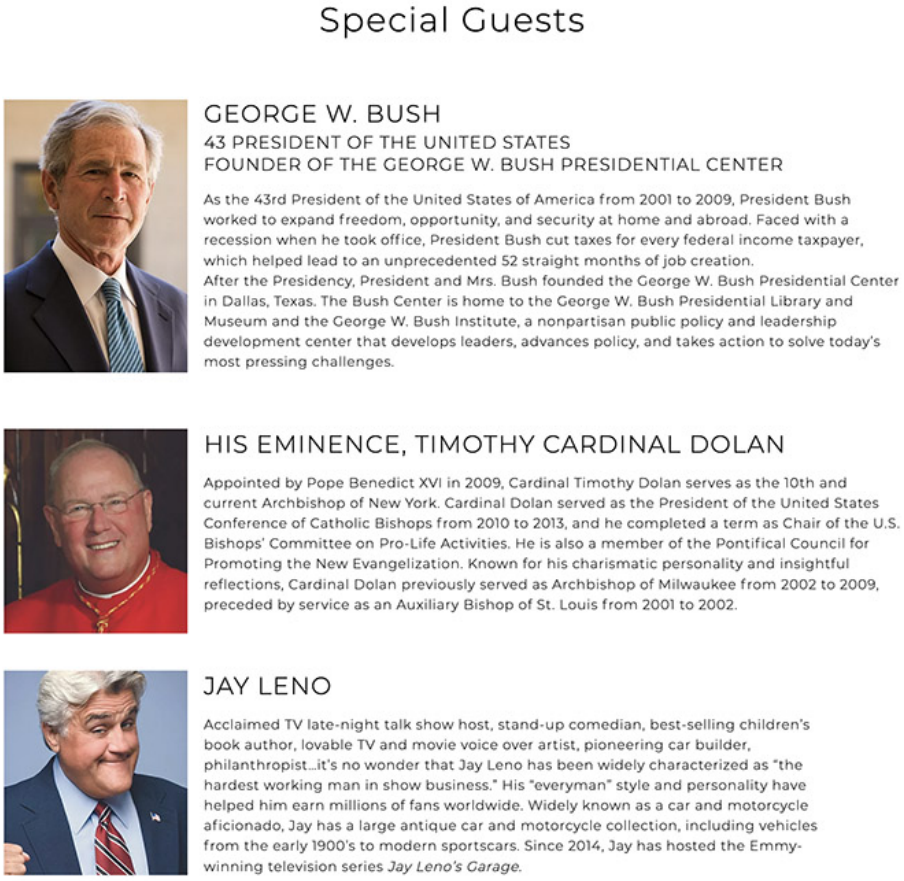
News



A guest list that includes former President George W. Bush, Cardinal Timothy Dolan and comedian Jay Leno is seen on the website for the Oct. 28-31 FOCUS Founder's Forum. (NCR screenshot)



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Former President George W. Bush, Cardinal Timothy Dolan and former late night comedian Jay Leno will headline an exclusive conference hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, known as FOCUS, in October.

FOCUS' campus outreach program, which operates through young adult missionaries evangelizing college-aged students, has become one of the most rapidly growing Catholic ministries in the United States over the last 20 years. The organization is modeled after the even larger Protestant college outreach program, "Cru," which was founded as Campus Crusade for Christ.

The Oct. 28-31 event, the "FOCUS Founder's Forum," is billed as an opportunity to join a "small group of friends for a transformative weekend of vision, inspiration, and impact" and is being held at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, a luxury resort overlooking the California coast.

Room rates for the weekend of the conference begin at $881 a night, although the hotel and costs of meals are covered by FOCUS. While the meeting has a publicly accessible website, the event appears to be invite-only, as it references an "intimate gathering of like-minded friends."

Representatives from FOCUS did not respond to NCR's request for comment.

As the archbishop of New York, Dolan has been a longtime supporter of the organization, saying, "If you're looking for the future of the Church, you've found it in FOCUS." The organization operates at both New York University and Columbia University.

Bush is a member of the United Methodist Church. Leno has not been public about his own personal faith commitments, although he has come under criticism from the Catholic League for allegedly mocking the teachings of the Catholic Church.

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Also set to take part in the weekend is Fr. Michael Schmitz, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota. Schmitz's podcast, "The

Bible in a Year," landed as the No. 1 podcast on iTunes at the beginning of 2021.

FOCUS was founded at Benedictine College in 1998 with two campus missionaries and, according to its website, has since grown to include programming on 187 campus and parish locations throughout 42 states and 5 international campuses.

According to its 2020 annual report, the organization is now served by nearly 800 campus missionaries.

In 2020, FOCUS reported annual revenue of over $86 million, up from $81 million in 2019. The organization operates on what is known as a "ministry partnership" model, which requires each individual missionary to raise a substantial portion of their salary.

A 2018 NCR report on FOCUS chronicled its longstanding ties with a number of conservative Catholic philanthropists and organizations. Among them are Sean Fieler , who is currently helping to fund statewide voter suppression efforts; Domino's Pizza magnate Thomas Monaghan, who founded Legatus, an organization of wealthy Catholic executives; and the Napa Institute, which was founded by hotelier Tim Busch. The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, is not listed in Busch's hotel portfolio.

FOCUS' 16-member board is chaired by William Mumma, a former Wall Street executive and current CEO of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty.

A version of this story appeared in the **June 11-24, 2021** print issue under the headline: FOCUS donor event features Jay Leno, $881/night hotel.