



Serra's Council for the United States, Inc.

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# Communications Manual

*Revised May 2013*

*“Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Mt. 9:38)*

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# Introduction

*“There Is No Story Until It Is Told”*

The image of your Serra club and the degree of attention given to vocations in your community do not happen by chance. An image and a sense of urgency are created by design. A Serra club can achieve this with a sound public relations program.

Public relations differs from advertising in that public relations cannot be bought. It is the science of placing the organization and its goals before the eye of the public often through various media. The impact of a club’s public relations and communications program should be to inform and educate your Catholic community about Serra’s objectives and that *all* Serra activities are designed to further the objectives. A good communications program is the backbone of a Serra club and will benefit every club committee. “There is no story until it is told.”

## Purpose

This manual is intended primarily for the club vice president for communications and other members of the communications committee. It also will be helpful to other club officers and to anyone associated with the club newsletter including the editor, the editorial board members and all members of the subcommittee. This manual is also an important reference for anyone involved in communications and public relations at any level of Serra.

# Organizing an Effective Club Communications Committee

Successful Serra communications programs and activities depend on an effective and organized club communications committee. If you are tired of hearing your organization called the *Sierra Club*, adopt a communications program that will establish your own image. The following are some basic criteria and guidelines for developing and maintaining a working club communications committee.

## Vice President for Communications

### *Responsibilities*

- chair the club communications committee
- develop a long-range plan for public relations with specific goals for the current year
- establish contacts with the local media — the Catholic newspaper editor, religious editors of secular newspapers and broadcast personnel. Approach these contacts with ideas for stories and keep them informed of Serra events
- maintain contact with the communications coordinator on the USA Council staff and keep the district informed of club events
- serve on the club board of trustees and alert board members about ways their projects can promote public relations objectives
- develop a cadre of club spokespersons who are available to talk with the media as the need arises
- implement communications projects developed by the USAC Communications Committee

### *Qualifications*

- have a keen interest in the position with the ability to learn the necessary skills
- be able to take the initiative in establishing contacts
- be able to write clearly and concisely
- be strongly convinced of the value of good communication

## Club Communications Committee

### *Responsibilities*

The primary responsibility of the club communications committee is to establish a comprehensive communications program and facilitate good communications on the club, district and international levels.

### *Structure*

The size of the club's communications committee should be determined by the number and types of jobs to be done. There are specific responsibilities like producing a newsletter that may require a separate subcommittee.

### **“Learning the Ropes”**

The office of vice-president for communication requires some very specific skills and nurturing of media contacts. Therefore, one individual should retain the office for several years with a future replacement “learning the ropes” as a communications committee member.

### **Good Staff/Club Communications**

Please notify USAC of the name and address of the vice president for communications (on the club officers' roster) for direct mailing of information on communications projects. Send the name as soon as possible after yearly elections or whenever a new vice-president is elected or appointed.

In general, the communications committee should consist of a sufficient number of people to accomplish the stated objectives. All committee members should be appointed on a rotating basis. Where deemed advantageous or appropriate, subcommittees may be established.

### *Composition*

Members on the communications committee should:

- have special interests in public relations
- have the time and energy to work on press releases, newsletters or generating publicity
- have previous experience or an interest in communications, public relations, journalism or advertising, if possible

The committee also should work closely with the other club committees to gather ideas and information that can be used in public relations activities including preparing the club newsletter.

### *Resources*

- *Communications Manual*
- **serraUSA** magazine, published twice a year and online
- The *Serra Leader* newsletter (published quarterly by USAC, in print and online)
- *Serra Connects*, published by Serra International online
- *The Bellringer*, published by Serra International online
- Diocesan directory
- Seminary directory
- National Catholic newspapers
- National Catholic News Service
- Diocesan newspapers

## Public Relations (PR)

### *Internal PR: Share News With the Serra Community*

- On the club level
  - publish an informative newsletter
  - distribute information in a timely manner
- On the district level
  - keep the district governor and regional officers on club email lists
  - regularly provide information for the district newsletter.
- On the national level
  - Use USA Council and Serra International publications as:
    - continuing sources of information
  - Email information from your club on an activity or item of interest which you would like to share with other Serrans to the editors of these publications.
    - Include a high resolution digital photo with your story if possible.

### **Serra's National Council for the United States publications**

The *Serra Leader* newsletter is distributed to USAC regional directors, district governors, club presidents and active Communications Committee members in your area.

SerraUSA is published online and is distributed to all Serrans in the USA.

Please email stories and photos for these publications to [serraus@serraus.org](mailto:serraus@serraus.org). Information and articles will be included at the discretion of the editor.

