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## CCST Officers (2025-27):

### President:

Deborah Auclair

### Immediate Past President:

Nancy Thorpe

### 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President:

Vita Balsino

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Pres. & Membership Chair:

Dianna Balsamo

### Treasurer:

Nancy Thorpe

### Recording Secretary:

Pat Lunsford

### Board Members at Large:

Bonnie Alberts, Bernie Chuinard,  
Ann MacDonald, Liz McCandlish

## A Joyful Day of Hope: Arizona's Get on the Bus Program – June 13, 2025

- Deb Auclair

On June 13, Arizona's *Get on the Bus* program celebrated a moving chapter of compassion, presence, and hope by reuniting children with their incarcerated fathers at Whetstone Prison. Families from both Tucson and Phoenix came together for a day filled with joy, creativity, and love that transcended prison walls.



**A LITTLE GIRL GETS READY TO BOARD THE BUS TO WHETSTONE.**

### A Morning of Anticipation

The day began at the Cathedral, where a joyful space welcomed families with music, food, decorations, and crafts. Fifteen children, ten caregivers, and ten volunteers gathered in



**CCST PROVIDED THE BACKPACKS FILLED WITH GOODIES THAT THE CHILDREN EACH RECEIVED.**

anticipation, joined later by Phoenix families whose participation doubled this year's event.

Deacon Mike, the Diocese's Prison Ministry Coordinator, provided invaluable

guidance, while Eva Hidalgo led craft tables where children poured their hearts into handmade Father's Day cards. Excitement bubbled as the children changed into their matching *Get on the Bus* T-shirts. Laughter and music filled ➡



## Get on the Bus Brings Families Together (cont.)



**MARK KVIDERA PLAYS HIS GUITAR FOR THE CHILDREN.**



himself a father of seven — was instrumental in expanding the program this year to include Phoenix families. Commanding Officer Inclan photographed each family, ensuring every participant left with a keepsake of their visit.

Inside the visitation room, emotional reunions unfolded. Some children embraced fathers they had not seen in years. Fathers and children played ➡



**DONNA OPSATNICK, DEB AUCLAIR AND JO ANN WESTON CHECK FAMILIES IN.**

the room, with Mark Kvidera's guitar setting a warm and uplifting tone.

Volunteers including Donna Opsatnick, Chris Kvidera, JoAnn Weston, and others welcomed families, ensuring everyone felt at ease. Gift bags were distributed with age-appropriate items, sparking delight — Antonio's joyful cry of "I love Play-Doh!" captured the spirit of the morning.

Katie Woodward, *Get on the Bus* AZ leader, coordinated the Phoenix contingent, while Project Cross generously provided lunch. Photographer Chris Auclair captured candid moments of anticipation before families boarded the bus.

### Arrival at Whetstone Prison

After a short ride, families were warmly welcomed by Whetstone staff. Deputy Warden Mormon —



**FOR SOME FAMILIES THIS WAS THEIR FIRST VISIT!**



## Get on the Bus Brings Families Together (cont.)



ONE VOLUNTEER OBSERVED, "IT WAS LIKE WATCHING A FATHER POUR AN ENTIRE YEAR'S WORTH OF LOVE INTO A SINGLE AFTERNOON!"

games, shared pizza, posed for photos, and poured months' worth of love into a single afternoon. One father and son battled it out over a spirited game of Battleship, the son gleefully winning the final round.

As JoAnn Weston beautifully observed: *"It was like fathers poured a whole year of love into one afternoon."*

### An Afternoon of Connection

All around the room, heartfelt connections blossomed—tears mingling with laughter as cards were exchanged, hands were held, and families made memories to last beyond the day. For many, this was the only visit of the year, and the tenderness was profound to witness.

When the time came to say goodbye, hugs lingered and words of love were exchanged through tears. Though the parting was bittersweet, the day radiated hope, reminding all present that love endures, even across prison walls.

### Voices of Gratitude

Families expressed their deep appreciation:

Gloria: *"Thank you for making this a great experience for my family and many others!"*

Leeana: *"Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity—it means the world to me and our little girl."*

Julie: *"Thank you all so much for everything you did for the kiddos! That was a very special day for them."*

### Looking Ahead

Conversations have already begun about expanding *Get on the Bus* even further. This ministry

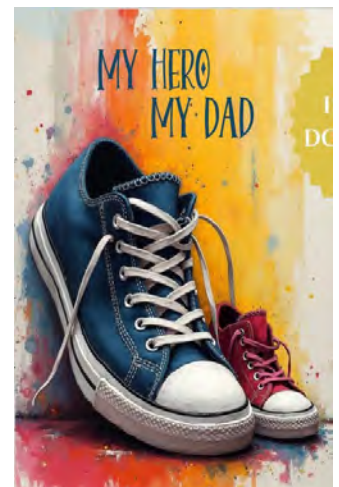
continues to remind us that even a single afternoon of connection can bring healing, joy, and the assurance that love truly knows no walls.

