THE MAGAZINE OF THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX
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The Catholic Sun



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for four young men

On June 6, four men in the Diocese of Phoenix will be ordained to the priesthood

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The Catholic Sun

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WALKING WITH OUR PRIESTS

I am so grateful for the priests of our diocese. Two hundred and eighty-nine good men who come from diverse backgrounds and enhance the vibrance of our local Church. Men who serve with a variety of gifts, strengths and charisms. Men who love their parishioners and walk with the people of God by embodying pastoral care and compassion. Men who remain faithful and engaged by continuing to serve as demands grow in the ever-thriving Diocese of Phoenix — which has quickly become one of the fastest-growing dioceses in the country.

At the core, our priests are men who share their hearts and their very selves with the Church, and they are a great gift.

As a priest myself, I can also attest to the reality that priests are human beings.

In the midst of the very real joys and crosses that come with accompanying, ministering to and serving the people of God in a variety of capacities, priests are men who also need to be supported, loved and poured into in return.

I'm thrilled to announce a new diocesan role — the vicar for priestly life and ministry — that has been established to do just that. Father Greg Schlarb, who has a great love for his brother priests and a great giftedness in this area, will step into the role on July 1.

I recently sat down with Father Schlarb and Auxiliary Bishop Peter Dai Bui, who serves as the vicar for clergy, to talk about the purpose and hope for this new position. **And it came down to one phrase: personal accompaniment.**

The vicar for priestly life and ministry will walk with priests, listen to them, ask them questions and seek to understand any challenges they may be facing. Visits from Father Schlarb will revolve around questions that are simple, but some of the most important:

How are you doing? How can we help you excel? How can we make sure you're doing well?

And he will joyfully listen. This new role is a proactive approach to supporting the wellbeing of our priests — humanly, spiritually, physically and emotionally — through spending time with them, hearing their concerns and sharing authentic encouragement and support. This role will work in tandem with the current role of vicar for clergy, which accompanies priests in more practical ways such as priestly assignments, day-to-day personnel management and support when problems arise.

In the Diocese of Phoenix it has been tremendous to see growth taking place, and as the shepherd of the local Church it is very important to me to tend to our priests just as much as we are tending to the many new sheep joining our flock.

I think Father Schlarb summed it up beautifully in our conversation when he described the scope of his new role with these words: "I'm here to serve our priests. To be with them, to help them, to encourage them. And really to love them ... They are my priority."

As we step into these summer months, we have much to anticipate with great joy regarding the priesthood here in the Diocese of Phoenix! From the expanding Nazareth Seminary and the four young men who will be ordained on June 6 — who you can get to know in the following pages — to the unfolding of this new vicar for priestly life and ministry role.

It is my hope that each and every priest here in the Diocese of Phoenix will thrive. And even more so that each priest may know that I am grateful for him, that his wellbeing is important to me and that he is a priority. ✝

+ John P. Dolan
Bishop of Phoenix

BISHOP JOHN P. DOLAN
is the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix.

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Scan the QR code to watch the conversation between Bishop Dolan, Bishop Bui and Father Schlarb.

Called to serve



DEBBIE DICARLO
serves as the executive director for the Office of Mission Advancement for the Diocese of Phoenix.

Nazareth Seminary — the Diocese of Phoenix's fully local seminary formation program — continues to be a place of profound joy, growth and hope for the future of our diocese. As we prepare to open the fourth formation home, St. Agnes House at St. Agnes Parish in Phoenix this fall, we are reminded that this moment represents far more than a new building. It is a visible sign of God's faithfulness and the increasing vitality of vocations, a witness to the Holy Spirit at work in our Church.

The first stage of seminary formation is both intentional and deeply human. It is where a man's call begins to take shape — where his mind, heart and spirit are formed in relationship with Jesus Christ and in fraternity with others discerning the same path. We were blessed to witness this formation personally through Aaron, a seminarian who recently interned in the Office of Mission Advancement at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Phoenix. His joyful smile, generous spirit and openness in sharing his story offered a glimpse into the journey of discernment.

Before entering seminary, Aaron worked as a nurse, caring for people in their most vulnerable moments. Over time, he recognized that his desire to heal extended beyond the physical. In discerning the priesthood, he realized he could continue to care for others while also leading them into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the ultimate Healer of body, mind and spirit.

Aaron's story reflects the beauty of seminary formation: not replacing what is human but elevating and integrating it into God's greater call. For men called to the priesthood, this culminates in the sacred and beautiful priestly ordination.

Yet ordination marks not the endpoint, but the beginning of a new stage of formation. Like marriage, the grace of the sacrament unfolds in faithfully living out that "yes" each day. Men formed at Nazareth Seminary will enter parish life, where their call is fully lived — walking with families, celebrating the sacraments and leading communities through both joys and challenges. They will also carry real responsibilities of leadership: managing staff, overseeing finances and guiding parishes.

While much is asked of them, God provides abundantly.

This is where ongoing formation becomes essential. Priestly life requires continual growth, support and renewal — it does not end at ordination but deepens over time. Through **Priests for Our Future**, a fund that supports both seminary formation and the lifelong formation of priests, new skills are fostered, fraternity is deepened and spiritual renewal is made possible in a deeper way. Rooted in their relationship with God, our priests can pour themselves out each day in love and service — shepherding others with the heart of Christ.

We are grateful for Bishop John's vision in guiding this mission forward, especially with the appointment of Father Greg Schlarb as vicar for priestly life and ministry. This new role has been created to help priests thrive, both as individuals and as a community. It reflects a growing commitment to ensuring that our priests — newly ordained and seasoned alike — are supported in living their vocation with depth, balance and joy as they carry out Christ's call to "go and make disciples of all nations." (Mt 28:19)

What a gift it is to be part of this mission. It is something worth praying for, investing in and celebrating together. In supporting all stages of formation, we not only accompany those called to serve, but we also share in the lasting fruits of their faithful "yes." ✝



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SEEKING GOD'S WILL FOR OUR KIDS

One of my standard mama prayers in these past two decades of parenting has been: "Make Your will clear, Lord!" I have prayed this for myself, and on behalf of my husband, friends, parents and, of course, my children. When it comes to my children's vocations, the prayer has been the same desperate plea with a slight edit: "Make Your will clear *to them*, Lord!"



MARYRUTH HACKETT, PHD, is a mom of four with a doctorate in educational psychology. Her passion for helping others make informed decisions in daily catholic life led to the development of the podcast Parenting Smarts, and an unexpected career writing and speaking about the practical applications of developmental psychology. Mary Ruth is the author of two books: *Daughter by Design* and *Discernment of Spirits for Beginners.*

A few years ago, I found myself playing the role of chauffeur for a visiting priest. Captive in my car, I asked him how I could best support my sons as they discerned their vocations. I assured him we had a 15-minute drive, so he could take his time responding.

