



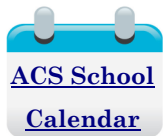
Annunciation Press

Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2026
Volume XVII
Issue 4

WHAT'S INSIDE

<i>New Science Club</i>	2
<i>Summer Camps</i>	2
<i>Farewell to Maria Garcia</i>	3
<i>High School Acceptance 2026</i>	3
<i>Fruit of the Spirit Awards</i>	4
<i>8th Grade Ambassadors</i>	4
<i>4th Grader Wins Music Award</i>	5
<i>Kiwanis Grant</i>	5
<i>2026 Graduates</i>	6-7
<i>Spring Athletics</i>	8
<i>Catholic Sun Angelus Garden Article</i>	9
<i>Alumni News</i>	10
<i>New NJHS Officers</i>	11
<i>Student Volunteer</i>	11
<i>New Student Council</i>	12



IMPORTANT DATES

July

29 1st Day for Teachers

August

- 3 Open House 1:00-4:00
- 3 New Family Dinner & Orientation 4:30
- 5 1st Day for Students
Noon Dismissal
- 12 K-5 Curriculum Night
- 13 6-8 Curriculum Night
- 15 ACS Family Mass 4:30
- 15 Back to School BBQ 5:30

ACS Students Enter the Catholic Church at Easter Vigil



Credit to Allison Daley Photography

We are so happy to share that 23 Annunciation students and siblings were baptized into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil on the evening of Saturday, April 4. Special thanks to our Pastor, Fr. Chad King, ACS religion teacher Mrs. Jennie Cullen, Child Faith Director Mrs. Kira Mello, Youth Minister Mr. Steven Piorkowsk and Deacon Matt Irish from parish office of Discipleship, and all the sponsors for their help in bringing these students and their families into intimacy with Christ!

Top Row: Priskilla D., Delaney F., Courtney D., Aven F., Ella C., Sydney C., Bria B., Taryn C., Savannah D. **Middle Row:** Junior D., Trever C., Iezekiel B., Ashton C., Lacy G., Lexi G., Trinity B. **Bottom Row:** Talia C., Troy C., Jackson D., Jimmy G.

Not pictured: Jemma F.

The Mission of Annunciation Catholic School

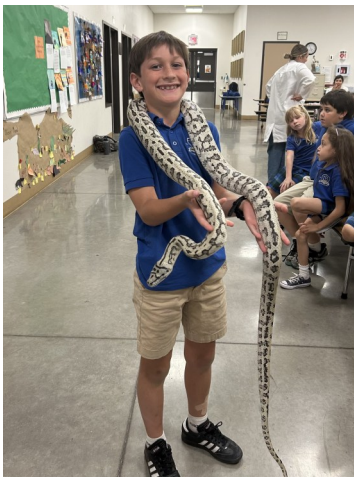
Within our strong Catholic community, we develop children to their fullest God-given potential - spiritually, intellectually, morally, socially, and physically.

After School Science Club is Crazy Cool!

In January, Annunciation added another great after school club to our lineup of after school opportunities.

Crazy Cool Science is a hands-on, mind-blowing after-school enrichment program hosted by **Arizona Instruction** for elementary students (typically Kindergarten through 5th grade). The program focuses on the scientific method, encouraging kids to conduct experiments, solve problems, and occasionally "blow stuff up" in a safe and engaging environment.

In March, Our Crazy Cool Science Club students had an AMAZING time at the Radical Reptile Show! They loved getting up close, learning all about these fascinating creatures, and even facing a few fears along the way. Hands-on learning at its best. So many smiles, so much excitement, and memories we won't forget!



2026 Summer Programs at ACS

June 1 - 5: [Camp Turn Up! Theater Camp](#). Session 1, 9am-3pm. Students in rising grades K-8.

June 8 - 12: [Sticky Fingers Cooking Camp](#) from 9am-12pm. \$275 per student.

