Harvey, Roger Mahony, Gerhard Müller and Christoph Schönborn.

Removed as head of the church's highest judicial body, the Apostolic Signatura, in 2014 by Francis, Burke has been a prominent critic of the pope, including Francis' approach to marriage and family life and his reforms of annulment procedures.

Francis reappointed Burke as a rank-and-file member of the Signatura in 2017.

Burke was one of four cardinals to sign an open letter to Francis posing five yes-or-no questions they claimed would clarify what they described as doctrinal ambiguity in *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis' apostolic exhortation on family life.

An advocate of Latin liturgy, Burke has raised eyebrows for his backing of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute near Rome. Stephen Bannon, former strategist for

President Donald Trump, is a patron of Dignitatis Humanae and a member of its board of trustees.

Easily among the most influential laymen in the U.S. and Rome, Busch is involved in myriad Catholic entities in addition to the Napa Institute and the Catholic University of America, where he chairs the business school advisory board:

- The Magis Institute, which he co-founded in 2008 and which concentrates on the intersection of science and religion; Busch chairs its board.
- Eternal Word Television Network, an international Catholic broadcasting empire that also owns the National Catholic Register newspaper and Catholic News Agency; Busch sits on the EWTN board of governors.
- The Papal Foundation, which helps fund charitable projects favored by the pope; Busch is a trustee and has served on its executive committee.
- Legatus, an organization of more than 5,000 that brings together wealthy Catholic business leaders and their spouses to "'study, live and spread the Catholic faith in their business and personal lives"; Busch has helped establish several of the organization's 90 chapters and has twice been named its "ambassador of the year."

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- The University of Notre Dame's McGrath Institute for Church Life, which forms lay leaders and "partners with Catholic dioceses, parishes and schools to address pastoral challenges with theological depth and rigor"; Busch is a member of its advisory council.
- The Diocese of Orange, California, where he led the campaign to purchase of the 3,000-seat former Crystal Cathedral, now Christ Cathedral; some EWTN operations and the Magis Institute are now located on the 35-acre campus.
- Catholic University's Institute for Human Ecology, which focuses on the "intersection of human rights concepts and Catholic social thought"; Busch is an advisory board member.
- JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano and St. Anne School in Laguna Niguel; Busch and his wife, Steph, co-founded both California schools.
- The Napa Legal Institute, which provides legal counsel and financial education to nonprofits "aligned with the Catholic faith"; it was founded late last year by Busch and his law firm partner, John Peiffer, and is located near Catholic

University.
- Pontifical North American College in Rome where the Busches received the 2016 Rector's Award.

'The system failed': Viganò's letter

Interestingly, a fellow recipient for the 2016 honor from Pontifical North American College was former U.S. nuncio Viganò, whose 11-page "testimony" last August made headlines around the world.

"I knew nothing about the letter before it came out," Busch told NCR, "but somebody put up on Twitter when it first came out that I had authored it, but they took it down right away."

He was "simultaneously" provided a copy of Viganò's statement, he said, as it was being released to the public through various conservative Catholic media outlets, including the National Catholic Register.

Does he believe Viganò's claims that Francis ignored or repealed Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's apparent restrictions on McCarrick?

On May 28, Busch repeated past observations, telling NCR that Viganò is a friend and "has a lot of credibility," that much of what the archbishop had stated "seemed to have some authenticity," and that the accusations deserved examination.

On that same day, Francis was quoted in an interview with a Mexican journalist as saying he did not remember if Viganò had spoken to him about McCarrick, publicly denying for the first time knowing anything about McCarrick's transgressions or restrictions. He told the reporter, "Otherwise, I would have not stayed quiet."

In response to a follow-up inquiry, on June 4 Busch said the pope's rebuff of Viganò's claims of papal irresponsibility in regard to McCarrick creates "a terrible situation."

"As I said, I have no knowledge, and I don't think anyone does ... of what was discussed in 2013 — other than Pope Francis and Archbishop Viganò. I don't like anyone calling a pope a liar regardless of the circumstances. It belittles the office and the person," Busch said.