His answer was beautiful. He simply said: "Let them know that they will be great fathers — however that looks — either of a family or as a priest."

What I appreciated most about this answer was that my own inklings or biases toward vocations were not the focus. He never asked if I thought my sons were called to religious life, or if I wanted them to be priests, or even if I thought they would be good priests. His words reinforced their gifts and the truth that the Lord is preparing each of them for his vocation. The statement also communicated that both married life and religious life are viable and holy paths. As a mother, in these precious last years of greatest influence, my role was simply to prepare them for fatherhood and remain open to either path.

Often when young men feel a pull toward the priesthood, they assume their parents will object. These assumptions may grow from subtle or offhand comments taken out of context, yet they can become seeds of doubt which grow into weeds that make it harder for them to see the vocational path before them.

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As a mom, I will always have thoughts about my children's futures. Yet as I support them in early adulthood, I trust that the Lord is preparing them each day for the vocation to which He calls them. As they grew up, my role was to introduce them to their heavenly Father and prepare them to be good fathers. Now I support that relationship primarily through prayer.

My daughters are younger, but I am striving to encourage them to recognize the many options ahead of them as well. Their futures may resemble my own — falling in love, marrying and raising a family — or look radically different. I want them to be open to God's invitation, should He call them to consecrated life as His bride or to married life.

Watching our children grow from babies into adults is both exciting and humbling, as is watching them discern their vocational paths. When they were little, they needed constant direction. Now, often the best thing we can do is step aside and pray. We think we know our children better than anyone, but as they enter adulthood, they are coming to know themselves as well. Our care and concern remain relevant, but we must never be so forceful that we prevent or delay them from answering a clear and personal call to serve God and the Church.

Scan the QR code for discernment resources

Vocational discernment is ultimately about holiness and our children's path to heaven. It unfolds slowly, often quietly, on ordinary days that do not look dramatic at all. As it happens, my two boys are pursuing different paths. My oldest is engaged to his college sweetheart, preparing for the sacrament of marriage. His younger brother works at a parish and hopes to enter seminary this fall.

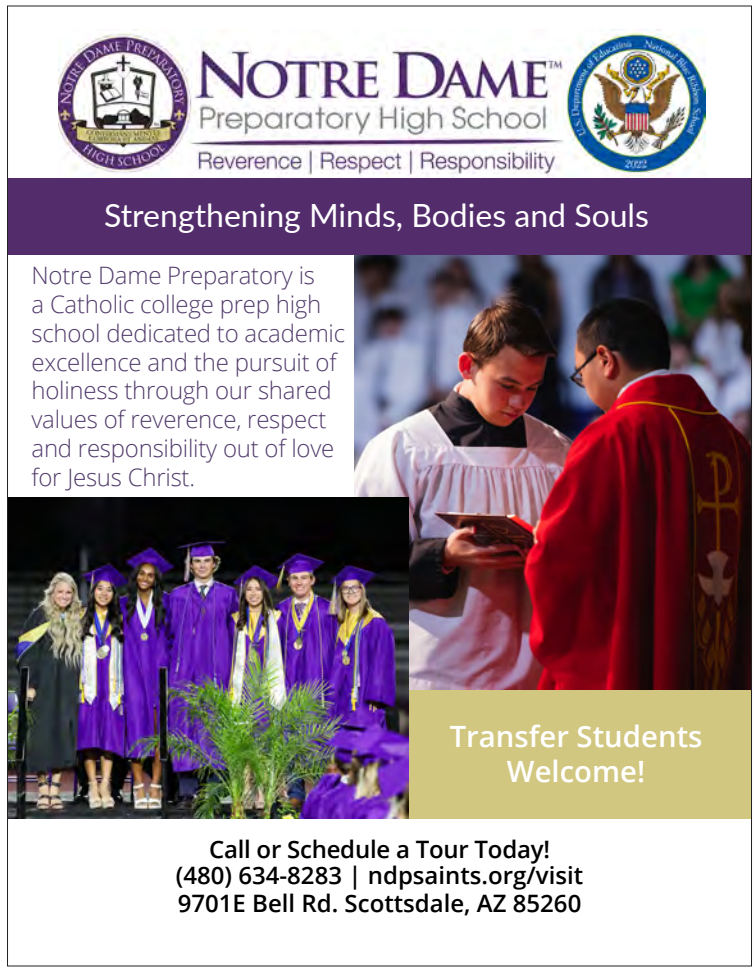
Both paths require courage. Both require sacrifice. Both require grace.

And so my mama prayer remains the same: "Make Your will clear, Lord." Because in the end, their vocation is not about fulfilling my hopes for them. It is about answering God's invitation. And there is no greater joy for a mother than watching her children boldly say "yes" to the Lord.

THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN:

- Keep communication open with your children as you strive to listen more and talk less.
- Give concrete direction if asked, eliminate their guess work and help them find the answers they seek.
- Continue to confidently pray for your children to find their vocation. ✝





THE GOOD NEWS WITH FATHER JOHN

Reflecting weekly on the ups and downs of life through Scripture, discovering how Jesus meets us right where we are.

JUNE 7, 2026

Solemnity of Corpus Christi



When I was a young altar server, I once overheard two very different comments about the Eucharist. One person asked, "Is Father distributing the bread or the wine?" Later, another asked, "Can you go get Jesus from the tabernacle?" Same parish, same Mass — but two very different ways of speaking. I pondered: So is it bread that we pretend is Jesus? Or is Jesus a tiny white thing in a box? I was utterly confused.

This feast of Corpus Christi is an excellent time to think about how we should speak about the Eucharist. In today's Gospel, Jesus declares, "My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink." (Jn 6:55) His words scandalized His listeners, who feared cannibalism. They also puzzle many today, who reduce them to metaphor. Both miss the truth.

The Church gives us better words to honor what Jesus says in the Gospel. After the consecration, we do not call it "bread" or "wine." Nor do we say, "a piece of Jesus." We say: *the Eucharist*. We say: *the Body and Blood of Christ*. We say: *the Real Presence*. We say: *the Most Blessed Sacrament*. These words safeguard the astonishing reality that Christ Himself is truly present, whole and entire, under the appearances of bread and wine.

If we speak well about the Eucharist, we will think more clearly and believe more deeply. And if we believe more deeply, we will adore more truly the One who gives Himself to us — not bread, not wine, but Jesus Christ Himself, whole and entire.