## Publishing a Serra Club Newsletter

The following suggestions are intended to make publishing a Serra club newsletter less intimidating for those who are responsible for producing it: the volunteer editor, communications vice president or club secretary. Because many communications vice presidents and newsletter editors have seldom had previous experience in communications work or newsletter writing, this information is meant to be a useful tool in starting and maintaining a club newsletter.

There are additional topics listed that may enhance a newsletter and improve its overall communicative depth, but they are listed as thought-starters, not as requirements. Individual newsletter layout, style and coverage will vary greatly and are only limited by the creativity and effort of the editor.

**\* Please visit [www.serraus.org](http://www.serraus.org) to see examples of newsletters that have won the annual Outstanding Club Newsletter Award.**

### *Materials Needed*

- Serra International logo, and/or club newsletter logo
- Coverage of meetings held including the speaker and the topic
- A calendar of upcoming meetings or events including time and place of club meetings
- Short reflection from the chaplain, vocation director, club president, district or regional officers
- Club election of officers when held
- Any local news involving the club or club members
- Club committee reports of importance

### *Setting Objectives*

The board (which includes the vice president for communications) and the newsletter editor (if he/she is other than the communications vice president) should establish the objectives for having a newsletter.

They may be:

- to inform all members of upcoming meetings and events (date, location, time, speakers, etc.)
- to report on meetings and events already held including a summary of the programs presented
- to serve members who were unable to attend some meetings and thereby help them feel more a part of the club
- to develop pride and esprit de corps among club members
- to be helpful in recruiting new members
- to communicate with the clergy and the religious of the area on the activities of Serra
- to spread district and international Serra news
- to be a medium for spiritual and motivational messages for club members
- to provide timely information on subjects of interest to Serrans including vocations and personal spiritual growth

### *Committee Goals*

- Establish a budget based on
  - what funds are available,
  - cost of production, and
  - circulation of the newsletter.
- Decide on circulation. Consider:
  - club membership and present and past chaplains
  - priests of the area
  - diocesan and other religious in the area (include deacons, seminarians, etc.)
  - directors of the diocesan religious
  - communication vice presidents of the other district clubs
  - Catholic retirement homes
  - Serra International and USAC offices
  - your district governor
  - your regional director
- Decide on production
  - Who will write the articles?
    - the editor
    - club officers
    - club chaplain
    - club members
    - speakers from club meetings
    - local priests or religious

### **Serra's National Council for the United States Outstanding Newsletter Competition**

Every year, the USA Council recognizes one national winner and one winner from each region for outstanding newsletters judged on appearance and content.

To enter, submit three copies each of two consecutive newsletters from the current Serra year to the USA Council office at 65 E Wacker Place, Suite 802, Chicago, IL, 60601, by May 1.

Include a cover sheet listing your club's name, newsletter editor's name, region number and club contact with your entries.

### **Graphics Aids**

- Serra logos in various sizes (**\*you can obtain camera-ready logos from USAC at 888.777.6681 or online at [www.serraus.org](http://www.serraus.org)**)
- Free clip art is available abundantly online. Be sure not to use any artwork that is copyrighted, or without permission.

### **Coordinate Diocesan Mailings**

If circulation is to include the religious of the diocese, investigate the possibility of coordinating the mailing with the diocesan office's regular mailing.

### **Layout**

Word processing programs like WordPerfect and Word offer the flexibility to create headlines and choose layout, style and graphics. There are other desktop publishing programs that contain additional options for producing a professional-looking newsletter.

### **Topics for Feature Stories**

The media are always looking for a good idea or angle on a story. Take the initiative to suggest a feature story or two to the media from time to time. Topics include:

- vocations,
- the dilemmas of the Christian in the work world,
- a profile of a member who is active in a particular ministry.

- How will it be designed?
  - Select a computer-based design or word processing program like:
    - Adobe InDesign
    - QuarkXPress
    - WordPerfect
    - Microsoft Word
    - Microsoft Publisher
- Arrange for reproduction and distribution including mailing as appropriate

### *Sources of Newsletter Content*

Everyone asks, "Where do you find 'news' to put in a newsletter?" The following list is an unlimited source of newsletter material with which the editor will then be able to apply the journalism cardinal rules of Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