"What I said before and I continue to push is for the Vatican and the United States dioceses in question — Newark, Metuchen, New York and D.C. — to investigate who knew what and when. And why was McCarrick allowed to ignore the restrictions requested by Pope Benedict XVI? I have recommended that this matter be filed with Archbishop Wilton Gregory using the protocol the pope has outlined in the *motu proprio* [*Vos estis lux mundi*] issued on May 9, 2019."

The open question still exists, Busch indicated, if "other prelates may have known of the sanctions ... and failed to enforce them in their diocese or to notify the appropriate Vatican officials."

"Rather than speculate," he said, "let's just find out."

In any event, he added, "the system failed."

Busch questioned why many people "want to throw Francis under the bus on this," since much of McCarrick's apparent disregard for Vatican restrictions "took place under Benedict's watch."

'Give this man due process'

Viganò also played a key role in the Napa Institute's bringing Nienstedt on board in 2016, after his resignation as head of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese in 2015.

According to Busch, both Viganò and Archbishop Bernard Hebda, who succeeded Nienstedt in St. Paul-Minneapolis, told him there were no impediments to hiring Nienstedt.

"We, of course, had heard rumors, too," about Nienstedt mishandling sex abuse cases and allegations of sexual relationships with priests, seminarians and other men, said Busch, "so we asked Archbishop Hebda, Archbishop Viganò and other bishops, too, if there was anything we should know about. We were told there were only rumors and that he was fine and free to do whatever he wanted."

Busch said he also vetted Nienstedt's role with the institute with Bishop Robert Vasa of Santa Rosa, California, before inviting him into the diocese.

"When we started to get involved with church [sex abuse investigation] reform, there were a lot of allegations that somehow we were harboring a person that was

part of the problem, not part of the solution," said Busch. "And so we felt at that time, and he understood, that the Napa Institute should no longer have a relationship with him."

Nienstedt has denied all allegations and said he would welcome a full investigation.

Busch supports the idea and says that, "with the new *motu proprio*, you don't have any excuses" not to "give this man due process."

"In the past, one would argue that only the Congregation of Bishops could deal with the Nienstedt problem. That's no longer true," Busch said. "I think it's time to just close this up. I think Archbishop Nienstedt would welcome an opportunity to prove himself innocent. ... Prove these allegations are accurate and take the appropriate disciplinary action, or clear his name. We now have the vehicle to do that."

Viganò has been accused of short-circuiting an archdiocesan investigation of Nienstedt being conducted by an independent law firm and of ordering destruction of documents related to it. He has adamantly denied both accusations.

Nienstedt's Napa Institute function was transcribing and editing various institute-related talks and preparing the texts for publication, Busch said.

The free market champion

Famously a champion of the free market system, Busch was asked what he might say to Francis about the pontiff's denunciations of capitalism, notably spelled out in his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Francis pulls no punches in his critique of unrestricted free-market economics and lambasts greed and economic systems that marginalize people.

"I would say that within the last 30 years, 80% of those people that were in poverty have been raised out of poverty in Third World countries through the use of the free market system," said Busch, a CPA and founder (1979) of the Busch Firm, a law firm based in Irvine, California. It specializes in high-net-worth estate planning, asset protection, tax, real estate, corporate law litigation and the representation of religious organizations.



Tim Busch presents Pope Francis with a bottle of "Cabernet FRANCis," made with only Franc grapes at the Busch family's Trinitas Cellars winery in Napa, California. (Courtesy of Napa Institute)

The entrepreneur has extensive business and real estate holdings, including the Pacific Hospitality Group and the Meritage Collection.*

He and his two brothers are partners in Busch's Markets, an upscale 17-outlet Michigan-based operation cofounded by their father, the late Joseph Busch.

Tim and Steph Busch launched the Napa-based winery Trinitas Cellars in 2002. Among its vintages is a red, "Cabernet FRANCis," whose label carries a variation of Francis' crest.

Busch said he gifts bottles of the wine to the pope, who appreciates them; the bottles are sometimes presented in conjunction with Papal Foundation audiences with the pope.