JUNE 14, 2026

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time



A few years ago, I met a woman in my parish who was a successful lawyer. In her free time, she poured her energy into a nonprofit she founded to advocate for children with special needs. When I asked what inspired her, she spoke of her niece, who was born with disabilities. Her niece was both a glorious gift and a constant challenge. Out of that painful, beautiful experience, she felt called to create something lasting for other children and parents. The nonprofit thrived, not because she had mapped it all out, but because she was deeply moved to act.

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Inset 1: Getty Images/Sidney de Almeida
Inset 2: Getty Images/boonchai wedmakawand

In today's Gospel, Jesus is "moved with compassion" for the crowd, for they were "like sheep without a shepherd." (Mt 9:36) So, He calls His disciples, ordinary men with no special qualifications, and sends them to heal, preach and cast out demons. Their mission flows not from their skills but from His authority and the Spirit's gifts.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Spirit continually pours out charisms, special graces for the good of the Church and the world. (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 4, 12) These often arise from the unfolding of our lives — from what breaks your heart, what fills you with hope, what suffering has shaped you. The Spirit works through those very experiences to equip us with gifts that build up others.

What is your charism? Well, what needs around you call you to loving action? This could be where Christ is sending you. Allow your heart to be moved like Christ's. Then get to work.

JUNE 21, 2026

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Jean Améry, a Holocaust survivor tortured by the Nazis, wrote about the abyss of human evil. He described his reaction as an "indignant despair." Haven't we all, to some degree, felt that abyss open beneath us? A sudden loss, a violent headline, a moment of loneliness or panic when the world feels fragile and meaning seems to collapse?

It is to this fear that Jesus speaks in today's Gospel: "Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body." (Mt 10:28) He does not deny evil or pretend we will never suffer. Instead, He reframes the abyss: Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Your life is seen, known and counted by the Father — even the hairs of your head.

This is no superficial comfort. Jesus Himself has entered the abyss — suffering, death, even our sense of forsakenness — and He has come through it. That is why His words, "Do not be afraid," have weight. They do not erase the abyss. They build a bridge across it.

Faith is not pretending everything is fine. It is staring into the abyss and still choosing trust. And in that trust, we discover we are never alone — Christ stands with us, and the Father's care surrounds us. That is the only comfort deep enough for our often fearful hearts.

JUNE 28, 2026

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time



I still remember the first homily I preached as a new deacon. It was at the seminary. The Gospel was this one: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." (Mt 10:37-38) Standing before more than 200 classmates and professors, I stumbled awkwardly through my words and realized how strange — almost insane — this teaching sounds. If anyone else said it, we would call it narcissistic or cultish.

And that is the point. I felt the weight of those words in my own heart then, as I still do today. Am I willing to live as though Christ's claim on my love is absolute? Are you?

Over the years, I've learned that the more I do, the more everything else makes sense. Family, friendships, vocation, even my very self — all of it falls into place when love for Jesus comes first.

That is why He dares to speak this way. Our Lord is not a cult leader hungry for control. He is the Son of God, the source of life and love itself. To put Him before everything else is not to lose, but to find everything and everyone in Him.

This week, name one thing or one person you are tempted to place before the Lord. Then consciously offer it back to Him in prayer.

JULY 5, 2026

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time



This weekend, our nation celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Unlike most nations, the United States was not founded primarily on a shared ethnicity, language or culture. Instead, our founders built a political community out of diverse peoples united by a shared vision of liberty. That vision echoes something deep in the Christian mystery revealed in today's Gospel.

Jesus offers praise to the Father along with a call for meekness and humility for us. As Matthew tells us, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and ▶

Inset 1: Getty Images/Cavan Images
Inset 2: Getty Images/Thomas Görtz
Inset 3: Getty Images/Douglas Sacha

humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves." (Mt 11:39) Jesus has come to inaugurate a new communion that transcends geography, bloodlines and culture. He has come to walk with us, to teach us how to cultivate peace and to unite all people in Himself.

At its best, America's national unity reflects this possibility, which fully subsists only in the Catholic Church. Our unity is not based on ancestry or tribe, but on a shared commitment to higher ideals. For this reason, we can love our country with gratitude, while situating patriotism within the larger horizon of faith.

Rooted in Christ, we are less vulnerable to the unholy tribalism that threatens civic life and faith. This weekend, let us thank God for our nation and pray that we also live as citizens of heaven in Jesus Christ.



JULY 19, 2026

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A man recently told me he was losing patience with the Church. **"**It's supposed to be God's kingdom on earth," he said, "but it's full of contradictions and hypocrisy. Why can't the Church just be better?" That last word landed with a judgmental thud. It hurt. Because at times the Church can look painfully ordinary, even disappointing.

But Jesus' parables in today's Gospel meet that frustration head on. He says, "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field," (Mt 13:24) yet the weeds grow up with the wheat and the master allows both to grow together until harvest. To His listeners, this sounded strange, even offensive. They expected God's reign to be pure, powerful and glorious, anything but mixed up, hidden or small.

Jesus is showing us something essential. The kingdom always begins small and grows amid imperfection. Grace and weakness exist side by side until the harvest. That is why the Church often looks messy. Yet within that mess, God's quiet work continues. The weeds do not stop the wheat from growing.

When we see the Church's flaws or our own, it helps to remember that this is exactly the field in which Christ chose to plant. The miracle is not that everything looks perfect, but that His Word keeps taking root anyway.

PRAYER: Lord, give me patience with Your field, the Church. Help me see Your hidden life growing even among the weeds.

JULY 12, 2026

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Sometimes I feel capable of absorbing almost anything except God's Word. My mind soaks up song lyrics, sports trivia and endless online content. But what was the reading at Mass this morning? I struggle to recall. That realization discourages me, and it leads to an uncomfortable question: What is my heart really for? Is it shaped for constant information and distraction, or is it truly designed for God? Am I capable of deeply receiving His Word?

Jesus speaks directly to this today with a simple image. **"**The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it." (Mt 13:23) By comparing the Word of the kingdom to a seed, Jesus reveals something hopeful about us. The human heart is made for that seed. Soil and seed belong together. No matter how compacted, rocky or overgrown the ground has become, the Sower never stops sowing.

God loves our hearts. He sees them as a farmer sees his fields — full of potential. Human hearts can indeed "understand the Word." Understanding does not mean mastering information. It means letting the Word sink in, interacting with it and giving it a home. It means trusting that beneath the surface, God is at work in quiet and hidden ways.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to loosen the soil of our hearts through prayer, repentance and simplicity, the same Word that created the universe begins to bear fruit in us — thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, Sower of life, soften the soil of my heart. Let Your Word take root in me again, and bring forth the fruit You desire.

