THE MAGAZINE OF THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX
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The Catholic Sun



LOVE *grows* *HERE*

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The Catholic Sun

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PUBLISHER
Most Rev. John P. Dolan
Bishop of Phoenix

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
Brett Meister

CONTENT AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER
Jennifer Ellis

OFFICE OF MISSION ADVANCEMENT
Debbie DiCarlo, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Martha Gamez, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT AND LEGACY GIVING
Sara Mitchell, SENIOR MANAGER DIOCESAN APPEALS

CONTRIBUTORS
Dulce Aguirre
Kirsten Conn
Joyce Coronel
Jonathan Fuentes
Julian Garoz
Jeff Grant
MaryRuth Hackett, PhD
Niko Hafley
Father John Muir
Catherine Mulhern
Gabe Salcido

PHOTOGRAPHY
Alyssa Greif
Niko Hafley
Brett Meister
Yuri Varesini

CONTACT US: catholicsun.org
FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, X, YOUTUBE AND LINKEDIN: @phoenixdiocese

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ART DIRECTOR/GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Rachel Squibbs

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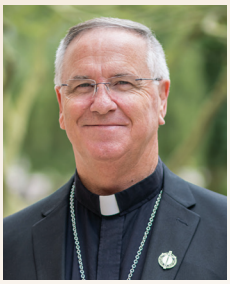
FROM BISHOP DOLAN

A TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTER

When I was a pastor at St. Rose in the Diocese of San Diego, we established a program for engaged couples called "Engaged in Love." For four weeks, couples would attend Mass together, then gather with other engaged couples for donuts and coffee in the rectory. We'd then delve into the Sunday Gospel. Each couple would take some time to read the Scripture and reflect on two questions: What does this mean for me? And what does this mean for us?



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

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On the fourth week, the whole parish community would extend their hands in prayer over the couples as the pastor gave the engagement blessing.

It was a beautiful tradition, and a fruitful one!

Couples leaned into Scripture, they fostered relationships with other couples and they became engaged in the life of the parish. It's a wonderful example of what we are trying to foster for marriage and family life here in the Diocese of Phoenix.

As a Church, we are really good at understanding and teaching marriage in the theological and scholastic sense. For example, our programs delve deeply into what a sacrament is and how it supernaturally changes those who receive it.

This understanding is very important. But if we remain there, we miss something essential.

We miss the messiness and beauty of what it means to live the sacramental life "enfleshed." In other words, we can miss the deeper sense of walking in relationship with Jesus and one another in the ups and downs of everyday life, rather than simply fulfilling an obligation for an hour on Sundays.

Each couple in our diocese is wonderfully unique — in age, culture, family of origin, gifts and talents. And each one is entering into marriage in their own place on the journey. Marriage preparation and ongoing formation are an opportunity to meet couples right where they are — in the real messiness and struggles, celebrations and joys of life — walking alongside and providing formation and support along the way.

It's a moment to foster a deep encounter for the couple with one another and with God. The type of encounter that leads to this "enfleshed" transformation, moving couples beyond simply going through the process of checking boxes to get married in the Church. The kind of transformation that inspires couples to really ponder deeply:

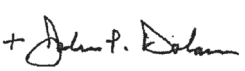
What does the sacrament of marriage look like in our life? What does it mean for us?

Our diocesan Office of Marriage, Family Life and Spirituality is actively building out a new vision to create such encounters for families and couples — engaged, newly married, seasoned, thriving and struggling alike. Encounters such that those on the journey know they are seen, accompanied, known and not walking alone.

To help build out this vision, the diocese will be hosting a series of listening sessions on the sacraments beginning in September. All are invited to come and share honest experiences on topics such as being welcomed (or not welcomed) in parishes when you approach the sacraments and how the sacraments serve as a moment of encounter with Christ, who sends us forth to bring Him to others.

The tagline of the listening sessions is: "Your voice. Your story. Your Church." Whether you just entered the Church at Easter or you've been a practicing Catholic for 85 years, your experiences are of value to the Church. Hearing real, lived experiences will help us understand what is working well, what support is still needed and how the Church can continue to walk alongside and support individuals and families in the ups and downs of daily life.

To all couples, know of my prayers for you. Know that the Church is here to support you. And know that your vocation — the uniqueness and fullness of your journey — is a great and vital gift to the life of the Church. ✝



+ John P. Dolan
Bishop of Phoenix

Scan the QR code for more information about listening sessions on the sacraments

Love that endures



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

When Richard and I married 39 years ago, our wedding day was joyful, beautiful and full of hope. Like most young couples, we looked forward to building a life together and believed we understood what marriage would ask of us.

What I know now is that the greatest blessing of marriage was not found in that single day. It unfolded slowly through ordinary moments, difficult seasons and the witness of couples who showed us what enduring love looks like.

The week I married Richard in 1987, his parents celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. At the time, I admired them, but I could not yet appreciate the depth of a love that had endured for four decades. Over the years, they have become one of the most important examples of marriage in our lives.

They showed up for one another, their family, their parish and their community — not through grand gestures, but through daily acts of kindness, encouragement, sacrifice and steadfast support. They lived the vows they had made in good times and hard times, in sickness and in health, through laughter and tears.

Life was not always easy for them, nor has it always been easy for us. Marriage is a gift, but it can also be messy. Burdens grow heavy. Worries arise. Difficult seasons test even strong relationships.

Yet walking through those seasons with someone you trust changes everything. Marriage becomes less about perfection and more about abiding love, less about feelings and more about faithful presence.

My father-in-law passed away in 2011, but the witness of his marriage continues to inspire Richard and me, as well as our grown sons in their own marriages. A faithful marriage leaves a legacy, even long after one spouse is gone.

Recently, Deacon Francis Staab, who serves at St. Mary Catholic Church in Kingman, Ariz., shared the grief he has experienced since losing his beloved wife, Marie, after 59 grace-filled years of marriage. He wears her wedding ring beside a crucifix around his neck and remains deeply connected to her through prayer.

What moved me most was that even in grief, he still seeks to serve others. After caring for Marie as her sole caregiver for several years, he now hopes to accompany hospice patients and their families, offering comfort and reminding them they are not alone.

