The Spirituality of Serra

What drives our work for vocations?
What inspired our patron to extraordinary feats?
Sometimes you hear that vocations are declining. Let me say, they might be worse if you (Serrans) weren’t doing your work and praying. A lot is being accomplished, visibly and invisibly. I’m grateful for that.

—Father Joseph Chinnici, OFM

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The Serran magazine is the official publication of Serra International. It is published quarterly. Views expressed in this publication may not reflect the views of the Board. Send letters or manuscripts to amccormack@serrainternational.org. The Serran does not accept advertising.

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What Pope Francis has called the “culture of encounter” is essential to vocational discernment and promotion. As Serrans who are trying to promote vocations and to encourage vocational discernment, you should understand and promote the culture of encounter.

The proof of this is found in the scripture, which is where we find the origin of all vocations. What you see when you study vocations in the Bible is that vocations come from an encounter with Christ – a life-changing encounter.

Pope Francis points out that it is the source of all true Christianity. He loves to quote Pope Benedict, as he does in Evangelii Gaudium (EG) 7: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

This gets to the heart of what Christianity is. Christianity is not a philosophy of life. It is not a code of ethics. It is a relationship with a living person. A relationship that invites one into a whole new way of life.

This relationship begins always in the Gospel with an encounter with love. The Gospel is filled with these stories of individuals who encountered Jesus’ love and whose lives were changed. Think of the woman caught in adultery, or Zacchaeus. Think of the call of the apostles. In all cases, Jesus encounters someone, and their life is changed by him. Pope Francis explains how this encounter changes us:

“Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being” (EG 8).

Pope Francis makes it clear that a lot of Christianity doesn’t actually make sense except in light of this personal encounter. Here he is calling us in our teaching and proclamation to focus on the heart of the Gospel. He points out that the difficult teachings don’t make sense, until someone has experienced that Jesus is real and he loves them. He continues:

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“Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love” (EG 39).

Of course this begs the question for us: Have we encountered this love – have we tasted the love that Jesus has for us personally?

In this light I always like to read to from a letter that Mother Teresa wrote to her sisters. What is striking is that she speaks to them about the importance of a personal encounter with Jesus. She is writing to consecrated nuns! If she says this to her sisters, we can apply it to ourselves.

Mother said in her Varanasi Letter: “Jesus wants me to tell you again, especially in this Holy Week, how much is the love He has for each one of you – beyond all you can imagine. I worry some of you still have not really met Jesus – one to one – you and Jesus alone. We may spend time in chapel – but have you seen with eyes of your soul how He looks at you with love? Do you really know the living Jesus – not from books but from being with Him in your heart? Have you heard the loving words He speaks to you? Ask for the grace, He is longing simply to give it. Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying ‘I thirst’ in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this intimate contact with Jesus as a real living person – not just an idea. How can we last even one day living our life without hearing Jesus say ‘I love you?’– impossible. Our soul needs that as much as the body needs to breathe the air. If not, prayer is dead – meditation only thinking.”

There is a difference between prayer and thinking. Prayer is an experience of a person – a real person who loves me. Mother Teresa is talking in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace” (EG 3).

It is this encounter with mercy that spurs us on to be Spirit-filled evangelizers.

“The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts” (EG 264).

This encounter is the source of all vocations. Unless a young person has this encounter, he or she will never discover their vocation.

Unless a young person has the encounter with Christ’s personal love and mercy for them, he or she will never discover their vocation.
come and follow him.

Let’s take a look at the story of the Gerasene Demonic:

And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. But he refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled. (Mk 5:18-20).

Compare that story to the call of St. Peter in Luke 5:1-11. At the end of this encounter Jesus says, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And then Peter left everything and followed him.

Just a few verses later Jesus encounters Matthew sitting at his tax post and St. Luke describes briefly the encounter: “After this he went out, and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he left everything, and rose and followed him. (Luke 5:27-28).

The beautiful thing was that St. Matthew was so taken by this encounter that he prepares a feast that night at his home for Jesus and invites all his friends: the tax collectors and the prostitutes. He wants them to be changed by an encounter with the mercy of Jesus too. But only Matthew is invited to be one of the apostles.

In fact, there is only one time when someone encounters Jesus and he says to them, “Follow me,” and they don’t: the famous story of the rich young man recorded in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 10: 17-32). The young man goes away sad, for he had many possessions.

Pope Francis spoke about this passage to young people a few years ago; in doing so, he invited them to encounter Jesus. He asked them to meditate on the three gazes of Jesus upon them: The first is his “intense gaze full of tenderness and affection,” when the young man expressed that “for him observance of the precepts is not enough, since it does not meet with his desire for wholeness.”

Pope Francis said Jesus’ second gaze was “the thoughtful gaze, and one of warning, denoting the Gospel phrase, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.”

The third gaze of Jesus is the look of encouragement, said the Pope; it is the one which says, “if we free ourselves from the slavery of things, we gain the freedom to serve for love.”

“The young man,” the Holy Father stressed, “did not allow himself to be won over by Jesus’ loving gaze, and therefore could not change. He continued: “Only in welcoming with humble gratitude the Lord’s love do we free ourselves from the seduction of idols and the blindness of our illusions. Money, pleasure and success dazzle, but later they disappoint: They promise life but cause death. The Lord asks of us a detachment from these false riches to enter into true life, a full life, that is authentic and luminous.”

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The Pope then turned his reflection into a concrete question for youth who were in St. Peter's Square: “And I ask you, youth, boys and girls, who are here in the Plaza, have you perceived Jesus' gaze upon you? How do you want to respond to him? Do you prefer to leave this Plaza with the joy Jesus gives or with the sadness in the heart that worldliness offers us?”

Do you see this culture of encounter? Do you see how it is essential to vocational promotion? How might we promote this?

First, we need to invite young people to a personal relationship with Jesus. This happens through testimony – one person sharing about how Jesus is a real person. This inspires faith. You see this in all the great youth ministries of our day.

Second, very practical, this happens in the sacraments; the main place where you and I can encounter the living Jesus today is in the sacraments. This is where Pope Francis encountered Jesus and discovered his vocation, in the sacrament of confession.

Perhaps some of you know that Pope Francis himself experienced a profound conversion in the sacrament of confession as a teenager. Just a few weeks before his 17th birthday, he had a day off of school and was going out with his friends to meet his girlfriend. While walking, he felt himself drawn to go into the Basilica of St. Joseph, his own parish. A priest whom he did not know was going into the confessional (later we learned it was Father Carlos Ibarra). Pope Francis said, “On confessing to him I felt welcomed by the mercy of God.” He experienced profoundly the mercy of God in that confession, and when he got up, he knew he was called to be a priest. He went home and did not go on with his friends, so great was the impact of this encounter.

Another place where young people can encounter Jesus in this way is in Eucharistic Adoration. Again, here we have before us in the Blessed Sacrament: the real and living Jesus. He is really there: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – that is the real Jesus, all that he is, so we can really encounter him. St. John Paul II spoke often about this: “This practice, repeatedly praised and recommended by the Magisterium, is supported by the example of many saints. Particularly outstanding in this regard was Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who wrote: ‘Of all devotions, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest after the sacraments, the one dearest to God and the one most helpful to us’ (Ecclesia di Eucharistia 25).

