

Program Manual Part 2:



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Introduction

Message from the USA Council Programs Vice-president

Your USA Council Program Committee believes you will find these suggested program themes interesting, easy to use, timely, and of value for increasing member awareness. The richness of their Catholic heritage can add to their personal sanctification and encourage advocacy for vocations. Questions, comments and program theme ideas are welcome. Please address them to the Programs Vice-president in care of the USA Council Chicago office.

In this index, you will find each club program in Portable Document Format (PDF). This format allows you to view the program electronically on most computers. The Adobe Acrobat reader is required to view and print PDF files and it is free. The first program in this index outlines the Program Process.

These suggested club programs are designed to help the club Programs Vice-president, together with the club Chaplain, in planning the club programs. For many, the theme alone will suffice; for others, the program process will assist the presenter in organizing the meeting — be it priest, deacon, religious order member, or Serran. Choose what suits your needs.

Program Outline

This outline sheet serves as your companion in planning. Each section provides information and support to help create your own program.

To get the most benefit from this format, we suggest you take a few moments to think about the experience that you want your club to have. This will help reinforce the material and provide an opportunity for designing a solid program that is enjoyable, worthwhile and challenging to club members.

Option 1: For Group Reflection and Discussion

Decide how you will present the topic for the program.

You may wish to have a member of your local club introduce the program and facilitate the process, or invite a speaker to give the program.

Opening Prayer

After the meal, if a meal is served, the program begins with a prayer related to the topic. Each club is encouraged to design a prayer based on local tradition, or use the simple prayer that is included with the program.

Scripture

Read aloud the text from Scripture, allowing a thoughtful and meditative pause.

Introduction

The program chair explains the importance of the University of Christian Principles in the life of the Serran and introduces the topic and format of the meeting. After briefly setting the context for the significance and relevance of the topic to Serrans, the introduction may be read or paraphrased.

Documentary Tradition

Someone — speaker, chaplain, club member, or guest — can provide a brief reflection based on the information in this section, or it can be read as it is written.

Discussion Questions

Invite participants to discuss one or several of these questions.

Closing Reflection

The program chair closes the program by reading or summarizing this section and thanking those in attendance.

Option 2: For Private Reflection

The greatest experience of adult learning and faith development occurs when people come together to share their faith experiences, pray about their learning and observe how it impacts their life. If this is not possible or if a Serran wishes to further his or her exploration of a topic, we recommend using these programs for private reflection.

The suggested format is:
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- begin with prayer
- meditate on the Scripture passage
- read the introduction
- use the Documentary Tradition to gain a broader understanding of the topic
- take time to answer the discussion questions
- share your insights through daily action or a journal of personal reflections.

Option 3: Have External Speaker Use This Format

When contacting a speaker, the program handout can be given to him or her in order to focus the presentation on the requested topic. Speakers will have their own comfort level, style and interpretation of the topic, so be flexible. The actual program may be used as is, or the speaker may create a variation. We suggest that the speaker utilize the discussion questions, if possible. If the speaker only gives the input, the club chair can facilitate the discussion questions. Involve as many members as possible in the discussion.

Mission and Ministry of Jesus

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Jesus, Son of the Living God, you came to save your people. Be with us as we strive to understand that every word and action of your life was focused on your teaching about the Father. Keep us ever mindful of how we the Church are to carry out your mission here on earth. We pray through you to the Father and the Spirit, Amen.

Scripture

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (*Matthew 16:13-16*).

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

There comes a time in life when we are faced with the question of what we believe. One aspect of this maturing faith is the ability to respond to the question: “Who is Jesus for me?” The purpose of this program is to express a response based on a faith that integrates the church’s beliefs, a community’s values and our own personal experience.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The church of the first several centuries struggled with its articulation of Jesus’ identity. Today we profess our faith in Jesus as truly human and truly divine. Although theological formulations of this mystery took time to develop, it wasn’t until the fourth century that the Nicene Creed formally stated what the early church had believed, prayed, and what we Catholics believe and profess today - namely that Jesus Christ is one in being with the Father.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) stands out in history, as the focal point for the development of the Church’s understanding of Jesus Christ. At this Council, the Church reached a clear consensus in its understanding that in Jesus there existed two natures, human and divine, in one divine person, with no confusion between the two natures. The great value of this Council is its insistence upon the fullness of Jesus’ humanity and divinity within the unity of one person. From the days of the Council of Chalcedon, this is how we have understood the Lord.

A few statements from recent documents shed light on how the church continues to answer this question of who Jesus is.

Christ “fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.” (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #22*).

“Christ, the Redeemer of the world, *is the Mediator between God and men,....* Christ, the Son who is of one being with the Father, is therefore the one *who reveals God’s plan for all creation and for man in particular.*” (*Apostolic Letter on the Coming of the Third Millennium, Nov. 10, 1994, #4*
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“The Word became flesh *to be our model of holiness*: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.’ I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me’ (Matthew 11: 29; John 14: 6). On the mountain of the transfiguration, the Father commands: ‘Listen to Him!’ (Matthew 9: 7; Deuteronomy 6: 4-5). Jesus is the model for the Beatitudes and the norm of the new law: ‘Love one another as I have loved you. This love implies an effective offering of oneself, after his example” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #459)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for a general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. How is Jesus present in the world today?
2. Based on Jesus’ life, what activities are at the heart of Christian behavior in the world?
3. How does being a Serran contribute to being a disciple of Christ?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

When we come full circle with what we really know and what we still embrace as mystery or articles of faith, we are left with the initial question presented to us by the Gospel writer, “Who do you say that I am?” Our response often affirms that in Jesus we encounter the human face of God. In essence, we will find what we seek precisely in a personal relationship with Jesus and not simply waiting for him to come. This intimate relationship moves us to proclaim, like Peter, “You are the Messiah, The Son of God.”

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Mission and Ministry of the Church

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, it is through your Church that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom is made known to the world. Guide us as we strive to do our part to build this Kingdom and make real the sacrament of Christ to all that we meet. Amen.

Scripture

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (*Philippians 2: 1-2*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Church means different things to many people. The Church's mission and ministry has been shaped by the many images that have been presented throughout history. No matter what image a person has in regard to the church, its mission and ministry is born out of a relationship with others as we live and proclaim the Gospels. This program will explore the different ways that church can be experienced.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The entire life of Jesus was the foundation of the Church. As he gathered his followers and revealed himself to them, the Church was being born. Early growth climaxed at the Last Supper and was strengthened with the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Since those times, the church has grown in its understanding of how to express the Word of God to others. Today its mission encompasses a set of images born out of both the Old and New Testaments and a rich history which includes teachers, servants, martyrs and great writers. The most prominent images from the Catechism of the Catholic Church present us with a framework that defines our experience of being church as the Body Christ, the People of God, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Similar statements can be found in many Church documents. A few are listed here.

"...For, those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God (cf. 1 Peter 1: 23), not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3: 5-6), are finally established as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' ... You who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God." (1 Peter 2: 9-10) (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #9*)

"... drawing on a rich biblical and historical tradition, gives marvelous expression to the role of the Church as the sign of the Kingdom of God. It was this Kingdom which Jesus came to announce and to inaugurate by his life, death, and resurrection...Jesus established the Church to bear witness to God's Kingdom especially by the ways his followers would live as the People of God." (*Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 13, 1980*)
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“The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which insofar as they are united to their pastor, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament In them, the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the Diaspora, Christ is present, through whose power and influence the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted.” LG 26. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #832)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. With the different images of the church presented in the catechism, which are you most comfortable with? Least comfortable with?
2. What is the mission and ministry of the church?
3. As a Serran, how do you personally, actively minister to the world around you?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

From the very beginning of his public life, Jesus invited people to follow him. As they listened to his message about God, the coming of the kingdom, and the promise of new life these followers formed the communities that became our Church. The Church grew as an assembly of those who were baptized in Christ, accepted the beliefs, participated in the sacraments, and engaged in ministry. The unifying goal was to make Jesus present in the world and point to the Kingdom of God. Today we carry out our relationship with God by the way we treat one another. We will continually be challenged to see our parish community or our Serra Club as an expression of our larger Church.

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Mission and Ministry of Priesthood

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

O God, You consecrated Your only-begotten Son, supreme and eternal Priest, for the glory of Your majesty, and the salvation of Humanity: grant that those whom He has chosen to be priests will be faithful in fulfilling the ministry they have received. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Scripture

“Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.... No one takes this honor upon himself, but only when called by God.”

(Hebrews 5: 1-4)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

A priest is a mediator presenting an offering of love and surrender to God in the name of the community of believers. At the same time, the priest is chosen by God to communicate the Lord's gifts of grace, love and forgiveness to the community. Priesthood has experienced significant changes throughout history. Current expectations of the priesthood are so diverse that false hopes are often placed on them by the community in which they serve. This program provides the opportunity to communicate the varied responsibilities and roles of the priest.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The priesthood draws its meaning from the life of Jesus, and from this foundation the Church views itself as the Body of Christ sharing in the very nature and activities of Christ. This includes sharing in his priesthood, which expresses what God has done for all humanity.

Over the course of history, the Church developed differences between the common and ministerial priesthood. This is most notably seen in the celebration of the Eucharist. Here the ordained priest acts in the person of Christ and offers the sacrifice of the Mass to God in the name of the people, and the people join with the priest in that offering. Through the sacrament of ordination priests are empowered to act in the person of Christ, which unites them in a sacramental bond with one another as they participate in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

The nature of priesthood has gained a considerable amount of attention since the Second Vatican Council. The Church is struggling to understand the priesthood of the faithful and to generate a deeper understanding of the unique call to serve in the ordained priesthood. While there are references to priesthood in the old and new testaments and church history the following quotes express our contemporary understanding of this special call from God.

“The priest has a special relationship with Jesus Christ. “By the Sacrament of Orders priests are configured to Christ, the Priest, so that as minister of the head and coworkers of the episcopal order they can build up and establish His Whole Body which is Christ.” *(Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, #12)*

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“The basic elements of the priestly ministry are: a) to proclaim the Gospel; b) to preside over the sacraments and liturgy, and c) to build up and serve the community which in turn serves the world.”
(*The Report of the Bishops Ad Hoc Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry*, p. 25)

“The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ. While being ‘ordered one to another,’ they differ essentially.... While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the faithful by the unfolding of baptismal grace — a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason, it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1547)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the main conclusion that we can draw from the doctrine of the common priesthood?
2. How will this challenge the priesthood in the 21st century?
3. As Serrans how can we help the common and ordained priesthood minister to each other?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In light of shifting perceptions of ministry within the Church, the distinctiveness of the priest has been blurred. Specifically, the Sacrament of Orders is considered to be a sacrament of service to the community. Reception of this sacrament gives those who receive it a particular role in the building up of the Church by engaging in the threefold ministry of preaching, celebrating the Eucharist and providing guidance for the faithful.

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Mission and Ministry of Religious Life

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Loving Father, we pray for those men and women who seek to serve you as brothers and sisters in religious communities. May the Holy Spirit and the unique charism of their founder inspire them to live the gospel to it's fullest. We pray particularly for those you have called through history, those you are calling now, and those you will be calling in the future. May we as Serrans always be open and responsive to those who receive such a vocation from you. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture

“His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world.” *(1 Peter 1: 34)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Men and women who join religious communities choose the vowed life as a way of expressing their dedication to God, with the individual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience being concrete expressions of that dedication. The purpose of this program is to appreciate the life of service these men and women live, as they become symbols of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Through our baptism, we are all called to be people of service. The religious responds freely and totally by serving within a community that is consistently being formed by the gospel in order to bring Christ to the world.

While such a choice is viewed as being difficult and limiting by today's standards of self determination and individualism, the religious finds his or he joy in living a life of prayer, obedience, and celibacy within a gospel- centered community where members experience the mystery of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church captures the richness and beauty of the religious life in the following two statements:

“The religious state is the one way of experiencing a ‘more intimate’ consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #916)*

“By a life perfectly and entirely consecrated to [such] sanctification, the members of these institutes share in the Church's task of evangelization, in the world and from within the world, where their presence acts as a leaven in the world. Their witness of a Christian life aims to order temporal things
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according to God and inform the world with the power of the Gospel. They commit themselves to the evangelical counsels by sacred bonds and observe among themselves the communion and fellowship appropriate to their particular secular way of life.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #229)

Finally, the value in religious life is based on the journey to conform to Christ, but is only effective to the degree that a particular community is able to renew itself in light of the needs of the church and the world. Thus, “The appropriate renewal of religious life involves two simultaneous processes: (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community and (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times. It is according to the following principles that such renewal should go forward under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church.” (*Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*, #2)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. How have the changes in the church in the last 25 years affected apostolic religious life?
2. What are the many different services that religious have been involved in because of the changes in the church?
3. What can parishes, local Serra clubs or Serra International do to respond more effectively to the needs of those in religious life?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

The vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience lead people to charity by connecting them to the Church and its mystery in a special way. Consequently, the spiritual life of these people is devoted to the welfare of the whole Church through special ministries. Also by the profession of these vows religious communities appear as a sign which attracts all the members of the Church to fulfill the duties of their Christian vocation. The challenge before the Church is to ask itself the questions about how to invite ever increasing numbers of faithful Christians to share more deeply in a spiritual life in a global culture that can appear superficial. At the same time, contemporary media presents us constantly with large realms of human need.