### Want to get involved next year?

Contact Deb Auclair Email:

[info@christchildtucson.org](mailto:info@christchildtucson.org)

Kleenex recommended. ☩



## Layettes *by Dianna Balsamo*

I am incredibly proud to share that our Layettes Program is thriving! This fiscal year, we have distributed 691 layettes—a 15% increase from last year.

A special thanks goes to St. Mark Parish, which generously hosted a diaper collection during June to support this effort. Their kindness, along with the dedication of our volunteers and supporters, has helped us provide essential items for mothers and babies in need. Together, we are making a real

difference in the lives of families. Thank you for being part of this mission of care and compassion.

### Baby Showers

A heartfelt thank you to Green Valley Baptist Church, **Christ Child Society**, and Family Life Radio who have generously supported New Life Pregnancy Center (NLPC) by hosting baby showers since the start of the summer. Your continued support is a blessing and a vital part of our mission of providing hope and care to families in need. We are truly grateful. Below are just a few photos. ✝

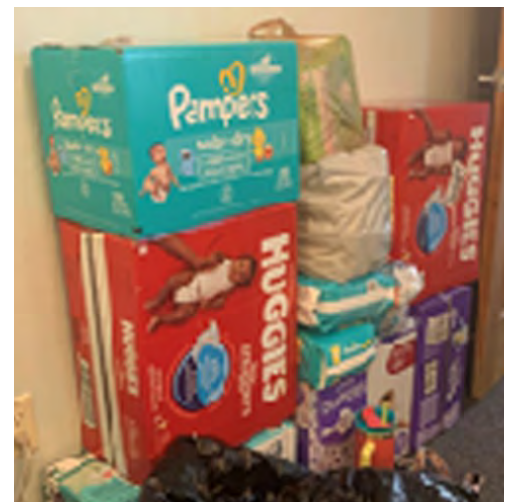


**CHRIST CHILD SOCIETY'S SHOWER OF LOVE FOR NLPC. A CRIB THAT WAS GIFTED WAS ABLE TO GO TO A MOM WHO IS EXPECTING HER BABY LATER THIS SUMMER**



← One of the many gifts from Green Valley Baptist Church. In total there were over 200 items donated.

A few of the boxes of diapers → donated to NLPC from Family Life Radio's Ultimate Baby Shower. In total there were 1,114 items donated. ✝





## Christ Child Society Expands Literacy Through Book Vending Machines - Deb Auclair

This August marked two joyful milestones for the Christ Child Society of Tucson (CCST) and its Literacy Committee, as two brand-new book vending machines were installed at Immaculate Heart Academy and St. Ambrose School. These colorful, interactive



**FR. HUY VU, PASTOR OF SANTA CATALINA PARISH & DEB AUCLAIR, CHRIST CHILD SOCIETY OF TUCSON PRESIDENT**

machines, manufactured by Global Vending Group, allow students to receive a brand-new book they can keep forever, helping to address a sobering reality: more than 70% of low-income households have no books at home.

### **Immaculate Heart Academy – August 8, 2025**

The first installation took place at Immaculate Heart Academy, made possible through funds donated by Santa Catalina Catholic Church. Father Vu, who has “adopted” Immaculate Heart as Santa Catalina’s school, regularly supports the students by hosting pizza days during Catholic Schools Week and celebrating Masses throughout the year.

At CCST’s April fundraiser, Father Vu generously matched the amount requested by the Literacy Committee, making this gift possible.

Twelve CCST members attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony, where students eagerly demonstrated the machine. Tokens triggered cheerful messages like “One book, coming right up!” and “Enjoy your book!” Principal Sister Veronica Loya expressed heartfelt gratitude, explaining how the teachers will award raffle tickets to



students who demonstrate good behavior, academic excellence, and leadership. Each month, two raffle tickets from every class will be drawn to award students tokens to choose books.

### **St. Ambrose Catholic School – August 22, 2025**

Just two weeks later, CCST celebrated again with the installation of another machine at St. Ambrose School on Tucson Boulevard. Founded in 1949, St. Ambrose currently serves 217 students in Pre-K through 8th grade.