He pointed out in the letter he wrote at the beginning of the Year of the Eucharist that the disciples on the Road to Emmaus said to the Lord, “Stay with us” and he answered this by giving them the Eucharist. In the Eucharist Jesus stays with us and is waiting for us:

“How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life!”

It is no accident that many young people discover their vocation in adoration. First they discover that this is a wonderful place to experience Jesus’ love. Gradually, as they spend time there, their hearts are purified. They begin to hear his voice calling them and their hearts are attracted to him. It is also no accident that parishes and dioceses which have adoration have more vocations. It is so pleasing to the Lord when people spend time with him here.

When you, as Serrans, spend time before him, you console his heart and you invite him to give vocations to the Church. Start with your own adoration – every Serran ought to have one hour of adoration in a chapel every week! Then begin to promote this place of encounter for others, especially for our young people.

**How might Serrans promote the culture of encounter in their vocations work?**

**Through testimony and the sacraments, including the presence of the Blessed Sacrament at Eucharistic Adoration.**

Bishop Cozzens delivered this talk to Serrans at the Serra Rally in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, on Feb. 17, 2017.
When the Pope announced the canonization of Junípero Serra in January 2015, it sparked a lot of activity: controversy, research, and preparations for the canonization that occurred in September of that year. Being an historian and also in archeology school at the time, I began to get a lot of phone calls, particularly related to the controversy of Junípero Serra. So I began to do some research and reading of his biographies and diaries, and decided on a particular course that I would take that maybe could contribute something new to our knowledge of Serra.

I realized that no one talks about the fact that Serra was a Franciscan friar. For me that is very significant, not only because of my own vocational choice in life, but also because the Franciscan tradition that Serra would have inherited is a particular view and vision of the world. I’d like to talk today about his spirituality and pastoral practice without concentrating so much on the controversy surrounding him. I’d like to talk about what motivated him, how he saw the world, and what kind of actions he took, in the midst of a good deal of conflict and an entirely new situation. I’d like to talk about him as a missionary disciple.

First of all, we know that he was a Franciscan friar, and at the heart of the Franciscan life is this quotation from Chapter 6 of the Rule of St. Francis (there’s only 12 chapters, the shortest rule in the Church): “Instead as pilgrims and strangers in this world, who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms with full trust. Nor should they feel ashamed, since the Lord made himself poor for us in this world.” Serra’s a journeyman, he’s a traveler, as we all are in our life, in our history, in our society, in the world in which we live. Serra renews this commitment to his Franciscan way of life every year; he professes, again, his solemn profession in the Order of Friars Minor. This was certainly key to his identity and to his practice. When I talk about the spirituality and his vision, you’ll see these elements come through very clearly.

Missionary Disciple:
The Spirituality of Saint Junípero Serra

by Father Joseph Chinnici, OFM
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When the Pope announced the canonization of Junípero Serra in January 2015, it sparked a lot of activity: controversy, research, and preparations for the canonization that occurred in September of that year. Being an historian and also in archeology school at the time, I began to get a lot of phone calls, particularly related to the controversy of Junípero Serra. So I began to do some research and reading of his biographies and diaries, and decided on a particular course that I would take that maybe could contribute something new to our knowledge of Serra.

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Lifelong Conflict with Civil Authorities

Serra embarked on his trip to the New World when he was 36 years old and came to California in 1768, when he was 56. He died 16 years later, in 1784. Though Serra spent the smallest part of his life in the California missions, that’s what he’s most known for. Yet his formative influence came from Mallorca and the Sierra Gordas. Let’s look closely at the first two periods and their formative influence on him. Each one of these periods saw Serra in conflict with the civil authorities.

Serra spent 36 years, the majority of his life, in Mallorca, an island off the coast of Spain. He was born in 1713, the year of the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. The Bourbons took over from the Habsburgs the island of Mallorca. Mallorca was an occupied land. It was a colonized land. The implementation of the Bourbon regime in Mallorca was oppressive. The new regime dissembled all local power structures and replaced the language of mallorquí with Spanish. Only those who spoke Castilian could testify and work in the court system, and the young men were conscripted. So Serra, in his youth, knew what it means to be colonized. That’s an important step in how he’s going to approach his own action and activities in California. He was not foreign in his own experience to the oppression that comes with colonization. Perhaps this places him in a more sympathetic, understanding position to the people who are colonized by a military force.

He was accepted into the Franciscans in 1730 and ordained a priest in 1737. He was a very learned man. He taught in the Llullian University at Palma Mallorca.

In 1749, he set out for the New World with his great friend Francisco Palóu, and arrived in Mexico City which was his home monastery, and missioned in that territory north of Mexico City called the Sierra Gordas for eight years. That, also, would be formative for what he would do in the California missions. Then we was called back to Mexico City as a novice master, a former of young Franciscans, young missionaries, and he was a teacher and a preacher there from 1758 to 1767.

As presidente of those missions just north of Mexico City, he ran into the local civil policies of the governor José de Escandón, who implemented what he called the “rancho system.” There’s a conflict here between the rancho system and the presidio mission system, two different ways of looking at colonization. The controversy there centers around Tancama Valley near Jalpan in the Sierra Gorda missions; Escandón fostered the colonization of that valley, where the native Mexicans were living. He gave the property to the colonists, who then enslaved the Indians in that period. He wanted to integrate those natives into Spanish society immediately. The natives went to Serra to protest against the loss of their property. Serra and the natives of Tancama Valley took the case to the viceroy, and they won. The colonists must leave, because the property and rights belonged to the natives.

This same issue will happen repeatedly with the governors of California, with whom Serra will have continual conflicts. He’s always dealing with the civil authorities and the political consequences of colonization, and he’s always dealing with what the handbooks refer to as those who are suffering, the miserables. He knows and sees the poor and the consequences of the systems in which he lives. So Serra’s very familiar with the force of the colonizing project and the experience of the natives underneath it. All this is very well documented, but very little referred to from his point of view.

Serra’s Relationship with Native Peoples

Following are four examples that illustrate Serra’s experience with this sort of conflict and how he approaches his encounters with the native peoples.

The first one comes from his diary, moving from Baja California to Alta California. He started the trip in March 1769 and concluded in San Diego, July 1769, with the foundation of the mission on July 15. This is a direct quote from his wonderful diary, which a lot of people don’t pay attention to, but Serra’s feeling for life comes through. The entry is dated April 7, 1769:

“I walked all day, only stopping briefly at noon to have a bite to eat and rest for a while. As night was falling, I arrived at the spot called El Cardón, where I slept.
Now, Baja California was completely Christianized in terms of the Native Americans. Serra had yet to meet what he refers to as a “gentile,” which is an unbaptized Native American. He continues:

“There I met about 10 families – men, women, boys and girls. When I asked them why they were there, they told me with great sadness that they were from Mission Guadalupe, up the road. Because there was not enough food, the padre was forced to send them back to the mountains to look for food. It was very hard on them, especially seeing the children suffer and hearing them cry. I felt very sorry for them. A pot of good atole was made for the women and children from some corn that was in a pouch. The process was repeated and a second pot of atole was given to the men, which was of some consolation to them.”

