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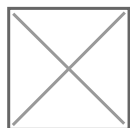


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Joseph Capizzi, former dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America, was appointed the new director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame effective July 1, succeeding theologian John Cavadini after his 25-year tenure.

The McGrath Institute partners with Catholic dioceses, parishes and schools to address pastoral challenges facing the Church. By connecting Catholic intellectual life to the life of the Church, the institute exists to form faithful leaders for service to the Church and the world.

OSV News spoke with Capizzi about the significance of this leadership transition, and the impact he hopes to achieve in his new role.

**OSV News: You're a Notre Dame alumni. So in a way, this is a return home.**

*Joseph Capizzi:* I got my Ph.D. in moral theology from Notre Dame in the mid-90s — so yes, I have returned to the place where I got my graduate degree. I remember my time as a student — but in many ways it's changed quite a bit since I was last here.

What are some of the changes you see?

Well, enormous construction — there are buildings in places there weren't buildings before; there are new names on buildings. Many of the faculty I studied under are no longer associated with the university. Some of the faculty I studied with passed away. Some retired long ago, and others are in the process of retiring.

Also, it's a bigger, more global, even better-resourced institution than what I left in the 90s — the kind of visionary institution for the Catholic Church that extends far beyond the United States at this point.

**The McGrath Institute is seen as a bridge between Notre Dame's theology department and the pastoral life of the Church — especially programs like the undergraduate Catechist Academy, Echo Graduate Service, online theology courses, the Church Life Journal, and so on. What are your thoughts about the institute's role in the pastoral life of the Church, and training people to take part in it?**

I've been on the ground in this role since July 1 — so only a very short amount of time. I'm just getting to know many of the 50 or so people who work as faculty and staff for the institute, and I'm just stunned. Both by the talent of all of these people and the impact of the programs — their reach and depth is much greater than I thought, merely from an external perspective.

So yes — we aspire to be a bridge between the academy and the pastoral life of the Church. And it's being done very, very well by the people here in the McGrath Institute, but also the people we partner with. We work with dioceses throughout the country — bishops who are supportive of the work done by us and by other institutions we partner with in this effort.

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**What would you say about the significance of this leadership transition?**

Dr. Cavadini — John — was a teacher of mine, as a graduate student here. He nursed the McGrath Institute into this robust institute that serves the church. For a quarter of a century he's been at its helm — you can't get more significant than somebody of that importance to the life of this community stepping aside.

I hope my own training at Catholic University — I served as a faculty member, a director of an institute and then as a dean — has prepared me to slip into John's shoes in a manner both respectful to the things he has helped these wonderful people build, and also equipped with the flexibility to move in the directions the church now needs.

Anytime there's transition like this, it's going to be significant — and perhaps even potentially disruptive. But I think John and I see eye-to-eye on many aspects of church life.

**So you're anticipating a continuation of his vision, but you also have a focus on new initiatives for evolving needs of the church — because it seems almost like a new era under Pope Leo XIV?**

There's always continuity and change in the life of the church. Just to identify a few things the church is currently facing that might distinguish it from the church 25 years ago, a couple would be disaffiliation, and the increased number of Hispanics in the church ascending into positions of leadership. These are somewhat novel — but also wonderful — opportunities to refresh the church. And McGrath, as an institute, hopes to be responsive by helping lead the church in refreshing these different areas.

**What would you say about the importance of encouraging the laity to play an active role in helping shape that change and the direction of the church?**

McGrath has always been an institute focused on the special responsibilities and opportunities lay people have in the life of the church. My own career, to some extent, reflects the changed demographics of the church — where priests, for instance, are fewer than they ever were previously.

I became the first lay leader at the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America. So lay people simply have to step into these roles; it's part of their own vocation. It's part of a church that is adequately and

rightly responsive to the new things present in the life of the church right now.

The people in McGrath, they're mostly lay people. And most of the people we're working with — partnering with outside of McGrath, either at Notre Dame or outside of Notre Dame — those are often lay people. So we will continue to be focused on the special gifts the laity possess in the building of Christ's kingdom.

That's something John emphasized from the very beginning. It's something the people I've encountered here at McGrath feel deeply about — and we'll just continue to try to activate the laity in constructive ways for the church.

### **Can you tell us about what you're working on?**

The first thing I personally am working on is just meeting everybody — hearing from everybody, getting to know the people. One of the reasons I decided to come was the talent and devotional commitment of the people at McGrath.

When you come into a new institution, you want to hear what's working, what they believe needs to be improved — because there's always room for improvement — (and) what their own personal aspirations are. So that's been my first agenda item.

The first thing is the relationships with the people, building those relationships. And then we'll become more programmatic in terms of growing the things that need to be grown.

### **Can you say what some of those things are that you want to grow?**

That's going to be a corporate judgment. Right now, my job is to be respectful of the people who have given their lives to these programs and projects and initiatives, to grants that are being written currently, to hear what their enthusiasm for these things are, and then to begin to set priorities for the community.

It would be presumptuous of me to come in with kind of a prior agenda. It's better for me to hear from people, and then for us together to come to conclusions about moving forward.