That is what enduring love does. It forms hearts capable of sacrifice, compassion and service. It teaches us to love not only our spouse, but also the people God places before us.

Our culture often focuses on the wedding day, but the true beauty of marriage reveals itself over time — in hospital rooms, around crowded dinner tables, through financial struggles, while raising children, while caring for aging parents and choosing one another again each day.

I am grateful to the couples who have shown us how to live marriage faithfully. Their witness strengthened our own marriage and helped us navigate difficult seasons. After nearly 40 years, I understand that the greatest gift is not simply finding someone to love, but finding someone willing to walk beside you through every season of life — this is a love that reflects the very real presence of God. ✝





PARENTING SMARTS

Choose *to* LOVE

At one of my bridal showers back in the 1990s, I received a litany of marital advice. I was young, the first of my siblings to get married, and I listened with sharp attention. Now, decades later, I clearly remember advice given by one of the older church ladies in attendance:

"NEVER ADMIT YOU KNOW HOW TO TURN ON THE BARBECUE OR START THE LAWN MOWER."

That was it.

In the first decade of marriage, I did try to respect that wisdom. But by the time we had four children and a chaotic schedule — my husband was traveling for long stretches — I simply could not continue to honor it. If I wanted dinner grilled, I had to let go of that advice.

As my oldest child now finds himself in the blissful season of marriage preparation and engaged to a lovely young woman he met in college, it's their turn to receive advice. I find myself pondering exactly what I would say if asked directly.

The guiding principle that has helped me most in 26 years of marriage is the simple recognition that love is a choice. To love is to will the good of another. We choose daily, sometimes hourly, to love one another. Love is an act of the will, not a passive emotion that guides our behavior. It's an active decision. So, this must be my one central piece of advice to my son and his bride:

Choose to love your spouse. Choose to honor your wedding vows. Choose the good of the other. And love your spouse out of love for God, because He has given you to one another.

A marriage with God at the center is a marriage with love at the center. God is love, and He will always call us deeper into it. When you choose to love, you choose God because God is love. He cannot be separated from the act of loving, for He is the source of all love. It's through the very act of loving that we come to know Him.

We hear in Scripture: *"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God."* (1 Jn 4:7)

Marriage is hard because life is hard. Our vocation is our path to holiness, and holiness does not come without sacrifice. Gazing upon the crucifix, we see sacrifice

and love intertwined and inseparable. If it were easy, we wouldn't need a Savior. If we could love perfectly all the time, we wouldn't need God's mercy and forgiveness.

In a healthy marriage built around a mutual love of God, there is an abundance of mercy to cover our human imperfections as we strive to choose love. With God's grace we can choose to love despite one another's flaws.

When we lack patience or kindness and the relationship is strained, it's often because somewhere along the way we forgot to choose love. We failed to practice patience with our spouse's imperfections and kindness when they were in need. Instead, perhaps we chose self-protection and defensiveness — building fortifications, going on the attack or looking for an escape route.

But choosing love means something different. It means choosing to lose oneself in love and to lean into the struggle with humility, invite the Holy Spirit into the situation, ask for guidance and respond with patience.

"Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Cor 13) may be one of the most frequently used wedding readings of all time. Yet, we often forget that patience and kindness are choices.

Love is chosen when we choose their preference over our own. Love is chosen when we set aside our plans or desires and take up our spouse's dreams as our own. Love is chosen when we get out of bed to respond to a child's cries, even when it isn't our turn. When both husband and wife die to themselves out of love for the other and act in this sacrificial way, they open themselves to God's grace. Their individual plans are replaced by His greater plan for their union.

When your marriage is stressed — as all marriages are from time to time — lean into each other, not away. Take time to pray. But stay; don't escape. Distraction, division, deception and despair are corrosive to a marriage. Yet, we often give in to them rather than choosing love when it's difficult. When you feel the pull to distract yourself, to isolate or to hide your true feelings, recognize these as movements away from love.

My marital advice is simple to understand, though difficult to live out perfectly. God willing, you will have a long marriage in which to practice:

Choose to love, over and over — again and again — without pause, without doubt, without fail. Simply choose to love. ✝



MARYRUTH HACKETT, PHD,
is a mom of four with a doctorate in educational psychology. She hosts the podcast Parenting Smarts, and is the author of two books: *Daughter by Design* and *Discernment of Spirits for Beginners.*





ENCOUNTERING SCRIPTURE

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.

AUGUST 2, 2026

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time



The artist Eminem raps in his song *Lose Yourself*, "The mood all changed."

We all know that moment when the mood changes, when life turns from lighthearted to deadly serious. That happens in today's Gospel. Jesus has just heard that John the Baptist, His cousin, forerunner and friend, has been murdered. As Matthew tells us, "When Jesus heard of it, He withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by Himself." Until now, He has been teaching in parables and healing quietly. But John's death signals a new phase. The shadow of the cross begins to fall. Evil shows its teeth.

And how does Jesus respond? Not with rage or despair. He goes to a lonely place to go into deep communion with His Father. From that silence comes action. He feeds the multitude. Out of grief comes generosity. Out of sorrow, life.

This is the rhythm of every disciple's life. When tragedy or violence breaks our hearts, we face a choice. We can react, or we can retreat into prayer like — and with — Christ. This is the hidden place where pain becomes compassion and compassion becomes self gift.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, when life intensifies, draw me into Your quiet strength. In that hidden place with You and the Father, turn my heartbreak into the bread of love for the world.

AUGUST 9, 2026

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time



As a young, newly ordained priest, I admired a senior priest who was gifted, beloved and had changed countless lives. Soon, I learned that he had fallen in catastrophic and destructive ways. The painful juxtaposition of good and evil was difficult to process. How could someone so seemingly good also be so broken and deceptive? It forced me to confront a sobering truth: leadership in the Church has no guarantee against weakness or sin.

Peter teaches that truth in this week's Gospel. When he sees Jesus walking on the sea, Peter does what leaders do. He goes first. "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the

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water." But when he saw how strong the wind was, he became frightened and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me." Immediately, Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.

St. Thomas Aquinas observes that Peter overcame the greater danger of the waves but faltered before the lesser threat of the wind. This is the paradox leaders often face. It is not always the great trials that undo us, but the smaller, quieter temptations, such as subtle fears and compromises, that lead us to sink.