Inset 1: Getty Images/sanayut Thaneerat
Inset 2: Getty Images/Instagram: krmk146



FATHER JOHN MUIR
serves as the vicar general and moderator of the curia for the Diocese of Phoenix.

JULY 26, 2026

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Around the time that the gold rushes ended in the 19th century West, a curious phenomenon arose in New England called money diggers. These were men who roamed the countryside with shovels, divining rods and superstitious hope, convinced that treasure lay buried beneath their feet. But there was not. The craze of these wild goose chases caused many to lose farms, families and sanity.

In this week's Gospel, Jesus inaugurates a new era of spiritual money digging. He announces, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field." (Mt 13:44) He invites us to become treasure seekers who search in the right place. What is of greatest value is not money beneath our feet, but the infinite treasure hidden deep in the humanity of Jesus Himself: God's own blessed life. The glory of heaven lies veiled in His ordinary life, His teaching, His suffering, His Church.

This teaching about the kingdom changes things. Now we see the Church's doctrinal and moral teachings are not arbitrary rules. They are a treasure map. Follow them and we will uncover divine happiness. Ignore them and we will wander aimlessly, spade in hand, digging in empty fields, discouraged.

Where have we wasted energy seeking treasure in the wrong places? How have we given up on seeking the treasure of truly finding God's love for us? If so, let us repent of both. Then let us dust off our shovels and get back to digging deep into the field of Christ Jesus and His Church. After all, He never ceases seeking His treasure in us. ✝

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Inset: Getty Images/standret

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field."

MT 13:44

ACCOMPANYING OUR PRIESTS FOR LIFE

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FEATURE STORY

IGNITING FAITH IN LOCAL FAMILIES

Father Eusebio Kino had a vocation that has impacted generations. As a Jesuit priest, he founded 20 missions in Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico in the late 1600s, riding on horseback while spreading God's love.

The Kino Catechetical Institute in the Diocese of Phoenix, named after this horse-riding priest, helps students experience a deeper sense of their vocation. Founded in 1972 by Father Ernest Larkin, the Kino Institute offers faith formation programs for Catholic school teachers, aspiring deacons, parish catechists and any Catholic adult seeking to deepen their faith.

Among the courses offered is a two-year faith formation program called *Agua Viva,* which is active in three parishes in the diocese — Our Lady of Guadalupe in Queen Creek, Ariz., St. Vincent de Paul in Phoenix and St. William in Cashion, Ariz. The program will also be starting at Ss. Simon and Jude Cathedral in Phoenix in September.



KIRSTEN CONN
is a freelance writer
for *The Catholic Sun*.



Getty Images/Douglas Sacha

A MARRIAGE SET ABLAZE

Originally from Guatemala, married couple Felipe Mateo-Martin and Reynalda Sebastian are parishioners at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Queen Creek. They enrolled in *Agua Viva* nearly 20 years ago. Mateo-Martin, a catechist for the local Guatemalan community at Queen of Peace in Mesa, Ariz., wanted to take the course to be a better leader. Sebastian joined, wanting to share what they learned with their two children.

The fire of the Holy Spirit was enkindled within the couple as they participated in *Agua Viva*, and they decided to enroll in an additional two-year formation program with the Kino Institute.

Although they were both born and raised Catholic, Sebastian admitted that she didn't really practice her faith until she married her husband. During the Kino programs, the couple found themselves clinging to the sacraments more than they ever had, and their deepening faith started to impact their children.

"Prior to going through the program, we were not going to Mass every Sunday, not praying very often and put God last," Sebastian said. "After the program … God is now at the center of our lives as a family."

Since graduating from the Kino programs, Sebastian has become an *Agua Viva* instructor herself, and the couple's vocation has deepened.

"It has helped us understand our marriage and that God is the author," Mateo-Martin shared.





AN INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT

But the impact didn't stop there. The flame of the Holy Spirit was passed to their children, Briseyda Mateo-Sebastian and Mike Mateo-Sebastian, SJ, who also decided to go through the same Kino programs as young adults.

Being exposed to religious literature during her time at Kino is what helped Briseyda grow in her understanding of God. For the first time, she claimed the Catholic faith for herself.

"I wasn't just praying or believing in something because I was told to. I was praying and believing in something because I now had the knowledge to understand why."

Although she graduated from the program 10 years ago, she still remembers how it impacted her.

"[Kino] helped me be less influenced by what the world was trying to teach me … I was able to … discern between what would bring me closer to Christ and what would … keep me away from Christ."

What stuck with her most from Kino were the different types of people she was able to meet.

"We were all there to learn about our faith. It exemplified the universality of our Church, and that God and our salvation isn't just for a select few, but for all."

Now, Briseyda follows the example of her parents, who continue to serve their Guatemalan community, by helping with sacrament preparation classes and the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).

"The Kino program was the start of how I started to serve my people. Before, I never thought about how I can share my faith with others. After having gone through Kino, I had the tools to be confident in being able to do that." ▶

A FAMILY LEGACY

Briseyda's brother, Mike, also went through the programs, which inspired him to give back to the Guatemalan community, as well as nearby parishes. The family legacy of service continued.

While Mike was going through Kino from 2014-2016, he was also attending Benedictine University in Mesa, Ariz., majoring in theology. It soon became clear to Mike that he was made for relationship with Jesus.

As he continued to grow in his faith, Mike noticed a new desire blooming — a desire for the priesthood. He first noticed this stirring his freshman year of college and his first year at Kino. He thought there might be something more than having a steady job after college.

"Seeds were implanted … [I thought], maybe there's something more to simply clocking in and out, day in and day out. There's something more I can dedicate myself to."

While attending discernment events hosted by the diocese, he realized he didn't feel a tug to become a diocesan priest. He continued to discern during his next round of classes at Kino, which included a course on Catholic spirituality. It was in this class that he was introduced to Ignatian spirituality.

"I felt like a match … with Ignatius spirituality … Living the faith day in and day out, [Ignatian spirituality] is something that can help me do that … I want[ed] more."

Mike put his vocational discernment on hold as he graduated with a degree in theology in 2018. He entered the workforce and continued to serve the Catholic community. It wasn't until 2020 that he revisited the question of his vocation, feeling a tug in particular to learn about Jesuit saints. Reading St. Aloysius Gonzaga's biography was a turning point.

"When [St. Gonzaga] decided that he was going to enter the Jesuits … he began to pray for certitude. I was like, 'St. Gonzaga did it … I might as well do the same thing, too.' I [prayed], 'If this is what You want from me … I pray that You confirm this.'"

Like a still, small voice, the Lord continued guiding Mike to the Jesuits.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Kino Catechetical Institute

"I was like, 'Lord, I really feel and see Your winds guiding me this way. I don't know how this is going to end, so I trust in You.'"

