

Special Guests



GEORGE W. BUSH
43 PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
FOUNDER OF THE GEORGE W. BUSH PRESIDENTIAL CENTER

As the 43rd President of the United States of America from 2001 to 2009, President Bush worked to expand freedom, opportunity, and security at home and abroad. Faced with a recession when he took office, President Bush cut taxes for every federal income taxpayer, which helped lead to an unprecedented 52 straight months of job creation. After the Presidency, President and Mrs. Bush founded the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas. The Bush Center is home to the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum and the George W. Bush Institute, a nonpartisan public policy and leadership development center that develops leaders, advances policy, and takes action to solve today's most pressing challenges.



HIS EMINENCE, TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN

Appointed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, Cardinal Timothy Dolan serves as the 10th and current Archbishop of New York. Cardinal Dolan served as the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops from 2010 to 2013, and he completed a term as Chair of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities. He is also a member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. Known for his charismatic personality and insightful reflections, Cardinal Dolan previously served as Archbishop of Milwaukee from 2002 to 2009, preceded by service as an Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis from 2001 to 2002.



JAY LENO

Acclaimed TV late-night talk show host, stand-up comedian, best-selling children's book author, lovable TV and movie voice over artist, pioneering car builder, philanthropist...it's no wonder that Jay Leno has been widely characterized as "the hardest working man in show business." His "everyman" style and personality have helped him earn millions of fans worldwide. Widely known as a car and motorcycle aficionado, Jay has a large antique car and motorcycle collection, including vehicles from the early 1900's to modern sportscars. Since 2014, Jay has hosted the Emmy-winning television series *Jay Leno's Garage*.

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)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

May 20, 2021

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

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.

Advertisement

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.