News



A view of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. (Pixabay/JamesDeMers)



by John Gehring

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Timothy Busch of the Napa Institute announced that the conservative Catholic organization — known for its high-priced conferences and networking events with bishops, Republican politicians and business leaders — will open an office in Washington blocks from the U.S. Capitol.

During a Nov. 30 gathering in California that he described as an annual "Catholic CEO men's group," Busch, the institute's co-founder, said the office will open in April and be housed in a newly renovated EWTN headquarters next to Union Station. Busch has served on the global Catholic media network's board, according to 2019 tax documents.

While the Napa Institute has a larger footprint in California — Busch owns a winery, several luxury resorts and founded two Catholic schools in the state — Napa's profile in the nation's capital is growing.

The institute has co-hosted several conferences and events in Washington in recent years, including at the now-shuttered Trump Hotel and at the Catholic University of America's business school. The school was named after Busch when his $15 million gift to the university in 2016 became the largest donation in school history.

The Busch School of Business has emerged as a high-profile venue in Washington circles for promoting libertarian-inflected economics and has hosted Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and billionaire industrialist Charles Koch. Koch's foundation has given more than $10 million to the business school.



Timothy Busch of the Napa Institute speaks at a Nov. 30 gathering he described as an annual "Catholic CEO men's group" in California. (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Napa Institute)

Napa already has a Washington presence with its Napa Legal Institute office at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. Napa Legal provides consulting to faith-based nonprofits on corporate, tax and philanthropic issues.

The legal division launched what it calls its "flagship program," the Napa Legal League, at a 2019 event at Catholic University's business school. The league, according to the institute, seeks to become a "nationwide network of attorneys, accountants, and nonprofit professionals committed to Catholic culture-building in the 21st century."

A photo posted on the Napa Institute's Facebook page last week shows Busch dining at a restaurant in Washington with a small group of lay Catholics and clergy, including Archbishop Timothy Broglio, who was elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops last month. Leonard Leo, the co-chairman of the Federalist Society, also attended the dinner. Leo advised Donald Trump on appointments to the judiciary and is viewed as a key figure in helping to orchestrate the rightward shift at the U.S Supreme Court in recent years. Leo is on the board of

the Napa Legal Institute and on the board of trustees at Catholic University.

'Growing expansively'

In a video of Busch's remarks at the Catholic CEO men's group event posted on the Napa Institute's Facebook page, he described the Napa Institute as "growing expansively," and noted that 800 people attended its annual summer conference in July at his Meritage Resort and Spa. He also touted a recent eucharistic procession through the streets of New York City that the Napa Institute organized.

"Dolan was like, I've never seen anything like it since I've been here," Busch said, referring to Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York. "We had a thousand people parading into St. Patrick's Cathedral. We shut down 7th Avenue, 6th Avenue and 5th Avenue, and the police were happy to do it. Next year, we will continue to build on that until we get 10,000."

Busch also thanked John Meyer, Napa's executive director, for his work traveling "to all the Catholic fundraisers that go on in Washington, New York and even South Bend."



New York City police officers escort a eucharistic procession Oct. 11. The procession, which followed Mass at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and traveled a mile-long route through Midtown Manhattan, concluded at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan led Benediction. The liturgical events were affiliated with the Napa Institute's Principled Entrepreneurship Conference taking place in New York City Oct. 11-12. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

The reference to South Bend, Indiana, points to one of Napa's newest projects at the University of Notre Dame. Napa, along with the Charles Koch Foundation and other donors, funds the Napa Institute Forum at the university's Center for Citizenship and Constitutional Government.

The center "plans to expand its focus on political leadership by bringing more national political figures to campus and hosting regular events in Washington, D.C., especially with established and aspiring Catholic politicians." The Napa forum kicked-off with an inaugural lecture from Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas at the university last fall.

NCR reported last year that the project has sparked challenges from some professors at the university who objected to Busch's criticism of the Black Lives Matter movement at Napa's summer conference. Black Lives Matter, Busch said, is "promoting racism, critical race theory, and destroying the nuclear family." Faculty also objected to a speaker at the same conference, Republican activist L. Brent Bozell III, who described Joe Biden as "the president of the most radical leftist ideology in history." Bozell signed a letter that described Trump as "the lawful winner of the presidential election."