Mike was accepted into the Jesuit Order two years ago and now attends St. Louis University in Missouri. He resides at the Bellarmine House of Studies, a Jesuit formation house. On Aug. 9, 2025, he professed first vows, and he continues to follow the whispers of the Lord.

"I'm on this journey, but I'm not on this journey alone. No vocation is done alone. With me are my parents and my sister, praying. We're praying for each other."

As St. Aloysius continues to guide Mike in his vocation, it's likely that another Jesuit saint-to-be has been guiding Mike's footsteps — and the footsteps of his family — all along: Servant of God Father Eusebio Kino. ✝

> **"LORD, I REALLY FEEL AND SEE YOUR WINDS GUIDING ME THIS WAY. I DON'T KNOW HOW THIS IS GOING TO END, SO I TRUST IN YOU."**



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TILMA

Testify, O Church, to the Light of the Mystery of Love

Bishop Dolan's historic, seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization

Inspired by Our Lady of Guadalupe, Bishop Dolan launched his seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization in January 2025 entitled *TILMA - Testifica, oh Iglesia, a la Luz del Misterio del Amor (Testify, O Church, to the Light of the Mystery of Love).*

Each year of the pastoral plan has a bold and engaging theme, leading the Diocese of Phoenix on a journey of personal, parish and diocesan-level growth, counting down to the 500th anniversary of Our Lady of Guadalupe's appearance to St. Juan Diego in 2031. *El Camino Real* is the theme for 2026.

HAVE YOU READ BISHOP DOLAN'S PASTORAL LETTER FOR 2026?

Scan the QR Code to hear from our shepherd himself as he reads his letter aloud, sharing his heart about *TILMA* and Our Lady of Guadalupe. You can also find the letter in written form, as well as his pastoral plan for 2026.

DID YOU KNOW BISHOP DOLAN HAS A PODCAST ALL ABOUT TILMA?

He'd love for you to tune in! This monthly podcast delves into all aspects of his seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization — from exciting community events around the diocese to a deep dive into the themes of *El Camino Real*. Scan the QR code to catch up on past episodes and tune in to future conversations.

THE COUNTDOWN HAS BEGUN!

December 2031 marks the 500th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Join the diocese in anticipation of a massive celebration Bishop Dolan is planning to honor the patroness of the Diocese of Phoenix. Current countdown: 2,020 days

VISIT DPHX.ORG/TILMA FOR MORE INFORMATION

This site serves as a one-stop shop for all information on Bishop Dolan's seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization in English and Spanish. Check it out for FAQs, engaging videos, a history of Our Lady of Guadalupe and so much more. ✝

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XAVIER COLLEGE PREPARATORY

The Path Ahead



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COMMUNITY SERVICES

On June 6, four men in the Diocese of Phoenix will be ordained to the priesthood. Get to know them by reading their stories below — from a vocation planted in the heart of a toddler to a St. Paul-like conversion through the power of the rosary.

The ordination Mass will be held at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Avondale, Ariz., at 10 a.m. Join the livestream event on the Diocese of Phoenix Facebook and YouTube channels.

THE PATH TO PRIESTHOOD FO



ROSARY INSPIRES VETERAN'S RADICAL CONVERSION

Deacon Paul Graupmann, F.H.S.

BY JOYCE CORONEL

The reversion of Deacon Paul Graupmann, F.H.S., to the Catholic faith was a bit like the conversion of St. Paul: sudden, swift and sure.

He grew up in South Dakota in a family that attended Sunday Mass and always prayed before meals. After high school, he served in the U.S. Navy and was stationed in Japan. By then, he was no longer practicing his Catholic faith.

"I was living a pretty wild lifestyle. I never thought of God and was never praying."

What happened next can be laid at the feet of his older brother, Andrew.

At that point, Deacon Paul was serving in Washington state and had the opportunity to spend time with Andrew.

"My brother, who was kind of a frat boy, very far from the Lord, had his own conversion experience," Deacon Paul said. He shared his powerful testimony and "he actually got me to go back to confession.

"To this day, I don't really know why I went. It was just grace in the moment. And then I was given a penance of five rosaries to pray."

Five? That took some time but in the end, the penance bore fruit.

"On a whim, out in Washington state, I thought, 'Why don't I just try this prayer thing out and kind of see what happens?' I did, and it totally changed my life."

Turns out, the rosary has quite a history in Deacon Paul's family. His mother is one of 14 siblings. Growing up, her family prayed the rosary daily. All of her siblings are Catholic to this day.

"I remember being a kid and you knew you had to leave Grandma and Grandpa's house by 5 p.m. or else you're going to be caught praying the rosary," Deacon Paul noted.

Today, as a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Holy Spirit, he wears a rosary on his waist every day. "It goes with me everywhere," Deacon Paul said.

His road to the priesthood is rooted in his reversion experience. "It was just so revolutionary — like, God loves me. It was the most authentic thing I'd ever experienced in my life.

"And then it was almost an epiphany: Oh, there's something God wants me to do."

Andrew spoke to him about vocations and the different states in life. ▶

- **HOME PARISH:** Our Lady of Victory, Kadoka, S.D.
- **FAVORITE SAINTS:** St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Paul
- **FAVORITE SCRIPTURE:** "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us." (Rom 8:18)
- **HOBBIES:** Woodworking

FOUR YOUNG MEN



DRAWN TO CHRIST THROUGH EUCHARISTIC ENCOUNTER

Deacon Simon Ortiz

BY JOYCE CORONEL

Every time Deacon Paul asked the Lord if he was called to the priesthood, he received the same answer:

"I felt that same presence, that same kind of consolation that I received the first time I met the Lord."

He came to know the Franciscan Friars of the Holy Spirit during a retreat in 2015. They invited him to visit the friary for a nine-day novena to St. Francis. Deacon Paul fell in love with the community.

"They were on fire for the Lord and had a deep desire to evangelize and serve people, which was what I felt I was called to do. That's when I said 'yes.'"

Deacon Simon Ortiz grew up as the youngest of six siblings in a family that was active at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Scottsdale, Ariz.

"My mom sang in the choir, but I never altar-served or anything," Deacon Simon said. He attended religious education at the parish and during a retreat his sophomore year of high school, he went to a breakout session on vocations.

"This was my first time being around young priests. They were very lively and joyful about their vocation," Deacon Simon said.

The retreat took place in Williams, Ariz., and featured a few firsts. "I went to public school my whole life, so I had never seen religious sisters or younger priests," Deacon Simon said. He'd never seen snow falling either. "It was just a very joyful experience."

During his senior year, he went on retreat again. This time, during Eucharistic adoration, he felt called to the priesthood.

