



Branches on the Vine

JANUARY 17 - 23, 2026



Some members of the Catholic book club at Holy Infant Parish in Orange gather at the church for their bimonthly discussion.
PHOTO BY JOE PISANI

WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB EXPLORES THE CATHOLIC FAITH

When Margaret Siena was in third grade, one of her favorite books was an illustrated Little Book of Saints for children, with stories about young women like St. Agnes and St. Cecilia. "I could read it again and again and again," she recalls. "It was entertaining and informative and spiritual." Now, as president of the Women's Guild of Holy Infant Parish in Orange and coordinator of its recently formed Catholic book club, she uses those same criteria in her search for reading material that will inspire the group spiritually, entertain them and inform them.

Since it began last year, participants have read several books, including *The Story of a Soul*, St. Thérèse of Lisieux's autobiography; *Up from Dust*, historical fiction about St. Martha of Bethany, sister of Mary and Lazarus; and *Hills of Moab*, a novel based on the Old Testament Book of Ruth, about a Moabite woman who married an Israelite and became an ancestor of King David. "The goal of the Women's Guild book club is to offer enjoyable, inspirational reading while deepening our faith," Siena says. "Its focus is on woman saints, women of the Bible and Catholic women authors."

The bimonthly discussions are led by Donna DiMassa of St. Raphael Parish in Milford, who also leads a mystery book club at Case Memorial Library in Orange.

DiMassa began a recent meeting with a prayer she wrote that invokes the Holy Spirit: "Holy Spirit, we pray that through this newly formed Women's Guild book club, we come to know and understand you better and that we learn better how to serve you in our day-to-day lives. When we are reading the selections, help us to see the work through your divine lens so that we glean the lessons that you want to teach us. Lastly, when we are discussing the selections, let us learn at least one thing that will help us love you better and bring us ever closer to you."

Siena, who has been president of the Guild for more than a year, is committed to sponsoring activities that engage members in small groups. A lifelong reader, she searches for books that will be compelling to the women. Her research entails perusing reviews, looking at lists of popular books and talking to avid readers. "I find myself spending a lot of time searching for the right book," she says. "Not just the right book, but the right book from a Catholic perspective that will appeal to women."

She also believes that historical fiction based on Bible stories will offer an entertaining introduction that can entice readers to further biblical study. The discussions have been enjoyable for the women, who can relate to the experiences of characters like Ruth and St. Martha of Bethany.

Siena has always enjoyed historical fiction, especially stories about the role of women during World War II, and works of history that are accessible to a general reading public and not entirely academic. "I have a curiosity about a lot of things, and I like to read because I can get into the characters," she says.

Father Norman Brockett, pastor, praises the initiative. "It provides a great opportunity for women to develop spiritually, while engaging in discussions about issues that are timeless and also relevant to them," he says.

Most of all, Siena wants the club to be enjoyable and not have the members feel as if they are reading for a class assignment. "We're not theologians," she adds. "I just want the women to appreciate the beauty of the Catholic faith."

-Story by Joe Pisani



Upcoming Events


YCP
CENTRAL CT

“IS THERE ROOM FOR GOD AT WORK?”

FAITH AT WORK WHEN SILENCE FEELS SAFER

FRI. JAN 30 @ 7PM
ST. THOMAS MORE CHAPEL
@ YALE UNIVERSITY
NEW HAVEN

YOUNG ADULTS (AGES 18-39)
RSVP HERE!



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VICE PRESIDENT OF LEADER DEVELOPMENT:
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS



WELCOMING ALL YOUNG CATHOLIC ADULTS

Candlelight Mass followed by Pasta Dinner & Line Dancing

Come socialize with other young adults (age 21+) from surrounding parishes for a fun evening!

Friday January, 23rd

Mass at 6:30 P.M.
St. Patrick Church
110 Main St. Farmington, CT



Archdiocese of Hartford

Wedding Anniversary Mass

On **Saturday, February 7, 2026**, The Most Reverend Christopher J. Coyne, Archbishop of Hartford, will be honoring couples celebrating milestone marriage anniversaries: first and five-year increments from 5 to 60 years, and every year beyond 60 years during 2025 – 2026. *The Marriage Anniversary Mass* will be at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Hartford at 4:00 p.m. **Registration closes January 21.** (Snow date if necessary - February 28)

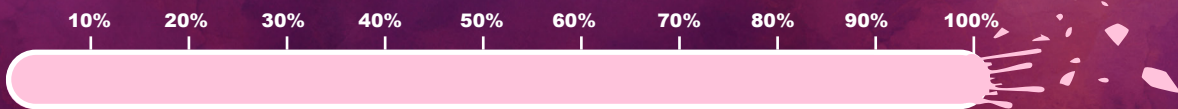
Questions? Contact Valerie St. Jean, Associate Director of Adult & Family Life Ministries at Valerie.StJean@aohct.org or 860-541-6491 ext. 2678.



UPDATED LINK

2025 ARCHBISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Through your generosity, we surpassed
\$10.1 million in donations. THANK YOU!



Goal: \$10M Pledges: \$10.1M

www.archdioceseofhartford.org/appeal