**SR. VERONICA THANKS ALL OF CCST, REPRESENTED AT IMMACULATE HEART ACADEMY: BY KAREN Z-BAKER, BONNIE A., PAT L., LIZ M., MARY B., VITA B., DIANNA B., ANGELA S., NANCY T., AND JUDY C.**



## Christ Child Society Expands Literacy Through Book Vending Machines (cont.)

Principal Ms. Tanya Dueñas shared her gratitude on behalf of the faculty and students, describing how the raffle-ticket/token system will encourage positive behavior and achievement among students. In a touching moment, students presented CCST with a four-foot, heart-shaped thank-you card, signed by the entire student body, and gifted it to Angela Schneider of CCST.



**ANGELA SCHNEIDER PROUDLY STANDS  
WITH CCST'S LITERACY CO-CHAIRS,  
BONNIE ALBERTS AND NANCY  
THORPE.**



MICHELLE WAY, DEACON MARK, DR. ANNA SANGUINETI,  
ANGELA SCHNEIDER, NANCY THORPE  
AND KAREN ZNAMENACEK-BAKER

The St. Ambrose Catholic School community is guided by its mission: “Through the grace, teachings, and example of Jesus Christ, we provide our students with a spiritual and academic foundation from which to achieve excellence.” The new book vending machine now stands as a living extension of that mission.

## Continuing the Mission

To ensure both schools can keep their machines stocked and the excitement alive, CCST has committed to provide \$500 twice a year to refill each machine with brand-new books. For the Literacy



THE PRAYER FOR CATHOLIC VOCATIONS IS WORKING,  
BECAUSE ONE OF THE 4TH GRADE BOYS WANTS TO BECOME A  
PRIEST AND OFTEN PRAYS IN THE PRAYER GARDEN,  
SHAPED LIKE A ROSARY



**FOUR-FOOT  
"THANK YOU" CARD  
CREATED BY THE  
STUDENTS OF ST.  
AMBROSE  
AND PRESENTED  
TO CCST.**

Committee, watching their dream come to life—one child, one book, one token at a time—was both a proud and deeply rewarding moment. †

## In Loving Memory of Frances Smith, CCST Past President

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of Frances Smith, who went home to the Lord on July 21, 2025, after a courageous battle with lung cancer.

Frances served as President of the Christ Child Society of Tucson from 2014 to 2016, and her contributions extended far beyond her time in leadership. She played a vital role in the success of our annual Fashion Shows and faithfully managed luncheon reservations for many years. She even opened her home for a garage sale to support our mission—just one example of her generous spirit. When COVID-19 emerged, Frances transitioned a beloved religious group online, which grew to include participants nationwide. Though this new ministry made

her less visible at our meetings, her impact remained strong. She also initiated our participation in the Jim Click Raffle and was a devoted supporter of the Layette of Love event. Living near St. Augustine High School, she helped connect their “Pack the Playpen” donations to our Layette Ladies.

Those who knew Frances remember her ready smile, sincerity, and deep kindness. “She was real,” said one member. “We shared a love of tea. I loved her, and I’ll miss her dearly.”

Frances was a treasured member, a dear friend, and a woman of great faith. We take comfort knowing she is now reunited with her beloved husband.

Frances also served as a Reverend at the Temple of Universality.



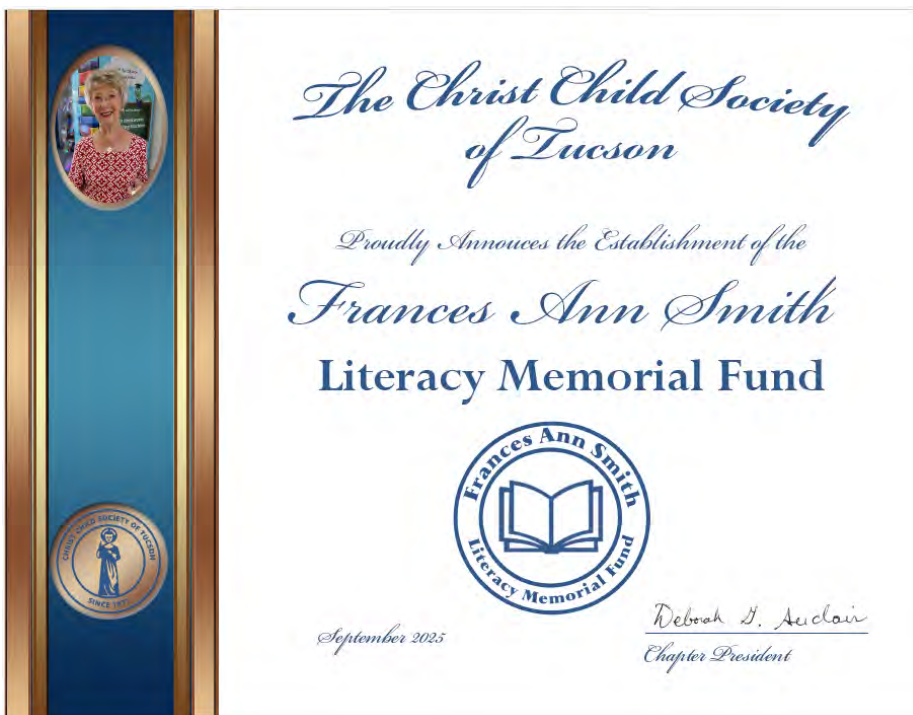
In Loving Memory  
**Frances Ann Smith**