The good news is that Jesus does not abandon Peter. He saves him before it is too late. Our frail humanity lives within a rhythm of grace, risk, failure and mercy. Jesus helps Peter overcome both the obvious and hidden sources of fear, and He promises to do the same for us. So, we pray for all, especially our spiritual leaders.

AUGUST 16, 2026

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Does God ignore or act a bit rough with you? In today's Gospel, Jesus crosses the border into the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon, the territory long outside the covenant. There, a Canaanite woman calls out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David." At first, He is silent. Then He rebuffs her. "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." But the Church Fathers saw this not as an insult but an initiation. Christ draws out of her heart a deeper faith.

She presses on. "Please, Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Jesus' silence and response solidify her humility and trust. She thus becomes a model of prayer for centuries of Christians. St. Augustine said she shows how sinners come to grace — by moving from silence to humility to perseverance.

This woman is the Church. She is you and I. She is every soul who dares to cry out from the margins, who endures divine silence until it turns to compassion. When Jesus says, "O woman, great is your faith," it is the joyful cry of God discovering faith where the world least expects it. Even the smallest crumb of Your mercy, Lord, is enough to heal the soul. Do we have the courage to show faith like that?

AUGUST 23, 2026

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time



The first time I stood inside St. Peter's Basilica, its majesty overwhelmed me. The sheer beauty of Michelangelo's dome seemed to lift my soul right out of my body. Later, I joined the Scavi tour that winds below the basilica, down into the ancient pagan cemetery where Peter was buried. There, in the dim light and narrow passageways, I found myself looking at the bones of a murdered Jewish fisherman, his feet once cut off so his crucified body could be taken down more easily.

What a paradox. Above me, the most glorious church ever built. Beneath me, the remains of a backwater fisherman. But this man dared to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" And crowning that immense dome above his tomb are the words from today's Gospel, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church."

Within you and me is the drama of the lowest and the highest. Every time we confess Christ, humbly, imperfectly, maybe even trembling, we enter that same mystery. The dust of our humanity touched by the splendor of heaven. God's presence and our dry bones together. Humility and glory. May our lives embrace both the lowest and the highest, like that great basilica, as we profess Jesus.

AUGUST 30, 2026

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time



Do you know what it is like to be thrilled by the power of Christian faith one moment and then utterly fail in the next? I do. That is Peter in today's Gospel. After last week's bold confession, he now hears Jesus speak of suffering and death, and something in him recoils. He takes Jesus aside and tries to correct Him. Jesus responds with the shocking rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan."

Peter is the mirror of every disciple. We love Jesus until He contradicts the script we have written for our lives. Peter does not reject Jesus. He rejects a suffering Jesus. ▶

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Inset 3: Getty Images/leolintang

So do we whenever we avoid a hard responsibility, resist a demanding relationship or cling to comfort instead of choosing love. We want a Lord who supports our plans, not one who overturns them.

Yet Jesus does not discard Peter. He redirects him. "Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." In effect, Jesus says stop trying to lead Me. Let Me lead you. Discipleship does not begin with heroism or clarity but with surrender. It means trusting that God's path to life often passes through places we would never choose.

Peter is all of us. We move from insight to confusion, from confidence to correction. That is why we should have hope. Jesus patiently teaches us again and again. "Trust Me. Get behind Me. Follow Me." When we stop fighting the crosses that come and start carrying them with Him, we discover a freedom deeper than comfort and a love stronger than fear.



SEPTEMBER 6, 2026

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



A few summers ago, my family had a big reunion. It included my parents, my four siblings and all their many children. One of my favorite moments was simply watching my parents' contented faces as they took in all of us together, laughing, sharing food, singing, telling stories. They loved seeing their children happily together with each other.

That is something like the heart of God we see in today's Gospel message about Christian reconciliation. These verses come right after Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. He is not giving the disciples a cold formula for dealing with conflict. He is revealing the Father's longing for children who love and reconcile with each other. His heart aches when His children are divided and isolated.

So, when Jesus says, "Go and tell your brother his fault," He is not deputizing us as morality police. He is inviting us into His mission of reconciliation. When He adds, "If he listens to you, you have won over your brother," we glimpse the real goal. Not winning arguments, but reuniting a divided family.

These days, we often think religion is just between me and God. But the Father's dream is about a lively family, one in which His children forgive, gather and rejoice together.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, give me the courage to seek reconciliation where it is needed. Make my heart resemble the Father's heart, longing for unity among His children.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In my parish, there was a new employee who frequently told me she was sorry for various imperfections in her work. It could be a little tiring. I finally told her, "You know, you don't have to say 'sorry' so often." She looked me right in the eyes and said, "Father, you're right. I'm sorry." Her ear-to-ear grin betrayed that she enjoyed the irony — and that she would keep asking for forgiveness as often as she needed it.

The Gospel reading this week proclaims to us that God, in Jesus, delights in the numerous requests for, and the granting of, forgiveness. To Peter's question, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus responds, "I say to you, not seven times but 77 times." In other words, Peter, stop counting.

Christian life should be marked by a commitment to frequent forgiveness. God never tires of forgiving us. His limitless love has overcome the power of vengeance, hatred and division. We tap into that each and every time we ask for forgiveness or extend it to another.

How beautiful our hearts become when they become accustomed to frequent forgiveness! How joyful and attractive our marriages, families and parish communities become! How light our souls feel when unburdened by the habit of keeping score.

CHALLENGE: Name one thing, small or large, for which you could ask forgiveness from someone in your life. Then do it.

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Inset 2: Getty Images/LAW Ho Wing

SEPTEMBER 20, 2026

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Every December, the priests of our diocese gather for a Christmas dinner with the bishop. Two hundred of us in one hall, old priests and newly ordained, parish builders and quiet confessors, men full of energy and others in wheelchairs. Some have known scandal or illness, success and failure. It is a tapestry of vocations and lives. As the bishop thanks us, I am always moved. For a moment, none of our differences matter. What matters is that we are brothers, grateful to belong together.

I often leave that night with deep peace, but also with a sobering thought: how poisonous comparison can be. It is the silent killer of joy in the vineyard of the Lord. Envy, entitlement and jealousy creep in even among those who work for God.

