



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

Mental Health
MINISTRY

Education, Accompaniment, Advocacy

AZSPC Hope Conference

October 27, 2025

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Director of Mental Health Ministry for the Diocese of Phoenix

Deacon Jason Kelly,
St. Francis Xavier Parish and AZSPC founder and board member

The Truth About Christian Theology and Suicide

Early historical perspective

Changing Thoughts

Relevant Biblical References

Church Teachings

Pastoral Care

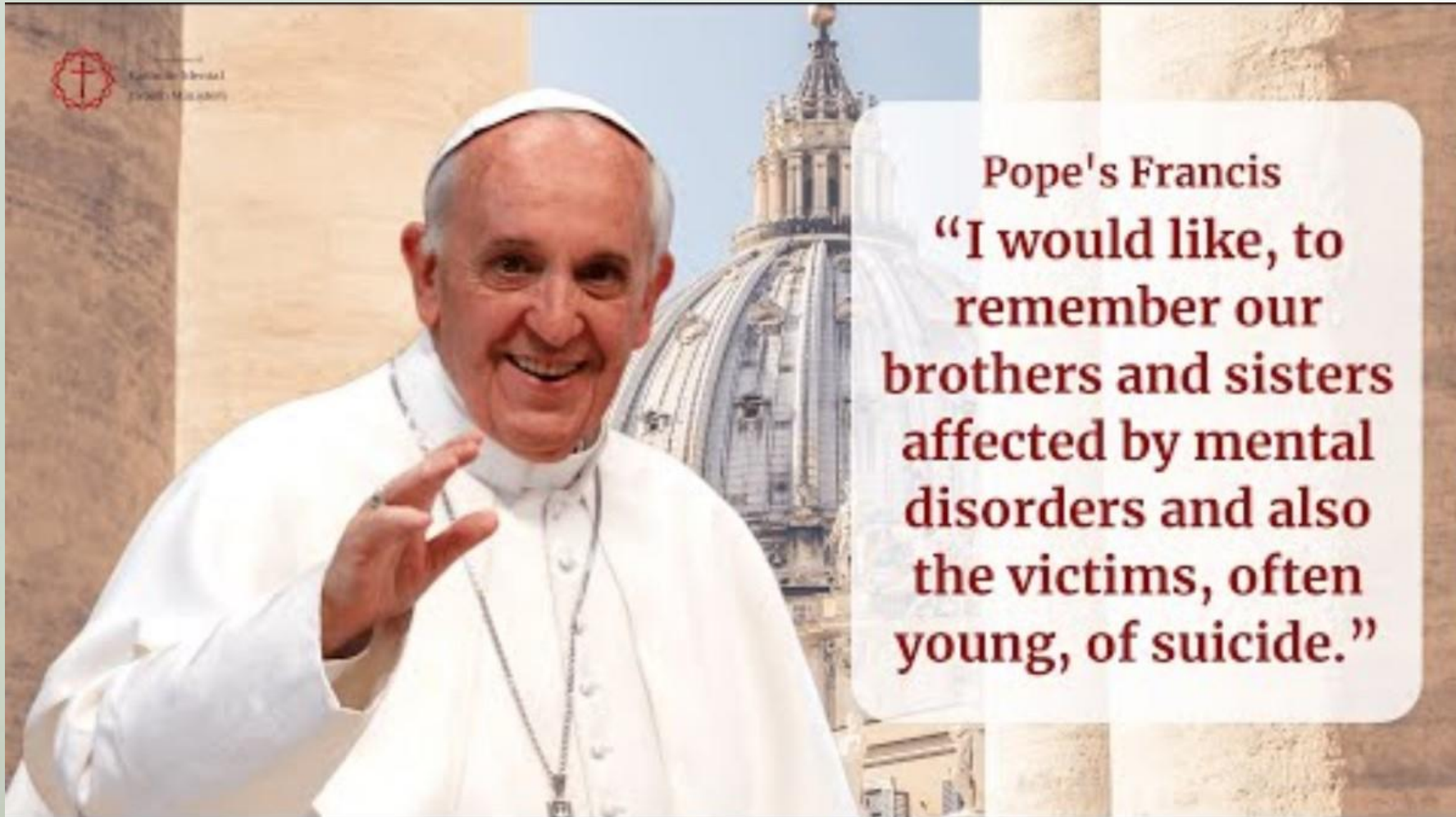
Parish MHM

Diocesan MHM



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The Truth About Christian Theology and Suicide



