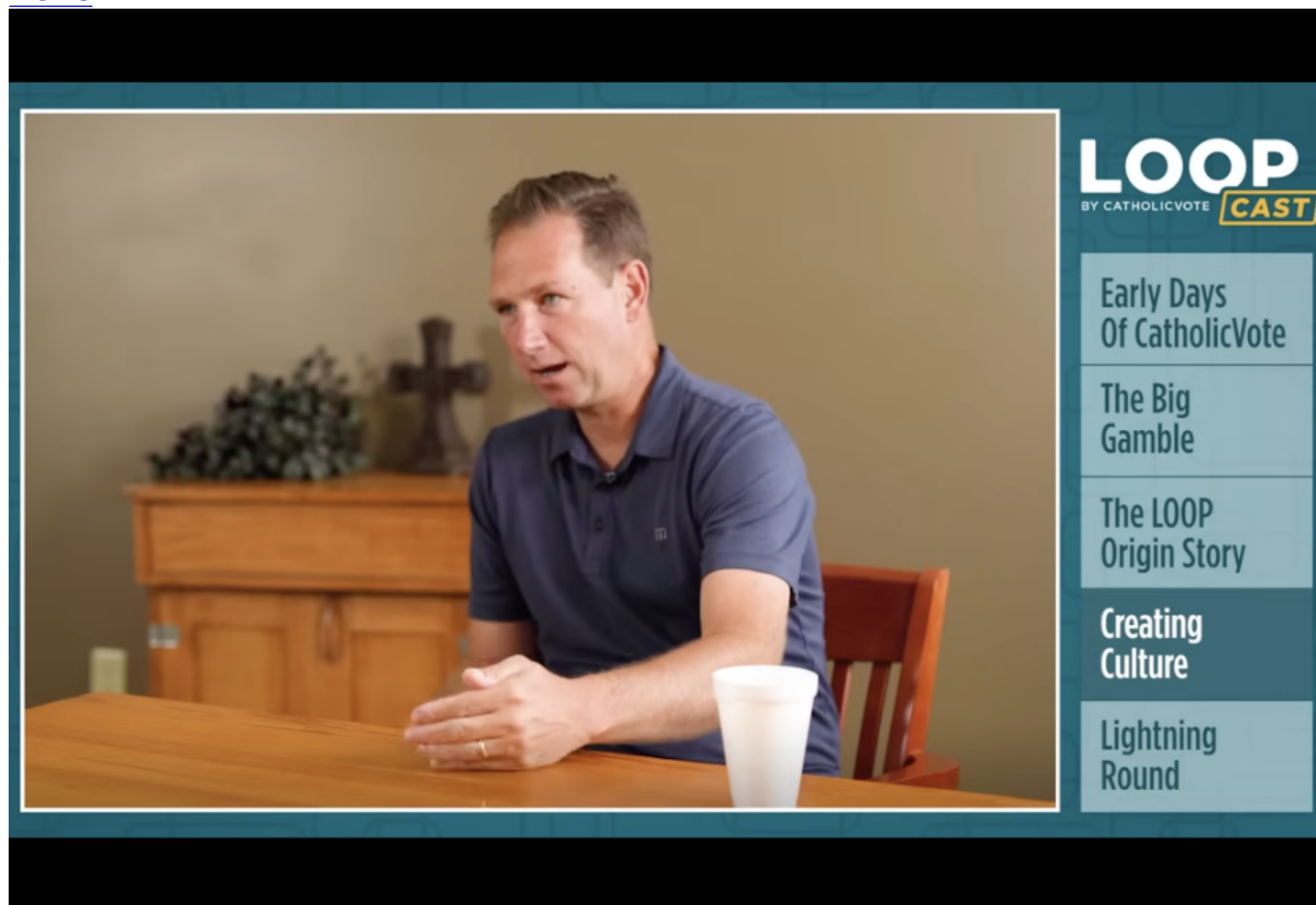




Brian Burch, co-founder of CatholicVote, speaks in an interview on "The LOOPcast," posted on CatholicVote's YouTube channel. (NCR screengrab/YouTube/CatholicVote)



by Heidi Schlumpf

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When it comes to Pope Francis, conservative Catholic Brian Burch has been far from diplomatic. Burch has accused Pope Francis of creating "massive confusion," engaging in a "pattern of vindictiveness" and called a central theme of this pontiff's reign "merely a ruse."

Today (April 8), Burch, a resident of the suburbs of Chicago, will be vetted to serve as President Trump's chief diplomat at the Vatican. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is set to question Burch, a persistent critic of Pope Francis, in a confirmation hearing to serve as the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See.

If confirmed by a majority of the full U.S. Senate, Burch would have a role leading diplomatic relations with the Vatican as Pope Francis has been critical of Trump, as the president has upended global relationships and implemented policies at odds with Catholic teaching.



Brian Burch, co-founder of CatholicVote, is pictured in an undated photo (OSV News/CatholicVote)

Burch, a co-founder of CatholicVote, a political organization that backed Trump for president, would also arrive in Rome as speculation swirls over Francis' successor and legacy as he recovers from a hospital stay for double pneumonia that twice nearly killed him.

Vatican watcher Massimo Franco predicts a tense relationship between Burch and the Vatican. "But that doesn't mean that conflict is a given," he said. "A relationship has to be built up, so we don't know exactly what's going to happen."

Trump acted quickly in nominating Burch, 49. "He represented me well during the last Election, having garnered more Catholic votes than any Presidential Candidate

in History!" Trump wrote in a Dec. 20 statement. "Brian loves his Church and the United States - He will make us all proud."