So he’s feeding people coming to him, and that’s a major attraction of the mission system – production of food in times of famine.

“I went to lie down and rest after the long day’s journey, and the Indians went off to pray together. They ended by singing a tender hymn about the love of God, which had come to them through the generosity of these pilgrims and strangers.”

Our second example takes us to Mission San Diego. Mission San Diego was founded in 1769 but there was a revolt there in 1775, and one of the friars, Luis Jaime, was killed. The tribe revolted because of the mistreatment of the Native Americans by the military colonists, particularly issues of abuse, raping the women of the tribe. Of course, the mission was associated with these activities because they were part of the colonizing issue. One other person besides Luis Jaime was also killed. The leaders of the revolt were captured. What was Serra’s reaction? (This is a capital crime under Spanish law, and you know what happens with capital crimes.) He appealed to the Viceroy Antonio Maria de Bucareli y Ursua on Dec. 15, 1775:

“One of the most important things I requested of the visitador general at the beginning of these conquests is if the Indians were to kill me, whether they be gentiles or Christians, they should be forgiven. And I request the same of nuestra excellencia. With respect to San Diego, let the murderer live, so that he can be saved, which is the purpose for our coming here, and the reason for forgiving him. What kind of God do we want to teach him about? Help him to understand with some moderate punishment that he is being pardoned in accordance with our law, which orders us to forgive him for his offenses, and to prepare him not for his death, but for eternal life.”

What is Serra’s law? The Gospel law: Forgive your enemies. Be kind to those who injure you. It’s a simple as that. And he’s arguing for forgiveness for this particular Native American, who has killed his own conferee. In fact, the viceroy listens to Serra’s appeal, and the two Indians involved are given exile but not capital punishment.

On Feb. 26, 1777, he wrote to Fr. Francisco Panagua, his guardian in Mexico City, describing the native peoples: “They are in places one cannot visit without walking a long distance and sometimes going on hands and feet, but I put my trust in the Lord, who created them.” This gets to the heart of his conviction. He sees them as objects of God’s creative activity, before he even gets there. These are human beings, made in the image of God. That’s the tradition he inherits. They’re not bap-

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tized, they do not belong to the Spanish Empire; they have no social status; they are the poor as he understands it. And yet he sees them as people, like himself, created by God. That’s the starting point. Not only has God created them, but redeemed them with the most precious blood of his Son. They’re already redeemed. He wants to tell them about the gift of Jesus Christ. God will bring them into the fold in the manner and at the time that he will be pleased to do so.

Throughout his life he sees himself as an instrument of God, not one who accomplishes the work. It’s like St. Paul – he’s given the grace of participating in God’s work in the world. It’s not his work, it’s God’s work, and he is trying to prepare the way. And if it happens in God’s time, it will happen, and they will come. This is a whole attitude that suffuses his writings and his activities.

The third example is related to property. When Mission Santa Clara was founded in 1771, the civil authorities wanted to found a pueblo (eventually it would become the city of San Jose, California) and they founded it so that it bled over into mission property. The colonists began to take over mission property, which belonged, to Serra’s mind, and according to the laws governing colonization, to the Native Americans. So, friars and Serra and the civil authorities got involved in this long, protracted controversy over property rights. It sounds much like what happened in the Sierra Gorda missions, or what happened in Mallorca.

Citing the Laws of the Indies, which reads, “No lands may be given to the Spaniards to the prejudice of the Indians, and any such lands, once taken, must be returned,” Serra wrote in 1782:

“The governor (it was Don Felipe de Neve, who was a disciple of José de Escandón in the Sierra Gordas), about a year after Mission Santa Clara was founded, made up his mind to start a pueblo on the other side of the river to be composed of gente de razón (people of reason, citizens), just as if the Indians did not have use of reason, too.” He sees the Indians also as gente de razón, not just the Spanish colonizers.

In trying to negotiate and to inject into the society in which he lives the roots of the Christian Gospel, and the roots and virtues of his Franciscan life, the object is to try to place charity and mercy where there is little charity and mercy. The object is to invite people to the Gospel – not to force them to convert, which is forbidden, both by the Gospel and by the laws.

Serra is part of this whole Spanish colonial project. There’s no question about that. And he follows the laws of the Spanish colonial project, the Laws of the Indies. He also participates in the disciplinary actions of the Spanish colonial project, and the mission project. But, he also stands with the Native Americans. So he finds himself, civilly and socially, in a very conflictual situation, caught between the poor and the colonizing project. We have to think of him as a real person. Not simply in relationship to the Native Americans, but also in relationship to the colonizing project. He is embedded culturally in an economic, military and political system. He can’t avoid that. That’s not the question. (Welcome to the world – everybody is in that situation.) The question is, what do you do with that situation and what kind of life do you try to live with the things that are under your control or for which you are responsible?

The Path to Canonization: Testimonies

Serra died in 1784. His tomb was opened in 1882, a little less than 100 years later. The Cause was opened in 1934, and I understand that’s when Serra International was founded and probably that’s why you have the name you have, although at that time very little was known about Junípero Serra in terms of his history and activities. A lot of research was done in the period following, and there were notarized interviews with the descendants of the colonizers and the Native Americans between 1943 and 1948. He was declared Venerable by John Paul II, Blessed in 1988, and declared a saint Sept. 23, 2015. I was in various positions during the time and actually privileged to be at all three events.

I want to read you a couple of things that are not public, that came up with the Cause. These particular two were done in 1943. They are verbatim, notarized reports from the descendants of Native Americans and colonists, and they tell how Serra was viewed for over 150 years.

“I, Jesse de Carli, was born at Carmel, and have lived here in this neighborhood all my life. My father, Cristiano Macado, was caretaker at San Carlos Mission for 30 years. I knew all the old residents of Carmel, Monterey, when I was young. Among them was an old Indian woman called Vieja Chepa, who had been a little girl when Father Serra was alive. She believed Father Serra was a saint. And the younger generation took over this belief. My own people used to pray a novena to Padre
Serra. I believe it was before Christmas.”
So the cult of his holiness developed very rapidly.
A second testimony:
“I, Joseph Hitchcock, was born in Carmel Valley, 1881, and have lived here most of my life. My father’s family here dates back to my grandfather who came with Commodore Sloat, 1846. My mother’s family came in 1866. My father’s mother belonged to the Indians who were descendants of those from Padre Serra’s day. My grandparents and others of their age used to talk about Padre Serra, and so did the old Indians that I knew. All these persons regarded Padre Serra as a saint. This was the local tradition here. The local Indians about 45 years ago had the custom of invoking Serra’s help in fishing by placing offerings at a rock called El Viejo, at the mouth of the Carmel River. The people here used to pray to Padre Serra, because they had the same confidence in him as they had in other saints.”
The testimony is almost unanimous in this period when it was collected. That kind of witness will change dramatically in the 1960s for other reasons. But this is the oral testimony of generations from the time of his death to 1960. We need to pay attention to that as impacting the controversy.