June 15 - 19: Play-Well TEKnologies Camps for ages 5-11. Each Class is \$140 per student

Class 1: 9-11:30am. \$140 per student- [Register for Jurassic Engineering](#)

Class 2: 1-3:30pm- [Register for Sports Lab Engineering](#)

June 22 - 26: Camp Invention from 9am-3pm. Kids in rising grades K-6, \$285 per child. Leaders in Training for students in rising grades 7-9. \$185 [Register now!](#)

June 29 - July 3: [Camp Turn Up! Theater Camp](#). Session 2, 9am-3pm. Students in rising grades K-8.

July 13 - 17: Our Lady of Joy Parish Vacation Bible School. [Register now!](#)

July 20 - 24: [Summer Art Angels Camp](#), 9-3pm \$275 per student or \$70 per day. Snacks and materials included but you must pack a lunch.



Visit <https://acsphx.org/summer-camps-and-programs/> for more info

Mrs. Garcia Retires from Annunciation

On a bittersweet note, our wonderful office manager, Mrs. Maria Garcia, is retiring from Annunciation and moving to Kansas to be closer to her grandchildren. Maria is the mom of six and grandmother of 3 (soon to be 4)! Her 3 youngest children, Qiliana, Zariah, and Lucia are all ACS alumni.

Maria started at Annunciation as a mom volunteer. In 2010 she chaired our first book fair and continued running it for five years. In 2012 she founded our American Heritage Girls troop, and served as Troop Leader for 9 years.




In 2016, Mrs. Garcia officially joined our staff as the extended care supervisor, and in 2018 she moved into the front office as an assistant to Mrs. Schwartz. As the school grew, so did Mrs. Garcia's responsibilities, including overseeing the front desk, attendance, admissions, yearbook, lunch program, the school musical, and much more.

Mrs. Garcia's devout Catholic faith and hard work have played a large role in the success and character of our school, and we are grateful for her 16 years of dedicated service. We will miss her immensely!

God bless you, Mrs. Garcia!



ACS 2026 High School Acceptance Results

Catholic High School	Applied	Accepted	Honors
 BROPHY <i>A Catholic, Jesuit School for Young Men</i>	8	8	2 with Highest Honors 1 with Distinction
 NOTRE DAME Preparatory High School	26	26	5
 <i>women of faith pursuing excellence</i> Xavier College Preparatory Roman Catholic High School	4	4	

Fruit of the Spirit for May: Generosity



In May we celebrated the gift of Generosity. Each month students are chosen by a homeroom or specials

Kindergarten: Olivia

1st Grade: Jemma

2nd grade: Conor

3rd grade: Julian

4th grade: Esme

5th grade: Anthony

6th grade: Tia

7th grade: Connor

Music K-2: Ava

Music 3-8: Case

Art: Alessandra (K)

Spanish: Joanna (1st)

Tia (6th)

Introducing Our 8th Grade Ambassadors for 2026-2027



From left to right:

Giada M, Isabella S.,
Hadley H., Charlie S.,
Olivia M., Josie J.,
Kaitlyn G., Jayden Z.,
Griffin S., Zac C. and
Connor C.

Congratulations to our 8th Grade Student Ambassadors for the 2026-2027 school year! Each of these students went through an application and interview process and were selected for their demonstrated love and respect for their faith, family, and school community.