That is what Jesus unmasks in today's parable of the workers in the vineyard. The indignant laborers are angry not because they are underpaid, but because others are overpaid. Resentment makes them incapable of rejoicing. When the landowner asks, "Are you envious because I am generous?" He exposes the real wound. Beneath it lies the bitterness that has always divided God's people — the older brother resenting the prodigal, the long serving worker scorning the latecomer. Jesus is ending that exile, gathering all into one household, early and late, saint and sinner alike.

When the wage is given, there is no middle ground. Joy or envy. Communion or isolation. The vineyard's reward is not fairness, but belonging to a lavish giver of gifts.

CHALLENGE: Name where comparison poisons your joy in God's work. Ask for the grace to rejoice when others receive His mercy.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2026

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus tells a short, uncomfortable story this Sunday. A father asks two sons to go work in the vineyard. One says no, but he later goes. The other says yes, but he never shows up. It is a parable so simple we almost miss how sharp it is. Jesus is clear about who it is for. This is not aimed at pagans or outsiders. It is aimed squarely at religious people, people who say the right words while lacking true obedience.

Jesus is not condemning unbelief so much as disobedience. The polite hypocrisy that says the right things while quietly resisting the father's will. St. John Chrysostom put it bluntly, "Not words, but deeds, are what God requires. Nothing so exasperates Him as insincere obedience, while nothing so delights Him as repentance."

Every disciple must face that mirror. Do I publicly profess faith in Christ while privately resisting what He asks of me? It is easy to say, "I believe in God in my heart." But if faith never becomes action, it slowly becomes an illusion.

Jesus does not expose hypocrisy to shame us. He reveals it to heal us. He wants our hearts and our deeds to speak the same word, to let our yes truly mean yes. Like the second son who initially refused but afterwards changed his mind and went, Jesus invites us to step into the Father's will, however late, however imperfectly.

CHALLENGE: Where is your public faith and private obedience divided? Where do you say, "I will go," but never enter the vineyard? Go, get to work, even if it is late. The Father's vineyard is still open. ✝





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

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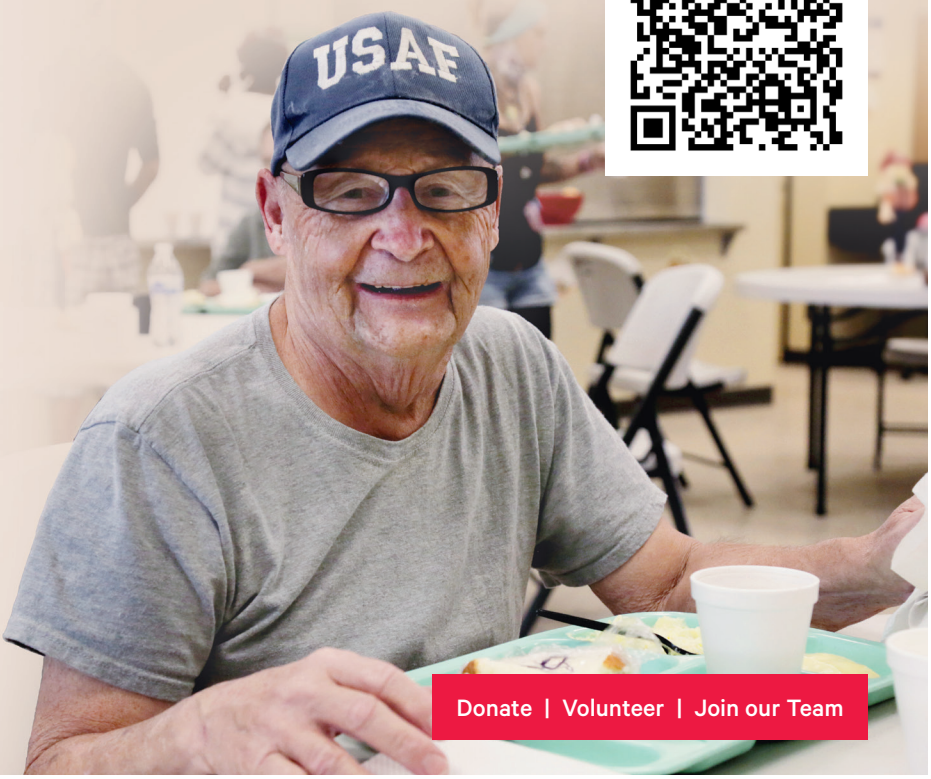

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KIRSTEN CONN
is a freelance writer
for *The Catholic Sun*.



FEATURE STORY

The joy of love:

A vision for marriage, family life and spirituality

For Jose Antonio Martinez, his first and best catechism teachers were his parents. Now married for 29 years with three children of his own, the love and accompaniment he experienced growing up now pours into his role as director of Marriage, Family Life and Spirituality for the Diocese of Phoenix. In tandem with Bishop John Dolan's vision expressed in *TILMA*, his seven-year pastoral plan on evangelization, Martinez oversees the marriage preparation process with a focus on mentorship, accompaniment and ongoing formation.

Background image: Getty Images/Christoph Wagner



Throughout the process, engaged couples take a series of steps, all with intentional formation in mind. They meet with their pastor, complete a marriage preparation inventory to get to know themselves and one another, complete a marriage life-skills course, attend a retreat, receive instruction in natural family planning (NFP) and celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation all before saying, "I do."

After their wedding day, couples are also invited to attend marriage retreats at parishes, a natural way for them to integrate into parish life, and are offered the opportunity for ongoing accompaniment from NFP instructors.

Though there are steps to the process, Martinez emphasized that marriage preparation is not about checking the boxes. "We need to listen [to these couples]," Martinez shared. "What do they need? What is their story?"

A couple's journey begins long before their engagement. Martinez said that formation "begins within the family … in the daily gestures through which love, faith and values are passed on."

This holistic approach to marriage preparation was deepened during a trip that Martinez made to Rome, where he had the joy of meeting with executives from the Dicastery (department) for the Laity, Family and Life.

"God surprised me!" Martinez said. "They shar[ed] some ideas … And they gave me the model they have [for married life] in the dicastery."