**Serra as Missionary Disciple**
These are Pope Francis’ descriptions of what it means to be a missionary disciple:

“A disciple of Christ knows that the Lord has loved us first. A disciple of Christ is moved by endless desire to show mercy. A disciple of Christ gets involved by word and deed in people’s lives. A disciple of Christ is supportive and stands by people at every step of the way. A disciple of Christ is faithful, however imperfect or incomplete the work. A disciple of Christ is always concerned with the fruit of actions in a particular situation – ‘How can I bring a little bit more good here?’ And a disciple of Christ is filled with joy.”

Serra is canonized because I think he represents a disciple of Christ in all of those dimensions. He is an exemplar for the Church, for us, of holiness. And this is how the pope describes it in *Evangelii Gaudium*. There’s a vision here of our evangelizing activity and our work as Friars Minor, or priests, or Serrans.

**The Franciscan Roots of Serra’s Spirituality**
From his Franciscan tradition, Serra inherits first the biblical and covenantal understanding of who God is. This is very important. What is our image of God? We can have an image of God as a judge. We emphasize God’s justice, justice in sorting out the world. Serra will interpret justice as God being just to oneself. This is the Franciscan tradition. God’s just to God’s goodness. God is just when God acts with integrity toward God’s own mercy. God is just to God’s very self when God remains faithful, even in the midst of sin. So, justice has a spiritual, theological content from his point of view. And this is the biblical and covenantal tradition that talks about the mercy, the graciousness, the justice, the gentleness of God.

We can also see God as an accountant, and there are many other images that are out there, marking down us, and all the things we do wrong. That would certainly keep God busy, but that’s not the way Serra sees God.

We’re fortunate to now have four sermons delivered by Serra in Mallorca in the middle of a famine. Ten thousand people died in the city of famine and plague in 1744, I believe. Serra’s four sermons are a commentary on Psalm 34: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” So these sermons were pronounced to people in the midst of great suffering. In them, he describes the rungs of the ladder that leads to God.

The first rung of the ladder: *God is gentle in the words God calls us to life.* He created them. That’s the the first word of God: “I create you out of nothing.” Gives you a personality, a soul, a spirit. Whether you’re a Christian or a non-Christian, you’re a creature of God. And God is so merciful and gentle as to allow us to be. God is gentle in his call. He also uses the example of Jesus calling forth Lazarus: “Come forth, Lazarus!” God is gentle and merciful in calling Lazarus to eternal life and giving him risen life.

From the beginning to the end, he has an experience of God as gentle, merciful, a gift-giver. “God is most liberal,” as the Franciscan tradition would say. *God is gentle in the law God orders us to observe.* He does a great meditation there on the Torah and the Beatitudes, and the comment of Jesus, “My yoke is easy and my burden light. Come follow me.” His image of God is that of a loving parent, father and mother. We’ll see this come through very clearly: raising up children to the fullness of their life.

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God, in giving us the Law, teaches us what it means to be human, what it means to be alive, what it means to be whole. God is gentle in the sufferings God sends us. And he uses here the Psalm quotation: “With your rod and your staff you comfort me.” The Lord disciplines those whom he loves.

He describes God as a doctor. The doctor diagnoses the problem with difficulty and sometimes has to excise the vice. And the sufferings that are given to people are given to discipline them into God’s goodness and health. So he sees suffering as gifts for our health. A very difficult concept but definitely very spiritual.

God is gentle in his pardoning. Here he describes the difference between the civil system in terms of a capital crime and the Gospel system. He quotes Psalm 103: “As the father has compassion on his children, so we have compassion on each other. God has compassion on us… God knows of what we are made.” And what are we made of? Dust. What do you expect from dust? What does God expect from dust? But God fills dust with God’s spirit. God knows that of which we are made. You know that of which your children are made. You know what I’m made of and what you’re made of. And yet God has blessed us with goodness and mercy and called us into being, dust creatures that we are.

God is gentle in the delights of the glory which God rewards us. Here he describes “the eternal weight of glory and risen life.” It’s an image of God that suffuses his missionary activity.

The Franciscan Masters

Serra was trained by the Franciscan masters. This is all over his writings. He was educated both as a novice and in theology at the university in Palma, where in the cathedral are the bones of Ramon Llull. Ramon Llull was a 13th-century layman, completely dedicated to missionary activity, training particularly people in languages. He was a nobleman who hired a Muslim slave to teach him Arabic, which he used in his work to convert the Muslims in Tunis and to spread the Christian message; he realized he had to learn their language, to be with them and to accompany them.

Llull wrote a very famous spiritual book called The Book of the Lover and the Beloved. The lover is Jesus and the lover was asked, “What is your wealth?” The lover replies, “The poverty I bear for my beloved.” In other words, love generates the Lord’s embrace of the poor human condition.

“And what is your rest?”

“The suffering I endure for love’s sake.” It’s like a mother caring for her child. You don’t really weigh the sacrifice; it’s irrelevant. You look at the motivation of getting up in the middle of the night, which is love, care, concern, compassion. It’s as simple as that.

“And who is your doctor?”

“The trust I have in our beloved.”

In other words, Jesus on the cross will go to any extent to love you and me, to cure us of our ills, to take all of our sins unto himself and forgive them. The action of Jesus on the cross is an action of love and compassion.

“And who is your teacher?”

And the beloved answers, “The signs which created beings give of his beloved.”

Look around. Look at creation. Look at the beautiful trees and the flowers. Look at the weather, the rain that we have now in California. We need water. It’s provided. These are signs of God’s bountifulness.

Like The Book of the Lover and the Beloved, he sees his relationship with God in terms of a personal dialogue. And he reads Saint Bonaventure very carefully:

“All that is needed,” he writes to one of his friars, “is to read a bit from San Bonaventura’s book or library on the crucified Christ.” Now, Bonaventure imagines Jesus on the cross as Augustine imagines it – as a book. Read what the book says. The book says, “I love you.” The book says, “I forgive you.” The book says, “I love you unto the end.” The book says, “You’re my friend.” Greater love than this no one has. “I give up my life for my friend.” This is the Gospel he wants to give to the Native Americans.

Also, Serra celebrates from Bonaventure the presence of God in all things. The following is an excerpt from his diary on June 2, 1769:

Continued on page 25
Serra Rally combines work and prayer
Phoenix event offers “spiritual shot in the arm” alongside nuts-and-bolts workshops to promote club excellence

About 100 Serrans from all over the United States attended the first-ever Serra Rally in Phoenix, Arizona, which took place from February 16-19, 2017. The yearly event featured dynamic, top-notch speakers in addition to the usual Serran-led workshops focused on leadership and club excellence. Bringing the internationality of our vocations apostolate to the event was Serra International President Dante Vannini of the Serra Club of Siena, Italy, who was joined by his board including leaders from Mexico, Brazil and Canada.