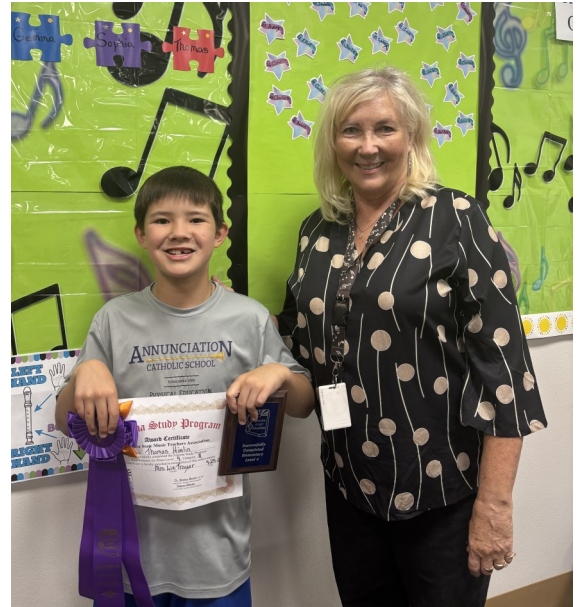
Our ACS ambassadors represent our student body by assisting at open houses, campus tours, greeting and ushering at school Masses, and serving at events like the annual fundraising gala, school concerts, and our 8th grade graduation. Special thanks to Mrs. Christy Brown, ACS Development/Marketing Coordinator, and the ACS Ambassador program leader. We appreciate her wonderful work with these fine students. We wish them a fun 8th grade year ahead!

ACS Fourth Grader Achieves Highest Honors in Music Program

Tommy Himlin, 4th grade, received highest honors from the Arizona Study Program in April. The Arizona Study Program is a 12-year graded course of piano study, developed by the Music Teachers National Association (1958), which Mrs. Trayer (ACS Music teacher) has been a member of for over 20 years. This program provides students in grades 1-12 the opportunity to develop Musical Performance (memorization of 4 pieces in their original form), Theory (test of music terms, symbols and composition) and Technique (fluency in scales, key signatures and chord structure).

Each year, at the end of April, an adjudication process takes place on college campuses where the students perform for a college professor. When level 12 is completed, there are scholarships available, as well as ribbons, trophies, and certificates of completion, for every level completed.

There are four ratings that a student can receive - Participant, Good, Excellent, and Superior. Tommy Himlin received Superior with Honors (all 4 pieces memorized perfectly with high scores in both theory and technique.) This is a very big challenge, and it is met with commitment and lots of practice, skill, and talent. Tommy now moves from the elementary level to the advanced level in his studies. Tommy also plays the pipe organ and violin. Congratulations Tommy!



Thank You Carefree Kiwanis for New Student Chromebooks

The Kiwanis Club of Carefree has been very generous to Annunciation Catholic School for the past 9 years, with grants totaling over \$180,000 to support technology, special needs, and athletics.



Our second and third grade classes will receive new Chromebooks in August funded by a recent Kiwanis grant of \$21,000. Due to the Kiwanis Club's generosity, Annunciation is able to update our student Chromebooks and teacher laptops every three years.



**Make an Impact in Your Community ...
Shop at the Kiwanis Marketplace Thrift Store!**

Please support Kiwanis of Carefree by donating to, and shopping at their thrift store, the Kiwanis Marketplace. It is located in Cave Creek across from Dairy Queen. The Kiwanis Marketplace is also in need of volunteers. It's a great place for our middle school students to provide service hours to our community.

Learn more about Kiwanis at <https://kiwaniscarefree.org/>.

Annunciation Class of 2026

We are proud to present the eleventh graduating class of Annunciation Catholic School. Like the ten classes before them, all students who applied to Catholic high schools were accepted, many with honors, scholarships and other distinction. We look forward to seeing where these amazing students go in the next four years and beyond. We hope to see their faces around campus in the future.

Congratulations, Class of 2026!

* Accepted with Honors

** Accepted with Highest Honors - Brophy designation

† Recipient of the Catholic Community Foundation Christian Service Award scholarship



Teagan Anderson *†
Notre Dame Prep.



NaTalia Aronson
Notre Dame Prep.



Ariyan Baasten
Brophy College



Mason Baasten**
Brophy College Prep.



Chase Bainum
Notre Dame Prep.



Sebastian Bax
Brophy College Prep.



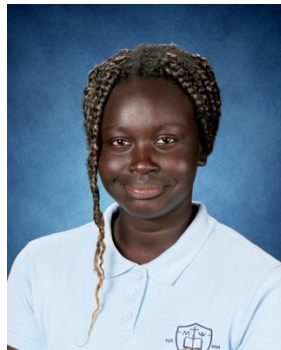
Victor Boggiano**
Brophy College Prep.