Pope's Francis
“I would like, to
remember our
brothers and sisters
affected by mental
disorders and also
the victims, often
young, of suicide.”



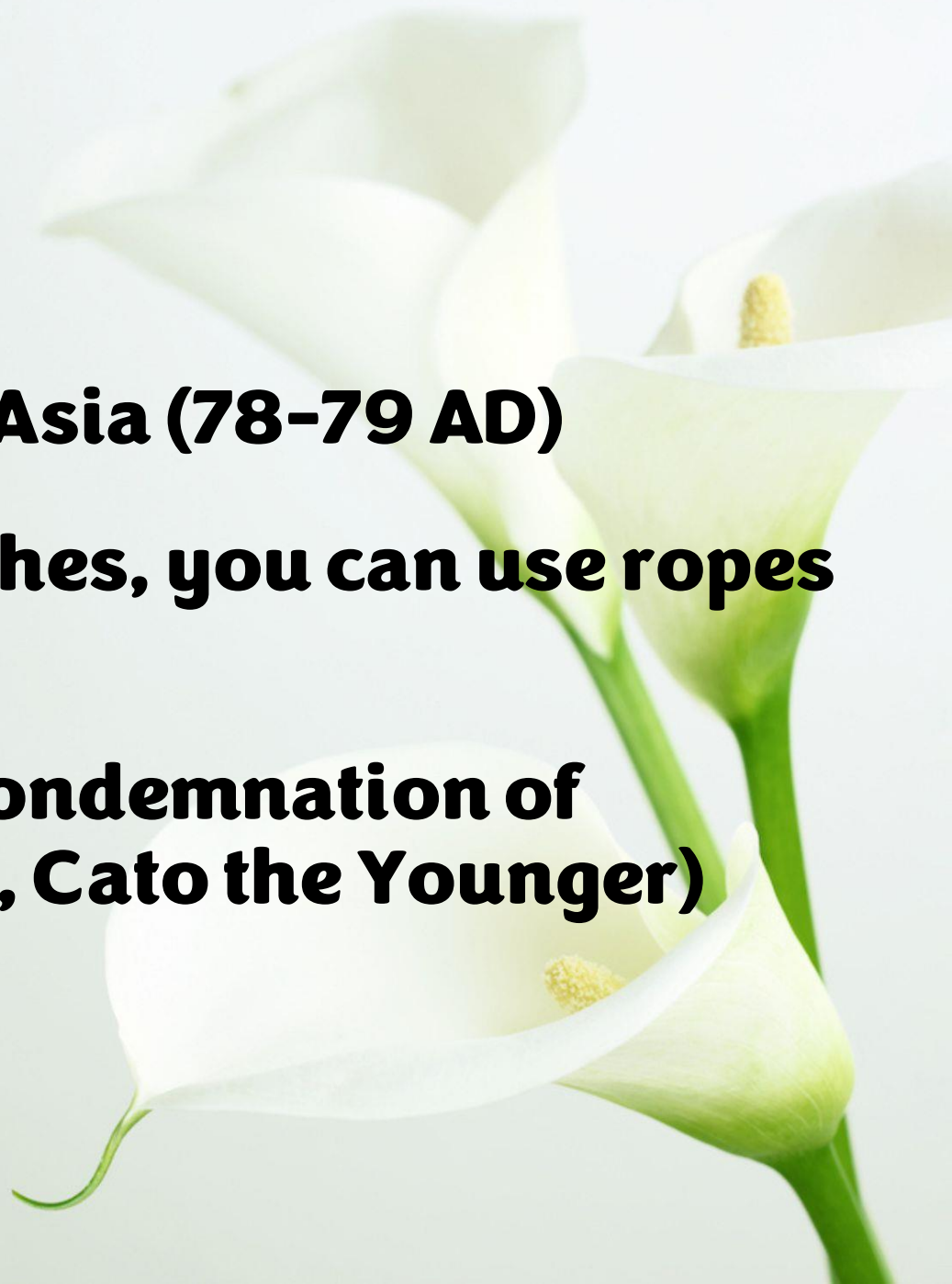
Early History

Martyrdom

Arrius Antoninus, proconsul of Asia (78-79 AD)

“If you want to die, you wretches, you can use ropes or precipices.”

**Augustine of Hippo and condemnation of
“heroic” suicide (see, e.g., Cato the Younger)**



Relevant Biblical References

First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

1 Tim 2:1-4

Faith, hope, and love.