“Your commitment to Serra, its mission, and to supporting your Church does not have to be a lone wolf experience,” Serra USA Council President Greg Schwietz told attendees. “The Rally gives you a chance learn from your fellow Serrans and rejoice in our shared calling to support vocations.”

Expertly organized by Phoenix Serrans led by Wayne Rich (see back cover) and Tom Castellanos, this year’s Rally took a special focus on spirituality. High points included Masses with His Excellency Thomas James Olmsted, Bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix, and Most Rev. Eduardo Nevares, Auxiliary Bishop for the Diocese of Phoenix. Serrans were fortified with prayer throughout the weekend guided by emcee Wayne Rich and others.

This spiritual focus was widely reflected in the choice of speakers, too. Most Rev. Andrew Cozzens, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and Episcopal Adviser to the USA Council delivered an inspiring presentation on the role of the culture of encounter in Serra’s vocations work (see p. 3). Historian Father Joseph Chinnici, OFM, shared with us never-before discussed aspects of our patron’s personal life and Franciscan training that sheds a clearer light on his role in the colonial project that places him so often at the center of controversy (see p. 7).

Continued on next page
Serra Rally 2017: Engage, Inspire, Ignite!
Plan now to attend next year in Phoenix: Jan. 11-14, 2018

President Schwietz recognizes district governors with the “Face of Serra Award”

Making its debut at the Rally this year was the “Face of Serra Award,” presented by the United States Council to distinguished district governors who have shown particular zeal and dedication to the Serra organization, its club members and its noble mission, reminding us of our patron, St. Junípero Serra. Winners of the Face of Serra Award are selected by regional directors and Serra’s USA Council Board.

District governors recognized in person at the Rally were District 9C/9E Governor Michael Downey, District 12C Governor Nancy Gibson, and District 18 Governor Sally Nance (pictured holding their awards at left with President Greg Schwietz).

Other recipients of the award are the following: District 6 Governor Bob Bucheit, District 28 Governor Art Burke, Jr., District 9W Governor Bob Campney, District 11 Governor Gerald Dicharry, District 1-E Governor Aileen Fields, District 154 Governor Tom Hausladen (who received his award shortly before he passed away on June 3), District 125 Governor John McQuillen, District 31 Governor Diana Seixas, District 85 Governor Gustave Skapek, and District 137 Governor Albert Wolf.
RIGHT: Serra International Treasurer-elect Tom Castellanos, Serra International President Dante Vannini, and Serra USA Council President Greg Schwietz pose for a photo with Phoenix Diocese Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted. BELOW: Fr. Ralph O'Donnell, Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, spoke at the Rally and is pictured here with his mother, Omaha Serran Janie O'Donnell.

LEFT: USA Council President Greg Schwietz presents Past Serra International President Tim O'Neill with a framed icon of Junipero Serra in gratitude for his service to the organization. BELOW: USA Council Episcopal Adviser Bishop Andrew Cozzens inspired all assembled with his talk on the culture of encounter (see p. 3).

FAR LEFT: Phoenix Auxiliary Bishop Eduardo Nevares presided over the concluding Mass and spoke to Serrans on the “Joyful Promotion of Vocations in Latino Communities.”

LEFT: Past Serra International President Affonso Iannone of the Serra Club of São Paulo, Brazil, smiles during a Serra International Board Meeting.
Featured Club Program: Mission and Ministry of Serra International

By our Serran spirituality, we bring the Serran International vocation message and mission out into the world. Our spirituality is made visible in several ways. It is evident when we gather together in fellowship and the breaking of bread. Coming together to pray, educating ourselves about our Catholic faith, and informing others about the teachings of Jesus Christ creates awareness that all are called to a vocation.

Most important, the spirituality of a Serran is made visible in how we bring and share Christ’s love with one another in our workplaces and communities in which we live.

The USA Programs Committee wishes to invite all clubs to participate in the prayer program titled, “Mission and Ministry of Serra International” found in the Serran Call to Holiness manual. Beginning with the Serran prayer and the scriptural passage from Acts 2: 42-47, the program leads us to recall our history and mission, preparing us to continue in our ministry.

Before the closing reflection, an interesting question is posed: “What is unique about Serra International that distinguishes it from other organizations?” One of our priests from the Diocese of Spokane answered this wisely. He said, “No matter how much things change, Serra has always been a stable force, and its mission never changes.”

—Aileen G. Fields, USA Council Program Chair

Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.

Opening Prayer
O God, who wills not the death of a sinner, but rather a change of heart and life, grant we implore You through the intercession of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, Saint Joseph, Her spouse, Saint 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, and then read the Introduction out loud.

Introduction
Serra International is an organization whose members continue to study and learn about their Christian heritage, their 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 ways 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.

Boost your club’s prayer life!

Let the Programs Manual: Call to Holiness amplify your members’ spiritual bond with thought-provoking club programs for any time of the year. Download it for FREE at: https://serraus.org/club-meetings-programs/. Use this manual to create instant club programs led by a Serran facilitator, chaplain, or to enrich the formal presentation of a guest speaker.
Documentary Tradition
In 1934, four Catholic laymen in Seattle, Washington, USA, 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 1930s, 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. 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.

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

“The laity derives 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)

“These 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 cannot 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. ☰

Bibliography
2. Serra International Constitution and Bylaws.
Dear brothers and sisters in Serra: I send you my customary greeting with high esteem. I consider the time has not yet come for me to elaborate on the concluding chapter of this extraordinary experience as President. I still face one last important endeavor which may be the most challenging: The Serra International Convention of Rome, which will be the pinnacle of my experience as a Serran at the service of the Holy Church.

The motto “Always Forward” of Saint Junípero Serra will guide us during our work. The Pope granting us an audience is a symbol of the importance of our mission, hence an incentive to continue with even greater commitment.

We are not a cultural association. Our mission in society is essential, free from concerns of continuity or adjustments to changing contemporary mores. We should be always mindful of the particular way we serve priestly and religious vocations, affirmed in prayer and supported by material assistance. These are the tangible daily actions that make Serrans unique, who have been forged by their actions, who refrain from saying: “I have fulfilled my duty because I have observed the Lord’s commandments.”

There is no denying that the task is not a simple one, and on occasion, a single person cannot always succeed. We need God as the essential and extraordinary partner, who is not presumptuous, who does not hide, deceive, or scam. We must have the strength to recognize our weaknesses and accept help; only in this way will it be possible to give true testimony of who we are — a testimony that can not be granted just by wearing a pin on our jackets. Let us demonstrate it in the way we carry out our daily activities, either in our professional life, at work, in school, etc. It is not a diminished rhetoric but rather amazing by its simplicity, and because it is a difficult road, God comes to meet us and provide us His cooperation and support.

It is up to us to take the attitude of listening: all the great ones of the earth have possessed the ability to listen. By being proactive we will have to change our ingrained habits, try new routes, new strategies to attract young people and secure Serra’s future. For this reason, I ask of myself and all of you to be immersed in humility. It is crucial that we feel fragile and limited, and find our strength in the solidarity with other men and women as we achieve the rebirth of a new Christianity as taught by Pope Francis, the great innovator.

