



the Serra Leader

GIVING THANKS FOR SERRA

by USA Council President Michael E. Strong

The holiday season gives us wonderful opportunities to reflect on our Catholic faith and our special role as Serrans.

On November 1 and 2 we celebrated All Saints Day and All Souls Day. These two special days encourage us to reflect on family, friends and Serrans who have gone before us to join the saints in heaven or the souls in purgatory. We are reminded that we are one with them in the body of Christ, the living and the dead. Our response in love is to pray for them all. For our family Nov. 1, 1977 became personal: Cecilia Durmin, my wife Judith's mother, died of cancer on that day. Each November 1 since then we have been consoled by the simple statement made by our parish priest and the religious sister who visited Cecilia during her last illness in our home: "She died on her day." Her memory helps us to pray not only for her and other family members but those who have no one to pray for them.

Later in November on the fourth Thursday, we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. This is a wonderful time for family, friends

and Serrans to give thanks for the many blessings showered upon us daily by a generous and loving God. Our response in love is to share what we have, both material and spiritual.

On the first Sunday of Advent we began the four-week vigil of Our Lord's birth in Bethlehem. That Christmas falls during these challenging economic times gives us a perfect opportunity to find the special grace to appreciate those closest to us.

I am grateful and edified by the many contributions made by our USA Serrans to their families, their parishes, and our Church. But we can do more! Let's take up the challenge to invite committed Catholics among our family, friends and parishioners to join us in our mission, praying and working to awaken new vocations to the priesthood and religious life that have been planted by an all-loving God and Father of us all. May our efforts be rewarded with more laborers for His vineyard. ★



Michael E. Strong

the USA Council leader datebook

JANUARY

8-11

USA Council SuperWeekend Leadership Meeting, Chicago, IL

11-16

National Vocation Awareness Week

FEBRUARY

8

World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life

20-22

Regional Directors and District Governors Planning Conference, Kansas City, MO Airport Hilton

MARCH

12-15

USA Council Executive Committee Retreat

MAY

3

World Day of Prayer for Vocations

The College Connection program for Catholic students

by **Judy Cozzens**, USAC Vocations Committee Chairman,
Serra Club of Southern Maryland

Going away to college is an exciting time when students make hundreds of decisions about their lives, not the least of which is choosing their future friends. The first few days on campus can be a lonely time. The College Connection program works to see that one of the first invitations the new freshman receives is to a Catholic Campus Ministry program. It is important that we reach out to our Catholic youth quickly before they get

too involved in other things. Making good Catholic friends and learning about Catholic events on campus helps our young people stay involved in their faith.

The College Connection program is important for our young men and women. If young people remain active in their faith and surround themselves with other Catholics doing the same thing, they are more likely to live their faith. This can lead some to consider the possibility of a reli-

gious vocation.

The purpose of the College Connection program is to involve incoming freshmen in the Catholic Community on campus as soon as they arrive. It does this in two ways. First, it helps incoming freshmen locate the "Catholic presence" on campus -- especially at those schools that have an active campus ministry program -- by sending them information even before they leave home. Secondly it identifies these new students to the campus ministers early enough to allow the campus minister to send letters of invitation to the students prior to their arrival and contact them again shortly after they arrive on campus.

The recent study completed by CARA

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Fun(ds) with Dick and Jane

Has your club ever been approached with a request for financial help from a person discerning a vocation?

Read on for a solution that won't break the bank!

Editor's note:

Probably a week doesn't go by when someone doesn't call our USA Council office in Chicago, asking for the name and number of a Serra in some city. We on staff will ask them why they are requesting such information, and this person will invariably say that they are, or are calling on behalf of, someone discerning a vocation, but they can't enter the seminary or novitiate due to existing tuition debts or because of some other financial hardship.

It is our policy never to share Serrans' personal information with anyone outside of Serra, and we notify such callers of this policy. We also routinely tell them that the USA Council of Serra International does not have a national initiative for such requests for financial support, but that clubs or groups of clubs may do this at their own discretion. Then we take the caller's information and alert the local club, who may or may not contact the caller with regard to the request.

The fact remains that these seekers are not usually talking about amounts of money that average Serra clubs can significantly reduce.

When Dick Sweeney handed me this article at a recent Serra gathering, I thought, "Hallelujah! A 'how-to' article for clubs who may not have the funds, but still want to help!" Please share it with your officers and club committees.

-- Anne McCormack, Serra Leader editor

by Dick Sweeney, Region 5 Director

Late in the first quarter of 2007, my phone rang. The caller identified himself as Joshua Quick of Huntsville, Ala., and said he had been referred to my wife and me by the bishop's office in Birmingham. The referral was made because Jane and I are active members of the Serra Club of Birmingham.

Joshua, better known as Josh, was preparing to enter the Dominican Order of the Province of St. Albert the Great. Before he could be admitted, he said, he needed to retire an educational loan of \$60,000. He said that the Order would absorb half of the obligation, but he must generate the balance of \$30,000.

Josh was then an assistant principal in an elementary school in Huntsville. He was working and reducing the student loan he had incurred on his goal to earning a doc-

torate in education. He was more than half way through the doctoral program when he discerned a call to religious life. He investigated the diocesan priesthood and several religious orders before discerning that the call was to the Dominicans. But the issue of the student loan was a major obstacle to entering religious life immediately.

Josh could generate about \$10,000 from a qualified retirement account with the possibility of a few hundred more dollars from the sale of his 2003 Mitsubishi Eclipse. He wanted to know if the Serra Club could assist financially.