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Mission and Ministry of Serra International

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

O God, who wills not the death of a sinner, a change of heart and life, grant we implore You through the intercession of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, Saint Joseph, Her spouse, Blessed Junipero Serra, and all the saints, an increase of laborers for Your Church. Fellow laborers with Christ, to spend and consume themselves for others through the same Jesus Christ Your Son. Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit God forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers..... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”
(Acts 2: 42-47)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Serra International is an organization whose members continue to study and learn about their Christian heritage, the Catholic faith and how to contribute to the daily needs of the world. This program focuses on sharing a deep faith and wanting to incorporate the teachings of Christ into daily life, and explore way to be true spiritual leaders who transform their communities while encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

In 1934, four Catholic lay men in Seattle, Washington decided to meet for the purpose of growing in their faith by participating in programs of Catholic education and assisting in the education of young men for the priesthood. While financial support of seminarians loomed large in the 1930’s, Serra’s mission has evolved over the years in response to the changing times and needs of the Catholic Church in America and across the globe.

In 1968, Serra restated its purpose of continuing to make the encouragement of church vocations its hallmark by expressly stating its mission to foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood of the Catholic Church by developing an appreciation for the ministerial priesthood and for all religious vocations in the Catholic Church, and by participating in fellowship and education to fulfill its Christian vocation to service.

While Serra enjoys international status, the United States has created an organizational structure that assists, educates and further develops men and women to fulfill their purpose in local clubs scattered throughout the country. All Serrans are asked to involve themselves in activities that will enrich their own spiritual and communal life while fulfilling the mission and purpose of Serra International.

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This involvement in study and ministry is rooted in the Catholic vision of the laity in the world.

“The laity derive the right and duty with respect to the apostolate from their union with Christ their Head. Incorporated into Christ’s Mystical Body through baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through confirmation, they are assigned to the Apostolate by the Lord. They are consecrated into the royal priesthood and a holy people in order that they offer the spiritual sacrifices through everything they do, and may witness to Christ throughout the world.” (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, #3*)

“Those who sincerely accepted the Good News, through the power of his acceptance and of shared faith, therefore gather in Jesus’ name in order to seek together the Kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community, which in its turn evangelizes. The command to the Twelve to go out and proclaim the Good News is also valid for all Christians, though in a different way.” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World, #13*)

“It is incumbent on those who exercise authority to strengthen the values that inspire the confidence of the members of the group and encourage them to put themselves at the service of others. Participation begins with education and culture. ‘One is entitled to think that the future of humanity is in the hands of those who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism.’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1917*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is unique about Serra International that distinguishes it from other organizations?
2. How does Serra International foster the spiritual life of its members?
3. What contribution does Serra International make to its members, church and society?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

While fostering vocations is the hallmark of Serra activities, there is the danger of focusing on only the vocation of the professional religious. We can not neglect that through baptism every Christian has a vocation. That is to say, God calls every Serran to a specific way of making God’s love visible to the world. It is through participation in Serra that members are able to proclaim their faith and witness to the resurrected Christ by the way that they contribute to their families, the Serra organization, their local club, and the parish.

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Mission and Ministry of a Serran

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Lord, through the missionary activities of Blessed Junipero Serra your saving work has continued to this day. We praise and thank you as we gather here to celebrate the joy of being a Serran. May the love we have for your Church continue to guide our activities. Give us the strength, courage, and insight we need as we work to bring the vision of Serra to reality. We pray in the name of Jesus your Son. Amen.

Scripture

“Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made us: eternal life ... As for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, so that you do not need anyone to teach you. But his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and not false; just as it taught you, remain in him.” (1 John 2: 24-27)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Involvement in Serra International challenges its members to live up to their baptismal call as Christians. In essence the success of Serra’s mission and ministry is dependent on its members’ personal actions in living a Christian Catholic life. This program matches an individual’s personal calling with the mission of Serra, which is to learn about the Catholic faith, foster vocations, and providing outreach.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Traditions

As Christians, we have always believed that the life of faith is not a private affair but rather a communal expression. Basically, Christianity is a community event as well as a personal calling. There is a basis for community whenever people discover that they share a concern for some significant aspect of their lives. When this common interest is important enough it will move people to come together in light of these concerns.

Through its history church communities have formed around particular acts of service and expressions of prayer and devotion. In each case people see the religious ideal of community as the goal for their interactions with one another and the model for how they can best serve the Church in a particular way. Common elements found in the mission and ministry of a Serran includes:

“Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the earth. This duty is more pressing when it is only through them that others can hear the Gospel and know Christ.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #900*)

“...The specific role of the teaching of adults consists in an initial deepening of their faith, received at baptism, in an elementary, complete and systematic way (CT 21), with a view to helping individuals all life long grow to the full maturity of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4: 13)” (*Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*, #32)

“On behalf of the Church, I must tell you of my esteem and my encouragement for your numerous initiatives in favor of vocations. It is really admirable that lay persons, deeply convinced that the Church and society needs priests and religious, take as a purpose of their commitment as Christians prayer and hard-working action for the spread, development, perseverance, increase and assistance of vocations. You are mindful in this of Jesus words, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (*Pope John Paul II to Serrans*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. When you hear the words “Serra International,” what comes to your mind?
2. When you think of serving as a Serran, how does it make you feel?
3. How does participation in Serra meetings contribute to your faith? The faith of others?

Closing Reflection

The mission of the Church is one of service to the community. The Church is a community of disciples. Serrans share in this discipleship in a way that is based on their initial call from the Lord. They are also called to be together in community that is sent out into the world to make a difference. Such involvement requires that they understand the dignity of their calling, service, and ministry in light of their contribution to the Church, their local parish, and Serra International.

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Liturgical Seasons

Introduction

Our liturgical calendar marks the celebrations that shape, carry on, and expand the Church's communal life. The Sundays along with the seasons and feasts of each year establish a pattern of celebrating many events in the life of Jesus and the appearances of Christ's dying and rising.

Within each liturgical season there is a blending of spirituality, celebration, and religious instruction that show how we can live this paschal mystery in our everyday lives. Furthermore, the scripture passages that make up our lectionary readings during each liturgical season reveal to us the story of Jesus' life and ministry, with a special focus on his death, resurrection and imminent return.

The purpose of these programs is to reflect on the liturgical seasons of the year to gain greater insight into the universal themes that are part of our faith tradition. The enclosed reflection sheets are a resource to explore the seasonal themes of our church's liturgical life. The format is simple and consistent allowing the themes to be building blocks upon which to build an annual program. The paragraphs capture only glimpses and summaries of the scripture's richness as they are presented for each season. The content is inclusive of all three cycles of readings and acts as a catalyst for your club to enter more deeply into the beauty of each liturgical season.

Advent

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

O Lord our God, you have made us and this beautiful world in which we live. As we celebrate this advent season we pray that you enter into our lives more fully. Bring to us a peace that overcomes any doubt. Let us know the true meaning of waiting and understand the great love given to us through your incarnation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” *(Luke 1:26-35)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The season of advent resets the clocks and calendars of Christian worship and calls us to a new beginning. We once again begin the rhythms of community and embrace the themes that make the Christian journey so rich.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Advent is the first season of the Church year. It is a four-week time period that blends together a penitential spirit, a liturgical theme of preparation for the Second Coming, and a joyful attitude of getting ready for the birth of Christ. It is a season of great hope and expectation.

These blended themes are a summary of the lectionary readings. The scripture passages for the first half of advent speaks to us of hope for the future. They emphasize being alert and *watching* for the Lord's coming since the time of his coming is not known. The readings for the second half of advent focus on the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, where God's promise to his people was fulfilled in the act of being born into the human family.

The movement from watching for the glory of God to seeing the glory manifest in the Christ child arouses our imagination and awareness. We are invited to a mature expectation of the Lord's coming into our own lives. As Christians, we celebrate what already is, while standing in expectation of what is yet to be revealed. In essence, the reign of God is already among us but is not yet made manifest in its fullness. This waiting and watching clears a space in our hearts and souls that opens us to see the

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mysteries of God show themselves in the joy of the advent season. During this time we learn that how we wait and watch for the Lord is as important as learning how to meet him.

“When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Catechism of the Catholic Church #524)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does watching mean to you?
2. How do you watch for the Lord's coming in your life?
3. How can Serrans express this watchfulness in their club activities?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

As the conception of Jesus was an Advent, a coming, this season becomes a time of joyful anticipation that Christ will offer us a new beginning by reaching out to cradle us in his loving forgiveness. Through God's merciful gift of love crooked ways are made straight, hardened hearts are filled with joy, and the disenfranchised are welcomed.

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Christmas Season

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, we now know the joy of receiving the Christ Child in our hearts. Help us to hold Him with a reverent spirit so that we experience His continual presence in our lives. We pray that your holy birth inspires us to live in loving peace where we recognize the signs of good tidings and salvation to the world. Amen.

Scripture

“On that day, the root of Jesse set up as a signal for the nations, The Gentiles shall seek him out, for his dwelling shall be glorious. On that day, The Lord shall again take it in hand to reclaim the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria and Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, and Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the isles of the sea.” *(Isiah 11:10-11)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

More than any other time of the year, the Christmas season is a time of celebrating the great gift of salvation through Jesus. During this period we marvel at God’s unconditional love for humanity. The purpose of this program is to experience the gift of the Christ child and the true gifts God has given us.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

During the Christmas season we celebrate the coming of the Messiah into our lives and into the world of justice at the end of time. The unending love of God that is to be seen in the Bethlehem event of 2,000 years ago is present among us today. Consequently, the nativity story is more than an historical drama that is reenacted each year. It is also a time to reflect on how Jesus is born into our lives every single day.

While popular culture may be finished with Christmas on December 26th, the church has not yet begun to celebrate the fullness of the season. We embody the incarnational Christmas theme by continuing to tell the story. Because Jesus was born, God now resides in our flesh and blood, is in the pulsing of our needs and aspirations, and even in the shadows of our forgiven sins.

The scriptures for this season capture the events of history that the prophets uttered to their people. Their message is simple. *Believe in the creative, redeeming, purifying, loving, and blessing word of God.* By remembering the community’s return from exile, the prophets lay the foundation for the good news to be proclaimed as it reflects not only what God said to His people, but also who God is in history and how God acts.

These Christmas days are filled with specific festive events highlighting aspects of Jesus’ humanity. These include the birth of Jesus (Christmas), born of Mary (Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God), who become a part of a human family (Feast of the Holy Family), was manifested to the nations (Epiphany), and revealed as God’s own beloved child (Baptism of the Lord). The Christmas season celebrates the appearance of God among us. It highlights the familiar bonds that foster relationships
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and provides learning about life, receiving seeds of faith, experiencing communion, and being of service that Jesus understood as He grew in wisdom, age, and grace.

“Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night:

The Virgin today brings into the world the Eternal, and the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible. The angels and shepherds praise him, and the magi advance with the star, For you are born for us, Little Child, God eternal!

To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become "children of God" we must be "born from above" or "born of God." Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this "marvelous exchange":

O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 525-526*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does Jesus' birth teach you about God?
2. How has believing in the Word of God affected your life?
3. In what ways does your Serra Club proclaim the Word of God to others? Is a gift to others?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

Christmas does not merely celebrate the birth of a child but rather this great feast celebrates the birth of our Lord in our very flesh. These days reveal the divine manifestation and human discovery. They celebrate the dawn of salvation in a world shrouded with shadows of sin and darkness. We come to live in the true light and warmth of the Christ child, the greatest gift to us all.

The movement from the birth of Christ to the reality that He is now a part of our human world is a challenge to many of us. We are called to begin, continue, or assess how we have brought Christ in to the world through our actions and service to one another. The giving of gifts to family and friends must open to giving to the rest of humanity in whatever capacity we are able.

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Lent

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

God of mercy, give us patience in this season of reconciliation. Stand by us when our imperfections and selfishness get in the way of truly loving you, our neighbor, and caring for the world around us. Continue to bestow your generous love upon us. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

“For they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, from the midst of an iron furnace. Thus may your eyes be open to the petition of your servant and to the petition of your people Israel. Hear them whenever they call upon you, because you have set them apart among all the peoples of the earth for your inheritance, as you declared through your servant Moses when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD.” (1Kings 8:51-53)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Lent is a period for the instruction of the catechumenates. It is also a period of reflection for the baptized as well. In Lent every Catholic has the opportunity to relive his or her baptism experience and deepen its meaning through the process of prayer, fasting, and works of charity. This program presents the Lenten experience within the context of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Lent is a journey of faith during the time from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday. The seasons of Lent take their shape and meaning from the process and rites of conversion. The readings, prayers, and seasonal practices are interpreted and celebrated in the light of our baptism into Christ’s dying and rising. During this time we take special care to follow God’s will in our daily lives and in the larger world.

Three themes hold this six-week season together. *The mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the implications of this mystery for those preparing for baptism and a spiritual renewal of faith and conversion for those already baptized.*

It is at this time of our liturgical year that the whole church goes on retreat. This annual spiritual renewal prepares us for the celebration of Christianity’s most fundamental belief: Jesus was raised from the dead and is Christ the Lord. Lent becomes our time of reconciliation where we ask God for forgiveness and seek to follow Christ in all things. Lent is also a challenge to conversion because during these forty days we prepare to renew and personalize our baptismal commitment. It is a time to move forward toward the light of Easter and the light of Christ in our lives.

