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Republican presidential nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump joins Republican vi

Republican presidential nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump joins Republican vice presidential nominee Ohio Sen. JD Vance during Day 1 of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee July 15, 2024. Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States Nov. 6. (OSV News photo/Brian Snyder, Reuters)

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If U.S. investor and hedge fund manager Scott Bessent is confirmed as President-elect Trump's treasury secretary, he will be only the second openly gay cabinet secretary (after current secretary of transportation Pete Buttigieg) and the first Senate-confirmed openly LGBTQ+ person to serve in a Republican administration in any capacity.

But Bessent may also broach a lesser-known boundary: If approved by the U.S., he would be the first active French Huguenot to serve in the cabinet in centuries — maybe ever.

Bessent, who lives in Charleston, South Carolina, attends the city's French Protestant (Huguenot) Church of Charleston, the only active church left in the U.S. that is associated with the Protestant tradition whose members largely arrived in the British American colonies on the run from the French king's persecution in the 16th and 17th centuries. U.S. members slowly amalgamated into Presbyterianism and other Protestant denominations centuries ago.

Reached for comment, a church official said only that “it’s an exciting honor for our fellow church member, Mr. Bessent, to be considered for such an important post in President-Elect Trump’s cabinet.”

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Bessent’s peculiar religious distinction fits nicely with the eclectic religious makeup of Trump’s top-level nominees, among them pastors, Catholic converts and one who owes his spiritual rebirth to a book by a Swiss psychiatrist. Long associated with conservative Protestants, Trump has chosen to lead his second administration alongside a broader representation of faiths than his first term.

According to the Deseret News, businessman Howard Lutnick, nominated to run the Department of Commerce, is Jewish, but Trump has selected fewer Jews than in 2016.

Most robustly represented are Catholics, such as Vice President-elect JD Vance; Sen. Marco Rubio, Trump’s choice for secretary of state; Lori Chavez-DeRemer, nominated for labor secretary; Sean Duffy, chosen for secretary of transportation; and Linda McMahon, who could oversee the Department of Education.

At least two members of the group — McMahon, whose husband, Vince, achieved fame for his promotion of professional wrestling, and Vance — are converts to Catholicism. Rubio’s religious history is a bit more complex: Raised Catholic, his family also briefly became members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1970s.

“My mother desperately wanted to give her kids a wholesome environment,” he told Christianity Today in 2012. “We had extended family members who were and remain active members of the LDS church, which does provide a very wholesome environment.”



Sen. Marco Rubio speaks at Catholic University of America on Nov. 5, 2019, in Washington. (RNS/Video screengrab via CUA)

Rubio is also known for frequenting Christ Fellowship Church, a Southern Baptist megachurch in Florida. In his 2012, “An American Son: A Memoir,” he attributed the decision to a desire for his family “be part of a wholesome, family-oriented church.”

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is slated to run the Department of Health and Human Services, comes from one of the most famously Catholic (and Democratic) American families: His uncle, John F. Kennedy, was the first Catholic president. RFK Jr. has spoken often of his Catholic upbringing and during the campaign was featured in a pro-Trump ad produced by the group CatholicVote.

But in an interview with Sage Steele, Kennedy signaled his own relationship to the church may be complicated. “My relationship with God belongs to me, and … I don’t have to report to a priest or my Catholic faith,” he said. Asked how Catholicism influenced his feelings about his two divorces, he referred to church teaching as “wisdom of the ages” but concluded, “morality is complicated.”

Speaking to Catholic outlet EWTN earlier this year, Kennedy said he wandered from faith while addicted to heroin for more than a decade, but after a “spiritual

awakening," he now prays "pretty much all day." In a video called "My Journey Toward God," he traces his spiritual shift to "Synchronicity" by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, citing Jung's idea that "it's irrelevant if there's a God up there or not," but "if you believe in one, your chances of living a healthier life, and recovery, are better."

The teaching, Kennedy said, spurred him to believe in God because it would help him with his own recovery.

Protestants are far from absent from Trump's cabinet. In addition to Bessent and Trump (who identified as Presbyterian for most of his life before calling himself nondenominational Christian in 2020), Susie Wiles, Trump's choice for chief of staff, was described by Politico as a "soft-spoken Episcopalian"; Kristi Noem, tapped to run the Department of Homeland Security, attends Foursquare Family Worship Center in Watertown, South Dakota; Doug Burgum, the potential secretary of the interior, has said his Methodist upbringing "sustained" him after losing relatives. Douglas Collins, who could serve as secretary of Veterans Affairs, is a Baptist.

Scott Turner, the former football player nominated to run the Department of Housing and Urban Development, serves as an associate pastor at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas.

"Two things that my parents taught me: My mother taught me how to have a tremendous faith in the Lord Jesus, and my father taught me a tremendous work ethic," Turner said on a Prestonwood Christian Academy podcast in October.

The most headline-grabbing Protestant of the bunch is military veteran and Fox News anchor Pete Hegseth, who sports a tattoo on his bicep reading "Deus Vult," a rallying cry for the crusaders of the Middle Ages. Hegseth attends Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship in Tennessee, a church affiliated with a denomination known as the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, co-founded by Doug Wilson, the controversial Christian nationalist pastor in Moscow, Idaho.

Hegseth recently told podcaster Sean Parnell he moved to Tennessee "specifically" so his children could attend Jonathan Edwards Classical Christian Academy, a classical Christian school of the type popularized by Wilson. Hegseth told Parnell that in enrolling his children at the school he hoped his children would "become future culture warriors."

While promoting his book “Battle for the American Mind” — a work heralding classical Christian education co-written with David Goodwin — Hegseth said on another podcast that he believes the “entire premise of our country is based on Judeo-Christian values” and said public schoolchildren are unable to discuss virtue adequately because they can’t read the Bible in class. He told yet another podcaster that the U.S. was a “Christian nation,” but that left-leaning forces “chipped away” at the country’s religious foundations.



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of Calif., administers the House oath of office to Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, during a ceremonial swearing-in on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, Jan. 3, 2019, during the opening session of the 116th Congress. (RNS/AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

Tulsi Gabbard, nominated to be director of national intelligence, became the first Hindu elected to Congress in 2012 and took her oath of office on her personal copy of the Bhagavad Gita. Gabbard's parents have been associated with the Science of Identity Foundation, a controversial group with ties to the International Society for

Krishna Consciousness. Gabbard has also been accused of supporting Hindu nationalism, a characterization she vehemently rejected in a 2019 Religion News Service editorial while she was running for president, calling the allegation “religious bigotry.”

Onetime television personality and failed Pennsylvania Senate candidate Mehmet Oz could also be confirmed as the administrator of Medicare and Medicaid. Oz, who has called himself a “secular Muslim,” has said that in his youth he aligned his religious views with Sufism, a mystical sect of Islam, as a rejection of both his father’s strict adherence to a traditional form of Islam and his mother’s adherence to the secular vision of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

The faith affiliation of some Trump nominees is unclear. Secretary of Energy nominee Chris Wright has said little publicly about his faith. Pam Bondi, the former Florida attorney general who could end up running the U.S. Department of Justice, once co-wrote an editorial on religious freedom with Pentecostal pastor Paula White, Trump’s closest religious adviser, but Bondi has not made her own tradition explicit. While not apparently a member, Bondi has taken part in campaign fundraising events associated with the Church of Scientology.

Even less clear is how the religious diversity of Trump's cabinet will be reflected in how he governs. Will he still be guided by his dependence on evangelical Christians, which led him in his first term to nominate a rash of conservative Catholics who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Or, with his last campaign over, will his fascination with the politics of faith pass away?