1 Cor 13:13

hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts

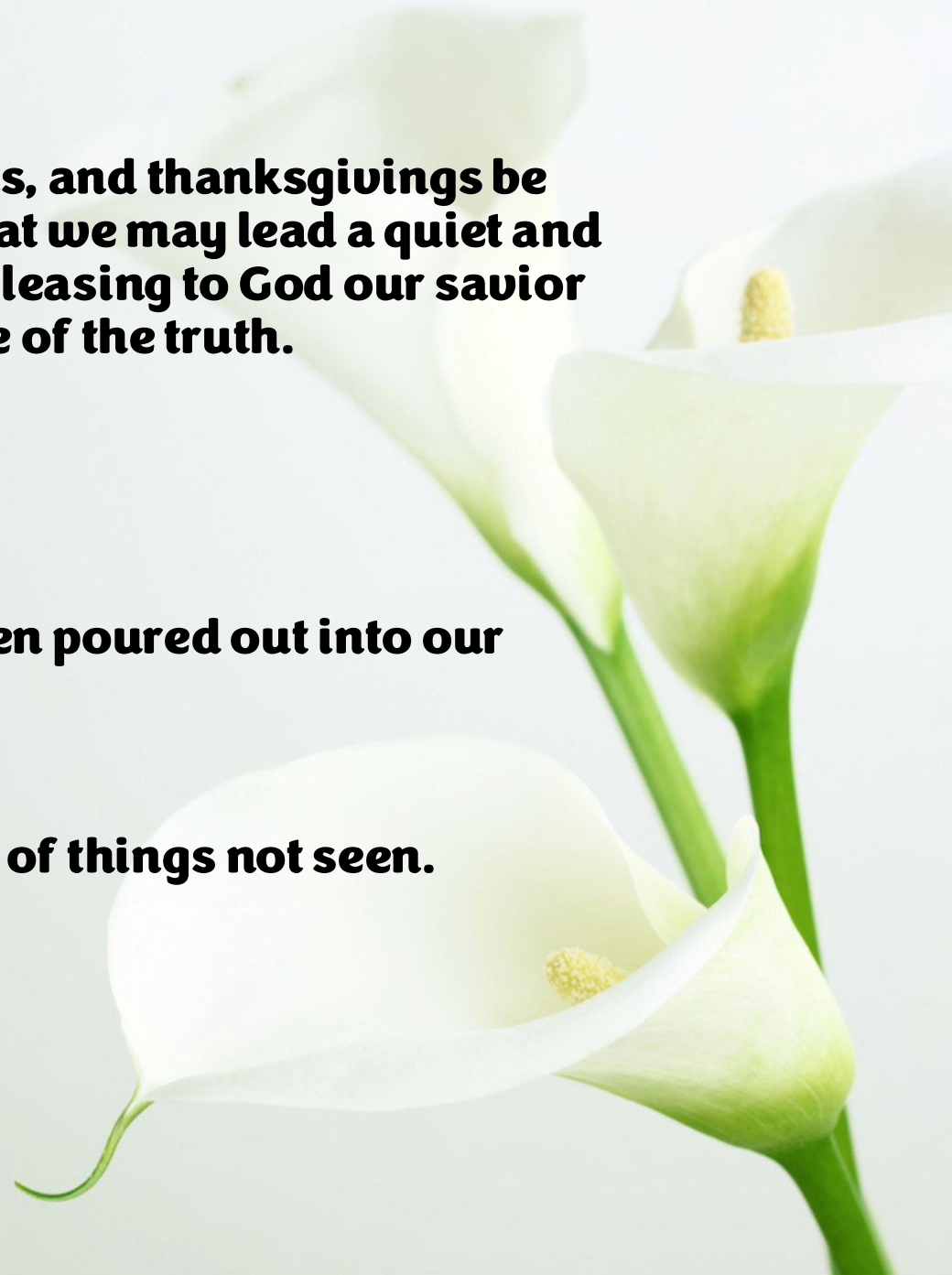
Rom 5:5

Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence* of things not seen.

Heb 11:1

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.

Rom 12:12



Changing Thoughts

St. John Vianney, the *Curé d'Ars*

Augustine left room for emotional and psychological turmoil begin mitigating factors

Psychology meets spirituality



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Church Teachings