During this season we listen carefully to the word of God and reflect on its meaning for our lives. The scriptures give us insights into the reality of salvation history. We see that there is no greater blindness than self-deception and sin. Yet being tempted is part of being human and overcoming temptation is part of belonging to Christ. These scripture readings call us to journey into the paradox of belief and

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unbelief. The transformation of sinful people into faithful disciples shares in the transfiguration of Jesus. Our challenge as we experience the tension is to always see and hear the deeper spiritual realities in what Jesus is saying and doing.

Jesus' temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him. This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter for us: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning." By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 540)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you do to foster your spiritual renewal of faith?
2. How do you participate in the Church's Lenten Retreat?
3. How important is Jesus' death and resurrection in Serra's mission to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and to participate in the University of Christian Principles?

Closing Reflection

God's call and response in faith is the rhythm that has marked this season as an epic saga of salvation history. In the glory of Christ Jesus, the perfect one is sustained so we might all have life. Through the thirst and desires of our Lenten fast and abstinence we find the refreshment we are truly seeking in the person of Jesus.

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Easter Triduum

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Father, for your glory and our salvation you appointed Jesus Christ to be your eternal High Priest. May the people He gained for you come to share in the power of His cross and resurrection, for He lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come. Through him (then) let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.” *(Hebrews 13:12-15)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The Easter Triduum (three days) and its inclusion in the Holy Week liturgies is the climax of the Church’s year and its celebration of the great events by which humanity was released from sin and reunited with God. This program highlights the Triduum as the transition moment in our faith and its importance in our lives.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the Resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of this source, the year is transfigured by the liturgy. It really is a "year of the Lord's favor." The economy of salvation is at work within the framework of time, but since its fulfillment in the Passover of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the culmination of history is anticipated "as a foretaste," and the kingdom of God enters into our time. *(Catechism of the Catholic Church #1168)*

The three days of the Easter Triduum begin as the season of Lent comes to a close. The Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. These three days are the center of the entire year for Christians. They are best understood and enacted as a single liturgy that celebrates Christ’s Passover from death to a new life. The dominant themes of the scriptures focus on the detailed events of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper.

The resurrection of the crucified Christ is the point on which the weekly and annual cycles of the Christian calendar turn. In fact it supplies the clue to the whole history of salvation. Every Sunday and every Easter day is a commemoration and celebration of the resurrection of Jesus and an anticipation of the day when the Lord will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and finally establish the kingdom of God.

To this end the Easter Triduum is usually seen as three distinct liturgies that are experienced as one movement. The church proclaims the direction of these days by the opening antiphon of Holy Thursday, which comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians (6:14):

"We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for he is our salvation, our life, and resurrection; through him we are saved and made free."

This verse sets a spiritual environment for the whole Church to enter into the Triduum.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What religious traditions have you enjoyed in the past, but watch with pain as they faded away? How did you adjust to their absence?
2. What new religious traditions had you resisted at first but finally came to accept and appreciate? How did you adjust to them?
3. How is your Serra Club participating in the rebirth of our Lord? How does your group accept and appreciate this?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

As we finish our Lenten retreat we enter with Jesus into the events of his betrayal, crucifixion, death and resurrection. In some way we enter two very profound mysteries when we participate in this summit of our Christian faith. First, we gather around the mystery in which our lives are played out. We experience in our own lives the mystery of conversion, as we die to those aspects of our life that prevent us from experiencing the loving presence of God. Secondly, as members of the Body of Christ we share with Christ the horror of his death and his hope in the resurrection. In essence we measure these three days by our own *rebirths, our own return*, as we participate in the very life of God.

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Easter Time

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Jesus, you give your Church constant growth by calling new members to your family. Continue to call us to conversion and help us to live out with faith the baptismal promises we received. Amen.

Scripture

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we preach), for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the scripture says, No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (*Romans 10:8-13*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Easter time is the time when the unfolding mystery of God and the Church take place. This program emphasizes that through Jesus' resurrection we begin to fully enter the paschal mystery and integrate it into our every day lives.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

"On the day of Pentecost when the seven weeks of Easter had come to and end, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested, given, and communicated as divine person: of his fullness, Christ, the Lord, pours out the Spirit in abundance.

On that day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed. Since that day, the kingdom announced by Christ has been open to those who believe in him: in the humanity of the flesh and in faith, they already share in the communion of the Holy Trinity. By his coming, which never ceases, the Holy Spirit causes the world to enter into the "last days" the time of the Church, the Kingdom already inherited though not yet consummated." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #731-32*)

Easter is the season of Alleluia; a hopeful sign of the time when all we will do is rejoice in God and be fully in His presence. This oldest season practice of the church draws heavily on the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypse for its scriptural readings during the great fifty days. The readings focus on the followers of Christ as they celebrate in the gift of the spirit, spread the good news of salvation, and work toward the life of heaven on earth. Throughout the season of Easter the scripture readings are of parallel and progressive selections. Material is presented on the life of the primitive Church, its witness and growth, its spirit of joyous faith, and its encounter with the risen Christ.

The scriptural message states that it is not a celebration of one man's victory but a universal triumph of that One Man on behalf of all of us. Easter is the heart of our Christian faith. We are all born anew in Jesus' death and healed by his suffering. Without a strong unswerving belief in the resurrection of
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Christ we could not be a people of the resurrection and bring the Good News of Easter to others. We share the great joy that accompanies the promised gift of everlasting life. Like the disciples we don't do this alone. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide our lives and our church. During Easter we struggle with the huge mystery of the resurrection and the urgent necessity of carrying on Jesus' work of peace and healing, forgiveness and nurture.

Jesus' glorification in the Christian assembly is the central theme of the Easter season. It celebrates a *resurrection faith* that delivers us from the slavery of time, sin, death, and loss, which serves as an instance of courageous witness. Those who have been baptized, anointed, and admitted to the table at Easter are led more deeply into the very mysteries that they have now celebrated. The fifty days taken as a unit celebrates God's gathering of a scattered people to Himself by joining them to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Eastertime is not just a remembrance, but is also recognition of the actual person of Jesus Christ in our midst, when we are gathered together in him whose very person is itself the feast.

(The facilitator can read the discussion questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you know that you have faith?
2. Why is Easter a faith experience?
3. How important are other Serra members in my journey of faith?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

These fifty days can only begin to unfold their mystery and meaning when we accept the new life brought to us by the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Its joy is ours now, if we take the time to embrace our new life, and celebrate it to the fullest as we reflect on it daily. The result is an incredible realization that we can alter this world's illusion of perfection and help shed the light of Christ on our world, by being that light, to our highest ability at the moment.

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Ordinary Times

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Father, keep before us the love and compassion of your son Jesus. Help us to be like him in work and deed, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces. A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to be silent, and a time to speak.

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace...He has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into their hearts, without ever discovering, from beginning to end, the work which God has done.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-13)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

During Ordinary Time no particular theme is covered. Instead we are exposed to an overall sense of Jesus work in the world revealed in varied scripture readings. We are challenged by Jesus’ call to discipleship as we participate in our work, relationships, fears, sorrows and joys. This program seeks to offer us an understanding of the Church’s cycle of readings as a means for growing in discipleship.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“In the liturgical year the various aspects of the one Paschal mystery unfold. This is also the case with the cycle of feasts surrounding the mystery of the incarnation (Annunciation, Christmas, Epiphany). They commemorate the beginning of our salvation and communicate to us the first fruits of the Paschal mystery.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1171*)

During the Ordinary Time between Christmas and Lent, we focus on Jesus’ calling of His disciples and His works of healing and teaching. Similarly, during the post-Pentecost Ordinary Time, we again focus on the task of bringing Christ into the world in practical ways with a strong emphasis on social justice.

The two seasons of Ordinary Time reflect an ordered progression of weeks that are not a part of the major feasts and seasons. This allows us to focus on the *sacredness of everyday life* that we are not able to do when we are preparing for or celebrating an extraordinary feast or season. The recognition and celebration, beauty and goodness of our everyday lives focuses on the simple things that fill our lives between the peaks and valleys. Ordinary Time is a time for reaching out, learning, growing, and maturing as Christians.

Depending on the year, the scripture readings of Ordinary Time are taken from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The seasons of Ordinary Time are also marked by the feast days of many people the world knew as ordinary, but we now call extraordinary. We use this time to examine how these people, the saints, lived the message of Jesus Christ and we try to imitate their lives.

(The facilitator can read the discussion questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. In Jesus' life what holds the most meaning for you?
2. What characteristics do you admire most in Jesus?
3. How is your involvement in Serra an expression of discipleship?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

The best way to experience and appreciate ordinary times in the liturgical life of the church is to remember that before the religious individual or community can begin to do or say anything, God with infinite love has already spoken it and acted upon it. While all the high holidays celebrate something profound in Jesus' life it is during the ordinary times that we are truly called to respond to God, who already effected how we are as a people of faith.

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God: Father of Humankind

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

Scripture

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
(Luke 1:31-33)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

We identify with God as the Father of his only Son Jesus, but we also recognize that we, too, are children of God because God said we are. In the Feast of the Annunciation, God gives himself totally to humanity through the conception of Jesus. Through this program we again see the power of God, the wonder of the Holy Spirit, and the vulnerability of the person of Jesus.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Christian message of God the Father is one that is found in our most basic creeds. “I believe in God, the Father Almighty”, is a statement that sums up our understanding of God as Father to all of humanity, each one’s own Father. This reality is made present in Jesus’ teaching about the Father as the ultimate source who connects and relates to all aspects of His creation.

First, we can say that God the Father revealed Himself to the Hebrew people through the covenant, and as a nation they recognized him as creator, protector, and guide. From this foundation we see, in the bible, individuals and communities expressing new life because of their relationship with Him. Today, God as the creator continues to sustain all things and guides them through his loving care. We also see God the Father revealed in the New Testament, through Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom. He makes clear that God’s reign has its source in the Father.

“We can adore the Father because he has caused us to be reborn to his life by adopting us as his children in his only Son: by Baptism, he incorporates us into the Body of his Christ; through the anointing of his Spirit who flows from the head to the members, he makes us other ‘Christ.’”
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2782)

The fatherhood of God offers us a deep understanding that we can experience both a vocation and an election that is rooted in God, which not only points back to first creation but also points forward in hope to continual re-creation.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)
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Discussion Questions

1. When did you realize that through your baptism you became a member of God's family?
2. When does your parish community express itself as God's family?
3. How has Serra become part of God's family for you?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

For many Christians, "father", is one of the most familiar and frequently used ways of addressing God in prayer. Many find it to be a meaningful way of expressing the kind of relationship they have with God. Jesus used the term "Abba" to express the special relationship he had with his Father. The intimacy of the Abba relationship was not exclusive; rather, it was a dynamic relationship that still shares the Holy Spirit with His entire creation. In this way, our lives as sons and daughters are more than child-like; it is uniquely responsive to our own capacity to be co-creators in a divine family that is forgiving, healing and inclusive, in the spirit of Our Father.

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God: Father of Jesus

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Father of Jesus, you gave your only Son to the world so that your complete love could be made real to all of humanity. Be with us as we come to know you, through the life and ministry of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Scripture

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light... Suddenly, a bright cloud covered them with a shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favor. *(Matthew 17:1-3)*”

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

We learn from an attentive reading of the Gospels, that Jesus lived and worked in constant reference to His Father. He frequently addressed God with a term of endearment and love—“Abba.” Through this example God is revealed in the fullness of paternity. This program illustrates that in the light of Jesus’ definitive testimony we can know that God’s fatherhood pertains first of all to the mystery of God’s inner life and its mystery of the Trinity.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“The Gospels report that at two solemn moments, the Baptism and Transfiguration of Christ, the voice of the Father designates Jesus as his beloved Son, Jesus calls himself the only Son of God, and by this title affirms his eternal preexistence. He asks for faith in the name of the only Son of God. In the centurion’s exclamation before the crucified Christ, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God,’ Christian confession is already heard. Only in the Paschal mystery can the believer give the title Son of God its full meaning.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church #444)*

By becoming human in Jesus Christ God communicates with humanity and seeks out every person. Through this searching, God’s love becomes ever more evident in the world. Jesus Christ is the word and image of the Father, and in him, the hidden God is revealed to us. In essence when one encounters God through Jesus, one encounters the Father. Through this relationship, God makes his presence real in the person of Jesus. Jesus offers all humanity a message of hope and love. As God defines himself through the humanity of Jesus, He becomes active as the Father of Christ and our Father.

There are many truths revealed by and in the one living mystery of God.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does Jesus’ life reveal about God the Father?

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2. How has the Church embodied these characteristics?
3. How does your Serra club most express these characteristics?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

There is no doubt that the New Testament attributes a unique identity to Jesus as God's only son. Faith in this identity is affirmed primarily in the transfiguration. Along with the baptism and the agony in the garden, the transfiguration is the key event in which the Father communes with the Son in a special way about His mission. The description of Jesus' face and clothes and the transfiguration identifies him as a member of the heavenly realm. He continually invites us to engage in becoming like Him, even as He engaged in becoming like us so He could bring us to the Father.

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God: Father of Love

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.

Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit.” (1 John 4:7-13)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

There are passages in scripture through which the inspired authors express the spiritual truth about God’s love by referring to him as the Creator. This spiritual truth in some way always points to the love of God and the need for this love to be expressed in relationship with all that was created, especially humanity. This program makes the connection between God’s love for humanity and our invitation to love one another.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

God created humanity through love and invites humanity into love. This vocation to love is at the heart of the Church’s attempt to make Jesus’ love real to the world. Furthermore, the abundance of God’s love manifests itself in the redemptive act of Christ’s death and resurrection. By this supreme gift, God is faithful to His eternal plan, and also calls all of us, through the Church, to be reconciled so this love is really evident in our own lives.