August 3, 1939- July 22, 2025

In lieu of flowers, donations were directed to both the Temple and CCST. In a touching gesture, the Temple made a generous gift to CCST, noting, “We understand that the work of the Christ Child Society was particularly special to her.”

On August 3, Frances’ life was celebrated with a beautiful service attended by her family. Tributes from friends continued for over an hour, reflecting the love and respect she inspired.

The CCST Board has designated donations received in her memory to establish a literacy memorial fund in her honor. A certificate commemorating this tribute was mailed to her daughter, Sharon Bottock of Phoenix. †



**IN 2025 FRANCES SMITH WAS HONORED WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MEMORIAL FUND IN HER HONOR.**



# St. Augustine Feast Day Service Project

## St. Augustine Catholic High School Service Day

On August 28—the feast day of St. Augustine—the Christ Child Society of Tucson joined St. Augustine Catholic High School for our annual joint service project. Sixty-five Juniors created no-sew fleece blankets, carefully tying each with festive Christmas ribbon. These blankets will be given to homeless teens in Tucson this Christmas.



**FIVE MEMBERS OF THE JUNIOR CLASS WORK ON A NO-SEW FLEECE BLANKET.**

The day was led by Ms. Karen Brady, Director of Ministries, with every grade participating in special projects:

- **Freshmen** painted inspirational rocks to place around campus.
- **Sophomores** designed flags inspired by St. Augustine.
- **Juniors** crafted fleece blankets with CCST for homeless teens.
- **Seniors** made sock puppets to bring joy to children.

Many Juniors expressed a deep interest not only in making, but also in personally giving the blankets to homeless teens. Some were saddened to learn of the need. One young man with Ukrainian roots even hoped to send his blanket overseas to comfort



**A MATH TEACHER HELPS A STUDENT PREPARE HER BLANKET FOR CUTTING.**



**ANN MACDONALD GIVES THE STUDENTS INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DAY'S SERVICE PROJECT.**

children in Ukraine. Ms. Brady shared that she will explore opportunities for students to present their gifts directly so let them know the joy in giving.

The students impressed us with their respect and kindness—many addressing us as “ma’am.” We left inspired and hopeful for the next generation of leaders being formed at St. Augustine’s.

CCST members Marcia Wells, Mary Barrios, Ann MacDonald, and Deb Auclair were honored to attend. After announcements, prayer, and the





## St. Augustine Feast Day Service Project (cont.)

Pledge of Allegiance, the students recited this beloved passage from their patron saint:  
*"O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."*

As St. Augustine also reminds us:  
*"Do not complain that you were born in a time when you can no longer see God in the flesh. He did not in fact take this privilege from you. As He says, 'Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers, you did for Me.'"* ✝



**A STUDENT PROUDLY DISPLAYS ALL 65 COMPLETED BLANKETS.**



**ANN, MARCIA, MARY AND DEB ARE HAPPY FOR THIS SUCCESSFUL DAY.**



**CCST MEMBER, MARY BARRIOS, HELPS A STUDENT.**



**CCST MEMBER, MARCIA WELLS, TALKS WITH A STUDENT.**



**A STUDENT PROUDLY DISPLAYS HER COMPLETED BLANKET.**



**THE GROUNDS OF ST. AUGUSTINE ARE BEAUTIFUL.**



## Red Wagon Award

At our June 2025 meeting, the Red Wagon Award was presented to Deb Auclair. This prestigious honor has been awarded 23 times since 2000.