At the Catholic men's gathering in California last month, Busch introduced Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, Napa's ecclesiastical adviser, as the evening speaker. The archbishop was elected secretary and chairman of the Committee on Priorities and Plans for the U.S. bishops' conference during the annual fall meeting in November.

In another sign of Napa's influence and connections with the most prominent conservative bishops, Busch announced that Broglio will be next year's speaker at his post-Thanksgiving gathering.



Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services smiles during a Nov. 15 news conference after being elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops during the fall general assembly of the bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)

"We don't do anything that has to do with the church without his approval," Bush said about Coakley. "It doesn't matter whether I think it's a good idea. If he doesn't think it's a good idea, we're not doing it."

Before delivering his 45-minute remarks, titled "Transgenderism and the Eclipse of Truth," Coakley had opened a bottle of Trinitas sparkling wine from Busch's winery with a sword.

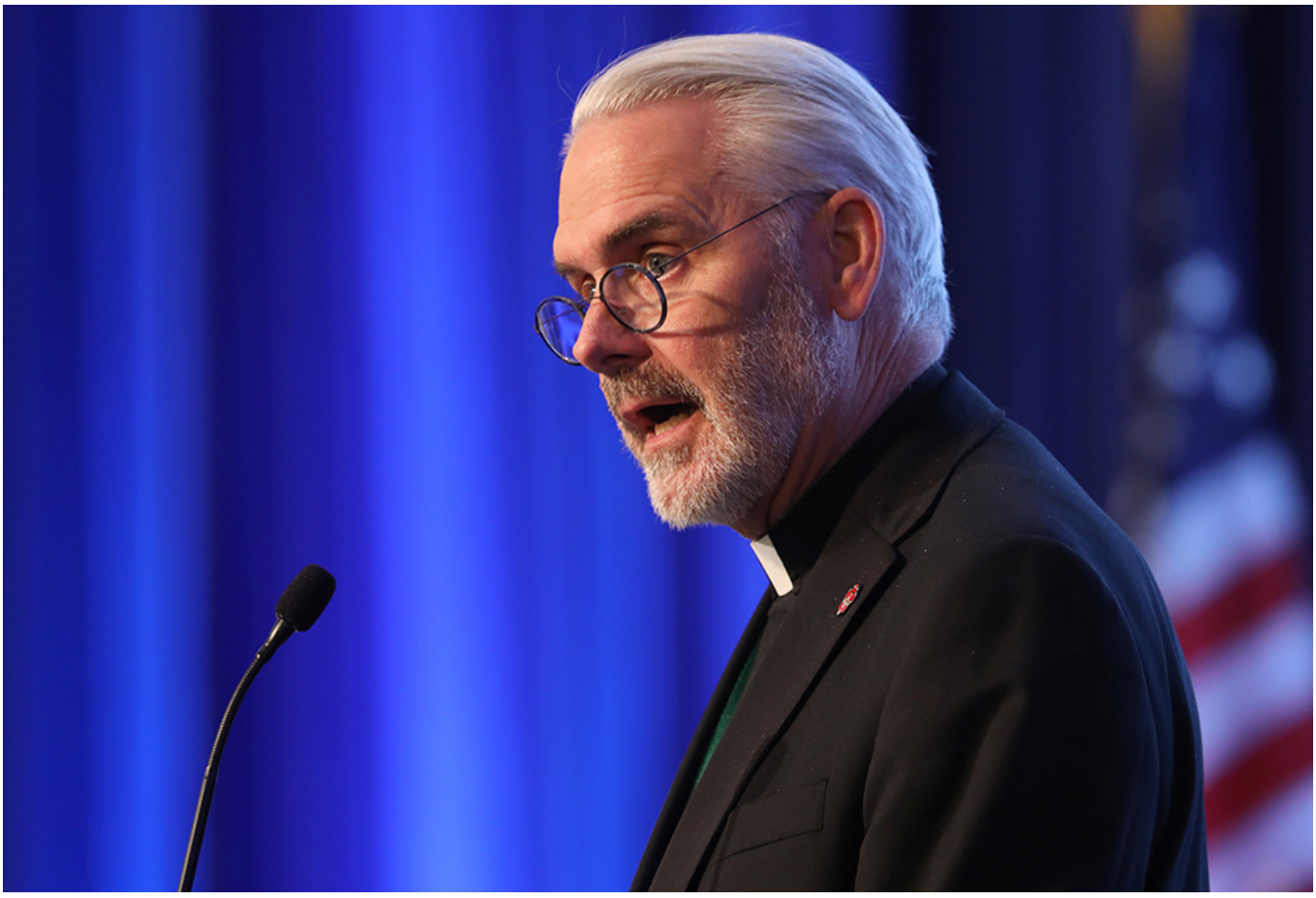
'Well-intentioned madness'