“To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become children of God we must be born from above or born of God. Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this marvelous exchange...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #526)

Becoming a child to enter the kingdom is necessary to experience the kingdom fully. By becoming childlike (not childish) we are able to place ourselves in complete dependence on God, resulting in the experience of being unconditionally loved for who we are. This fosters in us an attitude of accepting and loving others for who they are in the eyes of God.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in your life that may help or hinder your experience of the love of God and your ability to share it with others?
2. Do you think that your parish thinks of Christmas in terms of birth or celebration of God's love? How is this expressed?
3. Do you experience your Serra Club as one, which is attuned to the love of God and the Second Coming of Christ?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In Pope John Paul II's challenge to reflect on God the Father in 1999, he is very clear that God is the father of love. All Christians are called to be open to this truth and to share it with others. God's love is then made real in the miracle of Christmas, because it causes us to see humanity with very different eyes. It is at this time that we truly realize that in the darkest night and the coldest hours, the warmth and light of a loving God appears through the birth of Jesus. This infuses the Christmas Spirit in us as something to be carried in our hearts throughout the entire year.

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Mary: Model of Hope

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Scripture

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” (*Luke 1:34*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The Church honors Mary with a variety of titles such as Our Lady, Mother of God, Blessed Mother of the Church, and Queen of Heaven to name a few. As our loving Mother, Mary continues to intercede for us before her Son Jesus. It is fitting that we also see her as a model of hope because through her “yes” to God’s presence in her life, we have been given the true gift of salvation, leading us to live and to express our lives in everlasting hope. This program presents Mary as a model of hope through whom we all experience our call to holiness.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

From the Church (the Christian) learns the *example of holiness* and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary, (the Christian) discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him....”(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2030)

Seeing Mary as the first faithful disciple provides a context from which Mary can be understood. She is a woman of faith who embodies trust in her motherhood as she accepts God’s invitation. She continues to grow as she learns more of who and what her son is all about.

The Holy Spirit prepared Mary by grace. She became the first person to be touched by the Spirit that would signal the reign of God in humanity. In this fullness, Mary became the first disciple receiving the Word through the Spirit. She then shared that Word with Elizabeth before she gave birth to Jesus. With her husband, Joseph, she nurtured the Spirit in her Son, calling on the Him to give hope to those in distress at Cana. As a constant companion to Jesus, she accompanied him in his ministry right up to the foot of the cross. She watched in hope at the tomb and greeted the resurrected Christ. To reflect on the life of Mary and her collaboration with the Spirit is to realize that she did not accept a passive role; rather, she embraced the Spirit with a self-direction and focus that allowed her to give herself to the reign of God. In essence, she heard the Word of God and acted on it intimately, becoming the true beacon of hope for all women and men, everywhere.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does Mary's life tell us about living a life that is rooted in the Holy Spirit?
2. Which incidents in Mary's life give you the most hope for the future of the Church?
3. What significance does the life of Mary have for Serrans?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

The scriptures present Mary as a disciple actively involved in a maturing process. She comes to know, love, and follow her Son, the Christ. The Church, at the Second Vatican Council, reminds us that we ought to revere her because of this great event, and also points out that all devotion to Mary leads to Christ. Let us look to Mary as our most human and most friendly example of virtue, faith, and hope, with her total love of God and of others.

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Church: Beacon of Hope

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory to God from generation to generation in the Church through which we experience the hope of salvation and in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Scripture

“I will pour my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...” (*Acts 12:17*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

From the beginning of his public life Jesus called people to follow him. As more and more people responded to his invitation to follow, and a community was born. Within this community today, those who have been baptized find their hope through the Holy Spirit, are formed in the Lord’s name. This program stresses that our hope lies in our need for each other, which is experienced as the mystery of God’s profound love for each one of us.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

From its earliest beginnings the church has been described as a community that is imbedded with God’s hidden presence. Its stance as a beacon of hope is born out of the Father’s love, the Sons saving work, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance. For two thousand years, the church has defined its identity by Christian behavior in the lives of saints and all the faithful members of the community.

“What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. To this Spirit of Christ, as an invisible principle, is to be ascribed the fact that all parts of the body are joined one with the other and their exalted head; for the whole Spirit of Christ is in the head, the whole Spirit is in the body, and the whole Spirit is in each of the members. The Holy Spirit makes the Church the temple of the living God.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #797*)

The church is founded on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We see the Spirit bestowing these gifts and making them active in the church. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is then regarded as an endowment bequeathed by Christ to the Church to carry on the same mission of Jesus, and mandates it to demonstrate the reign of God. Through this activity, the Holy Spirit assists the Church to become a living beacon of hope by establishing continuity between Christ and the ongoing Church community worldwide. Taking possession of the apostles at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit revealed that the newly born family of faith has the responsibility to spread hope.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean for the Church to be a sign of hope?

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2. In what ways do you experience your parish as a temple of the Holy Spirit?
3. How does your Serra experience complement and extend the Church's mission of hope?

Closing Reflection

The Church is the bearer of divine life offering hope to all those who comes in contact with her. Through its human and divine elements the Church becomes the "salt and light" to the world showing the path to experiencing the mystical body of Christ and transforming the world into God's kingdom.

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Humanity: Called to Hope

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's mighty works among us. We have been called by love into faith and are treasured in the sight of God. We pray for God's help to freely respond as chalices and instruments of hope for others. Amen.

Scripture

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." (*1 Corinthians 3:16*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

To reflect on our experience of community is to become more aware of the spiritual heritage that challenges us to consider the welfare and well being of each other. This program points out that by attending to the needs of others we make visible the love of God in the world, and offer hope to those who find themselves in painful or desperate situations.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Through our humanity, we become aware of God in unique and individual ways. As Christians, we know a personal God through the experience of Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit is universal, we speak of the Spirit's work throughout the world. We perceive the Spirit as also working in our lives as our Father-Creator, Son-Redeemer, and Spirit-Unifier. The Spirit brings people together in a closer community to struggle with bettering the world. The working of the Holy Spirit in this context is the development of the human person as he or she moves toward fulfillment. This is a spiritual orientation that makes each aware of the need for mutual care and concern for the other, in fairness and sharing that promotes the common good.

"Through his grace, the Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us, and to communicate to us the new life, which is to know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ. But the Spirit is the last of the persons of the Holy Trinity to be revealed. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #684*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you need the Holy Spirit to be hopeful?
2. How can you become a sign of hope to those around you?
3. How does your Serra Club show signs of hope in its concern for the larger Church, and larger Serra?

Closing Reflection

The virtue of hope, while oriented to the next life is now viewed as having significance for the world in which we live. In the Spirit of sharing in God's creation we offer hope by caring for those in need.

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Celebrating the Third Millennium: Evangelized Through Adoration

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Let us put aside the busyness of our lives as we gather here to share, to pray and to be open to God through the many ways we give adoration to our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture

“The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ So Abraham built an altar there to the Lord who appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name.” (*Genesis 12:7-8*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The millennium brings us the opportunity to reflect on a variety of our Catholic Traditions and to recommit to those that have been part of our heritage for so long. The purpose of this program is to affirm the importance that adoration has within the Catholic Tradition so that we can begin to include adoration as part of our conversion within and our outreach to others.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

In our Catholic tradition, the experience of adoration is expressed by reflecting upon God with reverence and awe. Through this simple act of devotion, we come to acknowledge God’s intimate love and glory in continual creation. Adoration is much more than a precise moment in our day. It is the directing of our whole being toward God in every activity. This turning to God is at the heart of conversion. Participation in the sacraments for us and that of our church community can deepen our conversion. As adoration affects our spiritual and mental attitudes, we experience a turning within our hearts that causes us to grow in our relationship with God and our understanding of what it means to be Christian. This moves us to reach out to others and share our faith with them.

We may experience traditional forms of adoration such as sitting before the Blessed Sacrament, going on a pilgrimage, participating in Forty Hours, novenas and First Fridays but there are new forms as well, such as meditating on the scriptures and centering prayer, seeking out natural settings, and walking the labyrinth. These forms of adoration constantly remind us of the reality represented in the adoration itself, which is God’s merciful love.

“The dual dimension of the Christian liturgy as a response of faith and love to the spiritual blessings the Father bestows on us is thus evident. On the one hand, the Church, united with her Lord and in the Holy Spirit, blesses the Father for his inexpressible gift in her adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. On the other hand, until the consummation of God’s plan, the Church never ceases to present to the Father the offering of his own gifts and to beg him to send the Holy Spirit upon that offering, upon herself, upon the faithful, and upon the whole world, so through communion in the death and resurrection of

Christ the Priest, and by the power of the Spirit, these divine blessings will bring forth the fruits of life to the praise of his glorious grace.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1083)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What forms of adoration have you experienced and found meaningful?
2. How could adoration affect the way we celebrate this year?
3. How can your Serra Club participate in different forms of adoration during the next year?

Closing Reflection

As Christ continues to make all things new in us, we turn our minds and hearts to praise and thanksgiving through our acts of adoration. By opening doorways in this new millennium, we are called to be children of light. What better way to do this than to direct our adoration toward the Lord in the living mission of Serra International. Let us pray for vocations to meet the needs of all humanity.

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Celebrating the Third Millennium: Reconciled Through Community

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Lord God, we are all too often wrapped up with ourselves, lost in a seemingly indifferent world, where we allow ourselves to become cold to those who are around us. Help us to reconcile the past and call us into new ways of caring for each person around us. We are able to pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

“Therefore, brothers since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love, and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (*Hebrews 10: 19-25*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

To experience reconciliation reminds us of God’s mercy and helps us to experience divine forgiveness by being reconnected with others. The purpose of this program is to identify the parish community as home to reconciliation and forgiveness, so we can come to encounter Jesus Christ in the reception of Holy Communion.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“A parish is definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ’s saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love...” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2179*)

The church founded by Christ, for the salvation of all, is a model society. Our parish community fills the gap in our experience of being disconnected, by embracing the spirit of reconciliation with God and one another. In essence the parish is where Church happens because people come together in faith. There the word is proclaimed, sacraments are celebrated, the community gathers as the people of God, and their lives are a living demonstration of gospel values.

Through our involvement in our faith community we recognize our need for healing and reconciliation. We have the opportunity to constantly begin anew and to acknowledge our need for forgiveness from God and one another. There is the recognition that we are an Eucharistic people opening the door to a new millennium with the challenge to examine the ways we participate in the community of believers. We are invited to look at how we can be instruments of Christian unity. As we enter the church community through our baptism, we celebrate the Eucharist, and embrace the spirit of reconciliation with God and one another.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is your experience of reconciliation?
2. How has that experience drawn you closer to God, or others?
3. In what ways do you participate in your parish community?
4. How does Serra International serve the Christian community?

Closing Reflection

A basic element of being human is experiencing relationships that are strained or completely ripped apart. The alienation that occurs can only be removed by forgiveness and healing in our relationships, with Christ, the world, and daily life. Once this is accomplished we can experience a complete change of heart that gives birth to radical change in our lives.

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Celebrating the Third Millennium: Celebrated as Serrans

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Strengthen, O God, what you have begun in us. You gave your apostles the Holy Spirit, commanding them to hand down that gift to the faithful. Look with favor on us as we continue in this tradition through our efforts as Serrans. We make our prayer in Jesus name. Amen.

Scripture

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, “ABBA, Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” (*Galatians 4:4-7*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The Church prepared for the millennium by reflecting on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit during the years of 1997 through 2000. Serrans not only celebrated this event in their parishes but also celebrated their special role in serving the Church. This program will help Serrans appreciate their responsibility for the future by promoting vocations to religious life and the priesthood.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

A Final Word On The Great Jubilee by John Paul II,

“I invite the faithful to raise to the Lord fervent prayers to obtain the light and assistance necessary for the preparation and celebration of the forthcoming Jubilee. I exhort my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the ecclesial communities entrusted to them to open their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit. He will not fail to arouse enthusiasm and lead people to celebrate the Jubilee with renewed faith and generous participation.

I entrust this responsibility of the whole church to the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. She, the mother of Fairest Love, will be for Christians on the way to the Great Jubilee of the third millennium the star, which safely guides their steps to the Lord. May the unassuming young woman of Nazareth, who two thousand years ago offered to the world the Incarnate Word, lead the men and women of the new millennium toward the One who is true light that enlightens every man.” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente #59*)

“Because human nature was assumed, not absorbed, in the mysterious union of the Incarnation, the Church was led over the course of centuries to confess the full reality of Christ’s human soul, with its operations of intellect and will, and of his human body. In parallel fashion, she had to recall on each occasion that Christ’s human nature belongs, as his own, to the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it. Everything that Christ is and does in this nature derives from one of

the Trinity. The Son of God therefore communicates to his humanity his own personal mode of existence in the Trinity. In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity... “(*Catechism of the Catholic Church # 470*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. With what expression of celebration are you most comfortable?
2. How can you participate in celebrating a year of favor?
3. What can your Serra Club do to highlight this year and participate with rest of the Church?

Closing Reflection

As Christians we have a story to tell. We know we are called to share it with the world. As Serrans we also have another story to tell the world: one of service to the Church and commitment to personal vocations and the priesthood. May this Great Jubilee which led us into this millennium be the door through which we walked with faith and hope. May we continue to share and celebrate our common heritage around the world.