For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met:

Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.

(CCC 1857)

1. Grave (serious)

2. Full knowledge

3. Deliberate consent



Church Teachings

**It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice.
(CCC 1859)**

**The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders.
(CCC 1860)**



Church Teachings

Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. (CCC 2280)

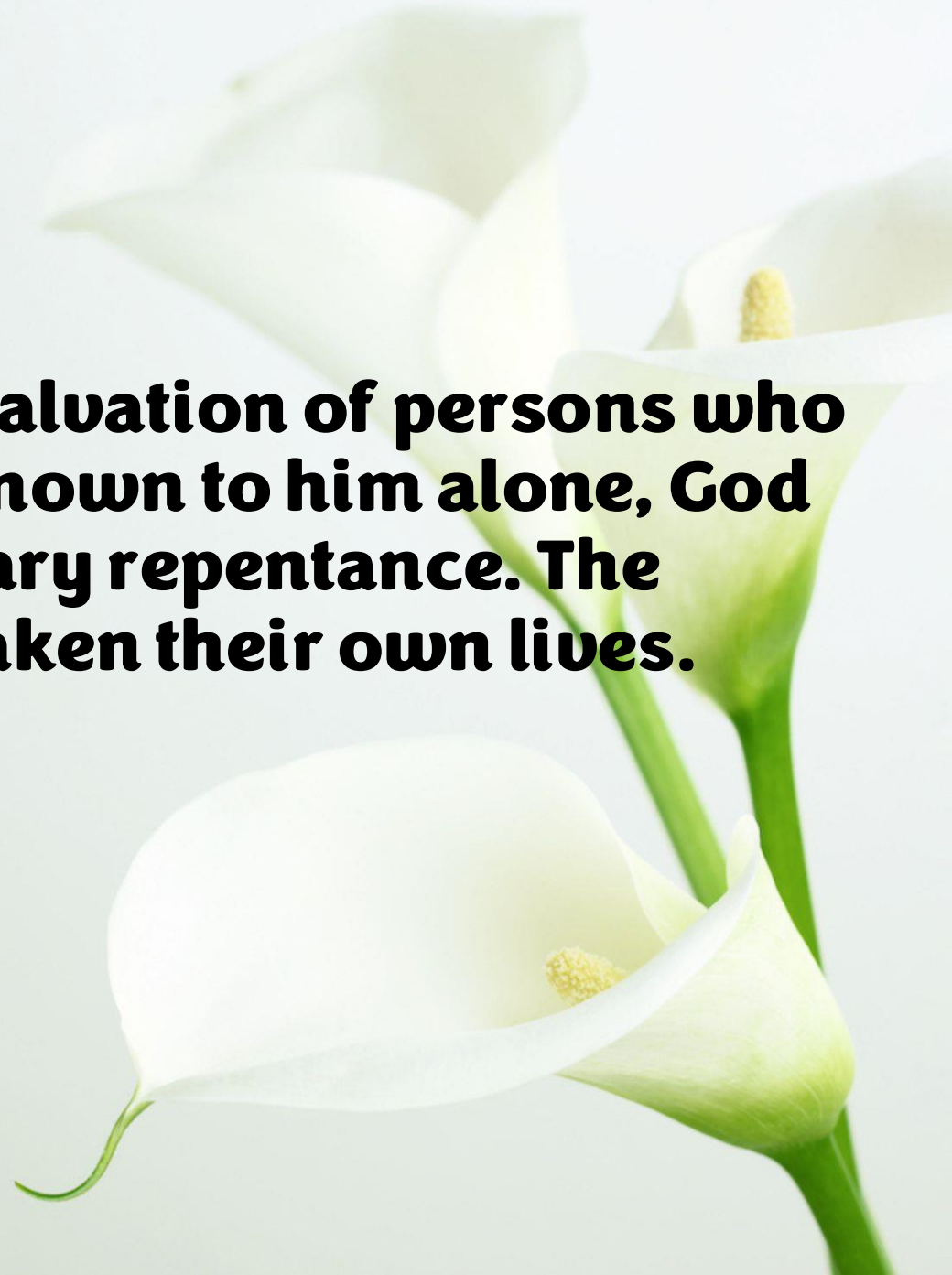
Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God. (CCC 2281)