"I don't know Pope Francis intimately, of course, but I would assume that he is familiar with Argentina," Busch continued, "and I would call that crony capitalism. And what I mean by that is that it is a system whereby business people collaborate with government to protect their financial interests and preclude others from entering the marketplace through heavy regulation and market oversight. I am for less regulation, freer rules for young businesspeople to come into the marketplace and create new products and services that can be provided in a more efficient way, reducing prices and increasing productivity."

Past speakers at Napa Institute sessions have argued that Francis is not necessarily chastising the U.S. economic system so much as less regulated, more freewheeling markets.

Principled capitalism, Busch submits, "is focused on everybody having an opportunity to succeed."

"This has worked throughout history, and it is working right now in our country, which is at an all-time high in terms of economic production," he said.

The Napa Institute "supports co-creation, which is a Catholic concept, solidarity, the common good, and all of these things that Catholic social teaching promotes," he said.

At the Busch School of Business, he added, "we're teaching our businesspeople ... to understand their role in the marketplace, to co-create with God, to create businesses, to create jobs, but also to look after their constituencies, which include all of their employees, shareholders, the community, the environment."

Busch emphasized, "You can't be a good Catholic and pay wages which are not adequate to live on."

Views on organized labor

At the same time, he disparages increasing the minimum wage (he said it stimulates automation that eliminates entry-level jobs). He supports right-to-work legislation, "which means people are not forced to join a union to work for a company that is unionized," and he endorses laws that shield workers from being "forced to pay union dues that are used to form policy which is inconsistent with their beliefs."

The U.S. bishops disagree. On Jan. 19 last year, the bishops' conference filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court supporting public-sector unions' right to collect money from nonmembers for collective bargaining. The justices, however, ruled 5-4 against labor in *Janus* v. *AFSCME*. The majority opinion stated, "Neither an agency fee nor any other form of payment to a public-sector union may be deducted from an employee, nor may any other attempt be made to collect such a payment, unless the employee affirmatively consents to pay."

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Busch steadfastly requires his full-time employees have health insurance, and he derided the employment practice of 19-hour workweeks to sidestep legal requirements to offer health care.

"I will never let anybody do anything that inhibits health insurance for my employees," he said. "I really believe this. I think this is where we as free market capitalists get a bad rap. And we deserve it."

"Capitalism is in trouble because of this attitude among some to take all that they can as long as it's legal," he has written in the past. "We want to develop a higher standard than just profit, even though profit is important."

Busch enterprises employ "more than 2,000 people," he told NCR.

Proponents of church teaching on labor unions might chafe at Busch's views on organized labor.

"Under *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII and under the Constitution of the United States there is a fundamental right to freely associate," he told NCR. "This means and includes labor unions."

"To the extent unions serve their members to better wages, benefits and working environment, I am very positive toward them. However, if they are used to stop competitors coming into their marketplace or to stop innovation for the purpose of

maintaining the status quo, I am against that objective. To flourish we need to avoid cronyism."

Did anti-union sentiment play a role in lack of an organized labor voice at the Busch School of Business/Napa symposium on "Dignity of Work" last October in Washington, D.C.?

"It was a scheduling problem, not ideology," Busch told NCR, explaining, "We confirmed a head of a labor union and he canceled at the last minute."

The high cost of Napa

In light of the Napa Institute's emphasis on wealthy individuals and the high cost of attending its functions (registration fee for the July conference is $2,600, which does not include lodging), how does its co-founder respond to those who describe it as elitist?

"This is another way to marginalize what Napa is doing," replied Busch. "Is it expensive to go there? Absolutely. Can most Catholics afford to attend the Napa Institute? Probably not.

"However, we do have programs for bishops and priests and nuns and young people that we afford scholarships and discounts to accommodate their attendance because it is important to have a great cross section of people."

In addition, he said, "lay apostolates which also do not have enormous resources ... have found that being at the Napa Institute is so productive" in terms of connecting with potential benefactors that they "rework their budgets to accommodate their participation, their sponsorship and their attendance."

Attendance at the summer institute has grown annually from roughly 300 at the early assemblies to an estimated 660 for July.

"It has grown every year, so it must be accomplishing its objective," Busch said.

[Dan Morris-Young is NCR West Coast correspondent.]

**This story has been updated to correct the name of the Meritage Collection.*