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**The Magnificat:
The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
May 31**

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

We praise you, Lord, in this Daughter of Israel, Mary, your faithful One and our Mother. We pray as She did; may your name be holy, may the hungry be filled and the rich know hunger, may the proud be scattered and the oppressed raised up, may your love be ever with your people. We make our prayer always through Mary's child. He arose from her the Son of Justice, Jesus who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. Surely from now on, all generations will call me Blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and Holy is His name. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever.” *(Luke 1:47-55)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The opening words of the Magnificat beautifully capture the essence of Mary's life: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” This program offers Mary's entire life as a way of being open to the presence of God and making it evident in daily activities.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

Devotion to Mary is a strong and very personal part in the faith life of many Catholics. Our understanding of Mary comes from the scriptures. These show her to be a very strong woman who followed her Son, Jesus, in a manner that equaled or even surpassed that of the disciples. Recent studies and church documents have laid a foundation that fosters an understanding of Mary as both a woman of faith and a timeless disciple.

From the moment of her Immaculate Conception to her glorious assumption, Mary sought to enlarge the grace of God and decrease the influence of her own ego. This attitude and virtue is similar to John the Baptist, who like Mary is unselfish so that Jesus can become more present. By decreasing their egos they become heralds of the true Messiah. In essence we see in Mary a longing and a searching for God that is part of all humanity. Her response shows us how we can nurture God in our lives.

“In celebrating the annual cycle of Christ's mysteries [in the liturgical year], the Church honors with special love Mary, the Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of Her

Son. In Her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent effect of the redemption and joyfully contemplates, as in a flawless image, that which the Church itself desires and hopes wholly to be. “
(*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [Vatican II, #103]*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is your understanding of Mary as an image of what the Church hopes to be?
2. Mary praised God for turning the accepted social order upside down, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry, and sending the rich away. Do we expect the present social order to be similarly turned upside down? What would it cost us personally and professionally as a church, as a Serra club, as a country?
3. What are great things God has done for you and for us? How do we praise God for them?

Closing Reflection

The words of the Magnificat are a powerful reminder that the human condition and the needs of the poor are alive in God’s heart. In some way we are all poor and therefore, like Mary, must remove the illusions of self-sufficiency and let ourselves accept the richness of God’s mercy. Our interdependence in relationship with God will change us. Through us, then, everyday miracles will flow from our hearts and hands into a world that sorely needs them.

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Triumph of the Cross **September 14**

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

All powerful and ever living God, in the plan of your wisdom you chose to save us by perfect self giving love of your crucifixion. This day we give glory to your cross, for through it, we come to know the promise of our salvation, our life and our resurrection. Amen.

Scripture

“So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull ... There, they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle.”
(John 19: 16-18)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The cross, the cruel instrument of Jesus’ death, represents the burden that Jesus carried and the weight under which he stumbled. The cross reminds us that sometimes we are overburdened and stumble. Like Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross, Jesus assures us that he will help us with our burdens. As we gaze upon the cross, this program will help us realize the cross was at the heart of Jesus’ mission to reveal the love God has for each one of us. It will remind us that we are also here to help lift each other’s burdens.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The crucifixion of our Lord is an overpowering saga of grief, pain and loss. The events that lead up to the crucifixion are also harsh and brutal. It appears that all hopes found in Christ’s message would be lost as he hung on the cross. When looking at the gospel accounts of Jesus, we see that no matter how his ministry is portrayed and what each gospel writer wished to tell us about who Jesus was, all leads to the moment of the crucifixion. In this event we are faced with the paradox of God’s complete and total love for humanity. How can the innocent receive the death sentence of a criminal? How can such a bloody death bring about salvation? How can our God be so easily apprehended and murdered? The answers to these questions, the sufferings of Jesus, and the glory of his resurrection are inseparably joined in the Paschal Mystery. Consequently, the cross only makes sense when it is seen in the light of Jesus’ obedient love, resulting in his reunion with the Father and Spirit in the resurrection.

The reality is that through the cross we come to understand Jesus’ suffering. Ultimately the way of the cross becomes a way of looking at life that gives meaning to everything we struggle with, either individually or in society. Reclaiming the triumph of the cross is reclaiming a long tradition that captures the love of God who embraced the pain of humanity...and walked through the gates of death to show us how to love, how to forgive and how to return to our Father.

“The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the ‘one mediator between God and men.’ But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, ... he calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #618)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What meaning does the crucifixion have?
2. How can the cross be tragic and triumphant at the same time?
3. What effect does meditating on the cross have in the life of Serrans?

Closing Reflection

The Cross of Christ is the true signpost to the meaning of life’s journey. Hanging on it, Jesus showed us how to abandon ourselves to God. This stumbling block of murder and redemption offers us the image of courage and hope in difficult times. Whenever we are in great pain, we have the assurance that through each daily death comes more life if we abandon our hearts to God.

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Feast of Christ the King November 23

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

King of Glory, you broke the power of evil and made all things new in this world. May all creation rejoice in the splendor of your love. Open our hearts and free the world to share in your justice and the kingdom that is within you and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes of his resurrection and sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” *(Philippians 3: 7-11)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Through the water of baptism, Jesus invites us to share in his role of King as He inaugurates a divine kingdom that brings peace and reconciliation to a troubled world. The purpose of this program is to understand that we are to love Jesus first above everything else. We need to trust in His ways and use the gifts that God has given us to proclaim the kingdom to all we meet, at home, at work, and at play.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“In the Old Testament, ‘son of God’ is the title given to the angels, the Chosen People, the children of Israel and their kings. It signifies an adoptive sonship that establishes a relationship of particular intimacy between God and his creature.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #441)*

“Jesus’ messianic consecration reveals his divine mission, for the name Christ implies ‘he who anointed,’ ‘who was anointed’ and ‘the very anointing with which he was anointed.’ ... “His eternal messianic consecration was revealed during the time of his earthly life at the moment of his baptism by John.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #438)*

To give glory to Christ the King is to taste the kingdom as Jesus preached it. “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand,” requires us to step back and take a long look at what this means. We are called first to change, so we can recognize the kingdom within us. When we become aware of the intimate bond between the Kingdom of God, the earth and all of us, we realize that the Kingdom is not made of political structures. Rather, it is one that will be perfected in us over time. Since it is planted into this world through Christ, it is revealed through the all of us. As the Church we become a visible community called together by God to striving to make the kingdom real in this world.

Thus, the kingdom is fully present but not yet completed in the world. It is through the example of Christ and the power of God's love that the kingdom is revealed in our highest hopes. All those who would follow Jesus embrace this suffering enduring love. It will be experienced by every one who literally thinks, wills, and acts in full awareness that God is in us and for us. It is through this giving over, we see in Paul's writing that the kingdom becomes a reality that consumes us, and is revealed by our best actions.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does kingdom mean to you?
2. What does the Kingdom of God mean to you? How are they different or similar?
3. How are you as a Serran, participating in and proclaiming God's Kingdom?

Closing Reflection

We can see that when presented with the religious traditions of his people and the social situation of his day, Jesus spoke and acted with inspired confidence and dignity. He spoke with and about God in a way that was considered blasphemous by many people. He also did things that pertained to God, such as forgiving sins and casting out demons. This personal ownership and leadership in the Kingdom of God gives us a glimpse of how Jesus behaved in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. His kingship is love, forgiveness, healing, nurture, with judgement only by the Father.

Our Lady of Guadalupe **December 12**

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Blessed Mary of Guadalupe: On the Hill of Calvary, Christ said, "Behold your Mother." Fourteen centuries later, on Tepeyac Hill, you told Blessed Juan Diego, "I am your Mother, Mother of the God through whom everything lives." Unlike other apparitions before or since, you presented Juan Diego with your picture as proof of your presence. Now we ask for your help, confident in your promise that you will help us bring Christ to others and most importantly, to inspire young men and women to enter into service to His Church as priests, sisters and brothers. Amen.

Scripture

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." (*Revelation 12:1*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The full life-giving meaning of Our Lady of Guadalupe, commonly referred to as Mary of the Americas, can be seen and understood only in the overall context of the confused and painful reality of the post conquest period of this hemisphere. This program will guide us to see that just as the Savior of the world entered the world through the birth of a powerless and defenseless baby, so would the beginning of the new creation of humanity in the Americas be realized through the simple and powerless Juan Diego.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The history of Mary's mystical appearances around the world and during different times of history reveals an experience that is not culturally or historically bound. She has left her mark around the world as the mother of all humanity, all races and nations.

"By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a "preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (typus) of the Church." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 967*).

"Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further. "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 968*).

Mary's messages bear witness to another world than this earthly globe. In 1531, on Mount Tepeyac, located on the outskirts of Mexico City, she appeared to an Indian named Juan Diego with a message to build a church on the site to be given to the Bishop of Mexico. The timeless message is that the

mother of Christ wants all her children to be saved. She brought hope and inspired ultimate triumph of the humble and the grieving peoples of that place.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. God reveals Himself when we least expect it. Often times it is in the seemingly small and insignificant events of work and family life. Relate times when God has revealed His presence to you.
2. How does fear hold us back from a change of heart that can lead to our own conversion and the healing of our friends, families, and colleagues?
3. What does the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe have to offer Serrans?

Closing Reflection

“Through this lowly peasant, the poorest of the poor, God demonstrated that everyone, regardless of his or her station in life, can respond to the divine call to action, and if necessary, under the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, achieve results that are truly monumental.” *Francis Johnston, The Wonders of Guadalupe, 1981.*

“Don’t fear anything. Am I not here, your mother? Are you not in the foldings of my arms? Have I not placed you on my lap?” *Our Lady of Guadalupe to Blessed Juan Diego, Dec. 12, 1531.*

N.B. Many Marian experts consider Mary’s appearance at Guadalupe the greatest apparition. Its effect — the conversion of an entire nation — is undisputed. The gift of her image on Juan Diego’s tilma is also unprecedented. Nineteen books about the history, theology and spirituality of Our Lady of Guadalupe are listed in the back of the book “Mary of the Americas: Our Lady of Guadalupe,” (1989, Alba House Society of St. Paul, 2187 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10314) by Capuchin Franciscan Father Christopher Rengers. The list includes four books for children.

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Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ

December 25

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

God our Father, we rejoice in the birth of our Savior, Jesus, who made us your children. May we share in His life by living as He taught and be welcomed into your kingdom where He lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture

“When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go then to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told about this child.” *(Luke 2: 15-17)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Through Jesus, a great light came into the world. He showed us how to love each other and his Father. When we love as He did, we glimpse peace and know joy. With a humble beginning, shepherds came to see the wonder of this child. They heard the good news and were filled with wonder to be the first to behold the salvation of all nations through the power of God. The purpose of this program is to appreciate the revelation of God is given to the simplest and most humble.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“To the shepherds, the angel announced the birth of Jesus as the Messiah promised to Israel: ‘To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ‘From the beginning was the ‘one who the Father consecrated and sent into the world.’” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #437)*

The birth of Jesus is surrounded by a variety of theological themes. How one experiences the miracle of the incarnation depends on what perspective they take when reading the infancy narratives. It is always interesting to take a position or view from the least obvious. For example what was the experience of the shepherd’s journey to Bethlehem? Many were expecting the Messiah to come in great splendor. Jesus’ humble beginnings set in motion the mission to be with and for the least powerful of this world. Throughout his life Jesus’ main concern was not for the great and powerful, but for the common people, the poor and the hungry and disadvantaged and the unloved. It was appropriate that he was born in simple surroundings. The shepherds were fitting visitors, open to receive him at birth.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. Why did God give the birth announcement to shepherds?

2. When Jesus lived on earth, he always paid special attention to the outcasts: prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors, etc. If he were here today, to whom would he pay attention?
2. How can we as Serrans, receive Jesus' simplicity as a gift to our efforts to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life?

Closing Reflection

As we encounter the glitter and bright lights of the Christmas season we can remember that Jesus came to bring light to the darkness. The shepherds are like many of us. We experience times when darkness is real and pervasive, when danger, confusion and despair are part of life. The light given to us by Jesus burns through the terrors of the world and replaces them with confidence and hope. Essentially, the message given to the shepherds in the field was, those in darkness can see the light when their hearts and minds are open to God.

Baptism

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Loving God, complete the work you began in baptism and make the gifts of your Holy Spirit active in the hearts of your people. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your work in this world. May we never be ashamed to proclaim to the entire world our love of Christ crucified, living, and reigning forever. Amen.

Scripture

“Are you not aware that we, who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Through baptism into His death we were buried with Him, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.” *(Romans 6:3)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Baptism, the first of the sacraments of initiation, signifies our immersion in the Christian life and marks our spiritual rebirth in the Church. This program asks us to consider how we are living out our baptismal promises.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

From Pentecost onward baptism has been an essential part of the Christian movement. As soon as Christianity began to thrive and communities came into being through faith in the resurrection of Jesus, there arose a need to introduce new members in to this community. Throughout the New Testament the ritual celebration publicly expressed an acceptance of Jesus as Lord. Before long this initiation ceremony shifted its emphasis from entering a community to removing sin. With the restoration the Rite of Christian Initiation there is a restored balance in our understanding that embraces both cleansing and community.