If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law. Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide. (CCC 2282)



Church Teachings

We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives. (CCC 2283)



Hope in God's Mercy

**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.
John 3:17**



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Pastoral Care

**Suicide Begins Long Before The Act
Suicide Is Everyone's Business**

Prevention:

Education i.e. Mental Health First Aid

Seen, Heard and Valued

Connect and Contribute - Faith Communities

No Judgement, Blame, Shame - Reduce Stigma



Pastoral Care

**Begins Long Before The Act
Suicide Is Everyone's Business**

Intervention:

Observe and connect to resources

Protective factors:

coping skills, purpose, cultural identity

Need to know they belong

Call 988 24/7 Help



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Pastoral Care

**Begins Long Before The Act
Suicide Is Everyone's Business**

Postvention: Critical

Postvention is prevention

For every suicide, 135 people are impacted

Risk for suicide

Comfort (ease feelings) vs support (to bear or hold up)

Faith communities are the perfect place

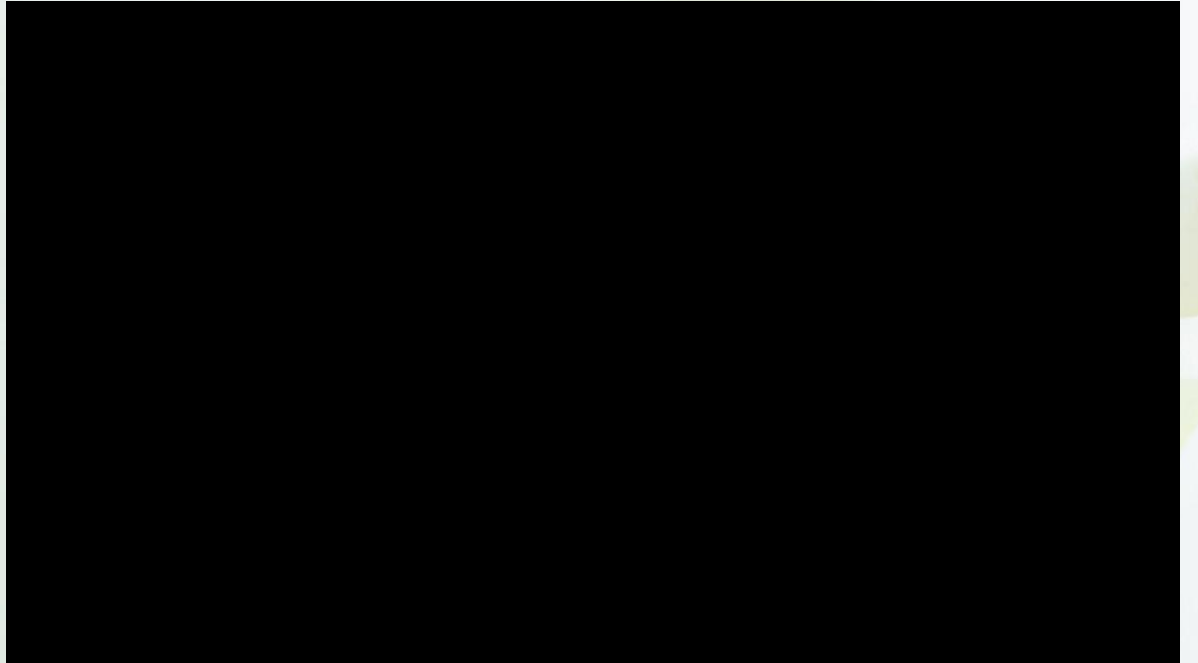
More messaging from pastor/support groups/changing norms