### Recent recipients include:

2013 – Nancy Jones  
2014 – Patricia Lunsford  
2015 – Sylvia Blout  
2017 – Sarita McCann  
2018 – Frances Smith  
2019 – Angela Schneider  
2024 – Bernie Chuinard  
2025 – Deb Auclair  
✚



**DEB AUCLAIR WAS DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO BE RECOGNIZED WITH CCST'S RED WAGON AWARD, JOINING THE RANKS OF MANY DISTINGUISHED PAST RECIPIENTS.**

## Wings Foster Teen Bag Assembly

The Wings Foster Teen Program has been busy these past three months, supporting the Get-on-the-Bus AZ initiative and providing care bags to our partner

agencies. This fiscal year alone, we have supplied 730 care bags. ✚



**MARY BARRIOS AND ANN MACDONALD GET THE STORAGE ORGANIZED.**



**NANCY THORPE AND KAREN KLAVETTER ARE ALWAYS SO HELPFUL.**



# CCST Installs New Officers & Calendar of Events

CCST Officer Title	Elected Officers
President	Deb Auclair
1 <sup>st</sup> VP & Corr. Secretary	Vita Balsino
2 <sup>nd</sup> VP & Membership	Dianna Balsamo
Treasurer	Nancy Thorpe
Recording Secretary	Pat Lunsford
Board Member at Large	Bonnie Alberts
Board Member at Large	Bernie Chuinard
Board Member at Large	Ann MacDonald
Board Member at Large	Liz McCandlish
Layette Chair / Co-chair	Dianna Balsamo / Vita Balsino
Literacy Chair / Co-chair	Nancy Thorpe / Bonnie Alberts
Wings Chair / Co-chair	Deb Auclair / Ann MacDonald



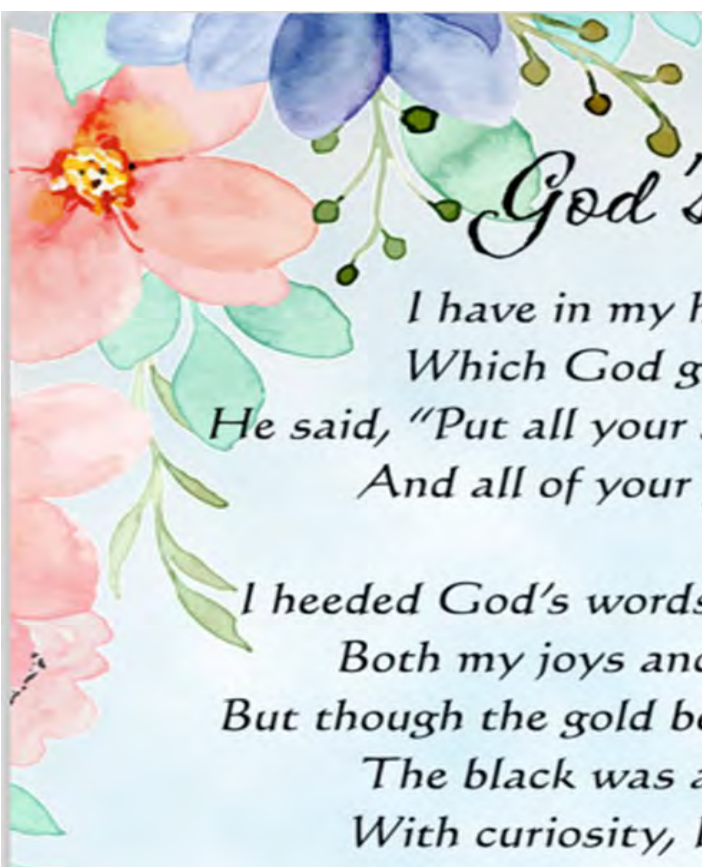
CCST Events for the remainder of 2025	
Sept. 12-13	NCCS Conference in Bethesda, MD
Sept. 20th	Amer. Heritage Girls Fleece Blanket Project
	United In Service Project
Sept. 11-12	Layette Pulpit Pitch at Santa Catalina
Sept. 20-21	Layette of Love at Santa Catalina
Oct. 13th mtg.	CCST Thanksgiving Snail Mail Appeal
Nov. 8-9	Santa Catalina Ministry Fair includes CCST

Sep-25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Oct-25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Nov-25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Dec-25						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



## *God's Boxes*

*I have in my hand two boxes  
Which God gave me to hold.  
He said, "Put all your sorrows in the black box  
And all of your joys in the gold."*

*I heeded God's words, and in the two boxes  
Both my joys and sorrows I stored.  
But though the gold became heavier each day,  
The black was as light as before.  
With curiosity, I opened the black  
I wanted to find out why.*

*And I saw in the base of the box, a hole  
Which my sorrows had fallen out by.  
I showed the hole to God and mused,  
"I wonder where my sorrows could be."  
God smiled a gentle smile and said,  
My child, they're all here with me."*

*I asked why God gave me the boxes,  
Why the gold and the black with the hole?  
"My child, the gold is for you to count your blessings,  
The black is for you to let go."*

*-Author unknown*