“The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities.” *(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #9)*

The reality is that through baptism we come to Christ, washed clean of our sins and embracing the community’s vision of human life, purpose, and identity. This happens only through a process of conversion that removes the obstacles from our hearts so we see the truth that God reveals to us through Jesus.

If we look at baptism from God’s eye view, we sense an overwhelming gift. We are made new and welcomed all at once. How we live as a community of believers and individually is an expression of

the promises we made at our baptism. This way of living makes Jesus real to others and visible in the world.

“Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [Vatican III, # 14]*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is your understanding and experience of the quote: “We were baptized into Christ’s death.” Hear the words addressed to you as an individual and the Church as a whole.
2. Baptism gives us the right and duty to participate in the liturgy, and from that participation we are to derive “the true Christian spirit.” Do you derive the Christian spirit from your participation in the mass and your prayer life? What do you see as the relationship between liturgy and the rest of life?
3. The Church has restored the practice of adult baptism, preceded by serious formation in the Christian life. How would your understanding of baptism and your vocation be different if you were baptized as an adult? Are there situations where you are called to help adults searching for Christ?

Closing Reflection

Whether we were baptized as infants or made the decision to be baptized as an adult, we live each and every day within the covenant relationship we proclaimed at that time. Our continual awareness of this relationship with God and the Church and our attentiveness to the fulfillment of what it means to be Christian keeps us moving ever closer to Christ. With ever-deepening belief we can make a profound difference in the world based, on the Gospel values and our response, hour by hour, day by day.

Christifideles Laici

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Lord, as ordinary men and women, we are decisive agents in bringing the message of church to the world. At Pentecost, your church received the gifts of the Holy Spirit for its work on earth. Fortify those gifts in us today so that we may remain faithful to our calling to serve you and to invite others into Christian service. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

‘He summoned the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick--no food, no sack, and no money in their belts.

They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance." (*Mark 6:7-13*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

When Jesus sent out the twelve He also gave them a new commandment. In that they love one another so the world will know that they are his disciples. This love is the challenge that is given to anyone who chooses to follow Jesus. It is with these words that this program provides a glimpse of the heart of the Christian vocation - to make a difference in the world, by the way we accept one another.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

“Each individual lay person must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and as a sign that God lives ... In a word, ‘what the soul is to the body, let Christians be to the world.’” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), Vatican Council II, Nov. 21, 1964, No. 38*)

In his later Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (Christ’s Faithful People), Pope John Paul II picks up the theme as first outlined in *Lumen Gentium* and addresses the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful in the world.

It is as an impressive and affirming document. It emphasizes that there are a multitude of people who are called and sent forth by God to labor in the world. His holiness draws on the image of the vineyard found in John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches.” He further describes a ”communion” of relationships between lay people and the church, the world, and the ordained ministry.

The call to holiness goes out to everyone and is expressed through many ways of working and many special gifts given to all by the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of the Church’s ministry and mission. In this writing we hear the message that all people in the Church are called to constant conversion. All are
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invited to bring the promise of the Gospel message that values and dignifies human life, to a broken world.

In conclusion, we see a shift that has occurred in the Church since the second Vatican Council. Basically, we are not to be suspicious or withdrawn from the world. Rather we are to be fully engaged in it, transforming it through our own relationships, deeply rooted in Christ, the church, family and community. This visionary statement gives direction and hope to all the baptized who experience God working in their unique lives. It invites them to search for a way to express a personal call to service.

Lastly, the Pope identifies marriage and family as an environment in which people experience their call to service by stating that... “The lay person’s faithful duty to society primarily begins in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the church itself.”
“*Christifideles Laici*,” *Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity*, Jan. 30, 1989. No. 40.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. Today lack of commitment, dedication, and discipline, are the sources of many troubles. How can we help our families instill these values?
2. As laity, we seem to be called often to “preach” the Gospel in subtle, almost unseen ways, at home and at work. Relate some instances.
3. Serra is an organization of men and women who are called to grow in holiness and participate in the Church’s apostolic goals. How does your Serra club foster growth in holiness and participation in the church’s apostolic goals?

Closing Reflection

“Lay Christians live their lives and do their work at all the crucial points where they can discover the God who renews the face of the earth. God’s Spirit helps them discern the seeds of life and the seeds of death in the modern world. Social processes are ambiguous and complex, and they often wear masks. Sometimes it is only the suffering of the poor and powerless that can unmask for us the evil inherent in a particular use of human power. Their voice carries to our ears the cry of Jesus pleading with the church not to abandon the world, but to meet him in it.” *Bishop John M. Sherlock (b.1926) of London, Ontario, speaking to the World Synod of Bishops (on the laity), Oct. 10, 1987*

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Junipero Serra A Study Guide

**Rediscovering Blessed Junipero Serra
Feast Day -- July 1**

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, in every age you have chosen servants to proclaim your word to the ends of the earth. Hear our prayer for Blessed Junipero Serra, who responded to your call to serve in the missions and who made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many people through his tireless preaching of the gospel. May his work and legacy inspire us. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Scripture

“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (*Matthew 28:16-20*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

The Serra Organization is based on the accomplishments of Blessed Junipero Serra, who tirelessly preached the gospel and served the people with zeal and love, relying on God’s mercy. This program explores those characteristics that make Blessed Serra so unique and provides us with the opportunity to see how they can be part of our lives.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Historical Tradition

Miquel Serra was born into a humble family in a farming village on the Mediterranean Island of Majorca. His parents sent him to a nearby Franciscan school where his teachers quickly recognized his intellectual abilities. Within a year he became a novice in the Franciscan order, taking the name of Junipero after the beloved friend of Saint Francis. Shortly thereafter he was ordained a priest.

Years of formation in the Franciscan way of life and academic studies in philosophy and theology followed with Serra being named professor of philosophy. He was well known as a bright and articulate scholar, a moving preacher and a clear precise writer. Dedicated to the gospel and a tireless worker, Father Serra responded to the call of the Franciscan missionaries to preach the Gospel to the New World.

In 1749 Father Serra was sent to the missionary territories in the American West Coast where he is credited with being responsible for the foundation and spread of the Catholic Church, and establishing a system of nine missions in what is now the state of California. Blessed Junipero Serra was a zealous

missionary devoted to spreading the Gospel message. He not only brought the Gospel message to the Native Americans, but as one who lived the Gospel, he also became their defender.

As a missionary in the Franciscan order of the Catholic Church and a political entity advocating for the rights of others, Father Junipero Serra was a driving force in the colonization of the state of California. Through his missionary activity, he and the other friars converted thousands of Native Americans and trained many in the European methods of agriculture, animal husbandry, and crafts.

Since 1934 Junipero Serra has been a candidate for canonization as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II remarked that Serra is an exemplary model of a selfless evangelizer, a shining example of Christian virtue and the missionary spirit.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

Blessed Junipero Serra was a man of faith.

At life's crossroads Junipero Serra traded in a professorial lifestyle that promised him a beloved homeland, associations of his youth, a cloister and community, books and university, honor and a secure future. He chose instead a missionary lifestyle that required him to say farewell to his home and life and embrace uncertainty and instability. He moved forward and did not dwell on his losses.

Which paths have I chosen at the many crossroads that have been part of my life?

Blessed Junipero Serra was a preacher.

If history were something static, the world would hardly be in need of missionary activity. However, the Gospel needs to be preached and interpreted in every age. As history unfolds, every generation is called to embrace the same challenge as Blessed Junipero Serra, and define for themselves how they will proclaim God's message to the world. **How are we as a church responding to the idea of conversion in our hearts and our world?**

Blessed Junipero was a missionary at heart.

The Missionary is one who responds to the privilege of participating in the Mission of God by offering himself to work for, and give witness to the salvation of the world. Fidelity is the quality of response that is necessary for a missionary to be daily converted to his personal calling. **How necessary do you think missionaries are today?**

Blessed Junipero Serra is just like us.

He was a visionary man who persevered in his mission despite adversity, controversy, and hardships. **How do we as Serrans persevere in our vision to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life? How do we further Catholicism by encouraging one another to fulfill our Christian vocation to service through education about our faith?**

Closing Reflection

The missionary vocation has been the motivating force behind the Franciscan life. Blessed Junipero Serra embraced this spirit and led a missionary's life. As Serrans who follow Serra we are called to lead a life open to wherever God may call us.

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- Father Serra and the American West
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The Beatitudes

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Bless us, O God, with your love and the love of our neighbor. Give us peace of heart, stillness of mind, and the command of our own affections as we strive to live the Beatitudes everyday. We make our prayer through Chris our Lord. Amen

Scripture

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.

He began to teach them saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.” (Matthew 5:1-10)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Its place in Scripture indicates that the Beatitudes are one of Jesus’ first teaching experiences. This instruction, founded on love, is Jesus’ concrete response to the needs of the people, springing from his unshakable faith in the promises given to Israel and His understanding of His Father’s love during the desert temptations. This program explores the spiritual contributions that the Beatitudes offer us as we work to bring the Kingdom to our world.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel is probably one of the most read and commented upon sections of the Bible. Bookstores are full of commentaries, reflections, and research, all of which lay the foundation for books and articles with such titles as *Jesus’ Pattern For A Happy Life*, *A Blueprint For Living*, *A Program For Action And Attitudes Of Being*, *The Directory Of The Devout Life*, and *The Laws Of The Spiritual Life*. The interest in this passage seems to indicate that this sermon has abundant meaning in the 21st century.

“The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham. The Beatitudes fulfill the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of the territory, but to the Kingdom of heaven: ... The Beatitudes depict the countenance of

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Jesus Christ and portray his charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples; they have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1716*)

Jesus returns from the desert with the distinct reality and clarity of insight that we humans are more than the conditions in which we find ourselves, and that there is always abundance available if we allow ourselves to experience it.

Understanding the structure and wisdom of the Beatitudes is to grasp an understanding of blessedness. While each beatitude has a wealth of information, mystery and wisdom, their collective message is encountered by realizing that we are people who are blessed. To be blessed means moving through life in a flow of inner well being that understands that everything reveals the reality of God. The structure of the Beatitudes can be described as a window that allows us to view how we can cooperate and participate in the Kingdom of God. We can move toward the Kingdom's fulfillment in us and our fulfillment in it by embracing the blessings of the hurts of our past, the possibility of the present, and our fears of the future.

As the gift of wisdom always presents the way of promise, there is implicit in each beatitude a wisdom pertaining to the awareness of obstacles that may block the flow of grace in our life. But when released of these blocks, our hearts and lives may become more Christ-like.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the challenges the Beatitudes bring up in your life?
2. What are some of the blocks in your life that keep you from fully experiencing the blessedness of the Beatitudes?
3. Where does Serra exhibit this blessedness?

Closing Reflection

The Beatitudes invite us to be open to the presence of God within us. Then our Christian attitudes of social justice, peace, and mercy can flow over into daily acts of compassionate love and service. When we live inspired by the Beatitudes, we are more open to the truth and beauty and possibilities of our faith.

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Life As A Vocation

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we give ourselves to your trusting care and wisdom for our lives. Reveal to us your meaningful purpose in whatever way we serve you. Work in us and through us so that your kingdom may be realized in all that we do. Amen.

Scripture

“Once again he went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.” *(Mark 2:13-14)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

On May 6, 2001, the fourth Sunday of Easter, Pope John Paul II gave a message for the 38th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. His message was entitled “Life as a Vocation,” which he considers to be undeniably important to the Christian life. This program summarizes that speech and invites us to integrate its message into our lives and daily work.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Reflection

In this address the Pope presented an inspiring message for the entire church, and a very prophetic message for Serrans. His message began by connecting our vocation to our relationship with God through which we are invited to converse with God. In essence, vocation lies in our communion with God as revealed in the Genesis story of creation. From this communal harmony we experience the potential to grow into the person that God created us to be. Vocation in this creation context is about the promise of “placing the universe in the operative hands of humanity” through the covenant relationship with God.

To consider the significance of placing the universe in the hands of humanity, a vocation encourages all of us to seek inner freedom based on a desire for the future. From this simple and profound truth, the Pope challenges us to “re-evangelize life.” Since we are not alone in fashioning our lives, we are called to discover the presence of God in our individual stories, realizing that our vocation is the experience of God being with us.

The challenge of these words is often subdued by our culture, which often pushes God to the sidelines, presenting God as a luxury commodity in a busy world, or viewed with suspicion because of the historic failures of organized religion. Regardless of how God is perceived, we can move beyond our perception and encounter the loving God who assists us in finding our own personal vocation and respond to it with generosity.

The Pope’s message closes with a comprehensive and inclusive statement that all men and women need to realize by their baptisms that they are called to be witnesses to the vocation of the ordained,

religious and lay apostolates. These life choices challenge people to walk with faith and respond to God with a generous and unconditional “yes” that places their entire existence at the service of the gospel.

In conclusion, Pope John Paul II reminds us that we are all laborers in the harvest who have responded to the vocations that God has given us. We pray with the Holy Father “that all men and women open their heart to the seed of God’s call. Let no one by reason of our negligence, ignore or lose this gift, but may everyone walk with wholehearted generosity toward the realization of [God’s] love. Amen.”

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. How has your definition of vocation changed over the years?
2. What aspects of vocation are you most interested in?
3. How can Serra be more of a vocational organization?

Closing Reflection

Having expressed our vocation by being part of Serra International, we participate in God’s creation through activities that support and pray for church vocations to the priesthood and religious life. As Serrans we can find the Pope’s message affirming, because it expresses vocation as a state of life, ministry in the church, and participation in Serra International. It is also challenging to encounter and consider new vocations that are being redefined by the changing needs of our church.