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Diocesan MHM

Bishop John Dolan



www.catholicmhm.org



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Diocesan MHM

Mission

Mental Health Ministry is being established to accompany those with mental health needs in our parish and school communities in a Catholic, sustainable, ethical, and meaningful way.

The focus of this ministry is education, accompaniment, and advocacy.



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Parish MHM

Education

Mental Health Literacy

- **Offering educational opportunities around differing mental health needs**

Pastoral Response to Suicide

- **Prevention**
- **Intervention**
- **Postvention**
- **Trauma informed parishes**
- **Culturally sensitive**
- **Culturally aware**
- **Elevate compassion**



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Accompaniment

- **Mass of Remembrance for Lives Lost by Suicide in September**
- **Mental Health Awareness Mass in May**
- **Support Groups, Grief, NAMI**
- **Spiritual Direction**
- **Small Group Gatherings**
- **Monthly Mental Health Mass at DPC Chapel Second Monday**
 - **Making the connection between the Pope's monthly prayer intention and mental health.**

The Well



A place of encounter



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Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network
UNITED STATES | CANADA
APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

Advocacy



A voice for the voiceless

- **Partnering with coalitions and local leaders in Arizona**
- **Give voice for those experiencing mental health illness**
- **Effect policy change**
- **Assure that mental health is at the forefront of discussions**



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Mental Health Ministry Pilot Program for Catholic Schools

- **Serve eight Catholic schools**

- **Elementary**

- St. Catherine
- St. Agnes
- St. Jerome
- Most Holy Trinity
- OLPH Glendale
- St. Louis the King
- St. John Vianney

- **High School**

- Bourgade High School

- **Collaboration**

- Catholic Charities
- Office of Mental Health Ministry
- Office of Catholic Schools



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Maintaining Mental Wellness

- **Community**
 - Prayer and fellowship
 - Having a good/healthy support system
 - A sense of belonging
- **Accompaniment**
 - Close relationships
 - Economic Stability
 - Support groups
- **Stable and safe home environment**
 - Consistent housing and routines
- **Having and using healthy coping strategies**
 - Ability to manage and regulate emotions
- **Medical and Mental Health Care**
 - Good nutrition
 - Physical Movement



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St. Dymphna

Patron Saint of Mental Illness

Lord, God, You chose St. Dymphna as patroness of those suffering with mental illness. Through her intercession, we pray for those afflicted and struggling and for all those who minister to them.

Grant, we pray, strength and clarity to mental health professionals; inspiration to those researching treatments; compassion and charity to family, friends and colleagues of those struggling; forgiveness to those who have been hurt by mental illness; and peace and health to all.

St. Dymphna, pray for us.