Martinez returned to the diocese with resources such as *Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life*. The resources also coincide with materials from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, such as *Called to the Joy of Love: National Pastoral Framework for Marriage and Family Life Ministry.*

Inspired by these resources, at the diocesan level there is an emphasis on accompaniment and creating a space for couples to encounter each other in the fullness of relationships and life, wounds and all. "Part of our mission is to develop resources and spaces that accompany these wounds with respect, compassion and hope," Martinez said. "No one should feel excluded from this journey."



Jose Antonio Martinez, director of Marriage, Family Life and Spirituality.

Supporting lifelong relationships

Many couples on the journey to marriage through the diocesan preparation program didn't grow up in Catholic homes. Diane Saunders, the director of the diocesan Office of Evangelization, Discipleship and Spirituality, has seen this firsthand.

"It's actually quite rare … that a couple comes in, both formed, both Catholic, as well as … catechized in the Catholic community. It presents kind of a different set of challenges."

These challenges led to questions that have shaped the marriage preparation model: How does the preparation process include the family? How does the process root couples within their faith community for ongoing support and lifelong relationships?

Saunders knows how important faith community is in marriage. She has been married 45 years and has five grown children. She shared that research points to the family as being the single most important part of transmitting the faith, another reason why her team places a renewed emphasis on accompanying couples in their faith.

Saunders shared that the marriage preparation process follows a "Trinitarian, relational, sacramental view of formation." In this approach, couples grow in intimacy with each other and with God. Additional resources in areas such as family life and spirituality, ongoing spiritual formation and grieving families are being developed to help couples grow in all areas of their relationship, both leading up to their wedding day and beyond.

This emphasis on authentic and lifelong relationship coincides with the recent consecration of the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on June 12, 2026. The image of the Sacred Heart depicts Jesus' heart as open, visible.

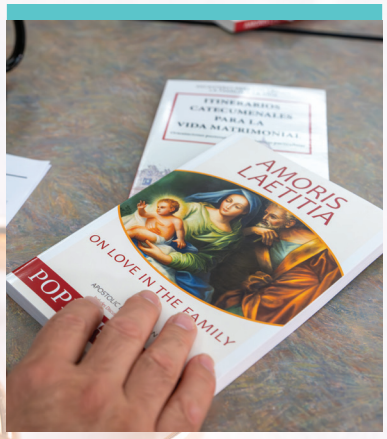
"Recognizing the importance of the open heart, the yielded heart, the receptive heart, that's so important in marriage," Saunders said.

Authentic conversations

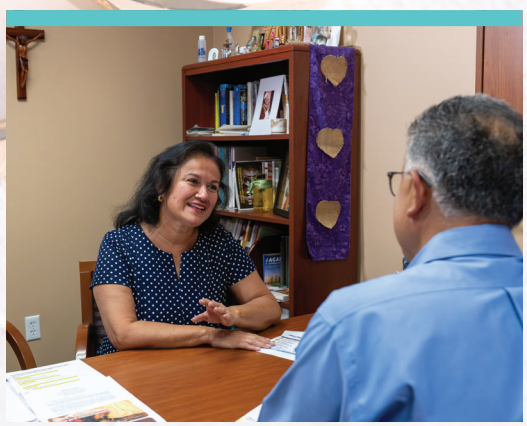
Luis Salinas is the coordinator of Marriage, Family Life and Spirituality and has been married 26 years.

Within the marriage preparation process, he works with parishes to host retreats which are led by married couples who share their testimonies. Engaged couples have shared with Salinas that personal ▶









> **“With God’s grace, it will work, with commitment and support.”**

testimonies are the best part of the retreat.

“We can have very good material … but the experience of the facilitators … that makes the change.”

Many couples come in not knowing what a healthy marriage looks like. According to Salinas, 50-percent of couples in marriage preparation come from families with parents who are divorced. Difficult topics are not shied away from, such as mental health and domestic violence. Authentic conversations and formation bring to light challenges that couples have experienced and help provide a path forward. They also serve as a reminder to couples that the Church is here for them in all the difficulties and joys of the marriage journey.

Salinas is already seeing the fruits of these retreats. At one retreat, a couple expressed their appreciation for the topics covered, especially the reality of mental health. Now, the couple volunteers with the diocesan Office of Mental Health Ministry.

Another woman participated in the diocesan marriage preparation program 20 years ago and discerned that she wasn’t ready for marriage. She just recently attended one of the marriage preparation retreats with someone else, thankful for the developing process.

“The retreat, it’s part of the discernment,” Salinas said. “If someone decides they’re not going to get married, [it] doesn’t mean that the retreat was bad. It was doing its job.”

There is also a curriculum being created for couples who are beyond child-bearing years. Salinas recently spoke with a couple in marriage preparation who are 82 and 79. There’s a place for these couples in the diocese.

Salinas shared that it’s easy for couples to get caught up in the marriage preparation process — the paperwork, the interviews — but “you’re not by yourself.”

“There’s some [marriage preparation] requirements because the Church is Mother, and mothers want to protect [their] children, so they can find a good vocation in marriage, [so they can be] happy together, grow old and after many years of marriage, they can … see that marriage is a blessing for their life and for the community.” ✝

Scan the QR code for more information about marriage and family spirituality

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.

Getty Images/hanakaz

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: 1,960 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. ✝

A LEGACY OF FAITH BEGINS WITH THE FAMILY GOD HAS GIVEN YOU

How one young Catholic family is planning for the future while living their faith today.

SEEDS OF FAITH

LEGACY GIVING

For Matthew and Yuliana, faith has always been at the heart of family life. Married for 12 years and expecting their tenth child, they have built their home around Sunday Mass, Catholic education, and a desire to pass on the gift of faith to the next generation.

Like many young couples, wills and estate planning were never topics discussed while they were growing up. But through their involvement in parish and diocesan life, they came to see planning for the future as an important act of stewardship — one that reflects their love for their family and their commitment to the faith.

"We hope to leave a legacy of generosity for our children and future grandchildren," they shared.

"We hope to inspire other young families that it's possible to leave a legacy committed to your faith."



This National Make-A-Will Month, take a simple step to care for those you love. Creating a will can help provide peace of mind for your family while prayerfully considering the values and faith you hope to pass on for generations to come.