Grant Collins
Notre Dame Prep.



Courtney Dean
Notre Dame Prep.



Priskilla Demalek
Notre Dame Prep.



Maxwell DiPasquale
Brophy College Prep.



Elliot Dyer
Notre Dame Prep.



Delaney Flowers✝
Notre Dame Prep.



Daniel Girdish
Brophy College Prep.



Alexa Gonzalez
Notre Dame Prep.



Kellan Henry
Notre Dame Prep.



Elise Hitchler
Notre Dame Prep.



Allison Kavanaugh
Notre Dame Prep.



Gabriella Muth
Notre Dame Prep.



Olivia Piraneo
Notre Dame Prep.



Wilson Pollack
Notre Dame Prep.



Sedona Ray
Arizona Agribusiness &
Equine Center



Sofia Ribadeneira
Notre Dame Prep.



Elsa Rigsby
Notre Dame Prep.



Paysan Sweeney
Notre Dame Prep.



Samantha Vitolo
Notre Dame Prep.



Jaxon White
Brophy College Prep.

Oh, the
places
you'll go!



Go, Angels!

ACS Spring Sports Teams End the Season Strong

The ACS Athletic Department and Administration would like to recognize and celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of our student athletes this spring season -- Track & Field State Championship and boys baseball success!

We would like to congratulate our Girls and Boys Track & Field teams on their tremendous success at the Great Heart Conference State Championship. Qualifying for the State Championship is a significant achievement and is not an automatic selection. Student athletes must meet qualification standards twice in order to earn a spot at the championship meet.

We are incredibly proud of all the athletes who qualified and represented ACS with excellence, determination, and sportsmanship. Their hard work and dedication throughout the season have resulted in a remarkable year for our Track & Field program.

In recognition of their accomplishments, the Girls and Boys Track & Field teams will be honored with a banner celebrating their outstanding season. Congratulations to both teams on this well-deserved achievement!

We would also like to congratulate our 5th and 6th Grade Boys Baseball Team on an exceptional season. Competing in the CYAA Conference, the team won Division I with an impressive 9–1 record during the spring season.

Their commitment, teamwork, and perseverance throughout the season were truly outstanding. To commemorate this achievement, a baseball signed by all players and coaches will be displayed in the school trophy case when school resumes in August.



Congratulations to all of our student athletes, coaches, and families for an incredible season. We are proud of your accomplishments and look forward to continued success in the future!



The Catholic Sun Features ACS Food Forest Garden

The following article was originally posted in the June 1, 2026 online edition of *The Catholic Sun*, a publication of the Diocese of Phoenix.

Fruits not commonly found in Arizona — bananas, guavas, mangoes and passion fruit — grow behind the youth center at Annunciation Catholic School in Cave Creek, Ariz. Berries and herbs blossom in the shade of the fruit trees, and vegetables flourish in planter boxes nearby. This thriving food forest and vegetable garden is known as The Angelus.

Annunciation is the only Catholic school in the state with a food forest — a sustainable agricultural system of edible plants that replicates patterns found in nature. Dr. Sharon Pristash, the founding principal when the school opened in 2009, was inspired to start the garden so students could learn where their food comes from.

“I grew up in the country in Wisconsin, so I know all about where food comes from. But I think most kids don’t,” Dr. Pristash said. “We’re big on nutrition here. Kids eat a lot of unhealthy foods, and we want them to learn to eat food straight out of the earth.”

In the fall of 2022, Dr. Pristash recruited a few moms to help start the garden by sending an announcement in the school’s newsletter. She then hired consultant Justin Haddad to design the landscape.

Haddad uses a practice called permaculture — a combination of the words “permanent” and “agriculture.” Permaculture works in harmony with nature to create long-lasting, food producing ecosystems. It is guided by three ethics: care for the earth, care for the people and fair share of the surplus.

In January 2023, Haddad planted over 50 fruit trees in the garden. These trees form a canopy layer that provides shade to the vines, herbs and berry bushes growing below.

