

USA Council of Serra International

REPORT

Promoting New Vocations in the United States

Introduction: There are over 300 Serra Clubs in the USA Council of Serra International. All USA clubs share a common commitment to fostering, promoting, and supporting vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated religious life in the Catholic Church. The individual clubs, however, carry out this Serran mission through a variety of programs and activities specific to their local club and circumstances.

This report is limited to the types of activities Serra clubs are doing in the United States to encourage and support “new” vocations. Although the clubs also do a great deal to affirm and support men and women who have already responded to God’s call, those activities are not addressed in this report.

The report is not meant to catalogue all “new vocation” activities. Rather, it provides a broad overview of the types of new vocation programs and activities underway in USA Serra clubs.

The report is divided into four broad areas related to fostering and promoting new vocations:

- Prayer
- Building a Culture for New Vocations
- Vocation Awareness
- Invitation and Discernment

If you have questions, please contact the USA Council of Serra International, 65 East Wacker Place, Suite 802, Chicago, IL 60601 or by phone at 1-888-777-6681 or by internet at www.serraus.org.

PRAYER

Prayer for vocations, especially new vocations, is an essential part of every club’s Serra ministry. Some prayer programs are unique to an individual club, but many are based on nationwide programs promoted by the USA Council. Here is a sampling of prayer programs and activities of USA Serra clubs.

- **31 Clubs:** The Serra club recruits and coordinates scheduling of individuals from the Serra club or parish to have at least one person going to Mass each day of each month to pray for vocations.
- **Eucharist Adoration:** Serra club members attend Eucharistic Adoration for Vocations on a regular, recurring schedule. They may sign up for Adoration already scheduled by a parish, or the club may arrange a specific Adoration time.
- **Monstrance Program:** During the year of the Eucharist Pope John Paul II blessed a Monstrance of each continent. The USA Council was tasked by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to handle the distribution of the Monstrance to Dioceses that wish to have special events that would feature the Monstrance. Since the beginning of the program the Monstrance has traveled over 150,000 miles and has visited 91 dioceses. The last scheduled appointment is now for June 2010.
- **Traveling Chalice Program:** This popular program goes by several different names and may vary somewhat from club to club. Essentially, it provides a family or school class an opportunity to pray for and learn about vocations as a chalice or crucifix moves weekly from home to home or class to class..
- **Prayers of the Faithful:** Serra clubs are instrumental in having parishes include petitions for an increase in vocations in the Prayers of the Faithful.
- **Vocation Prayers in Parish Bulletin:** USA clubs work with parishes to have them use vocation prayers specifically designed for use in weekly parish bulletins.

BUILDING A CULTURE FOR NEW VOCATIONS

God calls whom He will, but the culture in which the chosen live has a lot to do with how they respond to God's call. Serra clubs are committed to working to build a culture that will encourage and support new vocations. Some of the activities underway by USA clubs include:

- **Parish Vocation Committees:** The USA Council has a long-range goal of having a Vocation Committee in each parish in the United States. Clubs work with their parishes to establish and support vocation committees. Serra materials to help the clubs and parishes include: three brochures on parish vocation committees, "7 Steps to Forming a Church Vocation Committee in Your Parish" and "15 Ways to Promote Church Vocations in Your Parish."
- **College Connection for Catholics:** A recent (2005) study for the U.S. Catholic Bishops confirmed a strong opinion that those who were active in Campus Ministry: attended Mass more often than those who did not participate in Campus Ministry; donated more to their parishes; became leaders in the parishes; and were more likely to consider a vocation to the Priesthood or Religious Life. The purpose of this program is to help recent Catholic high school graduates locate the "Catholic presence" on campus and become involved. Serra Clubs contact Catholic high schools and parishes to obtain the names of graduating seniors and the colleges they plan to attend. The names are entered into a database maintained by USAC through a contract with NET Ministries. The database also has information on the

campus ministries at over a thousand US colleges and university. The student receives a packet with information about the Catholic presence at the college he or she plans to attend. The campus ministry organization gets information on Catholic students coming to the college so they can be contacted shortly after they arrive.

- **Relationships with Youth Oriented Vocation Collaborators:** Serra clubs are providing financial and other support to a number of youth oriented evangelization groups, such as Totus Tuus (summer evangelization retreats for grade and high school students), NET Ministries (young men and women ages 18-28 visit dioceses giving retreats for young Catholics), and FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). Not only do these organizations help bring the Gospel message to young people, staff members who work for the organizations have proven to be an exceptional source of new vocations. For example, about 15% of NET team members enter the seminary or convent after serving on NET.
- **Scout Venturing Program:** Many Catholic priests and men and women religious serving the Church today began their discernment, or found support for their budding vocation interest, during high school and/or in Scouting. The Serra Club of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and their Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting (CCS) formed the first Serra Club chartered Catholic Venturing Crew for students at West Catholic High School in Grand Rapids, with matching funds provided by a Serra International Foundation grant, for initial start-up costs. Serrans across the country are being invited to be part of this new movement. The Venturing units chartered by Serra Clubs provide programs that combine a vocation discernment focus with the benefits of belonging to a unit of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) within a high school extracurricular group.