### Sources of news

- reports on completed club meeting and events
- articles on future club meetings and events
- a "look ahead" calendar of upcoming events, meetings, speakers, etc., of interest to Serrans (this could include churches, colleges and organizations in the community)
- club president's message
- club chaplain's message
- news from other Serra clubs
- Serra International/USAC news and events
- Serra district and regional news and events
- club member profiles
- miscellaneous pertinent excerpts (e.g., vocations, personal spiritual growth) from other media sources; Catholic papers, magazines, *serraUSA* magazine and the *Serra Leader* newsletter, radio, television
- cartoons
- local parish news if it pertains to vocations or other Serra interests
- statistics from the diocesan newspaper or other media
- editorial comments (exercise caution in using editorials — not unanimously recommended)
- pictures of speakers, visitors, events. Black-and-white film is recommended for the best overall production quality. Pictures can be a very valuable part of a newsletter. Find someone who is willing to regularly take pictures wherever possible.
- local Catholic parish vocation activities/school/college miscellaneous items of interest
- pertinent community events and speakers
- seminary information
- club committee reports — finance, membership, vocations, communications, programs, and any other committees
- club committee structure showing member assignments
- club officer elections



- letters to the editor
- book reviews
- articles from a club's history files
- coverage of local religious orders
- retirements of clergy, priest, deacon, sister and brother
- diocesan programs (Called By Name, adult education series, ordinations, etc.)
- news about members and their families
- promotion of Blessed Junipero Serra to be recognized as a saint
- anniversaries of when club members joined
- profiles of saints
- prayer texts, especially those relative to vocations
- Vocation Office information

### ***External PR:***

### ***Share News with the Community at Large***

Public relations is the principal responsibility of the vice president for communications and his or her committee — sharing information about Serra's work and objectives with the community. The public image of your Serra club and local vocation awareness do not happen by chance. With good planning and some simple skills, you will be most successful in keeping Serra and vocations in the forefront of public awareness. Diocesan and local newspapers are prime targets.

### **Four Steps to Good Public Relations**

#### **1. *Make Contacts***

- Some very important allies in your public relations program will be:
  - religion editors of local newspapers
  - editors of parish bulletins
  - editors of Catholic papers
  - broadcast and TV personnel
- You are important to the people you need to know. Editors and program directors are interested in getting to know you as a news source.
- Write, phone or visit editors in your area, especially the editors of your diocesan newspapers, parish bulletins and parish newsletters.
- Questions to ask each editor are:
  - When is the deadline for copy?
  - How should copy be presented?
  - Does the publication use photos?
    - Do they prefer digital or print?
    - What specs? (Resolution, size, color)
- Be prepared to answer their questions about general and specific programs of your Serra club for the coming year. In fact, bring along the current information folder on Serra. Add a description of your own club's activities to the folder.

#### **Issue a Challenge**

Issue a challenge to the officers and trustees of your club — "Give us something to publicize" — and they will respond. When they are made aware of the need to do noteworthy things for the good of the church, for vocations and for the spirituality of the individual Serran, they are more apt to develop programs and projects that have good news value.

### What Is a Lead?

The first two or three sentences of a story are called the lead. A good lead captures the attention of a reader or listener and makes him or her want to know more about your club's activity or project.

### The Inverted Pyramid Method

The inverted pyramid is a writing technique used by professionals in which the most important information goes in the first paragraph with less important information to follow. It permits an editor to pick up the important facts of a story in the first few lines. Then, if the editor does not have space or time to use the whole release, he or she can cut it from the bottom where least important details are given. This is true of both print and broadcast media.

- Develop contacts with parish vocation committees and see that they receive appropriate information on the subject of vocations programs. Share *serraUSA* articles. Aim to increase vocation awareness and acceptance in the parishes.
- Create a mailing list of your news contacts, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and regular mail addresses for your file. Include your local Bishop, Serra International, and the USA Council headquarters on your list.

### 2. Gather Tools

Effective "tools" for good publicity are:

- your list of media contacts' names and email addresses;
- news media people who will supply you with guides to follow in preparing copy for them;
- a complete and accurate membership roster from your club secretary;
- a well-outlined program of important events and special projects for the whole club year;
- a date book to:
  - keep track of coming events
  - make notes of deadlines
  - plan future stories;
- printed news releases; and
- a file of your year's publicity as you go along.
  - Keep clippings of newspaper stories in your file.
  - Add notes of radio and television publicity and any other media used.
  - Use it as a tool to train your successor.

Keep all your tools in one place. You are then ready to meet with club officers at a moment's notice and are prepared to suggest the next step in the year's publicity program.

### 3. Discern What is News

Journalists work with two types of stories: news and features. News is time related, usually a specific event or something resulting from an event. A feature is not time related, often an interview, human-interest story or a more in-depth article on an issue rather than an event.