The Seven Petitions: The Lord's Prayer

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Jesus, the source of all prayer, through your life and ministry you taught us how we are to pray. So very simple, personal and direct. Be with us this day as we explore the wisdom of the Lord's Prayer. Amen.

Scripture

In Matthew's gospel the evangelist states "This is how you are to Pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom com. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'" (*Matthew 6:9-13*). Matthew gives a more detailed version than Luke (Luke 11:2-4), which the Church has retained as its liturgical tradition.

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Christian thinkers and people of prayer have explored the depth of these words and what they reveal to us about Christ's innermost being. In essence, the Lord's Prayer presents a summary of the whole gospel. It offers us insights into Jesus and His relationship with the Father and the divine treasures that are a part of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. Such attention has been given to the Lord's Prayer because it comes to us from the Lord Jesus, the master and model of prayer and has been one of the most important prayers of our Church. It is one of the first prayers taught to us in religious education classes. It holds a very central place in our sacramental celebrations, and is recited in many public and private prayer experiences by many Christians around the world. This program identifies the structure of the Lord's Prayer and clarifies the meaning of the petitions.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. While each petition holds a rich treasure of divine wisdom, together they offer us the prayer style of Jesus by defining two different sets of petitions. The "Thy Petitions" and the "Us Petitions". An analysis of these petitions reveal that the Lord's Prayer is a parallel construction that brings us into communion with the Father and with the Son, while at the same time reveals us to ourselves.

The three "Thy Petitions" can be found in the first part of the prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The intent of these petitions is to worship and welcome the glory of God in heaven and coming of the kingdom on earth. With God's will being experienced on earth each petition in some way addresses the reality and role of one of the three persons in the Trinity. To call upon the Father, whose name is hallowed, is indeed to call upon the almighty Father. Thy "kingdom come" is of the kingdom embodied by the Son of God made flesh, and "Thy will to be done" is the reign of the Holy Spirit in the life of the world, church and individual lives. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2804*)

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The four “Us Petitions” are a different tone and expression. “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. The “Us Petitions contain the essence of all petitionary prayer. Reliance on God for sustenance, forgiveness, guidance and deliverance makes up the basic attitude of faith. These statements reveal the most necessary assistance in the most serious of life’s temptations. These petitions parallel the three temptations of Christ. Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread, to test God’s special love and protection for Him, and the promise of all earthly Kingdoms. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2805)

The Bible shows us the unique understanding that Jesus had of the Father. Its implication is not merely world shaking but world remaking. It is what defines Jesus’ message and teaching about the relationship that we are to have with God. In a unique way the Our Father is a theological statement about relationship and interdependence that leaves humanity both loved and healed.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What new insights do you have on the Lord’s Prayer?
2. How has praying the Our Father influenced your relationship with God?
3. How does Serra live out the two sets of petitions found in the Lord’s Prayer?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In summary, if we follow the order of the words in the Lord’s Prayer, we discover a wonderful rhythm, carrying with it a sense of completeness, vital and rousing in its unity and form. It becomes the merging of the two great worlds of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. This prayer lays the foundation for our image of the Body of Christ, whole, healed, and restored to the Father.

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The Mass

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Give us, our Father, a sense of your presence as we prepare to reflect on the mass. Grant us the wisdom to see the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection as we remember your goodness through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

"When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed? What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this matter I do not praise you. For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup." *(1 Corinthians 11:20-29)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Saint Paul's reference to the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:20 highlights the importance that he feels Jesus placed on this last meal with his disciples. Supper in Paul's tradition refers to a full meal. The early Christian community saw the Lord's Supper as an experience full of expectations of the final kingdom. No matter how it is viewed, this experience which Jesus requested to be continued in his memory must be viewed in the context of Jesus' complete ministry of table fellowship.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents an extensive section on the celebration of the Church's liturgy. While it refers to signs and symbols, singing and music, holy images, and liturgical seasons, the Mass is mostly viewed and experienced as an action performed by the people of God through the language of faith which includes all persons and incorporates all cultures. To participate in the celebration of the Mass is to truly be engulfed in a sacrament of unity.

The Mass is at the heart of the Church's life. In the Mass, Christ Himself is present to His people in the Paschal Mystery. Rich in symbolism through ritual and gestures, the Mass bears within itself the whole mystery of Christ and brings to us His saving work. Through the church's history, the Mass had developed in many places at the same time. There naturally arose a variety of forms, which reflected the cultures of the various faith communities as well as the different theological insights and devotional preferences of the people. These developments have evolved into a beautiful expression of the Christian life in the Mass through four basic movements. The Introductory Rites where the

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community gathers together, the Liturgy of the Word where the community reflects on God's presence to humanity and through the Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Eucharist where the community offers its gifts, gives thanks and shares a meal, and finally the Concluding Rites where the celebration comes to an end. Each one of these movements builds on the other. Each provides the opportunity for our individual faith story to enter into dialogue with the faith story of the whole Catholic community, and the ongoing story of God.

Introductory Rites – As the Mass begins, we gather and prepare to become a worshipping community. The presider welcomes the assembly; we make the sign of the cross, remembering that we need God's mercy and forgiveness, then give glory to God. This gathering process is based on the experience of belonging as we prepare to enter prayer. Through baptism, we learn that we are part of a community and that we become a part of the great and wonderful family of God's church throughout the world. And when we gather we need to make sure that there is room in our hearts for everyone to gather at the table with us, even room for those we don't see. This is the purpose of the Penitential Rite. We clear the space in our hearts by acknowledging sin in our lives so that we are able to ask forgiveness and forgive others.

Liturgy of the Word – During the Liturgy of the Word we hear two readings from scripture that cause us to remember and praise God's presence and saving activity in history and in the present. When the Gospel is read we hear and respond to the Good News. At the homily we reflect on God's message and its application to our daily lives. This section comes to a close by praying the Creed, and the Prayer of the Faithful. We express our belief in God and ask for God's help. This storytelling ritual lets us feast on God's Word as it places before us the reality of our own truth, so we can be challenged to change our lives and be more Christ-like.

Liturgy of the Eucharist - As we begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist we present our gifts of bread and wine, give thanks for God's gift of friendship, and share a meal by accepting God's gift – Jesus Christ. We must realize that there are all kinds of food, but God knows that we need the best food - we need love. And so God gives us Jesus as our food. On the altar we see how great God's love is for us as Jesus' body is broken for us, and His blood poured out. By remembering often and by expressing profound gratitude we are able to remain close to Jesus throughout our lives. Sharing the Bread of Life by receiving communion can make us feel different. We become more aware of God's presence in our lives.

Concluding Rite - The Mass ends with the presider blessing and dismissing the community. This ritual allows for a transition from prayer and community to our individual lives. We thank God for the opportunity to serve Him and receive our mission to live the Gospel by going out into the world to carry on the mission of Jesus. The Mass sends us out to bring to others the love we have received.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for a general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the four movements is most meaningful to you, and why?
2. What are your most memorable experiences at Mass? What qualities did they possess?
3. How do Serra gatherings nurture the community of Serrans just as the Mass nurtures the parish members?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In summary, to worship God through the Mass means to express love and gratitude. It is here we meet the creator of all and ponder the depth of love as shown by Jesus' magnificent life, and the new life given through His resurrection in the Holy Spirit. This communion of love between God and God's people bonds a congregation of holy people in its mission around the world.

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Ecclesia de Eucharistia

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your presence and power at the Eucharist brings joy to all those who share in the bread and wine which becomes your body and blood. Fill us with a respect for the great gift you give us at the Eucharist. Help us to listen with our hearts and be attentive to the mystery that unfolds before our eyes. We pray with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture

“Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little (bit)." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted.

When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat.' (*John 6:3-13*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

On Holy Thursday, April 17, 2003 Pope John Paul II issued his fourteenth encyclical. It was on the Eucharist and its relationship to the church. “Ecclesia de Eucharistia” addresses the beauty and the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration as the source and summit of the Christian life just as the second Vatican Council proclaimed. The purpose of this program is to provide Serrans the opportunity to grow in their appreciation of the Eucharist by reflecting on the words of the Holy Father.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Reflection

In what church-watchers are calling the declining years of John Paul the II’s Pontificate, he has written an encyclical to invite us to embrace a renewed enthusiasm for living the Christian life. At this moment in history, he has seized the opportunity to remind us of the teaching of Jesus on the most precious gift of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul begins by drawing from what the Second Vatican Council has said, that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*) and then points out how the Church is a Eucharistic Community and reminds us that when we participate in mass, we do so as a community of faith that has its roots in the Church of the Apostles.

While much of this document can be found in previous papal statements and Church documents, John Paul II weaves together a beautiful reflection of what the Eucharist means to him and presents a *Manual Rev. 9/16/2008*

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Church that can only exist by drawing its life from the Eucharist. Together as community, celebrant and assembly share in the sacrifice of Christ where through the sacramental nature of the Eucharist, we realize that “in some way [it is] celebrated on the altar of the world.” This connection between heaven and earth offers the Church an insight into the relationship between God and humanity. God truly shares in creation by feeding and nourishing those who take part in this celebration.

The Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life.” Since the Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual heritage, the Pope stresses that the encounter increases our responsibility for making a difference in the world in which we live, and challenges us to recommit ourselves to change our lives so as to experience true conversion and become even more Christ like.

The Encyclical unfolds, reminding the Church that through liturgical reform, the assembly is to be full participants. The vantage points of full participation contributes to the chapters which include: The Mystery of Faith, The Eucharist Builds the Church, The Apostolicity of the Eucharist and the Church, The Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion, The Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration, and The Role of Mary as the Woman of the Eucharist. Each chapter builds on the Holy Father’s understanding that the Eucharist is a gift given to the Church by Jesus. The Church in turn is able to draw her life from it, to fully feed the demands of the Christian journey.

To summarize the wealth of each chapter the Pope identifies the Eucharist as “the church’s treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfillment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does the Eucharist mean to you?
2. How is the Eucharist a gift to you? The Church?
3. How does the Eucharist increase Serra’s sense of responsibility for the world today?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

Let us close with the words of the Holy Father. “ Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, at the school of the saints, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendor of a lived reality; it becomes “contagious”, and, in a manner of speaking, it “warms our hearts.” Above all, let us listen to Mary Most Holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a mystery of light.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, # 62)

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IN HIS STEPS

Introduction

[The "In His Steps" program was developed by the Program Committee of the United States Council (USAC) as an answer to three challenges:

- Pope John Paul II's request in 1989 and Vatican Cardinal Pio Laghi challenge in 1992 to Serra International to be the "lay arm of the Church for vocations" not just by words but by action;
- The National Conference of Catholic Bishops request to the United States of America/Canada Council (now USAC) that Serrans in the U.S. clubs be active in promoting their National Strategy for Vocations, "A Future Full of Hope"
- USAC's challenge to their Serra Clubs, long perceived as complacent, to be truly active in promoting both vocations to the priesthood and religious life and the personal holiness of its members.]

Leader: "In His Steps" is designed to be a program of renewal by which, on an annual basis, all Serrans recommit themselves to furthering Serra International's principles and objectives:

- To foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood in the Catholic Church as a particular vocation to service, and to support priests in their sacred ministry;
- To encourage and affirm vocations to consecrated religious life in the Catholic Church; and
- To assist its members to recognize and respond in their own lives to God's call to holiness in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Recall that we are in the presence of God as we pray, In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

R: Amen

(Read the Scripture passage out loud. [Ephesians 4:11-15])

Reader 1: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians.

And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God....(L)iving the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love. The Word of the Lord.

R: Thanks be to God.

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Meditation and Reflection out loud)

Meditation - Archbishop Romero's Statement of Hope:

Reader 2: It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete. Which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further developments. We

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provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything. And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are the workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

Reflection

Leader: Archbishop Romero's words describe the ministry and mystery of Serra so well. No one can read or hear these words without realizing Serran prayers and Serran programs are instruments designed to permit the Holy Spirit " to enter and do the rest."

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion)

Discussion Questions

1. What is my role in my club committee (vocations, membership, programs, communication)?
2. In what Serra club and/or diocesan vocation programs will I participate this year?
3. What other vocation programs should our club consider implementing in our area?
4. What can our club do to promote our members' spiritual growth this year? How can I help?
5. What can I do to build and retain membership this year?

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Leader: Serra's ministry is not limited to mere statements of mission. In addition to prayer, our ministry promotes practical solutions designed to assist men and women to overcome societal impediments of hearing the call of the Holy Spirit to the priesthood and religious life.

In the United States the resources of the Church are being strained by an increase in the Catholic population without a commensurate increase in vocations to serve the People of God. Our ministry must not be allowed to diminish over time; but must experience a renewed vigor necessary for the challenges of the new millennium.

Serra accepted, met, and continues to meet the previously stated challenges, but Serrans will not rest on past successes. Our society and our Church are changing so we must increase our vocation efforts to meet the Church's greater number of faithful, a people that hungers for the sacraments and other Church ministries.