"That's when I really received the call in a very profound way. Up until that point, I was thinking about where I was going to go to college. I was going to go to Northern Arizona University or maybe Scottsdale Community College."

He began going to adoration and praying the rosary daily. "And that's when the Lord really started to draw me to Himself."

Not long after, he applied to seminary and was accepted. "I entered at 17. I was only 17 for about a week of the seminary semester because my birthday is in late August, but I like to claim that," Deacon Simon said with a grin.

His parents were very supportive of his call to priesthood, though his mother said, "You shouldn't feel any pressure from me. You need to do what Jesus tells you to do." His father expressed initial concerns, but Deacon Simon said one of the biggest graces of seminary has been to see his father "deepen his own prayer life as a result of me entering into seminary."

Deacon Simon studied at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Ohio for four years and then transferred to St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver. One of the things he's enjoyed the most about his seminary years is the fraternity with other men who are in formation.

The daily rhythm of prayer has also been a source of joy. "We have a holy hour every day and we get to go to Mass every day," Deacon Simon said.

- **HOME PARISH:** St. Maria Goretti, Scottsdale, Ariz.
- **FAVORITE SAINTS:** St. Peter, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity
- **FAVORITE SCRIPTURE:** "Whoever loves Me will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him." (Jn 14:23)
- **HOBBIES:** Singing, sports, photography

He relished his spirituality year that featured time to grow closer to the Lord without academic pressure. He needed to discern whether he was being called to a religious community like the Carmelites or diocesan priesthood. In the end, it was clear that the Lord was calling him to a life of deeper prayer and to serve as a diocesan priest. ▶

FRATERNAL LOVE REKINDLES CHILDHOOD CALL

Deacon Nathan Blanchard

BY JEFF GRANT

Though his call to the priesthood was unmistakable, there was a point during religious studies that Deacon Nathan Blanchard seriously considered giving up.

After entering Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, out of high school at age 18, Deacon Nathan spent four years there before moving to St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver.

But after three years in Colorado, he found himself unexpectedly at a crossroads.

Deacon Nathan described a sense of disconnectedness, though not from his call or desire, but from the process.

"I wasn't in a good mental state," he recalled. "I needed to take a break."

Then, God intervened through a phone call from Father Paul Sullivan, rector of Nazareth House, the Diocese of Phoenix's local seminary.

Father Sullivan and Father Kurt Perera, then the vocations director, invited Deacon Nathan to move from Denver to Phoenix, where he settled into fellowship with the vocations team and took a job with a local electrician. Deacon Nathan began soaking in the love of Christ, his formation leaders and the brotherly atmosphere within his local seminary community, including conversations with Bishop John Dolan.

"He felt known and loved again," recalled his mother, Christina Blanchard. "He was ready to go."

Deacon Nathan said he might have left seminary altogether.

"But I knew doing that would be turning my back on Jesus Christ and [ignoring] the call God had given me so clearly."

The fourth of six children born to Deacon Greg Blanchard of San Francisco de Asis Parish in Flagstaff, Ariz., and Christina, Deacon Nathan displayed an affinity for the priesthood at an early age.

"He was less than 2 [years old], barely able to speak," Christina said. "He would get up into the presider's chair (the tallest chair where the Mass' main celebrant sits), and say, 'Father Nathan, Father Nathan.' At age 5, he wanted a play paten and chalice, so we made a ceramic set for him."

Then, in seventh grade, while on a summer camp retreat, Deacon Nathan found himself experiencing a sense of God's calling he could not ignore.

"On the first night, we were at Mass. I had kind of 'tuned out.' I received the Body of Christ and the Blood. The Lord spoke very directly to me. He said, 'Nathan, I want you to be a priest.'

"I cried for the rest of Mass, tears for this powerful experience and joy and excitement. Right after Mass, I pulled my youth minister aside and told her what happened."

After spending time at Nazareth Seminary, he returned to priestly studies with a semester of immersion in Honduras and wrapped up at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. He was ordained to the transitional diaconate in a Mass celebrated by Bishop Dolan last November at his family's home parish in Flagstaff, where his dad served as the deacon.

Deacon Nathan's dad sees his son bringing a friendly, unassuming nature to the priesthood with the heart of a spiritual father, someone who can enable others to feel as if they are the only person that matters when Deacon Nathan is talking with them.

"[Nathan] can make friends with anyone. If you can't get along with Nathan, you can't get along with anyone. He's definitely good with people," Deacon Greg said.

"What surprises me about him is the incredible growth," said Christina. "Five years ago, I thought, 'He has a way to go.' Now, he's ready."

- **HOME PARISH:** San Francisco de Asís, Flagstaff, Ariz.
- **FAVORITE SAINTS:** St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Louis the King
- **FAVORITE SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15 and John 15
- **HOBBIES:** Hiking, writing, ukulele



FORMER PILOT SOARS TOWARD GOD'S WILL

Deacon Jeff Pooley

BY JOYCE CORONEL



As a pilot, Deacon Jeff Pooley soared through the clouds, far above earth and its troubles. Soon, as a newly ordained priest for the Diocese of Phoenix, he'll guide others toward heaven.

Deacon Jeff grew up in Riverside, Calif., one of three children. He was active in his home parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and was an altar server until eighth grade. There were probably inclinations early on about priesthood, but it wasn't something his family talked about.

Then, when he was 17, the Lord reached into Deacon Jeff's heart with a prompting. At the time, a religious order priest who had been serving at the family's parish was retiring and returning to his native Spain. The priest died two weeks later.

"He knew he had cancer and that there wasn't much that could be done about it, but he chose to serve anyway," Deacon Jeff said.

At a memorial Mass for the priest, Deacon Jeff was overcome by emotion and asked himself why he was crying so much. In a moment of clarity, he felt an interior voice tell him, "This man laid down his life for you."

That same voice continued: "I could be calling you to do the same thing."

"I was petrified," Deacon Jeff said.

Not long after, he tearfully confided in a teacher at his public high school: "I think I'm supposed to be a priest — but I don't really want to be a priest!"

His teacher's words in that moment have stayed with him down through the years: "Pooley, we don't make decisions in desolation." She encouraged him to move forward with his life and realize that if God wanted him to become a priest, He would make it clear.

At 18, Deacon Jeff left home to study at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz. After earning a degree in aeronautical science, he stayed in Prescott and volunteered with the youth ministry group at Sacred Heart Parish.

"I was telling kids, 'Do God's will for your life, and you'll be happy,' but it felt like hypocrisy because I knew I had felt this call when I was 17, but I wasn't responding to it." He told the Lord, "If You want me to be a priest, make it abundantly known to me."