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"It was really simple, step-by-step process to create a family trust. Having little knowledge of how to do, the tool empowered us to make a major life decision simple to understand."

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COVER STORY

LOVE *grows* HERE

MENTORING FRIENDSHIP STRENGTHENS MARRIAGES

Illustration: Getty Images/Elena Platova

JOYCE CORONEL
serves as the manager of evangelization and sacramental life and co-hosts *The Bishop's Hour* podcast and radio program on Relevant Radio 1310 AM.



"HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW THREE COUPLES WHO HAVE THE KIND OF MARRIAGE YOU WANT? THEY'RE HAPPY, THEY'RE FAITHFUL, THEY LOVE EACH OTHER, THEY HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR, THEY'RE OPEN TO LIFE?"

It's a question Deacon Mark Lishko and his wife Barb pose every time they stand before a roomful of couples who are engaged to be married. The answers are a stunner: Over 13 years of ministry with thousands of couples, fewer than 10-percent raise their hands, Deacon Mark said.

Aarthi and Jude D'Costa would be part of that tiny, blessed group.

The couple married in their native Mumbai, India, 10 years ago and have grown close to the Lishkos since then. "They were very candid about a lot of things to do with marriage and family, so we felt that we could confidently reach out to them and speak to them when issues came up," Aarthi shared.

"The first thing about them is they're very approachable," Jude added.

The D'Costas are nearly 9,000 miles away from their homeland and, between that and the 12-hour time difference, life in suburban America can feel detached from precious family ties.

That's where the Lishkos stepped in.

"The really kind and wonderful thing about them is they have included us in their family Christmases or special occasions or even Easter," Aarthi said. "They've gone out of their way to make us feel warm and welcome."

They've also been there for the tough times, like when Aarthi and Jude experienced the tragedy of miscarriage. The Lishkos themselves had suffered a miscarriage early in their marriage and spoke about it in a presentation to couples at St. Andrew, the Chandler, Ariz., parish the D'Costas belong to and the community the Lishkos served for several years.

"We knew the first person we wanted to reach out to was them. They were so understanding," Aarthi said. "They didn't make our situation seem smaller, trivialize it or make it seem like it was commonplace.

"They were very sympathetic and empathetic."

Barb still sheds tears about the child she and Deacon Mark lost decades ago. Today, the couple has five adult children, plus a bumper crop of 20 grandchildren. And because the two families have enjoyed holidays and special occasions together, Aarthi and Jude have become friends with the entire Lishko clan.

"It's one thing when your parents are bringing in their friends and guests," Aarthi said. "It's a whole different thing when even the children are happily welcoming them. We have felt so loved."

Growing together

As part of their marriage ministry at St. Andrew, the Lishkos came up with clever ways to meet the needs of young married couples. From a series called "Love and Respect" to "Agape Nights," these unique approaches with an eye toward bolstering Catholic spirituality kept couples growing in love and faith.

"Love and Respect" is a 10-week series that includes dinner and child care. "Agape Nights" feature 30 minutes of Eucharistic adoration followed by confession, a short talk by a priest and dessert with fellowship.

A frequent topic of discussion was the critical area of communication. The D'Costas said they learned plenty from the sessions, including that much of the way they communicated with each other had to do with how they had been brought up, and that men and women communicate differently.

"There are times when you have to break the deadlock," Jude said. "When both of us are angry with each other, then (we need to be) a little humble and (try) to break that deadlock first."

When it comes to tough conversations, Barb has not demurred.

"She's not just listening to me; she's also calling me out when I'm wrong," Aarthi said.

The Lishkos, for their part, have great affection for the younger couple they've mentored. They laud the couple's commitment to straightforward, honest communication, even when it's tough.

"I think they're both beautiful souls," Barb said. "I love their faith and their openness to life." The D'Costas have four children under the age of 9.

"It's quite one after the other, basically," Jude said, "but it's been a blessing." And unusual in their homeland of India. Most Indian families have just one or two children due to social conditioning and an unofficial state policy that discourages larger families, the D'Costas explained.

"There was a lot of joy and acceptance within our immediate family — there was never any sort of discussion on that side," Jude said. "But once you get out of that, you know, it's like, hmm, eyebrows raised and all that." The Lishkos were very supportive of the D'Costas' zest for welcoming babies.





"GOD'S MASTERFUL PURPOSE IN PUTTING THE FOUR OF US TOGETHER IS A BEAUTIFUL THING."

A scant 1.5-percent of the population of India is Catholic, so living the faith deeply develops fortitude. Deacon Mark said he and Barb were struck by the sheer strength of the D'Costas' faith.

"Every Sunday, they'd be at Mass. Every holiday, or holy day of obligation. You would see them in the confessional line, and they would do everything as a family," Deacon Mark said.

The D'Costas brought some of the ministries they had been involved with in India — particularly healing — to St. Andrew. They've also shared their culture in the parish's annual multicultural festival.

"They have just enriched us all on so many levels," Barb said.

So what's the best advice the Lishkos have for any couple?

"You got to pray together because with God, all things are possible," Deacon Mark said. "If you are anchored in the Rock, you might get beat up, but you'll never be lost at sea."

The Lishkos said the D'Costas are living witnesses of faith in action and holy matrimony. And while the Lishkos have more years of marriage experience, they don't necessarily know more, they said. They believe that in His providence, God brought the two families together. ✝



Growing Diocese of Phoenix welcomes four new priests

Father Nathan Blanchard, Father Paul Graupmann, FHS, Father Simon Ortiz and Father Jeff Pooley were formally added to the fraternity of clergy during a Mass of Ordination celebrated by Bishop John Dolan at St. Thomas Aquinas parish in Avondale, Ariz., on June 6.

Family and friends of the new priests made up the congregation of more than 1,800 worshippers, which also included priests, women religious, deacons, laity and seminarians who are part of the largest formation wave in diocesan history.

"The Holy Spirit is moving," Bishop Dolan told the faithful. "The Lord is still breathing life into His Church. You four men are signs of that breath moving you and the Church here in Phoenix."

After Office of Vocations Director Father Will Schmid presented the four as "worthy," Bishop Dolan spoke briefly about each one.

"Brothers, your stories are beautifully different, but together they proclaim one truth: God acts first," he said.