Not everything a Serra club does is news. But a lot of things taking place regularly will be news for at least one medium. Here are some of them:

- The election of club officers or the appointment of a chaplain.
- The club's yearly schedule of programs with the central theme, if there is one.
- The appointment of any committee chairpersons or members.
- Advance stories on any special anniversaries and club activities being planned to observe them, e.g., officers installation or charter night.

- Advance stories on any special events:
  - a run for vocations,
  - the “Called By Name” program,
  - an appreciation dinner for sisters, and
- Presentation of an award to a club member (e.g. “Outstanding Serran”) or to the club (e.g., the Fr. Junipero Serra Award).
- District, area and international meetings and conventions at which members of your club will be attending.

These suggestions should give you an idea of what kind of information concerning your regular activities will be of interest to your various news sources. There will be other suggestions developing as your club program develops:

- new projects,
- outstanding speakers for a club meeting or other event,
- community service projects, and
- special honors accorded to a Serran.

#### 4. *Get Your Story to the Right Audience*

It has been said that the difference between the amateur publicist and the novice is that the amateur thinks of the *story* while the professional thinks of the *audience*.

Decide what audience you wish to reach:

- Do you want to make Serra better known in the club area?
- Do you want to build membership in the club?
- Do you want to motivate lay people to work for vocations?
- Do you need support from the general public for a fund-raising venture?
- Do you want to sell Catholic pastors of the area on the worth and accomplishments of your club?

When you have decided this, relate your story to the interest of the audience that you are seeking to influence. Then concentrate your efforts on the news media that will reach that audience.

## The Mechanics of Publicity

### *What Is a News Release?*

- A news release is the story you write to let the media know about your club news. Using news releases makes the task easier both for you and for the editor.
- You are able to send the story to many newspapers, radio stations or television stations.
- The editor receives a story already written that can easily be adapted to suit his or her needs.
- At times it will be appropriate to follow up a news release with a phone call to the editors to offer any additional assistance.

### Style Sheets

Newspapers and magazines generally have a style sheet. Style sheets give the rules on how their editors capitalize, abbreviate, spell and punctuate copy that they publish.

### Photographic Hints

The newspaper may have its own photographer take the photos, or your club may be asked to supply high-resolution digital files. Check with your local newspaper editor to find out exactly what the practice is. If you will supply photos, use a skilled photographer, either a member or a professional.

### *Writing a News Release*

- Five points are important in a correctly prepared news release: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHY. If possible, a sixth, HOW, should be included. Get all of these points into the lead of your story.
- Go into the details of your story. Each succeeding paragraph should follow the inverted pyramid method and be of declining importance.
- Use short words. Write short sentences, short paragraphs. Two or three sentences make a good paragraph in a news release.
- Be brief. Every news release can be typed on one or two double-spaced pages that will fill about 12 inches or one newspaper column wide. This is a lot more space than most editors can give one item.
- Always give an exact date in a news release: “June 10” rather than “next Thursday” or “Tomorrow.” Specify “October,” not “next month.” Double check dates and days of the week on a calendar.
- List the address as well as the name of a meeting place.
- Never use jargon.
- Always spell out numbers from one to nine, then use numerals from 10 on up.
- Never begin a sentence with numerals.
- When you have finished the draft of your story, go over it and cross out all the unnecessary words.
- Check every point of your story for accuracy. Never guess on dates, times, places or names.
- Stipulate “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” if at all possible. This means the editor or broadcaster can use it at once. If you must ask for a specific publication date, it should read “RELEASE AFTER (time, date) . . .” “Hold” releases complicate an editor’s task, so avoid “Hold” whenever possible.

### *Photos*

- Most newspapers will accept and print high-resolution digital photos based on their news value.
- Plan action photos. They will capture the interest of the editor and the readers.
- Photographers, like reporters, are always treated as guests at any function they cover. If food is served, offer it to the photographer.
- Prepare captions for any photographs you submit.

### **Public Service Announcements**

The radio or television public service announcement (PSA) is a way your club can announce events of public interest. The PSA should include the length of time of the announcement in seconds. To determine length, read your PSA aloud. (Most PSAs are 10 to 20 seconds.) For television use, include a high-resolution photo or video.

## *Other Ways to Share Serra With the Community*

### **Personal Public Relations**

Every Serran is needed to help further the objectives of Serra through his or her personal actions. A few words spoken to an acquaintance about vocations at a social gathering or a short chat about Serra with a business associate can have a great impact. Each Serran needs to be aware that he or she is Serra to the people he or she knows and that it is important to talk about Serra with friends and acquaintances.