Within The Angelus, Haddad never uses weed killer or pesticides. Birds, rabbits and insects are welcome in the food forest and are valued as a natural part of the ecosystem. For Dr. Pristash, her experience of The Angelus reminds her of the Garden of Eden.

“God gave us this earth and said to take care of it. We don’t use any sprays to keep the birds or the bunnies off, because they’re part of God’s creation too.”

The Angelus Garden Club

Terri Cole, a catechist and parishioner at St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church in Cave Creek, Ariz., began to volunteer at The Angelus in September 2023. The following month, she started a garden club for students at Annunciation.

Now in its third year, the garden club involves two eight-week sessions and is open to fourth through eighth graders. Students learn how to plant their own food and care for God’s creation.

Cole shared that the name of the garden — The Angelus — “just seems to blend with the parish (St. Gabriel the Archangel) and the school (Annunciation Catholic School). It’s all about Mary!”

Cole opens every club meeting with The Angelus Prayer, a traditional Catholic prayer commemorating the Incarnation, or a prayer to St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardeners. By now, most of the students know The Angelus Prayer by heart.

Students enjoy the garden club because they get to go outside, observe the plants and eat fruit straight from the trees. For many students, it is their first time seeing where their food comes from.

“They think it’s cool the way the trees are growing and producing fruit,” said Cole. “The figs and the pomegranates are the first to show, and the first time they ever saw that, they wanted to pick the fruit right off the trees.”

During the garden club, students decorate signs for each of the plants, learn about the different shapes of the trees and test the soil. Some students even bring a piece of The Angelus home to their families.

“The kids take home herbs like mint, thyme and oregano,” Cole noted. “One of the students’ families even planted a moringa tree at their house.”

In addition to the garden club, Cole also leads The Angelus Stewards, a program open to seventh and eighth graders. These students are knowledgeable about The Angelus and help monitor it during events.

As The Angelus quite literally continues to grow, Cole envisions it as a site for social events or harvesting opportunities. Dr. Pristash also hopes The Angelus can be a way to give back to the community in the future.

“We would love to have our own farmers market or put out a table after Mass on Sundays with ripe produce from the garden,” Dr. Pristash said. “We could give some to St. Vincent de Paul to feed the hungry and live out our Catholic Mission.”



Alumni News

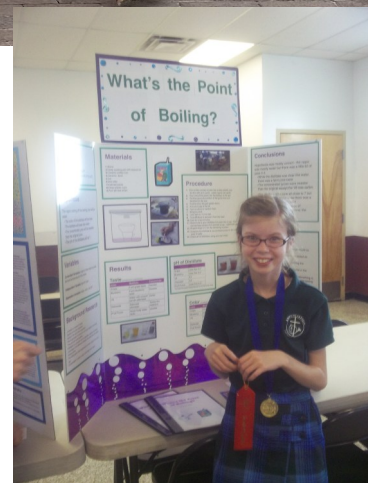
Erin Hill is a member of the ACS Alumni class of **2016**, our first graduating class. She is a founding member of the school, joining ACS in its inaugural year as a second grade student. After graduating from ACS, Erin attend Xavier College Prep where she excelled academically. She went on to Northern Arizona University where she received a Bachelor's degree in psychology.

Erin received her Master's degree in Behavior Analysis from the University of North Texas this past May. Fellow ACS alumni, Hadley Hawkins, flew out to Texas for the occasion. Erin and Hadley have been good friends since fourth grade, when Hadley joined the school and they were stars of the talent show in 2014 (see photo).

Over the summer, Erin will be finishing her clinical hours as Senior Behavior Technician at the UNT Kristin Farmer Autism Center teaching social skills to preteens with autism. Once her clinical hours are complete, she will take the BCBA exam to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst.

Erin's interest in the sciences began early in her school career. She took 1st Place at the Diocesan Science Fair in 4th grade, competing against 5th-8th grade students (see photo).