Recalling the day's first reading, the bishop reminded the four that while they answered God's call, it was He who chose them first.

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you," states the book of the prophet Jeremiah.

Bishop Dolan told the ordinands, "Before you ever searched for God, He searched for you. Before you ever loved Him, He loved you. And before you ever chose Him, He chose you."

"Brothers," he continued, "there will be days in priesthood when you will feel tired, days when ministry feels heavy, days when the wounds of the world and even the wounds of the Church weigh upon you. And on those days, do not begin with yourself, begin with Him. Because priesthood is not sustained by your personality or your efficiency or your success. It is sustained by abiding in the love of Christ who forms you, and knows you, and dedicates you and appoints you."

The four men then promised under the Holy Spirit's guidance to faithfully serve their flocks and the Church, and to be united more closely to Christ each day. They also professed obedience to the bishop and his successors.

Each man then prostrated himself before the altar as the congregation sang in supplication to the saints of the Church.

"It's a profound moment for the body of Christ to watch, be there with them and pray for them," said St. Thomas Aquinas parishioner Matthew Scheller, who is scheduled this November to be ordained as a permanent deacon.

"For them, it's an emptying; they're giving everything; their lives. When they stand up, they are then representing Christ as servant. They're changed," he said.

On education, mental health and human dignity in the digital age

Bishop John Dolan reflects on his visit to Vatican City and his meeting with Pope Leo XIV.



On May 29, I had the privilege of participating in a gathering that took place in Vatican City where ministers of education, representatives from nations across South America and leaders from the Holy See came together to address one of the most pressing challenges facing our world today: the intersection of education, mental health and rapidly advancing digital technologies, including artificial intelligence.

The meeting was entitled "Maps of Hope for a Regional Educational Agenda: Mental Health, Digital Technologies and Education," and it was held at Villa Pia, the home of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Together, we listened to the experiences, challenges and successes of the various nations that were represented. Throughout the day, one message seemed to continuously emerge: mental health is no longer simply a clinical concern. It finds overlap in the educational, social and cultural challenges that impact children, young people, families and communities throughout the world.

I heard many countries report rising levels of anxiety, physiological distress, suicide attempts and other mental health concerns among youth. I also found great hope and encouragement in the innovative ideas and programs that were described to bring together schools, families, health care systems, community organizations and governments. A common theme among participants was an emphasis on prevention, early intervention, teacher formation, family engagement and creating educational environments that promote not only academic achievement but also integrated human well-being.

It made me deeply grateful and proud of the programs we have here in the Diocese of Phoenix, including our Office of Mental Health Ministry and the Office of Human Dignity. Both hold a commitment to serving the human person and promoting the common good — and both ministries helped make my participation in this important international dialogue possible.

Ultimately, our local work and the mission of the universal Church remind us that social ministry is not merely about responding to immediate needs; it's about building relationships, fostering human dignity and helping create communities where every human person can flourish.

Read the full stories on *The Catholic Sun* website.

Beloved Sister Lynn Winsor retires after 52 years at Xavier



The Xavier College Preparatory community gathered at the end of the school year to celebrate the career of Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM, the vice principal of athletics and activities and former longtime golf coach. She is retiring after 52 years with the all-girls Catholic school, where she helped build a premier athletics program.

"You're an amazing human being," Bishop John Dolan said at the retirement celebration on the central Phoenix campus. "You're absolutely loved by the people of God here, and I love you, too."

A graduate of nearby St. Francis Xavier Elementary School, Wisconsin native Sister Lynn went on to Xavier, graduating in 1961. She earned her bachelor's degree at Arizona State University before joining the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, then earning her master's degree from the University of Iowa. She coached and taught at a high school in St. Louis. But two years later, in 1974, the school closed. After a call from fellow Sister of Charity, Sister Joan Fitzgerald, BVM, the new Xavier principal at the time, Sister Lynn headed west to work with her colleague.

"When I look back on my 52 years, I thank God for all of you," Sister Lynn said, "... alumnae, parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, associates, vendors, even people who coached against me; athletic directors, the AIA and the AIAA [athletics associations]. I have made wonderful friends. It has been really great."

Hired as a physical education teacher, Sister Lynn also coached basketball, softball and golf before becoming vice principal of athletics and activities in 1976.

"[Sister Joan] was getting Xavier's money's worth," Sister Lynn quipped.

It was in golf and the expansion of girls sports at Xavier and throughout Arizona where Sister Lynn's greatest impact was felt, along with her devotion to developing young women of Catholic character.

During her career, the Xavier Gators won a record 40 Arizona scholastic championships, producing numerous individual title winners. From 1980 through 1995, the school won 16 consecutive titles. Over one 27-year period, Xavier did not lose a single regular season match.

Overall, Xavier athletic teams won 163 state championships and 73 runners-up honors while Sister Lynn was there.

Named to the Arizona High School Athletic Coaches Hall of Fame in 1997, she became the National High School Athletic Coaches Association Coach of the Year in 1998.

Her other recognitions include inductions into the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), National High School Hall of Fame (2023) and the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) Hall of Fame (2021). She was also honored with the *USA TODAY* Studio IX Trailblazer Award (2025), as the *Arizona Republic*'s Most Influential Woman in Arizona Sports (2022) and as the NFHS Title IX Woman Trailblazer of the Year (2021).