Deacon Jeff worked as a flight instructor for two years. During that time, many priests came into his life and walked alongside him. "They loved me and showed me the joyful life of priesthood."

Then, while visiting a friend during alumni day at his alma mater, he heard that same still, small voice: "What are you waiting for?"

He emailed Father Paul Sullivan, the vocations director at the time, and entered seminary not long after. ✝

- **HOME PARISH:** Corpus Christi, Phoenix
- **FAVORITE SAINTS:** St. Teresa of Calcutta, Pope St. John Paul II and Sister Clare Crockett, whose cause for beatification was opened in 2025
- **FAVORITE SCRIPTURE:** "He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted … to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes …" (Is 61:1)
- **HOBBIES:** Cooking, watching movies



Historic Together Let Us Go Forth campaign comes to a close

The Diocese of Phoenix's historic Together Let Us Go Forth ~ *Juntos Sigamos Adelante* campaign officially came to a close in March, after nearly nine years of impact.

The $100 million initiative, which launched in 2017 under the visionary leadership of Bishop Emeritus Thomas Olmsted, emphasized discipleship and evangelization through building, renovation, beatification and development projects across a myriad of parishes, schools and ministries within the nearly 44,000-square-mile diocese.

What started as a diocesan-wide study indicating the need for a new high school in the West Valley soon turned into a full-fledged campaign, which carried the potential for a much broader impact.

"One of the big things [was] listening to our pastors, because they're the ones who really know what's happening," said Bishop Olmsted, who served as the bishop of Phoenix from 2003-2022. "And then also, we're blessed to have a good Catholic school board, who had a good sense of what's happening in Catholic education … As we listened to them, we knew this [would become] more than just a Catholic school."

The listening bore fruit.

As the campaign was developed, eight case components, or areas of focus, came to the forefront: direct parish support, Newman Centers, Catholic school growth and development, Francis Mercy Fund, St. John Paul II Catholic High School, ministry support, seminary support and tuition assistance.

Bishop Olmsted invited all 94 parishes and 24 missions in the diocese to participate — extending a particular invitation to each parishioner and family to discern the sacrificial gift the Lord may be calling them to give. Over the length of the campaign, the $100 million goal was met through the generosity of the faithful and a partnership with the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust.

The timing of the Together Let Us Go Forth campaign was nothing short of providential.

When it began as a seed of an idea in 2017, there were 1.1 million Catholics in the Diocese of Phoenix. As the campaign came to full fruition in March 2026, more than 2 million Catholics called the diocese home.

"These were little seeds that were planted, and then the wonderful gifts and prayers that people brought to the campaign … We're benefitting from this," said Bishop John Dolan, as he spoke about Bishop Olmsted's actions over the years of the campaign. "I can't tell you how incredible this campaign has been for our diocese."

Scan the QR code to read the full story and watch a special video episode of "The Catholic Sun" where Bishop John Dolan, Bishop Emeritus Thomas Olmsted and Father Greg Schlarb delve into the highlights of the historic Together Let Us Go Forth ~ *Juntos Sigamos Adelante* campaign.

New diocesan role established to support wellbeing of priests

The Diocese of Phoenix announced a new role established to support the human, spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing of priests — the vicar for priestly life and ministry.

After more than 13 years as pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish (OLPH) in Scottsdale, Ariz., Father Greg Schlarb will step into the position on July 1. He will work in tandem with Auxiliary Bishop Peter Dai Bui, who currently serves as the vicar for clergy. While Bishop Bui's role focuses on practical support for priests such as priestly assignments, day-to-day personnel management and support when problems arise, the new role will take on a more proactive and personal approach.

"The vicar for priestly life and ministry will walk with priests, listen to them, ask them questions and seek to understand any challenges they may be facing," said Bishop John Dolan.

The new role was established to encourage priests, as well as to foster a deeper fraternity with Bishop Dolan and the hundreds of other priests in the diocese.

"Visits from Father Schlarb will revolve around questions that are simple, but some of the most important: *How are you doing? How can we help you excel? How can we make sure you're doing well?"* Bishop Dolan continued.

Father Schlarb looks forward to putting almost 30 years of parish life experience into this new role. He will place a particular emphasis on accompaniment, spending time in conversation and listening.

"As the vicar for priestly life and ministry, I'm there to serve [our priests], be with them, to help them, to encourage them. And really to love them … I [consider] all of them part of my new community that I am going to be focused on first and foremost," said Father Schlarb, who will celebrate his last Mass as pastor of OLPH on Sunday, June 28.

"They are my priority."

Scan the QR code to watch a special video episode of "TILMA", where Bishop John Dolan, Auxiliary Bishop Peter Dai Bui and Father Greg Schlarb delve into the new vicar for priestly life and ministry role.





Evangelization team brings the good news to NCAA basketball fans

Cassock flaring in the wind behind him, Father Emmanuel Galvez, IVE, briskly pulled up on an electric scooter and parked on Monroe Street in front of St. Mary's Basilica in downtown Phoenix.

Father Galvez was there to join several other priests of the Diocese of Phoenix to offer the sacrament of penance to NCAA basketball fans who flooded downtown during the Women's Final Four Basketball Tournament in early April.

A volunteer team of Catholic evangelizers set up a table on the street for 12 hours on Holy Saturday, offering free rosaries, St. Benedict crucifixes, miraculous medals, holy cards and other sacramentals to passersby.

A mini-basketball hoop attracted families with young children who took turns taking shots while their parents spoke with volunteers. An 8-foot Sacred Heart of Jesus banner, as well as signs with messages such as "Can We Pray for You?" and "Catholic Priest Available for Confession," snagged plenty of attention, too.

At one point, while Father Joseph Nguyen, parochial vicar of St. Agnes Parish in Phoenix, was hearing confessions, there were 11 penitents in line for the sacrament. He said he heard about 20 confessions throughout the afternoon.

"It's a great blessing to offer God's mercy to people, especially those who have been gone for a while," Father Nguyen said. "I had a lot of very powerful experiences of people feeling God's forgiveness and love through the sacrament today and I'm praising God for that."

Led by the Diocese of Phoenix's Office of Evangelization, Discipleship and Spirituality, volunteers gave out hundreds of sacramentals throughout the daylong event.

For Jack Barone and his wife Jo, serving as evangelizers for the NCAA Women's Final Four was a slam dunk. The pair volunteered previously at the men's tournament and during a Super Bowl fan event at the Phoenix Convention Center where local volunteers also hosted evangelization tables.

Jack admitted he's an introvert, but he still felt called to serve as a Catholic street evangelist, offering the hope of Christ to people he's never met before.