Erin's next adventure will take her and her charming cat, Rutherford, to New Jersey for a PhD program in Applied Behavior Analysis at Caldwell University this fall. Erin's family is very proud of her and hopes that she will eventually move back to AZ. Do they have to call her Dr. Erin if she does?



Above left: Erin and Hadley at Erin's graduation from the University of Northern Texas. Above right: Erin and Hadley rocked the ACS Talent Show in 2014, their sixth grade year at Annunciation.

National Junior Honor Society Elects New Officers for 2026-2027

Each spring the members of Annunciation National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) elect officers for the upcoming school year.

Only 8th grade students are eligible to serve as officers. To qualify for National Junior Honor Society students in grades 7 and 8 must maintain a cumulative grade percentage of 96.25% in all letter grade subject areas and demonstrate a commitment to the five pillars of NJHS: scholarship, character, leadership, service, and citizenship.



Congratulations to the ACS 2026-2027 NJHS officers: President. - Kaitlyn G., Vice President. - Clarissa B., Secretary - Charlie P., Treasurer - Zac C., Service Coordinator - Izzy S., Social Chair - Charlie S.



ACS Student Exemplifies Commitment to Service



*Thank you, Case!
We appreciate you for
representing Annunciation's
commitment to
community service.*

Case Wallace, 8th grade, has been spending his summer volunteering at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Family Dining Room. His work at St. Vincent de Paul provides an opportunity for Case to give back to the community, represent Annunciation and Boy Scouts of America, and work toward a Citizen in the Community Merit Badge.



Case has been a member of Boys Scout Troop #323 since 4th grade. His current rank is Star Scout.

Case's work at St. Vincent de Paul includes unpacking donated food, working with the dishwashing crew, and creating to-go bags for families to take home after dining. He sets up and takes down family meal services, takes orders, and delivers meals to family dining tables.

**Click the link to learn more
about and volunteer at
[The St. Vincent de Paul Society](#)**

School Administration

Pastor

Fr. Chad King
frchad@stgacc.org

Principal

Dr. Sharon Pristash
spristash@acsphx.org

Vice Principal

Mr. Matt Raiff
mraiff@acsphx.org

Dean of Students

Ms. Lynne O'Keeffe
lokeeffe@acsphx.org

Director of Operations/Facilities

Mrs. Lynn Schwartz
lschwartz@acsphx.org

Development/Marketing

Mrs. Christy Brown
cbrown@acsphx.org

Front Office Manager

Mrs. Elizabeth Bravo
ebravo@acsphx.org

School Nurses: nurse@acsphx.org

For the complete staff directory visit
[http://acsphx.org/about us/staff directory](http://acsphx.org/about_us/staff_directory)



Student Council speeches and elections were held on Monday, May 11. We are happy to introduce our newly elected Student Council leaders. Congratulations to the eleventh Student Council of Annunciation Catholic School!

Student Council 2026-2027

President - Olivia M.

Vice President - Leila C.

Kindness Ambassador - Georgie R.

Religious Coordinators - Connor C. & Michael K.

Yearbook Coordinators - Jayden Z. & Amelia S.

5th Grade Reps - Julian P & Sophia R.

6th Grade Reps - Sam D. & Gigi J.

7th Grade Reps - Alli C. & Blaine M.

8th Grade Reps - Griffin S. & Charlie S.

ANNUNCIATION
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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www.acsphx.org

Email: office@acsphx.org

School Hours 8 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Office Hours 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

2026-2027 School Year Important Dates

Aug. 3: 1:00-4:00pm Open House for all families.

Aug. 3: 4:30pm New Family Orientation & Dinner

Aug. 5 : First Day for Students, 12pm dismissal

Oct. 30: All Saints Day/Grandparents Day/12pm dismissal

Nov. 25 - 27: Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 19- Jan. 4: Christmas Break

Jan. 5: Classes resume

Apr. 5 - 16: ITBS Testing

March 26-April 4: Easter Break

May 21: Last Day for Students, 12pm dismissal