She was the first religious sister in history to receive these awards. ✝



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Igniting Hearts (Theology of the Body Immersion Course)

Join Michael and Rachel Villanueva on a 10-session journey through Pope St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body. Sessions include instruction, time for guided prayer, reflection and discussions. ***Beginning Aug. 20 at 6:30 p.m. at St. Bernadette Catholic Church, Scottsdale***

Catholic Night with the D-backs

Join the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Diocese of Phoenix 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 co-branded D-Backs and Diocese of Phoenix cap. There will be fireworks following the game. ***Sept. 11 at 6:40 p.m. at Chase Field, Phoenix***

5th Annual Mass of Remembrance

Join Bishop John Dolan to honor those who have died by suicide and their families at the 5th annual Mass of Remembrance. ***Sept. 13 at 9 a.m. at Ss. Simon and Jude Cathedral, Phoenix***

Christ in Our Neighborhood Annual Morning of Reflection

This bilingual event features a continental breakfast, speakers, small group discussion, a special musical guest and a presentation by Bishop John Dolan. Anyone who has participated in Christ in Our Neighborhood (CION) faith-sharing groups, or who would like to join a CION group, is welcome to attend. ***Sept. 19 at 8 a.m. at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, downtown Phoenix***

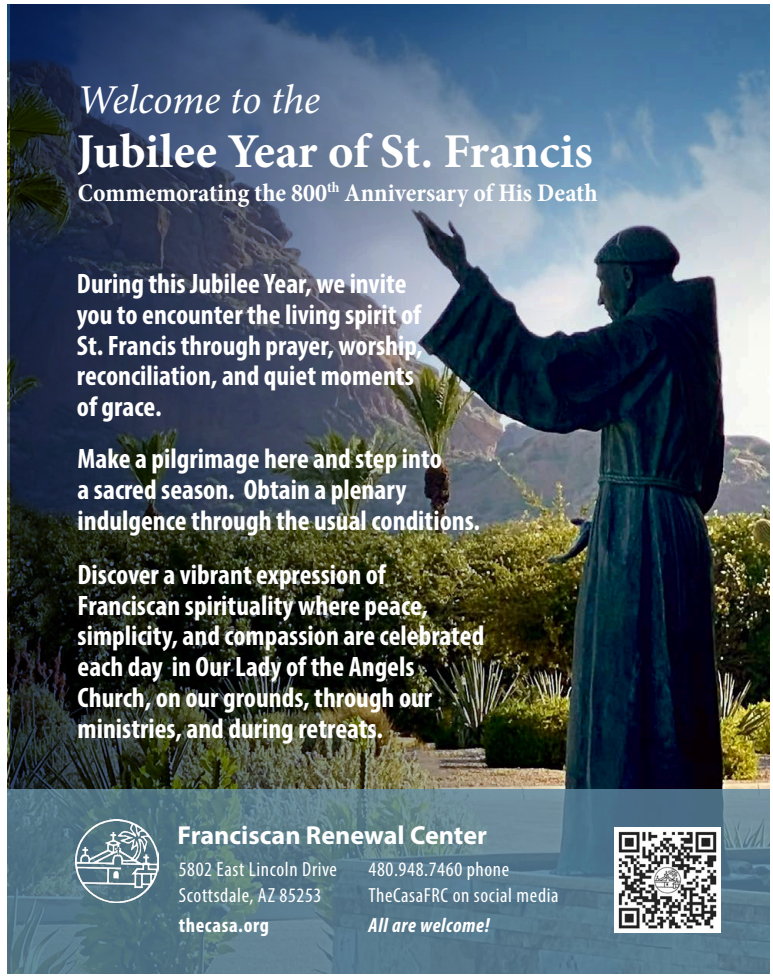
Respect Life Mass

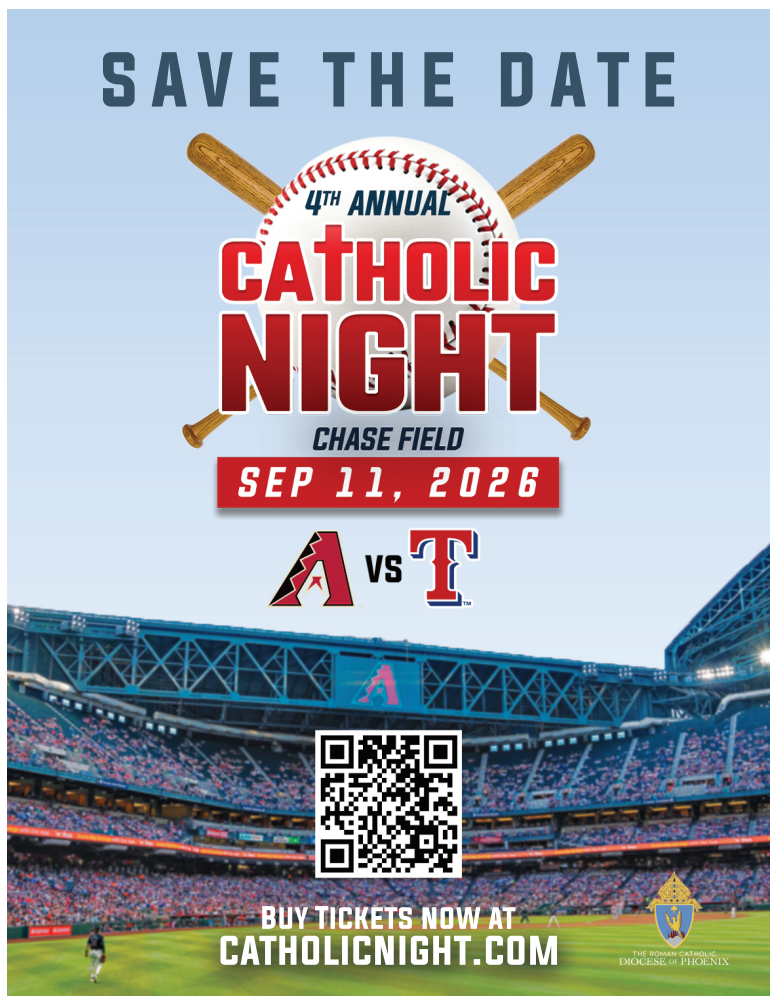
The Catholic Church in the United States celebrates Respect Life Month, and the first Sunday of October is designated as Respect Life Sunday. ***Oct. 4 at 9 a.m. at Ss. Simon and Jude Cathedral, Phoenix***

Arizona Rosary Celebration

Join thousands of Catholics at the 51st annual Arizona Rosary Celebration. This year, Mary will be honored under her title Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The day includes speakers, adoration and praying the rosary together. Let's pray the rosary, Arizona! ***Oct. 18 at 2 p.m. at the Phoenix Convention Center, South Building*** ✝

Scan the QR code to see all eventscatholicsun.org/events





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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.

Now you Know

Now You Know: A weekly series where Diocese of Phoenix priests answer common Catholic questions, like why we strike our chest during Mass or pray to Mary. Each short episode explores Church history with engaging insights, offering "ah-ha" moments and deepening your faith.

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.

PREP RALLY
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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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