An Italian poet from the 1800’s wrote: “You must think more about doing good than about feeling good, and thus end up feeling better.”

Dear friends, I look forward to seeing you at the Rome Convention. I wish you and your families success and well-being.

Mary, Mother of Vocations, St. Junípero Serra, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bernardine of Siena, pray for us. dvannini@serrainternational.org

LEFT: Serra International President Dante Vannini with members of the Serra clubs of Bangalore and Salem, India, whom he visited in January 2017. ABOVE: President Vannini with Fr. Soloman Raj, chaplain of the Salem club, and some future Serrans!
**Christ’ed Friendships**

The “secret sauce” that holds Serra together

In most dioceses that have Serra clubs, Serrans are rightly and properly identified with the many vocations activities that they do for the Church with regular frequency. It’s a given that most Serrans are known as “doers.” One will find that typically Serrans are active on many fronts, mostly focused on vocations, while also supporting some other worthy and important parish or diocesan cause.

However, participation in activities that foster or affirm vocations is only part of the picture of a top Serra club. Equally important to a club’s efforts to foster and support vocations to the priesthood and religious life (Serra objectives 1 and 2) are its efforts to support that important third objective: “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.” It’s my belief that the “secret sauce” of Serra is its internal spirituality programs, and its efforts to develop what I call “Christ’ed friendships,” enduring friendships that place Christ at their center. It is this element of Serra which holds it all together and makes Serrans “Serrans for life.”

So how does a local Serra club insure that it is working on this all-important objective of Serra while it is doing all the good work that it does in fostering and affirming religious vocations?

Let’s start with your club meetings. Top clubs will plan more club programs which provide spiritual growth and faith development. This is what many call “inspiration.” My observation is that many club meetings are strong on information but light on inspiration. A good club meeting is always a mix of both, but for long lasting Serran friendships, inspiration comes in the form of fully developed club programs that grow Serrans spiritually.

A rich resource for spiritual topics can be found on your recently updated www.SERRAUS.org website, with its many ready-to-use spiritual topics found under the tab “Programs and Club Meetings.” All of the topics presented are complete, stand-alone programs and the subjects are timeless, dealing with the fundamental spirituality of Serrans. Some programs are 1) seasonal, providing a robust assortment of liturgical year programs, or 2) topical, so that possibly a series on one particular subject, such as Virtues, can be investigated and embraced in depth. Further, in keeping with long-standing but often forgotten Serra learning principles, these programs can and should more often be led by Serrans. Serran teaching Serrans: What better way to learn than to have to teach something?

Club member spirituality will also be enhanced greatly by annual days of reflection and pilgrimages. Days of reflection are common among top Serra clubs, providing a richer and deeper spiritual enrichment by a holy local spiritual director. These days of reflection become poorly attended when clubs adopt a “same thing, different year” attitude about them, however. Each year, energy must be given to the planning of these special day-long retreats. Think bigger. Think deeper. Think out of the box on your retreats. How about a visit to a holy shrine, a special location that may be only a few hours away, or a religious abbey, or a seminary, or something that requires a bit of a trip — a pilgrimage? Top clubs frequently organize trips to these shrines to feed their Serrans’ appetite for the spiritual depth that satisfies. In addition, when taken as a pilgrimage, another good thing happens: Serrans meet new Serrans. It’s a road trip, with all the camaraderie and fun that attends such a group gathering.

When improved member spirituality becomes an important club focus, it is then that your members will begin to realize that being a Serran is more about who they are, rather than what they do.

To be a Serran is one of the greatest gifts in the world — one that is treasured by those who find themselves called to serve this noble mission. And it is Christ’ed friendships that make the difference. With these friendships come a mutual understanding and spiritual maturity that makes Serra one of the great organizations in the world. And, it adds immense meaning to your personal profession: “I am a Serran.”

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Bearing Witness in a Secular World

Lou is a dear friend of mine. He supports numerous charities and was one of the attorneys who worked with New York Governor Cuomo to abolish the death penalty in New York State. He cares deeply about social issues and stays well informed of current events. Lou was raised by Catholic parents in New York City. All things considered, Lou would make a great Serran if only he didn’t consider himself an atheist.

In the three years I have known Lou, we have worked through the litany of believer versus non-believer debates. Lou is content to keep “science!” as his primary faith and means of viewing the world. When he first brought this up, our conversation went something like this:

Lou: Science, not religion, is the best way of viewing and understanding our world.

John: So, you support the laws of conservation of matter and energy?

Lou: Yes, those govern the universe in which we live.

John: And you also are a proponent of the “big bang theory” which posits that all matter and energy were once compressed into one hot, dense singular point?

Lou: Yes, that’s where everything came from.

John: So, where did the matter and energy for that hot, dense singular point come from, if not from something beyond our world?

Lou: You are asking me to prove a negative and we both know that is incredibly difficult to do.

John: Ok, perhaps that is an unfair question. Let’s talk about consciousness and life. Why are humans the only “animals” that are self-aware and able to significantly impact and change the world around us?

Lou: That’s a great question, one that philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists have grappled with throughout recorded history. Most religions claim we are here because God or several gods put us here. That’s a very simple explanation but I don’t subscribe to that.

John: Why not?

Lou: I don’t believe that we were put here by some divine entity to just to worship it, him, her, or them. Why would an immortal, all-knowing, all-powerful being create us just to worship it or him? Moreover, why would he allow children to be born with fatal diseases? What good comes from a child being born just to die? How is that a sign of God’s “love” for us?

John: I do not claim or pretend to know the mind of God. All I can tell you is what I know and what I have learned by reading the works of those who spent more time thinking about this than I have. In short, God plays the long game, his plan is grander than our comprehension, and much of it is likely beyond our capacity for understanding. That being said, I know many people who have grown closer to God through suffering. Some of these people say if it wasn’t for some tragic instance in their past, they would not have a relationship with Christ. You might, and likely will, argue that this is a cruel and insidious way of gathering followers. However, I think you will agree that we cannot appreciate music without silence, or light without darkness. There are times when suffering can lead to greater joy and personal development.

Lou: That’s great but I still don’t buy into that without proof.

John: Proof walked this earth over 2,000 years ago in the person of Jesus, and Jesus’s followers established a Church to enable to world to bear witness to the good news of this “proof.”
2016 Serra International Foundation Club Awards

In 2016, thanks to your generosity, the following 22 clubs received awards recognizing their outstanding donations to the Serra International Foundation. Contributions from these clubs totaled near $98,000.00. This year, the Foundation received over 90 grant applications seeking more than $1.3 million in support. The Foundation’s current resources allow for less than 11% of these grant applications to be funded. But with your help, we can do more to support vocations and bring honor to your local Serra club. Visit www.serrainternational.org/node/25 to donate.