"It can still be awkward sometimes, but you get past it," Jack said. "The message motivates me, I guess, because I know it's an important message to get to the people, and I may not be doing it in the most eloquent manner, but I'm getting the message across, I think."

Father Emmanuel Ogla, the parochial vicar at St. Benedict Parish in Phoenix, was the first to arrive and hear confessions.

"This is a social evangelical drive, taking Jesus to people on the streets through the sacrament of holy confession. I had a lot of people who came and were so happy they had this opportunity. They couldn't have any Holy Week event, and they were so delighted to see a Catholic priest on the street just by the corner, ready to listen to their confessions."

The wooden confessional screen set up on Monroe was an eye-catcher for basketball fans who travelled from Connecticut, Texas, California, South Carolina, New York and other states, as well as Arizona-based hoops aficionados who came to cheer on their team.

Alex England, a student at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, lives in downtown Phoenix and said he liked seeing the confessional on the street. He stood in line with several others, even though it was a sultry 90 degrees.

"People are walking by and are able to see what it really is like to be a Catholic. And I think that's really cool," said England. "It's an intimate, you know, sort of connection between you and the priest and you're having a conversation about some pretty real and pretty tough stuff. But you'll leave feeling so much better.

"And you can look at the line. There are plenty of people who agree with me." ✝

For the most up to date events visit catholicsun.org/events

Ordination to the priesthood

Bishop John Dolan and Auxiliary Bishops Eduardo Nevares and Peter Dai Bui are pleased to announce the ordination of Deacon Nathan Blanchard, Deacon Paul Graupmann, Deacon Simon Ortiz and Deacon Jeff Pooley to the priesthood. All are invited to attend or watch the Mass broadcast live on the diocese's Facebook and YouTube platforms. ***June 6 at 10 a.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas, Avondale, Ariz.***

Father's Day

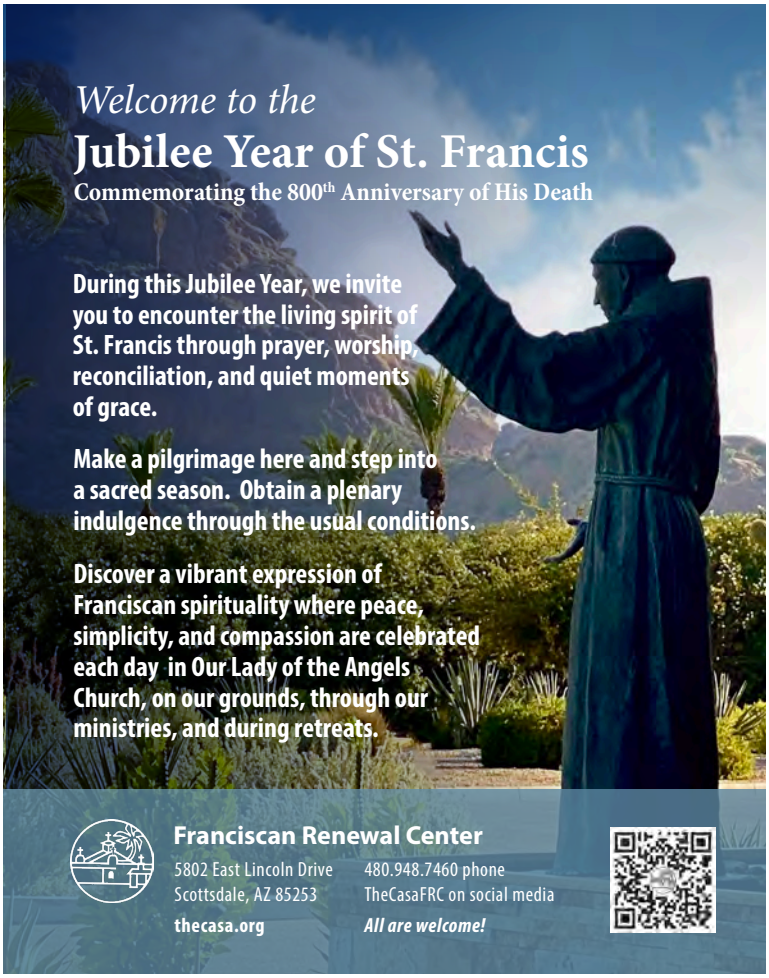
Today, we pray for all fathers — those who have given us life and love, our faithful priests and shepherds, all men who have impacted us by their fatherhood and for all fathers who have passed away. ***June 21***

God our Father, in Your wisdom and love You made all things. Bless these men, that they may be strengthened as Christian fathers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. Amen.

Catholic Night with the D-backs

Join the Arizona Diamondbacks, the Diocese of Phoenix and the Diocese of Tucson for the fourth annual Catholic Night as the D-Backs take on the Texas Rangers. Tickets are discounted and $5 from every ticket sold will go to Catholic School Support 365. In addition, each ticket purchased will receive a D-Backs-branded Catholic cap. Scan the QR code for tickets. ***Sept. 11 starting at 6:40 p.m. at Chase Field in downtown Phoenix.*** †

Scan the QR code to submit your events.





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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

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Word & Art with Bishop Dolan

Word & Art:
An exciting and insightful series where Bishop Dolan, who has a Master of Arts degree in Liturgy/Church Art, connects a Sunday Mass reading with a famous work of art.

MHHM Mental Health Minute

Mental Health Minute:
A space where we explore the vital topic of mental and emotional well-being, opening the conversation and journeying together towards a healthier, happier you.

Christ in Our Neighborhood / Cristo en Nuestro Barrio

Christ in Our Neighborhood:
Co-hosts Joyce Coronel and Jennifer Ellis are joined by a special guest to help us dive into the Word of God together.

MONTHLY PODCASTS

TILMA PODCAST

TILMA: This monthly podcast delves into all aspects of Bishop John's seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization – from exciting community events around the diocese to a deep-dive into the topics related to this year's theme, El Camino Real.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

A Seat at The Table: Joyce Coronel sits down with leaders of other faith traditions to discuss current events, spirituality and ways we can work together to support our community.

life TALK PODCAST

Life Talk: A monthly podcast co-hosted by Marina Salvador-Velazquez from the Office of Respect Life and a special guest host that delves into crucial topics concerning the sanctity of life.

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Prep Rally: This monthly podcast celebrates the talents of students, teachers and administrators from across the diocese. Each episode features a topic highlighting one of four pillars: faith, service, academics and arts, and athletics.

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Priest of the Week: is a video series offering a unique glimpse into the hobbies and personal stories of over 200 priests from the Diocese of Phoenix. From muscle cars to axe throwing, these short episodes showcase the surprising talents and interests of priests while highlighting their devotion to the faith.

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