He did not nominate his first Vatican ambassador, Callista Gingrich, until four months into his first term. Gingrich, like Burch, is among conservative Catholics who have opposed, or at least had little confidence in, the Francis papacy. But Gingrich was not confrontational, said Franco, an Italian newspaper columnist and author of a book about the Vatican.

"In this case, I think [Burch] may be more openly critical," Franco said. "This would be a novelty because usually the United States tries to have a representative that builds a good relationship with the pope."



Then-Ambassador to the Holy See Callista Gingrich, accompanied by her husband Newt, attends an audience for the traditional exchange of new year's greetings with Pope Francis in the Sala Regia at the Vatican Jan. 9, 2020. (CNS/Remo Casilli, Reuters pool)

Burch did not respond to the National Catholic Reporter's requests for an interview.

The nomination of Burch represents a larger issue for Francis in his relationship to the U.S. church, Franco said. "The bigger problem for the pope is not Burch himself, but the fact that 56% of [American Catholics voted for Trump](#)," he said. "It means that Francis' relationship with America generally, and with American Catholics, remains very controversial."

Burch has said he sees a "pattern of vindictiveness" in Francis. In 2023, Burch gave [The New York Times](#) a list of ways he and other conservative U.S. Catholics had been offended by Francis, including the pontiff's 2015 remarks about good Catholics not having to breed "like rabbits." (Burch and his wife, Sara, have nine children.)

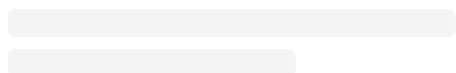
Burch's X account has been silent since he was nominated in December. But he previously posted about where he disagreed with the pope — most touching on culture war issues.

In November 2023, Burch [said](#) that the pope's "actions against his critics, together with progressive Catholic cheerleading, has only vindicated those that warned that 'synodality' was merely a ruse."

Syndodality is a central theme of Francis' papacy.



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A post shared by CatholicVote (@catholicvote)

CatholicVote Instagram post on Dec. 20, 2024, announcing Brian Burch's nomination as U.S. ambassador to the Holy See (Instagram)

In 2022, CatholicVote [sued](#) the Biden administration for communication records between federal agencies and Catholic nonprofits in Texas to understand how church-affiliated agencies may have contributed to what he called "chaos" at the border.

When the Vatican in December 2023 [OK'ed blessings](#) for people in same-sex relationships, Burch [accused](#) the pope of creating "massive confusion" within the church and added that the next pope must "clarify" the confusion of the Francis era.

In a [Feb. 11 letter](#) to the U.S. bishops, Francis decried the "major crisis" triggered by Trump's mass deportation plans. In 2016, Francis said Trump's plan to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border had [no basis](#) in the Gospel.

In 2023, CatholicVote [joined](#) Bishop Joseph Strickland, formerly of Tyler, Texas, and other conservative Catholic groups in protesting the Los Angeles Dodgers for honoring a pro-LGBTQ drag group that dresses in sisters' habits during Pride Night. CatholicVote also organized a [boycott](#) of the Dodgers for what they termed "anti-Catholic hate."



Pope Francis talks with U.S. President Donald Trump during a private audience at the Vatican on May 24, 2017. Trump announced Dec. 20, 2024, that he was appointing Brian Burch of CatholicVote as the next Holy See ambassador. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Pope Francis is not expected to veto Trump's pick for Vatican ambassador, two senior Vatican officials [told Reuters](#) in January.

Burch said CatholicVote's political work is an exercise in evangelization. "We are bringing the truth of the Gospel to our fellow citizens in the hopes that they too will see the beauty and richness of our faith and how it can be applied to the circumstances of our country," he said in a March 2024 [radio interview](#) with the head of Ohio Right to Life.

The oldest of six children born to Beverly and Brian Sr., a successful real estate entrepreneur, Burch attended Catholic schools in Phoenix, before studying political philosophy at the University of Dallas, which by then had gained a reputation as a favorite of traditionalist Catholics.

He and his family now live in the Chicago suburb of Lombard. Burch has served on the board of Seton Academy, a Montessori school in Villa Park, which [bills](#) itself as a Catholic school that promotes "academic excellence, character formation, responsibility and courtesy."

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Burch was a founding director of the Illinois Catholic Prayer Breakfast, which has featured appearances by then-Bishop Salvatore Cordileone of Oakland, California, and now the archbishop of San Francisco, and Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, who once [suggested that Cardinal Robert McElroy](#) (the newly appointed archbishop of Washington, D.C.) was a heretic. The Illinois prayer group also [disinvited](#) then-U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak of Michigan, an anti-abortion [Democrat who supported](#) then-President Barack Obama's health care reform, as a keynote speaker.

For about a decade, Burch served on the board of a pro-business group called the [Illinois Opportunity Project](#), which supports policies they say are "driven by liberty and free enterprise," such as crime, tax policy and public funding for private schools.

Burch co-founded CatholicVote in 2005 with Catholic conservatives Josh Mercer and Joseph Cella. They aimed to create a one-stop shop for Catholic issues, not a single-issue organization like many pro-life groups.

Burch defends CatholicVote's involvement in politics and political debates such as abortion. "The church needs to be at the forefront of these debates because it has the answers our world is looking for," Burch [said](#) in the March 2024 radio interview.

Our faith "is not something to be ashamed of. We need to be boldly defending it," he said.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)