Recommitment Ceremony

Reader 3: There are many references in Scripture and other church writings identifying the Trinity with light and with fire, for example, the Light of Mercy, the Light of Justice, the Light of Hope, tongues of fire, and the burning bush. There is one description, however, with which every Serran can identify, for we were each baptized into Jesus and we each renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

(Facilitator light the candle) As we light this candle you are each to remember that:

This candle is a reminder of the one each Serran received at baptism. The candle's fire symbolizes Jesus, the Light of the World, and its fire, the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit. As the candle is consumed by fire so, too, must we be consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Let the light and the fire of the candle be symbols of rededication to our solemn pledge to direct ourselves to the Serran

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principles of promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life and to our own vocation to Christian service.

Leader: Are you are ready to walk In His Steps” to meet the new circumstances present in the United States?

R: I am

Leader: Will you accept and support the objectives and purposes of Serra International: to foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life and to fulfill your own Christian vocation to service through spiritual growth, fellowship, and education?

R: I will.

Leader: Will you take an active part in the Serra programs and activities of your club that are designed to help accomplish Serra's mission?

R: I will.

Leader: Will you, by your daily living, strive to witness those Christian virtues that may help others to grow in their faith?

R: I will.

Leader: Will you pray often and work diligently for vocations, and encourage others to do the same?

R: I will.

Closing Prayer - The Serran Renewal Prayer

Holy Spirit, you are the love and light of the world. Continue to give all Serrans the courage and generosity to respond ardently to your call.

R: Here I am, Lord.

Fire each of us with a renewed spirit and enthusiasm to work for vocations for our Church. Deepen our commitment to the Serra mission that we may, indeed, walk "In His Steps" on our journey. Father, we ask this in the name of Jesus, Our Lord, through the intercession of Blessed Junipero Serra and Mary, the Mother of the Church and religious vocations.

R: Amen.

Bibliography

In His Steps, United States Council of Serra International Program Committee, 2000.

The original In His Steps program can be downloaded on line from www.serraus.org. This document provides background information on the development of the program and its suggested use. Additional prayers and activities are also included that can provide a variety of reinforcement formats throughout the year.

IN HIS STEPS

(Before the presentation begins, the presider or program VP should place forms on the tables with club projects listed on them for use at the end. There is a sample form in the Program Manual- Part II.)

Presider: "In His Steps" is designed to be a program of renewal by which all Serrans recommit themselves to furthering Serra International's principles and objectives on an annual basis.

Pause for a moment.

Let us begin as we always should, In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Reader 1: A meditation from Archbishop Romero:

"It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts: it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further developments. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything. And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are the workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

Pause for silent reflection.

Presider: Archbishop Romero's words describe the ministry and mystery of Serra so well. No one can read or hear this meditation without realizing Serran prayers and Serran programs are instruments designed to permit the Holy Spirit "to enter and do the rest". "In His Steps" is designed to be a program of renewal by which all Serrans recommit themselves to furthering Serra International's principles and objectives on an annual basis.

Reader 2: There are many references in scripture and other church writings identifying the Trinity with light and with fire, for example, the Light of Mercy, the Light of Justice, the Light of Hope, tongues of fire, and the burning bush. There is one description, however, with which every Serran can identify, for we were each baptized into Jesus and we each renew our baptismal promises at Easter. **(Light the candle.)** As I light this candle remember that:

This candle is a reminder of the one each Serran received at baptism. The candle's fire symbolizes Jesus, the Light of the world, and its fire, the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit. As the candle is consumed by fire, so too, must we be consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Let the light and the fire

of the candle be symbols of rededication to our solemn pledge to direct ourselves to the Serran principles of promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life and to our own vocation to Christian service.

Chaplain or Presider: O God our Father, we are gathered here to renew our commitment to Serra International's ministry. We pray for your help in our work of fostering vocations to the priesthood and religious life for the Catholic Church, the Church founded by your Son, Jesus. Holy Spirit, enter into our hearts and inflame us with greater zeal for our ministry.

And now, O God, we come to you and humbly petition:

- That Serrans live their vocation to Christian service as an active witness to the Gospel of the Risen Lord, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

- That Serrans throughout the world, trusting in the mercy and goodness of Christ the Lord, walk "In His Steps" to serve the Church with greater zeal, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

- That the Serrans of the Serra Club of (Club Name), inspired by their recommitment and filled with the Holy Spirit, renew their efforts in their ministry of promoting vocations and personal holiness, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

- That Serrans, through friendship, give moral and other support to seminarians as they struggle through their years of formation and study, we pray to the Lord. **R: Lord, hear our prayer.**

- That Serrans actively support priests and religious and encourage and unite young people to accept God's call to service in the Church, we pray to the Lord. **R: Lord, hear our prayer.**

O God, hear our prayers. Grant our petitions that we may serve our Serran ministry for your greater glory and that of your church.

R: Amen

Pause for a moment.

Presider: I now ask everyone to stand and answer, "**I will,**" to the Serran Pledge to Commitment.

- Will you accept and support the objectives and purposes of Serra International: to foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life and to fulfill your own Christian vocation to service through spiritual growth, fellowship, and education?

R: I will

- *Will you take an active part in the Serra programs and activities of your club that are designed to help accomplish Serra's mission?

R: I will

- *Will you, by your daily living, strive to witness those Christian virtues that may help others to grow

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in their faith?

R: I will

*Will you pray often and work diligently for vocations, and encourage others to do the same?

R: I will

Holy Spirit, you are the love and light of the world. Continue to give all Serrans the courage and generosity to respond ardently to your call. Fire each of us with a renewed spirit and enthusiasm to work for vocations for our Church. Deepen our commitment to the Serra mission that we may, indeed, walk "In His Steps" on our journey. Father, we ask this in the name of Jesus, Our Lord, through the intercession of Blessed Junipero Serra and Mary the Mother of the Church and religious vocations.

AMEN

Presider or Club President:

Thanks to all of you for your past work for Serra. Your recommitment pledge and your willingness to work on club projects is appreciated. The fruits of your efforts will be a finer club with more spirit producing results, as Archbishop Romero said "far beyond our capabilities."

Before the presentation begins, the presider or program VP should place forms on the tables with club projects listed on them. (There is a sample form in the Program Manual Part II.) After the presentation, time should be given for members to fill this form out.

Some ideas for reflection and discussion following the presentation:

1. **What opportunities is God giving me today to go forward in my spiritual life?** *(Allow silent time for a personal written response. Emphasize that answers to #1 are private, and they will not be asked to share them with anyone else.)*
2. **How do we, as Serrans, proclaim God's message?**
3. **Why should lay people promote vocations?**
4. **How can Serrans contribute to creating a vocational culture?**
5. **"Every life is a vocation, every man and every woman is sent by God into the world." What does this mean to you, in your life?**
6. **What can I do to learn more about my Serra family?** (This might be an opportunity for the Presider to suggest :
 - ❖ read the Serran magazine
 - ❖ attend regional/district conventions
 - ❖ attend Spring Leadership Planning Conference

In His Steps, a Program of Renewal and Recommitment (Leader's Program)

***Materials needed:** hymnal; a table holding one large lighted candle and lighted votive lights, several more than the number of participants; Bible or Lectionary; copies of the Participant Program, which includes the Renewal Prayer and the four reflection questions.*

Opening Hymn (*Sing verse 1 of "The Summons" (J.L.Bell) or of another appropriate hymn on discipleship.*)

Opening Prayer

Leader: We begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Heavenly Father, we ask your blessing on our gathering. Open our minds and hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit. Help us to imitate the virtues of our patron, Blessed Junipero Serra, in the work we do as Serrans. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

Leader: Please be seated.

Scripture Reading (*Read aloud Eph. 3:14-19 or other appropriate passage.*)

Reader 1: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians

I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name; and I pray that he will bestow on you gifts in keeping with the riches of his glory. May he strengthen you inwardly through the working of his Spirit. May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life. Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Hymn (*Stand and sing verses 2 and 3 of "The Summons" or verse of another appropriate hymn.*)
(*A separate table holds a larger "Christ candle" and lighted votive candles, more numerous than the people present.*)

Leader: Please come to this table and take a lighted candle. Return to your tables in groups of three or four and place your candles in the center of your table.

Reflection

Reader 2: Blessed Junipero Serra was a man of faith. At life's crossroads Junipero Serra traded in an professorial lifestyle that promised him a beloved homeland, associations of his youth, a cloister and

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community, books and university, honor and a secure future for a missionary lifestyle that required him to say farewell to his home and life and embraced uncertainty and instability by moving forward and never turning back.

Blessed Junipero was a missionary at heart. The missionary is one who responds to the privilege of participating in the Mission of God by offering himself as worker and witness to the reign of God. Fidelity is the quality of response for a missionary to be true to one's self and one's vocation. Blessed Junipero was a visionary man who persevered with his mission in spite of adversity, controversy and hardships.

Leader: Please consider this question for silent reflection and write an answer for your eyes only:

"May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life." What opportunities is God giving me today to go forward in my spiritual life?
(Allow silent time for a personal written response.)

Discussion

Leader: In your small groups please answer the discussion questions on your program:

- 1. What is my role in my club committee (vocations, membership, programs, communication)?**
- 2. In what Serra club/diocesan vocation programs will I participate this year?**
- 3. What other vocation programs should our club consider implementing in our area?**
- 4. What can our club do to promote our members' spiritual growth this year? How can I help?**
- 5. What can I do to build and retain membership this year?**

(After all groups have discussed the questions and made notes for themselves, call all to a moment of silence.)

(Sing **verse 4** of "The Summons" or verse of another appropriate hymn.)

Leader: Note the candles that were unclaimed, waiting for the members that we will bring to Serra. It is our job to replace the numbers of members lost through normal attrition, plus add new members, every year. Without sufficient numbers of members we cannot do what we need to do as Serrans.

Promoting & affirming vocations to priesthood and religious life is our work. Serra is also a vehicle to promote personal holiness through prayer, participation in the Celebration of the Eucharist and through excellent internal programs. Good educational programming increases attendance and attracts members.

Recommitment and Closing

Leader: Please stand and read the "**Renewal Prayer**"

All: Holy Spirit, you are the love and light of the world.
Continue to give all Serrans the courage and generosity
to respond ardently to your call.

With one voice now, all Serrans say, "Here I am, Lord."

Fire each of us with a renewed spirit and enthusiasm
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to work for vocations for our Church.

Deepen our commitment to the Serran mission
that we may, indeed, walk **In His Steps** on our journey.

Father, we ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord,
through the intercession of Blessed Junipero Serra
and Mary, the Mother of the Church and model of discipleship.

(Sing verse 5 of "The Summons" or verse of another appropriate hymn)

Leader: Please take a candle home as a reminder of your commitment to your vocation and the work of Serra.

In His Steps, a Program of Renewal and Recommitment (Participant Program)

Opening Hymn, verse 1

Opening Prayer

Scripture Reading Eph. 3:14-19)

Hymn, verses 2 and 3

Silent Reflection:

"May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life." What opportunities is God giving me today to go forward in my spiritual life?

Discussion

- 1. What is my role in my club committee (vocations, membership, programs, communication)?**
- 2. In what Serra club/diocesan vocation programs will I participate this year?**
- 3. What other vocation programs might our club implement in our area?**
- 4. What can our club do to promote our members' spiritual growth this year?**
- 5. What can I do to build and retain membership this year?**

How can I

Hymn, verse 4

Recommitment and Closing

Renewal Prayer

**Holy Spirit, you are the love and light of the world.
Continue to give all Serrans the courage and generosity
to respond ardently to your call.**

**With one voice now, all Serrans say, "Here I am, Lord."
Fire each of us with a renewed spirit and enthusiasm
to work for vocations for our Church.**

**Deepen our commitment to the Serran mission
that we may, indeed walk In His Steps on our journey.**

**Father, we ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord,
through the intercession of Blessed Junipero Serra
and Mary, the Mother of the Church and model of discipleship.**

Hymn, verse 5

Suggested Club Program Calendar

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
January					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Ordinary Times	MM of Priesthood	Church: Beacon of Hope	Humanity: Called to Hope	MM Religious Life
February					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Lent: Renewing the Spirit	MM Jesus	CTM: Evangelized thru Adoration	Lent: Renewing the Spirit	MM Jesus
March					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	CTM Celebrated as Serrans	Easter Time	MM Religious Life	The Mass	Easter Triduum The Three Days
April					
1st Meeting	Easter Triduum The Three Days	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Program of Choice	God: The Father of Humankind	Christfideles Laici	Beatitudes	Mary: Model of Hope
May					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Magnificat	Mary: Model of Hope	Baptism	Ecclesia de Eucharistia	Magnificat
June					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	God: Father of Love	CTM: Reconciled thru Community	God: The Father of Jesus	MM Priesthood	The Our Father
July					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Blessed Serra	MM of SI	Blessed Serra	MM of Serrans	Blessed Serra
August					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	The Mass	The Our Father	Life as Vocation	Ordinary Times	In His Steps
September					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	In His Steps	Triumph of the Cross	In His Steps	In His Steps	Triumph of the Cross
October					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice

Suggested Club Program Calendar

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
2nd Meeting	MM of Religious Life	In His Steps	MM of the Church	God: The Father of Love	MM of SI
November					
1st Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
2nd Meeting	Feast of Christ the King	MM of Jesus	Advent: Preparing For Jesus	Feast of Christ the King	God: The Father of Jesus
December					
1st Meeting	Christmas Season	Birth of Jesus	Our Lady of Guadalupe	Christmas Season	Birth of Jesus
2nd Meeting	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice	Program of Choice
Code Explanation	MM CTM SI	Mission and Ministry Celebrating the Third Millennium Serra International			
