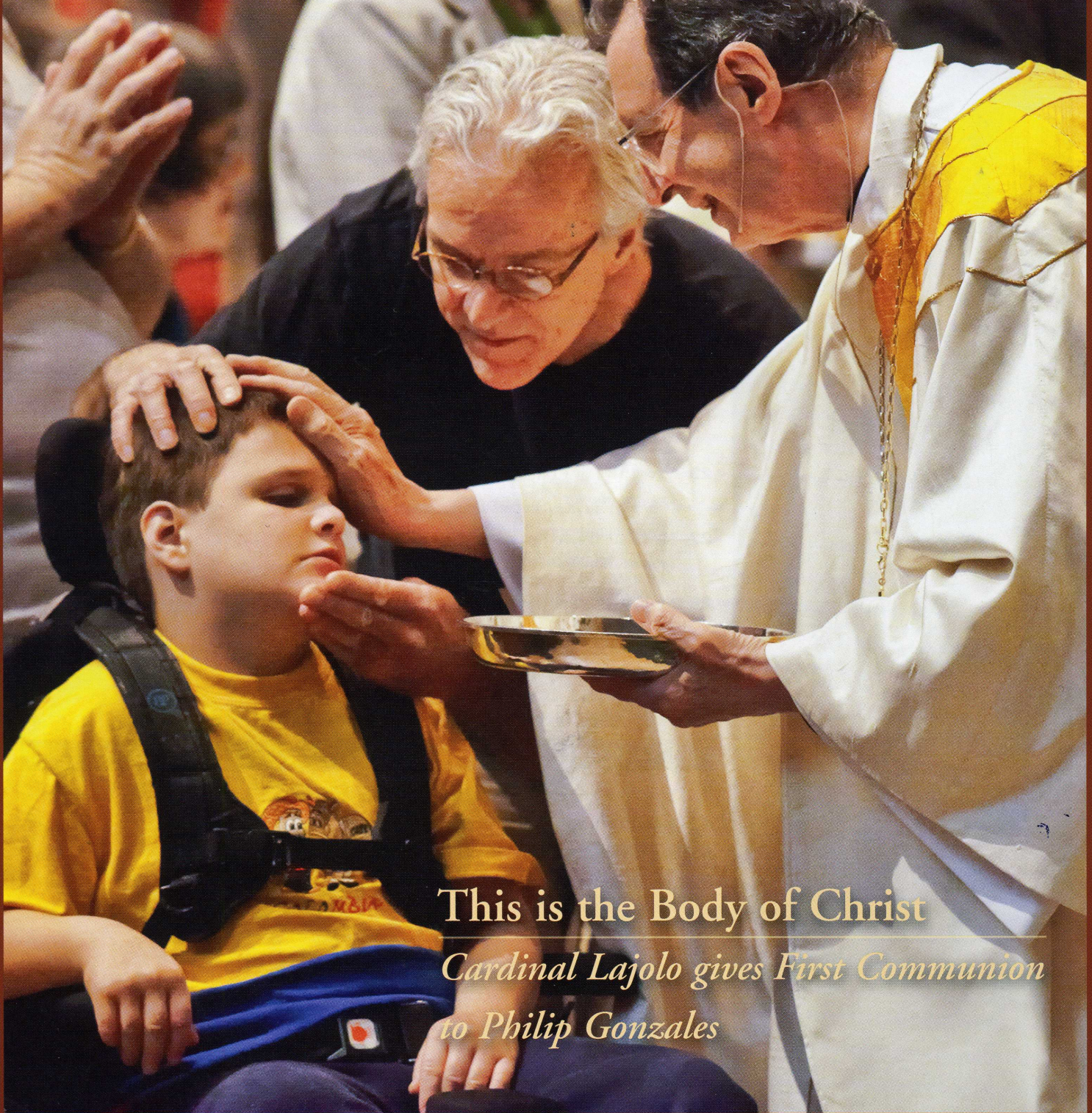


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*This is the Body of Christ
Cardinal Lajolo gives First Communion
to Philip Gonzales*

Faith and Peace

Signs of God's unending love



WHEN my father passed away in 2007, a key dichotomy of life became clearer to me: we seek peace in a life that is intrinsically unstable.

My son, Philip Ryan Gonzales, is 11 years old and has suffered all his life from a very rare degenerative disease. If ordinary life is unstable and unpredictable, then ours has been starkly perilous.

But stability and peace must live within us, and our life of peace is nurtured by allowing faith to triumph over difficult circumstances.

Through dozens of surgeries and years of medical tribulations, Philip Ryan has always looked to God for peace. Even as a small child, we did not bring him to God as much as he brought us to God. And God has responded with love, miracles, and nurturing from our Catholic community.

But one thing we prayed for constantly was to receive some sign that Philip Ryan was ready for his First Communion. Even without ordinary communication, he demonstrated that he understood the presence of Jesus Christ in church, and that he was completely immersed in his inner faith. But the logistics of First Communion were just not coming together. His disabilities made it very difficult to follow the usual paths.

When Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, governor of Vatican City State appeared unexpectedly one Sunday, Philip Ryan was radiating with some kind of sacred happiness. He sensed something was special about our day. Could this be his First Communion? During the Prayers of the Faithful, I asked for guidance.

At the Eucharist, Cardinal Lajolo looked expectantly at us. I said, "Your Eminence, by your hand this could be his First Communion." The Cardinal beamed a beautiful smile and said, "Yes!"

Afterward, we walked in a grace that spread throughout our extended family to those who were not even present on that day. Only Faith could have brought us such peace and signs of God's unending love. ✚

Philip A. Gonzales lives in Edina with daughter, Alanna, and son, Philip Ryan. His writing and consulting project, Attending the Miracle, can be found at www.AttendingTheMiracle.com.

By **Philip Gonzales**