VOCATION AWARENESS

USA clubs have a variety of programs to increase vocation awareness among Catholics in general, and young people in particular.

- **National Vocation Awareness Week:** UASC has developed a packet on Vocation Awareness for use by parishes that is available through the USAC web site. Clubs provide the packet to parishes. The packet contains activities for the week, including a homily on vocations, prayer cards to pass out as people enter Mass, and special activities for the youth.
- **School Vocation Awareness Programs:** Clubs sponsor and conduct a variety of programs to increase the vocation awareness of students in Catholic high schools, grade schools, and religious education classes. The programs are sometimes conducted by the Serra members and sometimes include presentations by priests, seminarians, or consecrated religious. Some clubs use “cut-outs” of a priest and a nun and take pictures of the children with their faces in the cut-out for them to take home.
- **Focus 11:** Focus 11 programs are usually run by a diocese and are aimed at young people who are 11 years old (5th and 6th grade) or who are in the 11 grade (high

school juniors). Local Serra clubs support Focus 11 programs in several ways. For example, the Archdiocese of Denver has conducted Focus 11 programs for several years. The Denver program involves bringing together about 1,000 5th graders from all the Catholic schools for a day of prayer and reflection about Church vocations. The local Serra clubs assist by providing snacks and drinks, staffing a booth with religious items that children can take home, and taking “cut-out” pictures of the children as a “future” priests or nuns.

- **Altar Server Programs:** Serra Clubs recognize the valuable service young men and women nation-wide offer the church by serving their parish community. Activities typically include bringing them together (often at a seminary) for a day of fun and games, and awarding certificates and medals to them for their service to the Church. At the same time, Serrans help create an awareness of religious life as a vocational choice.
- **Serra Vocation Essay and Poster Contests:** Serra clubs sponsor vocation-related essay and poster contests for the young people in our parish communities. These contests go beyond their competitive nature toward developing and nurturing an awareness of vocations in our midst. The young people are given the opportunity to thoughtfully reflect on the meaning of ministry and vocation in the context of their everyday life experience.
- **Catholic Scouting:** The Scouts have especially tailored programs of religious formation to offer a scout the opportunity to develop better relationships with the world and with God. Serrans assist Diocesan Committees on Scouting in a variety of ways, ranging from paying the salary of a Catholic chaplain at a summer camp to assisting in organizing and operating a scout retreat.
- **Parish Bulletin Clips:** These Parish Bulletin Clips provide parishes and Serra club with a short bulletin insert about vocation message for your use in the weekly bulletin. These bulletin articles raise the level of awareness for vocations among parishioners.
- **Vocations Literature Racks:** Clubs provide literature racks for church vestibules and keep them supplied with vocation brochures and vocation prayer cards.

INVITING & DISCERNING

- **Called by Name:** Called By Name is a national, parish-based program begun by the Serra Club of St. Louis. It has two objectives: to raise the consciousness of Catholics to foster vocations and to surface the names of individuals who may possess the qualities necessary for a vocation to priesthood or religious life.
- **Operation Andrew:** Clubs help parishes invite men to a one-day event with the Diocesan Bishop to consider the priesthood.
- **Quo Vadis Days:** Quo Vadis Days is a three-day camp for young Catholic men to learn more about the priesthood, to deepen their faith, and to better discern God’s call in their lives. The program involves talks from happy priests, recreation,

confessions, opportunities to talk one-on-one with priests, and evening camp fires where the young men hear vocation stories from seminarians. The Serra members and clubs donate money, transport the young men to camp, purchase and transport food, cook, clean up, and do about any other activity that they are asked. The Seattle Archdiocese has used the program for the last several years and of their current 35 seminarians eight have gone through Quo Vadis Days.

- **Single Adult Discernment Weekend Retreat:** The Life Awareness Weekend Retreat program targets single adults, ages 18-50, who may be interested in pursuing a religious vocation. During the retreat, adults listen to presentations and participate in discussions as they discern their vocation. Support groups are available after the retreat to help continue the discernment process begun during the weekend.
- **Providing Funds for Discernment Activities:** Individual clubs as well as groups of clubs provide financial assistance to young men and women to offset travel and other costs associated with the discernment process.