Like most Serra clubs, the Birmingham Club has a few hundred dollars to fund its regular programs of seminarian support, affirmation of priests and vowed religious, and the promotion of vocation awareness among students in Catholic high schools, grade schools and parish schools of religion. However, the club does not have the

resources to retire sizable student loans.

I suggested that Josh write a letter describing his desire to become a member of the Dominican Order. So he produced a straightforward explanation of his background, his discernment to enter the Dominican Order, and his request that the recipient "make my Dominican calling a reality" through prayer and financial aid.

Along with that and a copy of the acceptance letter to Josh from Fr. Andrew Carl Wisdom, promoter of vocations for the Province of St. Albert the Great, we prepared a cover letter that begins, "Before you read any further, please be assured that this is a request for help."

This was sent to about 80 friends through the Serra Movement, the Cursillo Movement, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, the Knights of Columbus, and a number of other Catholic organizations. Recipients were scattered across the United States. The letter requested prayers and financial assistance, if possible. It also contained a request to forward the letter to others who might want to support Josh.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the combination of letters generated an amount in excess of \$13,000. This amount, when combined with Josh's contribution of \$10,000, was deemed to be a sufficient amount of self-help to have the Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations issue a grant of \$27,000 to further reduce the indebtedness and guarantee both Josh and the Dominicans peace of mind regarding financial obligations.

We are awed by the caring response of the Catholic community, which supported Josh's call by reaching out to others as "beggars" on his behalf. It shows us the work of the Holy Spirit in action, as a few people, through contributions of prayer, time, and

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Boring but Important

by Ed Verbeke, USA Council Executive Director

You can't tell the players without a scorecard!" Familiar sound from the vendors at the ball park, isn't it? Same applies to us. We at the USA Council office don't know who your club's members are unless you tell us. There seems to be a tendency by some clubs, (not yours I'm sure!) to hold payment of the per capita dues to the last minute before sending it in. While holding the money may gain a few dollars in interest, it delays getting the roster changes, additions and deletions to us. Not only does this cause errors in our mailing lists, but also costs us money when the U.S. Postal Service returns mail to us.

Some clubs have the club secretary maintain the club mailing list. Meanwhile, the club treasurer reviews the roster and verifies the number of members and invoice amount. In some cases the treasurer is unaware of any address changes. Because of this, we occasionally receive a phone call telling us our lists are wrong. Club treasurer, please verify the members' addresses with the club secretary.

As you are aware, we send a welcome letter and membership card to all new members. In the welcome letter, we state that if the new member has not been supplied with a Handbook for Serrans (item #34, \$2.75 in our catalog) to call or email and we will send them one. We receive a large number of requests for these handbooks. Our studies have shown that the greatest membership loss is within the first year of a new Serran's membership. I would like to suggest that during the orientation of the new member, each new Serran be given a handbook to explain the mission of Serra and what the ministry of each Serran is all about. If you would like assistance in putting together a good orientation meeting for prospective or new Serrans, call our Membership Coordinator at 888-777-6681 or email him a peuningham@serraus.org.

As a Serra leader, start planning now to attend the Spring Leadership Planning Conference in February. If you have attended before, you should plan to attend in order share your knowledge and experience with new leaders. For more details, visit www.serraus.org. ★

Fun(ds) with Dick and Jane

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financial assistance, eliminated a major barrier and permitted another person to respond to Christ's call.

Our Serra Club of Birmingham has "adopted" Brother Joshua and continuously prays for him and his vocation while sending messages of encouragement along with boxes of goodies. Josh is also invited to all functions that our Serra club sponsors for the seminarians of the diocese, and we look forward to his visits when he comes to Birmingham.

An unexpected gift we have received is the growth of a joyful friendship with Josh and the Dominicans of St. Albert the Great Province. We also share the spiritual joy of Josh's unwavering conviction that he is where God wants him to be.

Josh is currently addressed as "Brother Joshua" and is completing his first year as a Dominican in the Dominican Novitiate in Denver, Colo. He made his simple vows on August 10, 2008, in Denver. ★

Catholic Connection

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for both the U.S. Bishops and Catholic Campus Ministry (November 2005) confirmed a strong relationship between those who were active in campus ministry and those who later became leaders in their parishes -- including those who later entered the priesthood and/or religious life. The obvious conclusion is that increasing the number of students participating in Campus Ministry should greatly benefit the Church in many ways.

How can Serra help?

Serra Clubs in the United States are being asked to solicit student information from Catholic high schools and parish youth ministers. This information will allow "searchers" to prepare small packets of information about the school's campus ministry programs and facilities (location, time of services, who's in charge, programs, fellowship, etc.). By furnishing the campus minister with the names and addresses of students coming to the school, the Campus Minister then has an opportunity to send a personal invitation to the student to visit their facility when they arrive on campus. Should there be no official "Catholic presence" on campus, the student will receive information about a nearby parish. Click on "Vocation Activities" at www.serraus.org for more details on how to get your club involved.

Support and Publicity

The proposed program has received the written approval of several past chairmen of the Bishops' Committee on Vocations, including Bishop Blase Cupich, our episcopal adviser. It has also received written support from both the executive directors of CCMA and NFCYM. The USA Council of Serra International Board has approved the continued development of the program by providing matching grants with the Serra International Foundation.

The program was featured nationally on the TV show "Life on the Rock" (EWTN June 14, 2007) and in an article in National Catholic Register (Sept. 2, 2007). Articles appeared in the magazines or newsletters of NCDVD, NRVC, CCMA, NFCYM and NECA. USA Council Vocation Committee members are working on more publicity for the near future.

As parents and grandparents, we often ask ourselves how can we keep our young people involved in their faith. One answer to this question is the College Connection program. Vocations come from young people who participate in their faith and surround themselves with other involved Catholics. ★