Banner Clubs ($1,000-1,999)
- Ibadan
- Indianapolis
- Lima
- Metropolitan Dallas
- Omaha
- Portland
- Toledo

Mission Clubs ($2,000-2,999)
- Allentown
- Baltimore
- Green Bay East
- Green Bay West
- Indian River Area
- Johnson County, KS

Padre Clubs ($3,000-4,999)
- Lake Charles
- Northwest Hennepin
- Reading
- St. Louis
- Wichita

Carmel Clubs ($5,000-9,999)
- Kansas City, MO
- Providence

Majorca Clubs ($10,000 or more)
- Houston
- Grand Rapids

Siempre Adelante Award Winner
- Grand Rapids

Thanks to donations from Serrans all over the world, religious like the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family in Kabwe, Zambia can further their vocations promotion projects.
Club Activities Around the World

Toronto Ordinandi Events Draw Thousands

On Saturday, May 13, Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, ordained 11 men to the priesthood. Over a thousand guests attended the celebration, which took place at Toronto’s newly restored St. Michael’s Cathedral Basilica. In celebration of this, daytime and evening activities concluding with an Ordinandi Dinner were coordinated and sponsored by the Serra Canada Foundation and the Toronto Central Serra Club with the support of the four other Serra Clubs in the Archdiocese of Toronto. This was the 27th annual event of its kind.

As in previous years, the numbers of attendees to the ordinandi events were large. Over 700 Catholic high school boys and girls hand-selected by their school chaplain attended the morning Ordinandi Youth Event from 71 Catholic high schools. The activities included an ordinand’s talk about his journey to the priesthood, followed by a religious sister who also spoke about her own unique vocation journey. Cardinal Collins concluded the event with a few words to the students. He stayed with them for lunch and pictures afterward.

“The feedback that we received from these students had an average rating of 4.5 out of 5!” said Serra International Treasurer and Toronto Serran Mario Biscardi. “This Ordinandi Youth Event is focused entirely at our Catholic high school youth, and is planned in conjunction with our Catholic educators for the Archdiocese of Toronto. In terms of ‘planting the vocation seeds,’ it just doesn’t get much better than this!”

That evening, 1,769 people attended the dinner event including 225 university-age young adults who heard the inspiring vocation journey messages of the 11 ordinandi. In total, 2,476 attended this year’s Ordinandi Dinner and Ordinandi Youth Event.

“As in the past, 100% of the surplus funds from the Ordinandi Dinner will be donated to St. Augustine’s Seminary, Redemptoris Mater Seminary and our Voca-

Continued on next page
Welcome to the Serra family, Serra Club of Ketu!

The Serra Club of Ketu in Lagos, Nigeria was chartered on March 26, 2017. In the photos above, charter members at the ceremony wore orange, while members of Serra Club of Maryland who came to show their support to the new club appear in yellow. Also in attendance were Serra International Vocations Vice President Patrick Ugbana, a representative of the Archbishop Very Most Rev. Fr Anthony Obanla, local district governors, and Serrans from different clubs within Lagos.

Omaha Altar Servers Awards Ceremony

On March 30, 2017, hundreds of Serrans, family members, parishioners and clergy attended the Altar Servers Awards Mass and Ceremony at St. Leo the Great parish in Omaha. ABOVE: His Excellency George Lucas, Archbishop of Omaha, distributes the awards to distinguished altar servers from all over the Archdiocese of Omaha.
Welcome, Northeast Fort Worth Serra Club!

The Serra Club of Northeast Fort Worth, Texas, USA, was chartered on April 18, 2017. It is the seventh club in the Dallas/Fort Worth metro area. LEFT: Pictured from left to right are Rev. James Flynn, chaplain; Greg Schwietz, president, USA Council of Serra; Larry West, president of the Northeast Fort Worth Serra Club; Dr. Bruns Watts, District 46W Governor; Don Simoneaux, Region 10 Director; and Past USA Council President Ernest Doclar, club organizer and Programs VP of the new Serra club.

President Vannini Visits Hong Kong Club

LEFT: Serra International President Dante Vannini poses with officers of the Serra Club of Hong Kong. BELOW: President Vannini inducts new Hong Kong Serran Fergus Chau on his visit in January 2017.

Ikeja Serrans Honor Altar Servers

LEFT: Recipients of Altar Server Awards from the Serra Club of Ikeja, Nigeria on Feb. 26, 2017, are pictured with club President Patience Olotu. Master Igboke Chibuike (center) was awarded the medal for Best Altar Server. ABOVE: A quiz competition was also organized as part of the event; the winner of the quiz competition, Master Christopher, is featured with Ikeja club members.
Chinnici, Continued from p. 12

“It seems that the thorns and rocks of California have disappeared, since these enormous mountains are almost entirely of pure soil. But there are flowers in abundance, and beautiful ones, as I have already mentioned. Nothing should be wanting in that direction. When we came to our stopping place we met the queen of the flowers, the rose of castile.”

So we imagine him sitting down at night, with a candle, writing in his diary. Now, this is a fellow who has walked all day; he’s tired, and wonders, where is God’s consolation? In a rose.

“While I write this, I have in front of me a cutting from a rose tree with three roses in full bloom, others opening out, and more than six unpetaled. Blessed is he who created them.” For you. For me. For little Junípero as he goes along the way, to provide for him a little sweetness, a little consolation.

Serra found himself in situations of conflict, and yet he moved forward because of faith, because of his commitment to action out of the mercy and gentleness of God.

Friars Birthing the Church
Serra writes to the Viceroy Teodoro de Croix on August 22, 1778, “In reference to the care we take of our converts, let me tell you: they are our children, for none except we has birthed them in Christ. The result is, we look upon them as a father looks upon his family. We shower all our love and care upon them.”

The father does discipline his children, but the father only gives discipline out of love. And how is a father? Protective. Gentle. Merciful. Just towards the object of his love. This is his image of God.

He writes to his fellow Franciscan missionary Fermín Lasuén: “But in the midst of all my troubles, I am happy, because children are born amidst pain.” Now he’s describing himself as a mother. “We all have our share of hardships. In reference to these missions it is true to say the wails of mothers” – that’s the friars – “went up to heaven as their children were being offered in sacrifice.” It means, here are some more children for God. Here are some more disciples of Christ as we baptize them or confirm them. The image is that of a giver inviting people into life. “Be consoled, be consoled,” says the Lord our God.”

And then even in suffering, this is his advice in 1778 to Father Figuer, one of the friars who’s afraid he’s going to be killed. “You should not feel upset on account of the present difficulties. They are sources of merit in the sight of our God. You might even call them presents or tokens. Whom the Lord loves, he chastises. This is the lot that befalls the elect. It’s the money with which heaven is bought. Man is only able to do a little bit in his life. In addition, while dealing with your own poverty, you earned a wealth of merits when you assisted those poor, starving people who were in dire need of food. Your actions distinguish you from others who have full granaries. Our Lord said to the widow who came to the well and tossed in two small copper coins that were worth a penny, ‘Whatever situation you are in, the small offering is rewarded way beyond its merit.’ It’s like the little cup of water given to the poor. And what does that receive? ‘Come, enter into the joy of your master. Come, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning. Never be afraid of small actions done out of charity. They receive the complete generosity and liberality of God.’