"We see the plague of relativism in nearly every aspect of life," the archbishop said. "In politics, we speak of alternative facts, in education this emphasis on equally valid perspectives, and sadly sometimes even in the church with its push to change her

moral teaching, especially her sexual ethic. There is no starker proof that we live in a culture where experience and a desire eclipse the truth than the transgender movement."

The archbishop pointed to the sexual revolution, the widespread acceptance of birth control, and the 1973 Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion as laying the groundwork for mainstream support of LGBTQ rights.

"In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a category of mental illness," Coakley said. "Support for homosexuality severed the connection between sexual activity and the inherent difference between men's and women's bodies, turning sexual orientation into an individual's choice based solely on desire."



Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley speaks at a Nov. 16 session of the fall general assembly of the U.S. bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)

"Gender is now determined simply by how one feels and how one identifies," he continued. "In order to avoid being labeled transphobic, these feelings must be accepted as the true indicators of gender and these feelings must be supported even to the point of inalterable gender affirmation surgeries. ... Nonbinary identities have mushroomed and their spread has gone mainstream. This transgender ideology, this transgender philosophy, is based on a false and defective and totally inadequate anthropology."

Coakley, who claimed that "the trans movement is doing great damage to society," criticized those who oppose so-called "conversion therapy" — a widely rejected practice designed to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity to align with heterosexual or cisgender norms. More than 20 states have some form of ban on conversion therapy. The American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association have condemned the practice. The archbishop called this opposition "well-intentioned madness."

Coakley also criticized what he described as efforts to "marginalize parents in order to protect their children's so-called gender rights" and railed against "the injustice of men identifying as women in sports."

The church faces "growing legal threats" to its network of charitable services, Coakley argued, noting challenges to Catholic adoption agencies that prohibit same-sex parents from adopting as one example.

"New threats to the church's good works are due to the intolerance of some extremists within the political left and their marriage to the most radical forms of social movements," he said.

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The Biden administration, the archbishop said, has "promoted regulations that would force doctors and hospitals to perform gender transition procedures and mandate insurance to cover these procedures."

"In the face of all these dangers from the trans movement, we are called to love and accompany every person struggling with gender dysphoria, especially because they are typically in immense pain," the archbishop said.

But he ended with a stark observation. "If the devil can confuse society about sex and gender, he obscures our understanding of God's plan for humanity at its very roots."

'Shameful pandering'

Marianne Duddy-Burke, the executive director of DignityUSA and mother of a transgender son, described Coakley's speech as "shameful pandering."

"That so many of our church's leaders are helping to make transgender and nonbinary people the target of elevated discrimination, social scorn and even violence is sin," said Duddy-Burke, who noted that at least 32 transgender people have been murdered this year. "They are failing to listen to the people of God, and to God speaking through the reality of the transgender population."

Last month, DignityUSA launched a new support initiative for transgender and nonbinary people called "Beloved by God: A Catholic Commitment to Trans-Affirmation" in response to the growing number of states and Catholic dioceses the organization says are enacting policies that are harmful to transgender people.

Duddy-Burke found the archbishop's support for conversion therapy particularly dangerous. DignityUSA will soon release a book about the issue.

"I have been speaking with survivors of various forms of this 'treatment' and the book is dedicated to the memory of a young Catholic woman who took her life after years of conversion therapy at the direction of her pastor," she said. "The damage of trying to force someone to be who they are not is horrific."

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