Sometimes even veteran Serrans have a difficult time responding briefly and clearly to the often-asked question, “What is Serra?” The vice president for communications and his or her committee should remind club members to have a simple, clear answer prepared. Brief examples help describe the rather complex concept of Serra:

#### *“What is Serra?”*

- “Serra is a Catholic organization of laypersons concerned with vocations — priesthood and the religious life. Our Serra club, among other activities, sponsors an annual vocation discernment retreat for young adults and hosts a colloquium at the university on business ethics.”
- “Serra is a Catholic organization for laypersons. We belong to different parishes, but we are all interested in the future of ministry in the church. We prepare and distribute a vocation calendar every year and try to encourage parishioners to pray for vocations.”
- “Serra is a lay Catholic organization that promotes vocations to priesthood and religious life, and helps me to be a better informed layperson. Speakers at our meetings discuss current issues in the church, and we are forming vocation awareness committees in every parish in the area.”

Club members also should have some knowledge of Father Junipero Serra (“*Yu-ni-peh-ro*”) and be able to pronounce his name properly.

### **Speakers Bureau**

Some Serra clubs have a speakers bureau and make arrangements for their own members as well as other contacts to speak to other organizations, parishes and schools. The speaking engagements spread the news about Serra and the need for vocations.

### **DVDs**

The committee should compile a list of useful DVDs, especially on vocations, available from USAC and other organizations. (Contact the USA Council office for a free list of videos available. Other resources include the public library, religious bookstores and religious AV companies.) The vice president or a committee member should be familiar with video equipment.

**Serra International and USA Council  
Communications Committees**

The Serra International Communications Committee was created by the Serra International Board in 1984 because of a growing need for communications. The members of the committee have expertise or an interest in communications and represent clubs around the world. There is also a Communications Committee for the USA Council. Both committees consider and plan communications projects that will benefit Serra, internationally, nationally and locally. Also, at each International convention the committee members present a workshop to help Serrans with club communications projects.

## 15 Ways to Create Serra News

1. Tie in with news events of the day.
2. Issue a report. For example, compare the number of theology students in your diocese today with the number five years ago.
3. Arrange an interview with a celebrity, perhaps your bishop or a visiting member of the Serra International Board of Trustees.
4. Arrange for a newsworthy speaker at a meeting.
5. Announce names of new club officers.
6. Celebrate an anniversary — your club’s charter night, Serra International Founder’s Day.
7. Present an award. Honor a local priest who has had an impact on vocations or an exemplary Catholic in business.
8. Hold a contest. Essay and poster contests are traditional, but consider a “Run for Vocations,” a song-writing competition or a golf tournament for priests.
9. Tie into a well-known week or day, such as Catholic Schools Week, Vocation Awareness Week, World Day of Prayer for Vocations or even Labor Day.
10. Fete an institution. Give special honor to a corporation that offers Mass during lunch hour or an outstanding local school.
11. Hold a seminar or workshop that would interest the community. Sponsor a parish or school “Careers With Christ” night.
12. Adapt national vocation reports and surveys locally.
13. Organize a tour of the local seminary.
14. Have members speak on vocations at parish or civic gatherings.
15. Organize a vocation pilgrimage.

## **Suggested Position Description for the Club Vice President of Communications**

**Position Title:** Vice President of Communications

**Reports To:** President

### **Principal Responsibilities:**

1. Attend all Club and Board of Trustees meetings
2. Serve on the Club Board of Trustees
3. Serve as the Chairperson of the Communications Committee
4. Identifies and invites members with communications skills or interest to serve on the Communications Committee
5. Formulates plans and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees for the improvement of internal and external communications and public relations
6. Implements the USA Council's communications plan within the club and diocese.
7. Promote, assist and attend Regional and District Conferences as appropriate
8. Establish comprehensive communication programs for use by the clubs
9. Develop a long range plan for the Communications Committee
10. Attend and actively participates in the Spring Leadership Planning Conference
11. Assists the President Elect in the preparation of the budget (i.e., cost of production and distribution of club communications)
12. Understand the responsibilities of the board president and able to perform these duties in the president's absence
13. Participate as vital part of the Club leadership
14. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the President and/or the Board of Trustees

### **Position Requirements:**

1. Thorough knowledge of Serra and its Objects and Purposes and the USA Council and its Objectives and Purposes
2. Ability to work collaboratively with volunteers

### **Desirable Knowledge, Skills and Abilities:**

1. Knowledge of current Catholic Church issues
2. Ability to communicate clearly and concisely orally and in writing



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