This kind of vision of life is what Serra brought to the California missions. He found himself in this situation of conflict, and yet he moved forward because of faith, because of his commitment to action out of the mercy and gentleness of God. This is what moved him. He’s trained in a very profound spiritual, theological, and social tradition in the Church. He does not mind bearing poverty for those he loves. He loves the Native Americans and they testify that they love him. It’s really as simple as that.

If we want to know what moved Serra, the Franciscan tradition moved him. It’s a distinct spiritual and theological tradition in the Church. It’s a missionary tradition, and these are its component parts, as outlined in Evangelii Gaudium 24:

We know that the Lord has loved us first. We’re moved by endless desire to show mercy. We get involved by word and deed in people’s lives. We’re supportive in standing by people every step of the way. We’re faithful, however imperfect or incomplete our work. We’re always concerned with the fruit of actions, small or great, in any given situation. We are filled with joy.” Not a bad profile for today’s world and the one in which we live.

An Oxford-educated historian, Fr. Chinnici is a widely-respected scholar, teacher and speaker in the history of American Catholicism and the development of Franciscan theology and spirituality.
The Serran Time Capsule 1957: A Prayer of Gratitude for Serranhood

The following prayer was read by the Reverend Cornelius Power, chaplain of the Serra Club of Seattle, Washington, USA, at the conclusion of the Program Session of the Los Angeles Convention on June 25, 1957. While it is much longer than what we normally think of as a standard prayer, it shows Fr. Power’s deep understanding and appreciation for what it really means to be a Serran, and how the work of Serra ripples out endlessly into the life of the Church. It truly is a privilege to be a Serran!

Lord, Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest, help me to reflect at the conclusion of this Program Session on the high purposes of Serra. Help me to recall the enthusiasm that was mine, as I was first inducted into its membership. Let me remember that I had the purest intentions in accepting a place on the roster of my local club; that I wanted to have an open mind to learn in the school of Serra programs how I might measure up to the duties and obligations of Serra membership.

How I sat with pounding heart as I heard speakers describe the intimacies which Serra was permitted in the sacred precincts of your holy priesthood! I thrilled to learn that a place was made by the bishops of the United States and then by the prelates of the world, and then later by the supreme pontiff himself, for Serrans to become a kind of unordained priesthood, sharing in the vision and consequently in the responsibilities of the bishops of the world.

Through the medium of the ceremonies of my induction into Serra, and through the religious content of the programs of my local club, through my contacts with my bishop and the priests of my parish and of my diocese, through my annual visit to the local seminary and through conversation with its dedicated professors, through my yearly day of recollection and retreat, through the books I have read that were recommended to me by the bishops, priests and laymen who address us through the year, I have come humbly to realize and cherish the privilege of my membership in Serra.

As a Serran I am able to educate those, who, one day, at the baptismal font over perhaps thousands of infants and adults would pour the purifying waters of rebirth and utter with unspeakable solemnity, “I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,” letting these new children of God share the supreme privilege of faith that is my coveted possession and which was won for me and through the outpouring of your Sacred Blood and the blood of countless martyrs. I am permitted to aid to the altar those young men who would stand as mediators between Heaven and earth, begging gifts from God from men through the Holy Sacrifice of Mass the only adequate expression of adoration and atonement, petition and thanksgiving to a devoted, generous and merciful God.

I am allowed to assist in the seating in the solemn chamber of the Confessional other Christs who like their Master, would pronounce over the bowed heads of humble penitents the words which in all the world they most want to hear: “In the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, Redeemer and Judge, I absolve you from your sins.”

To me as a Serran has been given the honor of having a part in sending the angel of mercy, God’s priest, to the aged and dying when they have been played out with the agony of suffering and have become exhausted with their prolonged and futile struggle to hang on to life. He will trace with his oil-dipped finger the sign of salvation on each of their senses – eyes, ears, nose, lips, hands and feet – beseeching the all-knowing and all-loving Heavenly Father to forgive the transgressions which have accumulated over a lifetime.

Divine High Priest, give me a greater appreciation than ever of your holy priesthood so that I may ever strive to make myself more worthy to be counted as Your co-worker in the redemption of mankind in this 20th century. Give me the grace to pray earnestly for our Holy Father, for all the bishops, priests and seminarians the world over, and in particular for the increase of vocations, for the harvest indeed is greater than it has ever been, but the laborers are only too few. Amen.
Lou: It's awful convenient that your God arrived on earth before photograph, video recording, or the invention of the scientific method.

John: Again, I do not pretend to know God’s plan but I have faith that it is at work in our world.

As you can probably guess, I failed to make a convert of Lou during this conversation. Later he admitted that if saints exists, Pope Francis is likely the best example of a living saint he has ever seen and that IF he practiced a faith he would belong to the Catholic Church. I haven’t given up on my friend Lou and we still have principled and respectful debates about the nature of faith and the existence of God. As Catholics, we are all called to bear witness to our faith throughout the world (Mt 28:19). ☪️

*It is not my aim or intention to denounce pure and applied science. Science in its purest form helps us better understand the world God made for us. The religion of “science” and the belief that all things can be rationally explained via the scientific method has quickly become the default setting for atheists who fail to take the time to contemplate the gaps in what science can explain and conveniently overlook the centuries of history where science and religion supported one another.

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Pray the Rosary for Vocations, via Conference Call!

Join us in a monthly international prayer of the Rosary, via conference call!

This global prayer takes place at 8:00 a.m. Central Time (-6:00GST) on the last Saturday of every month, when Serrans worldwide gather to recite the Rosary for vocations.

The next four Rosary dates are:
July 29, 2017
August 26, 2017
September 30, 2017
October 28, 2017

To join our rosary from your computer, tablet or smartphone, go to: https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/31431598
Wayne Rich, Serra Club of Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Shortly after entering the Catholic Church, my friend Dave Maza suggested I consider the joining the Serra Club. As a new Catholic, I was eager to contribute to the good of this great gift (the Church) that I had discovered. Married, with four children and a busy financial planning practice, the Serra Club provided a means for me to contribute to the good of the Church without detracting from my family nor my profession.

The mission of Serra inspired me. Recognizing the need to pray for, invite, encourage, and promote vocations as well as heed our Lord’s call to holiness resonated with my desire to serve the Church and, at the same time, cultivate fellowship with others who shared the zeal for Christ and His Church.

It is the vocation of each Catholic to share in the temporal and spiritual works of the Church. My patron, St. Josemaría Escrivá, said, “You have got to be a ‘man of God,’ a man of interior life, a man of prayer and sacrifice. Your apostolate must be the overflow of your life ‘within.’” When I read this, it inspired my work in the apostolate of Serra to deepen my prayer life. I realized that much of life can be filled with activity, often fruitless activity. The only activity that bears the fruit of eternal goodness begins and ends with prayer that is united with Jesus to God, the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this way, I find the apostolate of Serra to be a very practical way to contribute to the spiritual work of the Church and at the same time, be formed by this apostolate. ☩